



Obsolescence and Renewal: British Ceramics Biennial

Exhibition: Bampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme - 16/09/23-26/11/2023

Neil Brownsword



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Obsolescence and Renewal 2023

Exhibition: Brampton Museum and Art Gallery

Obsolescence and Renewal Neil Brownsword



Obsolescence and Renewal extends artist Neil Brownsword's examination of marginalised histories associated with the origins of British ceramic manufacture. North Staffordshire's industrial and economic growth was fuelled in part by its imitation and assimilation of Chinese styles and commodities to supply demand for the burgeoning fashion of tea drinking in the 17th and 18th centuries. Pre-industrial attempts to emulate the sophistications of porcelain and other ceramics imported from southern China, eventually led to material and technological advances that later influenced the regions development as a global centre of production.

In revisiting these histories, Brownsword sets out to further this process of exchange between materials, artefacts and production practices. Through copying his own ceramic culture, he dismantles methods of uniform reproduction by subverting traditional and digital technologies. Transferring his knowledge of ceramics to other materials and processes, Brownsword deliberately embraces the deviations and errors that occur within the thresholds of image and object simulation. His 'copies without originals' aim to reconnect a contemporary audience to innovations of an obscured industrial past that remain significant contributions to the cultural identity of North Staffordshire



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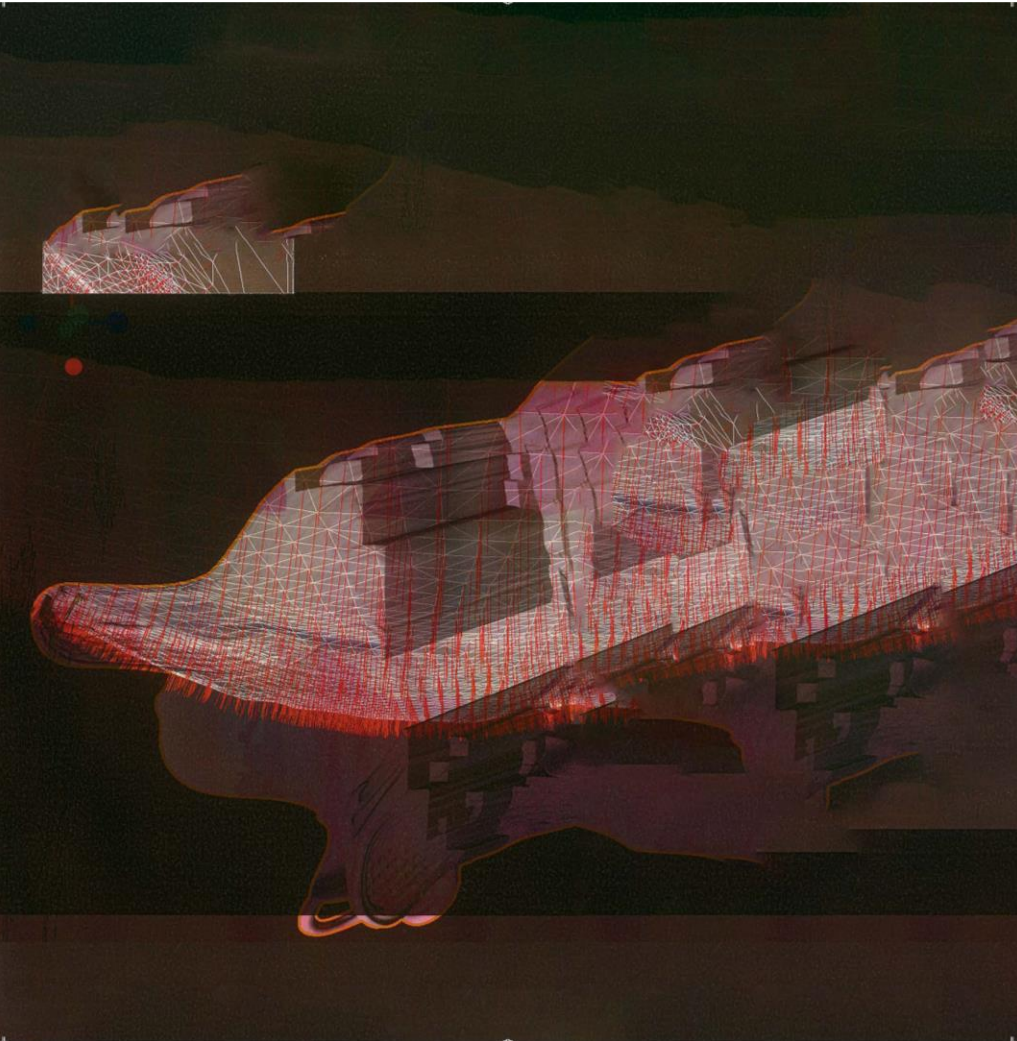


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The Swedish Arts Grants Committee



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Obsolescence and Renewal

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You and your guest are cordially invited to the preview of the exhibition on Saturday 23 September 2023, 2 - 4pm with welcome speech at 2.30pm.

The exhibition continues until Sunday 5 November 2023. Free Entry.

The Brampton Museum, Brampton Park, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 0QP

T: 01782 742609 / 01782 619705

<https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/museum>

Open: Tuesday to Saturday: 10:00am to 5:00pm. Sunday: 1:30pm to 5:00pm. Closed on Mondays.

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Obsolescence and Renewal

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Newcastle-under-Lyme is not known as a major pottery producing centre today, but pottery has been made here for hundreds of years. The district has large deposits of red clay, which are still used to make bricks and tiles, and it has also been home to innovative potters who introduced new working methods, bodies, and styles of pottery making.

In the late 1680s two Dutch brothers, John Philip and David Elers, set up a pottery at Bradwell Hall to make fine red unglazed stoneware tea wares, using the local clay. These wares copied the fashionable imported teapots from Yixing, China, in form and decoration but were made using innovative techniques.

