



Paul Scott: Artful anachronism

Paul Scott escaped into ceramics at England's Manchester Metropolitan University's School of Art. Originally studying painting and printmaking, he found the new medium liberating