Rather than forming their pottery on a wheel like their contemporaries, the Elers, who were silversmiths, used their knowledge of metalwork techniques to shape their wares in moulds using liquid clay. The unfired pottery was then turned on a lathe before finely detailed decorative motifs were added. These techniques were not passed on to local workmen, however, and when the Elers left Newcastle in 1698 it was several decades before they were rediscovered.

In the 1720s a much larger pottery was established at Lower Street, Newcastle. The owner, Samuel Bell, made a wide range of tea wares, again using local red clays, but glazed with lead. Although most were formed on a wheel, some more elaborate teapots were moulded, usually with exotic animals or Chinese motifs.

After Bell's death in 1744 the pottery was briefly left to William Steers, who attempted to make porcelain, and then to Joseph Wilson. Excavations on the site in the 1960s and 1970s found sherds of experimental porcelain tea wares, imitating Chinese porcelain. These wares, which used white clay brought from Devon and Dorset, were not only the first porcelain made in Staffordshire but were also the first to be decorated with Chinese-style blue painted decoration of landscapes or flowers.

Acknowledgements

Obsolescence and Renewal is funded by Arts Council England and supported by Staffordshire University, British Ceramics Biennial and IASPIS (International Programme for Visual and Applied Arts), Sweden. Sincere thanks go to the following individuals and organisations:

David Barker and Miranda Goodby, Kimberley Chandler and Stephen Knott

Brampton Museum and Art Gallery Clare Griffiths and Nerys Williams

Staffordshire University David Aincham, Warren Best, James Brindley, Catherine Dineley, Matthew Duddington, Andrew Forrester, Jonathan Furnedge, Mark Hatton, Peter Smith, Tom Vine, Ben Warburton.

IASPIS Magnus Ericson Konsthantverkensentrum Maj Sandell British Ceramics Biennial Clare Wood



At the time of Plof's map, produced in the 1690s, Newcastle-under-Lyme was both an important market town and a transport hub where five roads met. It was the commercial centre of north Staffordshire and remained so until the late 1700s. By contrast, the towns that today make up the Potteries were just small villages before the middle of the 18th century.

Prof's map shows the main road heading north from Newcastle. It passes just to the west of 'Bradwell' (Bradwell) and runs through Red Street. Bradwell Hall, shown with an enclosed park, was where the Ebers brothers' pottery was in the 1690s. The village of Red Street was insignificant in the 17th century but was home to several potteries, brick, and tile works in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

While pottery-making went on to become a major industry in the neighbouring Six Towns, in Newcastle it was always a small-scale undertaking, although the first porcelain made in Staffordshire was produced here, in Lower Street, in the 1740s.

Obsolescence and Renewal

Neil Brownsword



Gallery Map

1. Obfuscation Series (1), multi-pass Giclée print, 2023
2. Obfuscation Series (2), multi-pass Giclée print, 2023
3. Chinoiserie Landscape Disrupted, tapestry, wool, cotton and acrylic, 2023
4. Obfuscation Series (3), multi-pass Giclée print, 2023
5. Obfuscation Series (4), multi-pass Giclée print, 2023
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8. Obfuscation Series (8), multi-pass Giclée print, 2023
9. Obsolescence and Renewal (1), tapestry, wool, cotton and acrylic, 2023
10. Obsolescence and Renewal (2), tapestry, wool, cotton and acrylic, 2023
11. Use Value Abstracted, Giclée print, 2023
12. Ghost (1), Bone China, 2023
13. Topology of John and David Elers reconfigured, Giclée print, 2023
14. Ghost (2), Bone China, 2023
15. Pomona Simulacrum, 3D PLA print, 2023
16. Samuel Bell Simulacrum, 3D PLA print, 2023
17. Samuel Bell Simulacrum, 3D PLA print, 2023
18. Simulacrum, 3D resin print, 2023



Exhibition preview , 26 September 2023

Obsolescence and Renewal 2023

Exhibition: Brampton Museum and Art Gallery

Digitisation of historic objects to engage broader audience interaction via QR code mobile phone access

Simply scan the QR codes using your smartphone for virtual access to some of the exhibits on display, and other related objects within Brampton Museum and Art Gallery's collections

Jug, experimental porcelain painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with Chinese-style flowers
Lower Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1746-1754
Museum 2023.06.24 (P) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Exhibit 1 (cube display)

Red stoneware teapot with applied decoration
John Philip & David Elers, Bradwell Hall, c. 1690s
Museum 2023.06.24 (P) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Acquired with assistance from the UKA Purchase Grant Fund and the Art Fund
Exhibit 1 (main display)

Mustard pot, experimental porcelain, painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with Chinese-style flowers
Lower Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1746-1754
Museum 2023.06.24 (P) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Exhibit 5 (main display)

Tankard, experimental porcelain, painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with a Chinese landscape of rocks and trees
Lower Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1746-1754
Museum 2023.06.24 (P) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Exhibit 6 (main display)

Teapot, experimental porcelain, decorated with metallic oxides under the glaze
Lower Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1746-1754
Museum 2023.06.24 (P) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Exhibit 7 (main display)

Jug, experimental porcelain, painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with Chinese-style flowers
Lower Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1746-1754
Museum 2023.06.24 (P) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Jug, experimental porcelain, painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with Chinese-style flowers
Lower Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1746-1754
Museum 2023.06.24 (P) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Teapot, experimental porcelain, painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with a Chinese landscape design
Lower Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1746-1754
Museum 2023.06.24 (P) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Teapot, experimental porcelain, painted in underglaze blue with a Chinese landscape design
Lower Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1746-1754
Museum 2023.06.24 (P) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Teapot, experimental porcelain
Lower Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1746-1754
Museum 2023.06.24 (P) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Project co-ordinated by Professor Neil Brownword with former and current digital visualisation staff at Staffordshire University including Tom Vine, David Edwards, Richard Harper and Jan Korenko



Red stoneware teapot with silver gilt cover. Made at the pottery of John and David Elers, c.1691-1698
<https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/red-stoneware-teapot-made-by-elers-brothers-b440a822c6fc4554b853bd4bf6992c92>

<https://sketchfab.com/Bramptonmuseum> total hits 1600

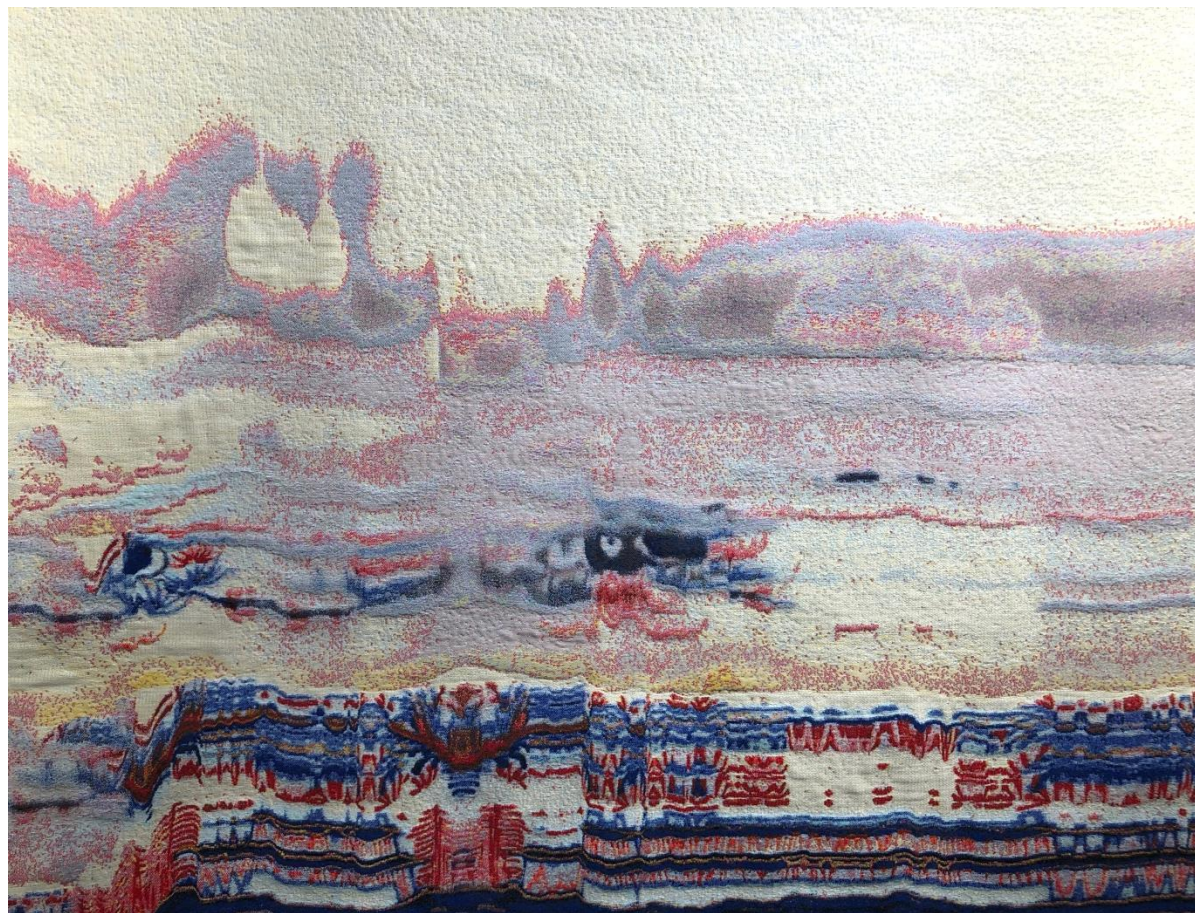
Documentation of project outputs: *Obsolescence and Renewal*



Chinoiserie Landscape Disrupted, tapestry, wool, cotton and acrylic, 2023



Obsolescence and Renewal exhibition



Chinoiserie Landscape Disrupted, tapestry, wool, cotton and acrylic, detail. 2023

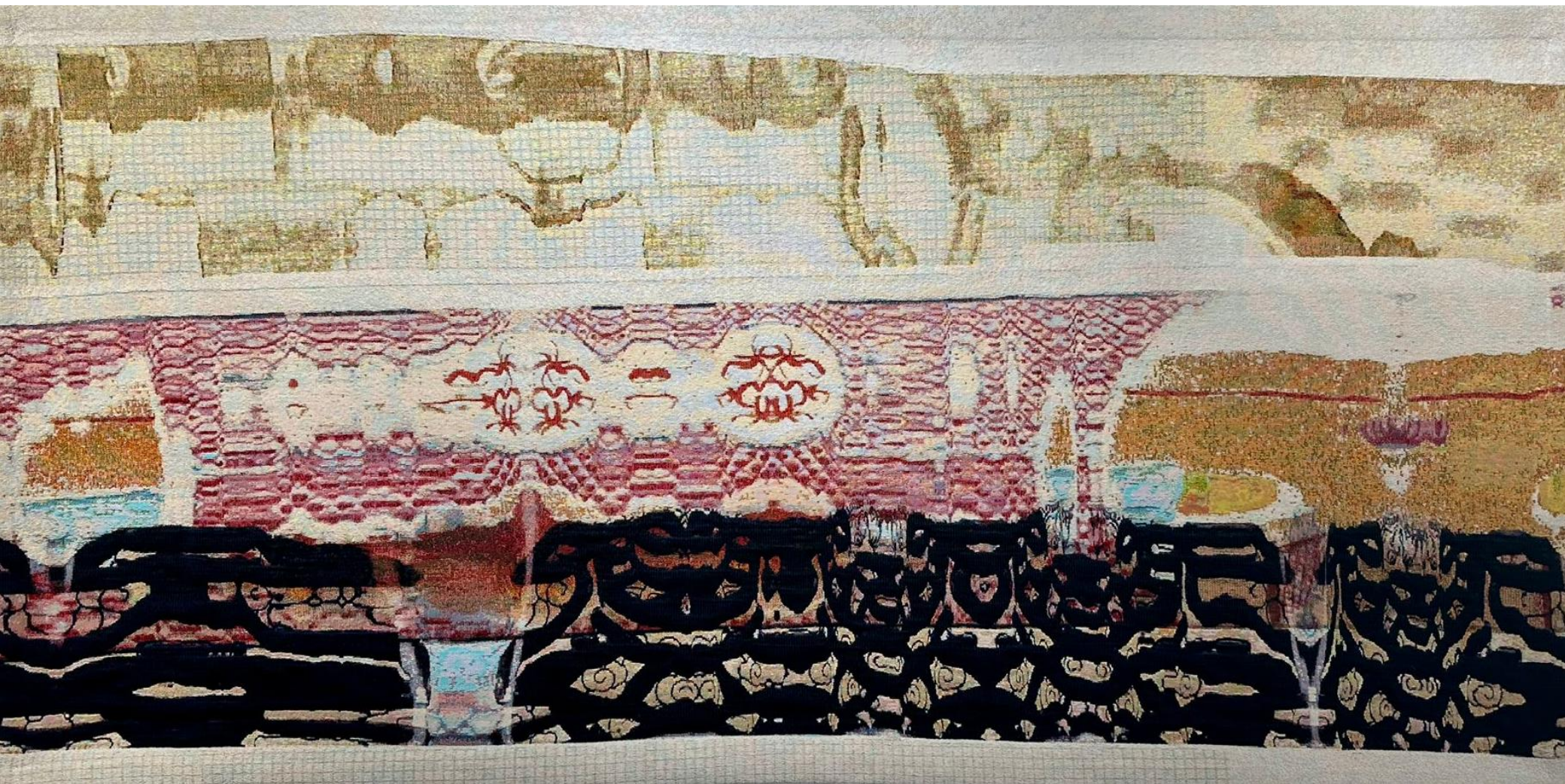
The Jim Wain Courtyard Gallery



Obsolescence and Renewal (1 & 2), tapestry, wool, cotton and acrylic, 2023



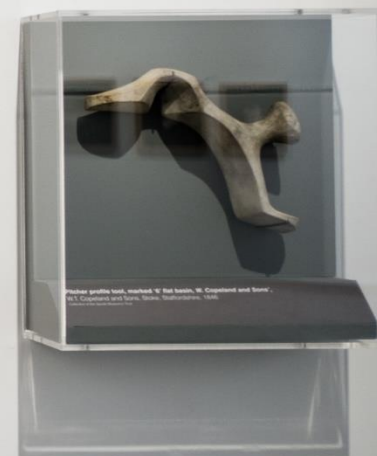
Obsolescence and Renewal (1), tapestry, wool, cotton and acrylic, 2023



Obsolescence and Renewal (2), tapestry, wool, cotton and acrylic, 2023



Obsolescence and Renewal (1), tapestry, wool, cotton and acrylic, 2023





- 1 **Sauceboat, white salt-glazed stoneware, Staffordshire, c.1760**
The decoration consists of rococo scrolls enclosing panels of basketweave and diaper patterns.
Private Collection
- 2 **Block mould for a sauce boat in white salt-glazed stoneware, Staffordshire, c.1760**
Block moulds were the original forms from which working moulds were taken to facilitate production.
A/No. 425. Loan courtesy of The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent



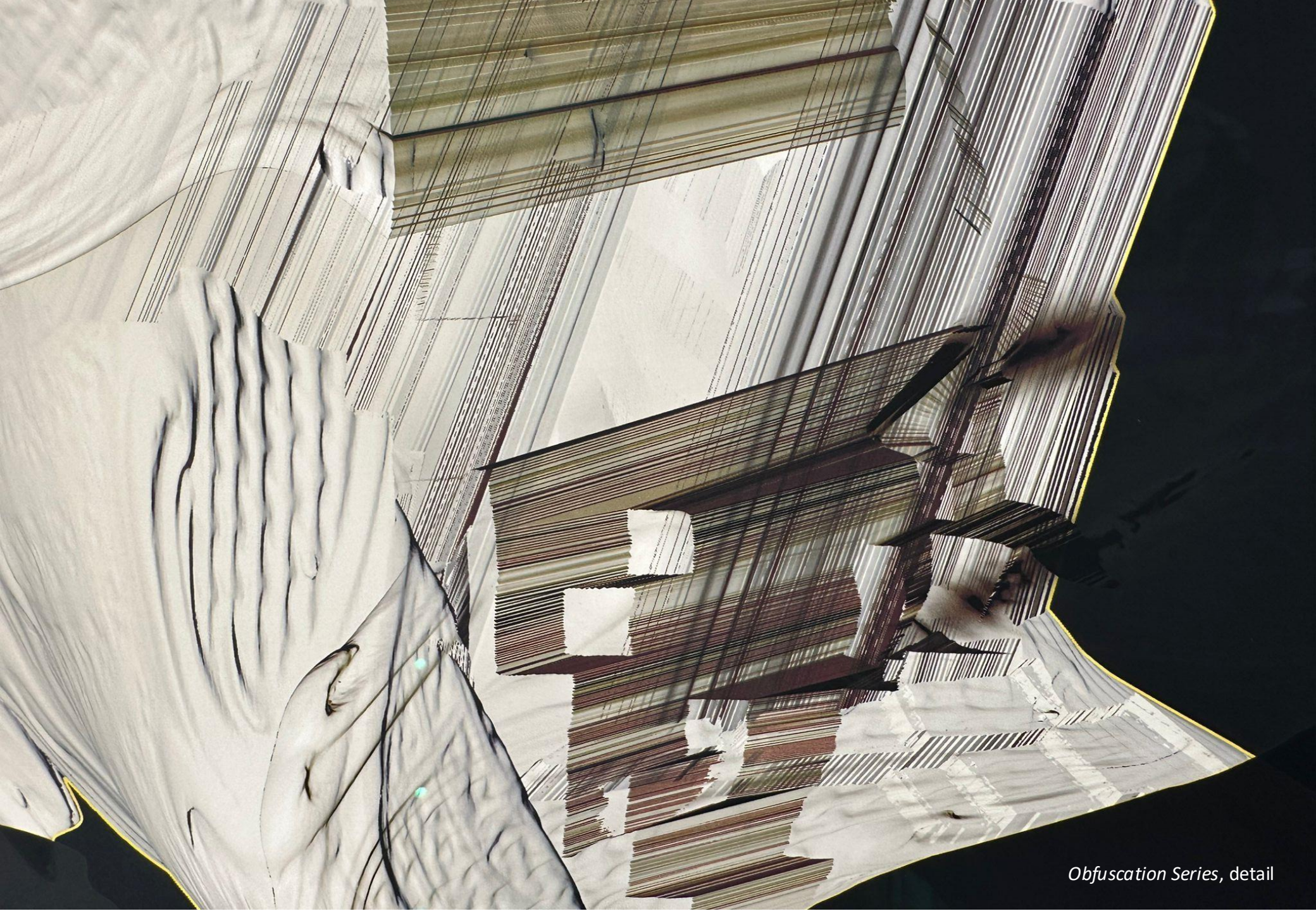
White salt-glazed stoneware, Staffordshire c.1760 loan courtesy of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery



Obfuscation Series, multi-pass Giclée print, 2023

Obfuscation Series,
multi-pass Giclée print, 2023





Obfuscation Series, detail



Obfuscation Series (1 and 2), multi-pass Giclée print, 2023



Obfuscation Series (1), multi-pass Giclée print, 2023



Ghost (1), Bone China, 2023



Ghost (2), Bone China, 2023



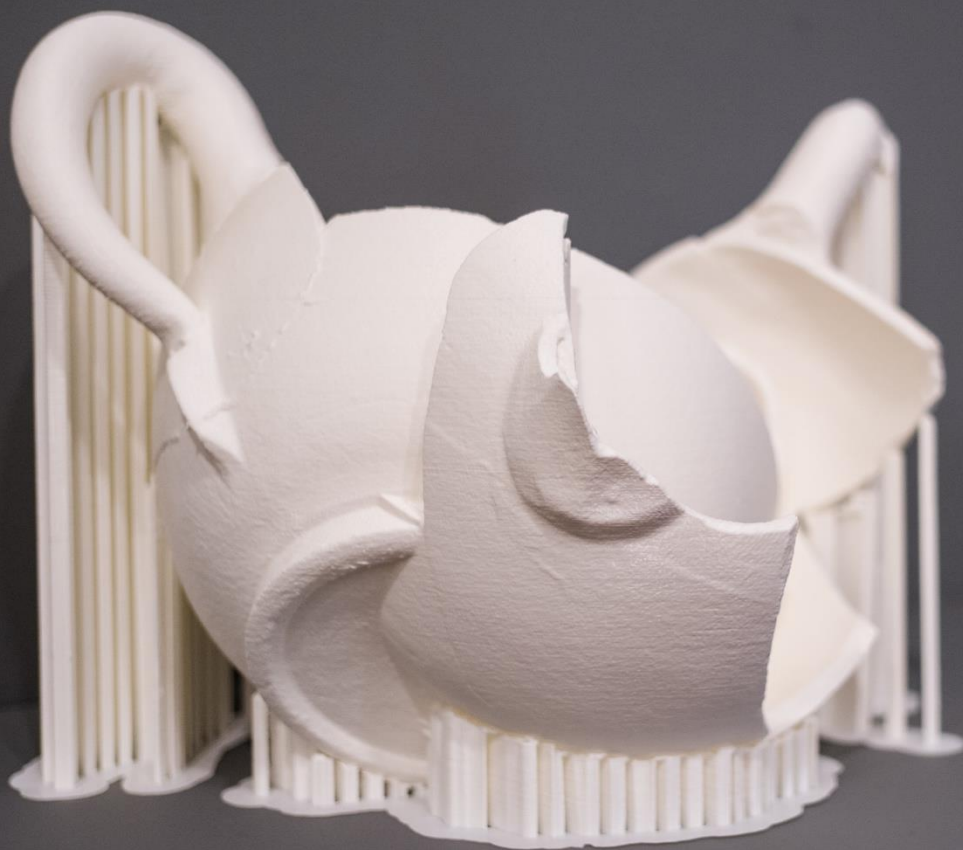
Simulacrum, 3D resin print, detail, 2023

Simulacrum, 3D resin print, detail, 2023

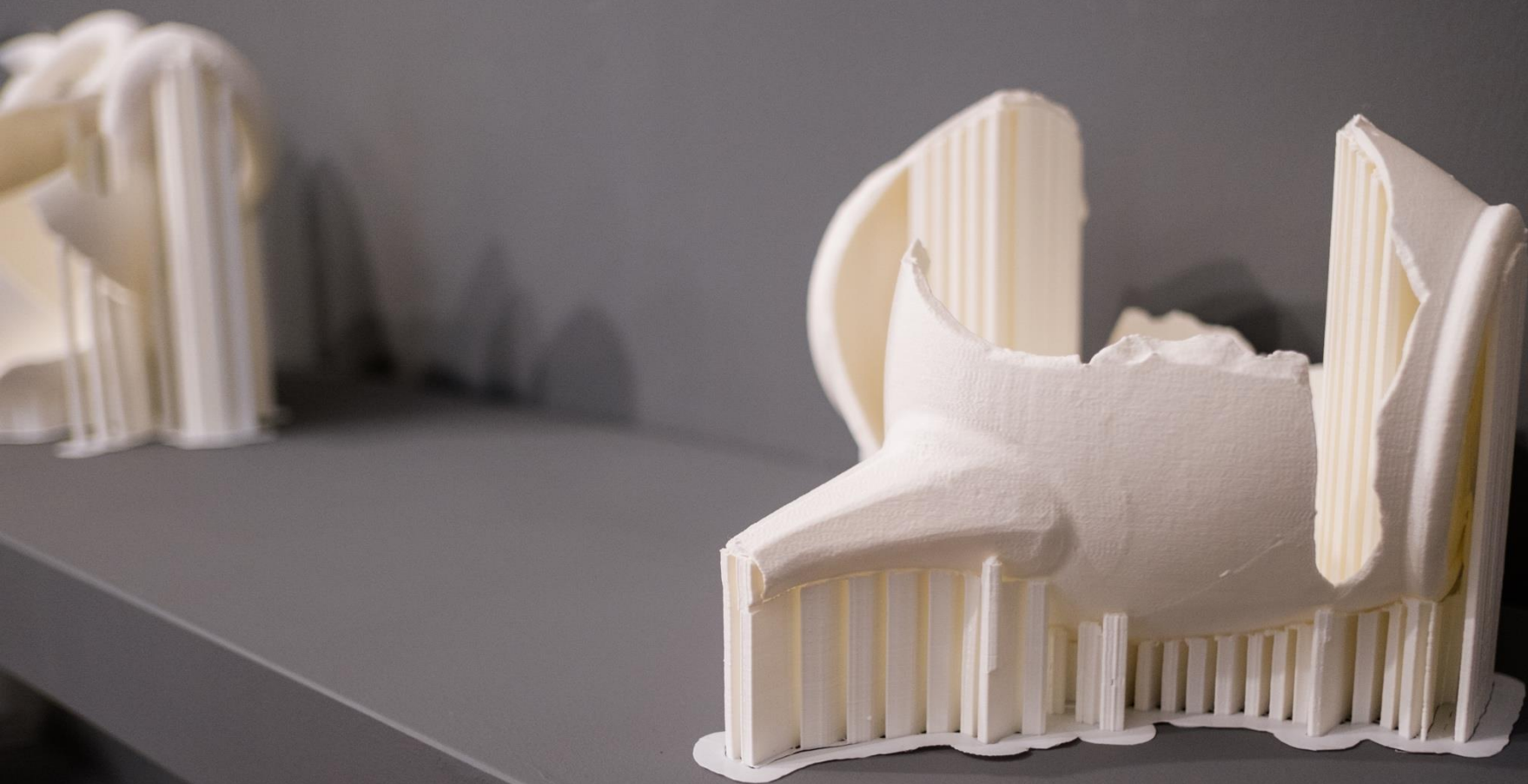




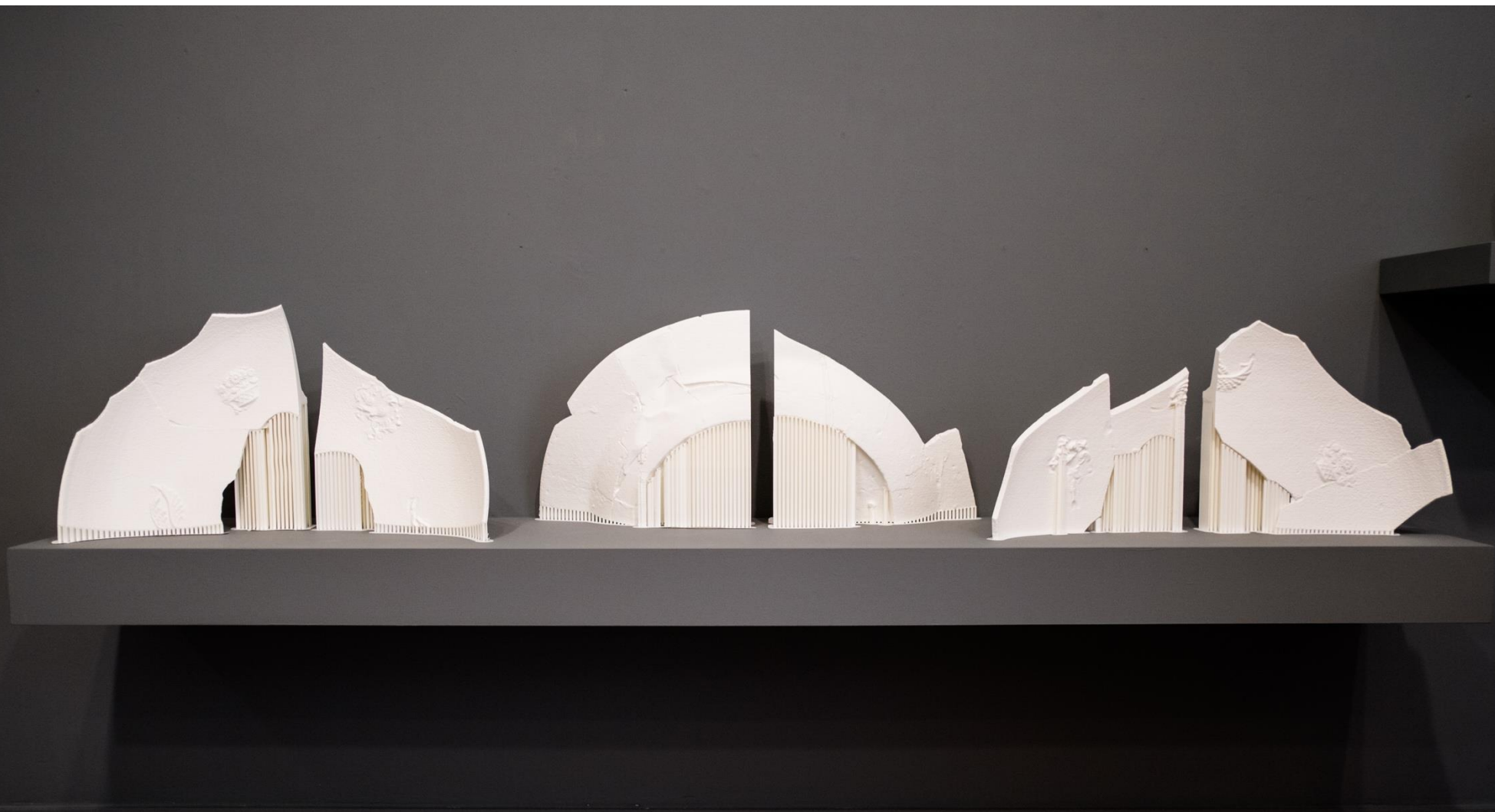
Simulacrum, 3D resin print, 2023



Samuel Bell Simulacrum, 3D PLA print, 2023



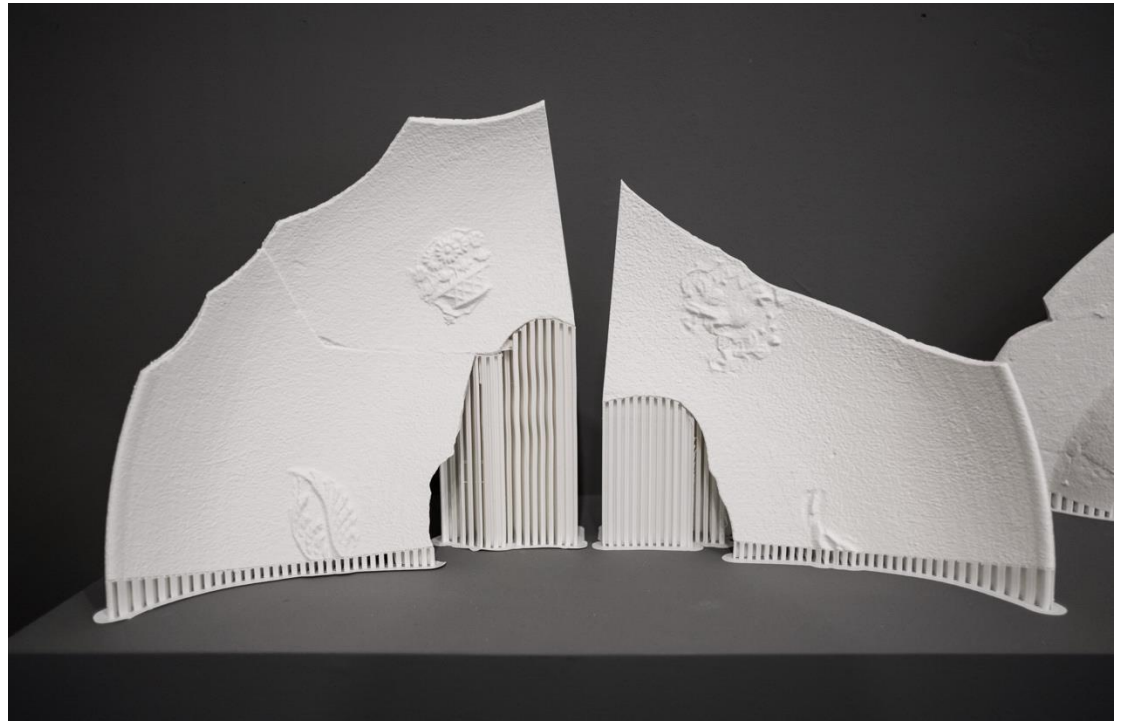
Samuel Bell Simulacrum, 3D PLA print, 2023



Samuel Bell Simulacrum, 3D PLA print, 2023



Samuel Bell Simulacrum, 3D PLA print, 2023



Samuel Bell Simulacrum, 3D PLA print, 2023

Fine China

Amidst the burgeoning trend of tea consumption in the early 18th Century, potters in north Staffordshire capitalised upon demand for finer wares by trying to emulate porcelain and other ceramics imported from China. However, numerous designs were often idealised to align with western taste, perpetuating stereotypes and diluting cultural motifs into superficial aesthetic novelty. In a reappraisal of this complex history, Brownsword accentuates the slippage inherent in replication by disrupting representations typical of Britain's industrial-scale appropriation of imagery and artifacts from East Asia. He reminds us how cultural influence was a fundamental catalyst for innovations that would go on to shape the identity of 'British' ceramic manufacture.



Image © Neil Brownsword



Creamware teapot decorated overglaze with painted Chinoiserie figures.
Factory unknown, c. 1770–1780. Private Collection.
Image © Catherine Dineley

Never Married... A Husband Desir'd

Overglaze printing played a significant role in facilitating the reproduction of ceramic decoration for a mass market during the 18th Century. Designs were transferred using a thin sheet of animal glue known as a 'bat' which was pressed onto an engraved copper plate loaded with linseed oil. Removed from the plate, the bat was 'rolled' onto the previously glazed ceramic surface and peeled away, transferring a sticky image which was dusted with colour and fired. Stretching the bat over the ceramic object would often introduce characteristic distortion, which Brownsword cites through his re-enactment of this process. 'The Fortune Teller', a popular bat printed design – manufactured by William Greatbatch and other factories, is reproduced using rudimentary scanning procedures. The rotation of the object during its digitisation celebrates the glitch within reproduction that marred the historic pursuit of perfection.



Creamware teapot body with bat printed and enamel decoration, entitled 'The Fortune Teller'.
Factory unknown, Staffordshire, c. 1780. Private Collection.
Image © Catherine Dineley



Image © Neil Brownsword

Chinoiserie landscape re-imagined through the lens of AI

During the 17th and 18th Centuries, when global travel was limited, knowledge of distant cultures was primarily acquired through written and spoken accounts, as well as through the exchange of commodities. With the absence of comprehensive information about East Asian culture, western perceptions of it remained a combination of reality and fantasy. In citing this period of history, Brownsword subjected a fragment of early British Chinoiserie to an artificial intelligence tool.

Here advanced algorithms reconstruct and reimagine its incomplete information, and extend the incongruity between historic appropriated visual elements and their new context.

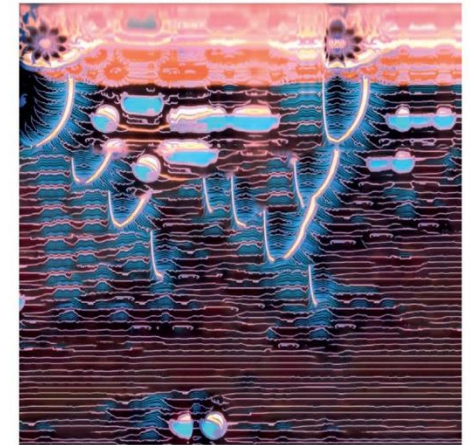


Image © Neil Brownsword



Bule-shaped teacup, hard-paste porcelain with 'Imari beehive all-over design', pattern #752.
New Hall Porcelain Works, Shelton, Staffordshire, c. 1820. Private Collection.
Image © Catherine Dineley

Obsolescence and Renewal 2

Collaboration with Johnson Tiles



JOHNSON • TILES

Obfuscation

This tile is composed of numerous Chinoiserie patterns produced in the late 18th and early 19th Century, by factories that were operating in north Staffordshire. Chinoiserie refers to a European artistic style that imitates Chinese elements and aesthetics. Using low-fi scanning procedures, the patterns are digitally stripped away from the ceramic object, a process of variable replication which both introduces error and disrupts the continuity of the copy. The scanned images are reworked to erase and flatten borrowed cultural motifs. In their reproduction, each image is subsequently superimposed upon the next, further undermining modes of representation to obscure their original context.



Image © Neil Brownsword

Teapot with print and enamel decoration on hard paste porcelain, depicting 'The boy and butterfly' pattern.
New Hall Porcelain Works, Shelton, Staffordshire, c. 1790-1795. Private Collection.
Image © Catherine Dineley

Tile designs for BCB fund raising
in collaboration with Johnson Tiles



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Long life, beauty and elegance contorted

Chinoiserie refers to a western style that incorporates Chinese motifs and aesthetics popular amongst the aristocracy in the 17th and 18th Centuries – a time when only a handful of Europeans had experienced China first hand. In lieu of actual encounters, an idyllic and imaginative realm was depicted through ornamental patterns and scenes of oriental landscapes, flora and fauna. The 'exotic East' was both fetishized and commercially exploited by Staffordshire potters way into the 19th Century – an era tainted by opium conflicts, trade, and colonial pursuits. Patent Ironstone was first produced by the Masons factory in 1813 to provide a cheap substitute for Chinese Porcelain, perpetuating western constructs of the East to the mass market.



Image © Neil Brownsword



Ironstone jug with gilt and enamel bamboo and butterfly painting on a mazarine blue background with dragon handle.
Masons, Fenton, Staffordshire, c. 1813–1825. Private Collection.
Image © Catherine Dineley

Obsolescence and Renewal 2023

Collaboration with Johnson Tiles



JOHNSON • TILES

Use-value abstracted

Hand tools serve as the intermediaries between human creativity and the transformation of raw materials into functional and aesthetic objects. The image composition for this tile is a digital abstraction of a profile tool made by a factory worker in earthenware in 1846, which subsequently reproduced clay commodities en masse. The tool's 'use value', or inherent practical benefit, ensured the standardisation of shapes and sizes during manufacture. Yet within production, the complexities of knowledge embodied within material goods, the contributions of private labour and the intricate web of social bonds between individual workers often are concealed or not fully recognised. Instead, value has a tendency of being attributed to the commodities themselves and their associated price tags.



Pitcher profile tool, marked '6" flat basin, W. Copeland and Son'. W.T. Copeland and Sons, Stoke, Staffordshire, 1846.
Collection of the Spode Museum Trust.
Image © Catherine Dineley

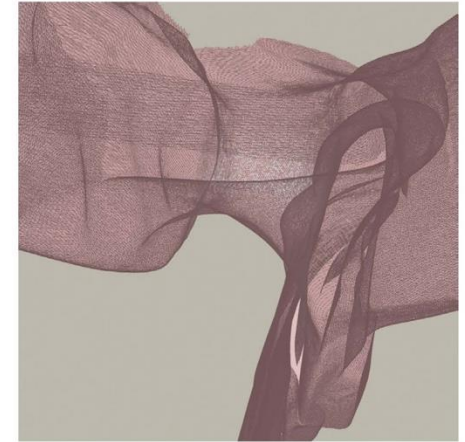


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Obsolescence and Renewal 21

Collaboration with Johnson Tiles



JOHNSON • TILES

John and David Elers topology reconfigured

This teapot represents one of the earliest imitations of Chinese ceramics made in north Staffordshire during the 1690s, which was formed from Bradwell Wood's red firing clays. Its contemporary reproduction using 3D laser scanning enables forensic scrutiny of the Elers pioneering use of slip-casting – a staple method of manufacture that followed in the ceramic industry. A digital x-ray function is applied to the scan data to reveal the object's hidden anatomy and visualise its internal and spatial attributes. However, the digital topology which captures the connectivity and shape of the object is deliberately glitched, raising questions about accuracy, interpretation, and the intrinsic nature of what constitutes a copy.



Red stoneware teapot with applied decoration.
John Philip & David Elers, Bradwell Hall, Staffordshire, c. 1690s.
Collection of Brompton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council.
Acquired with assistance from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Art Fund.
Image © Catherine Dineley



Image © Neil Brownsword

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Tile design for BCB fund raising in
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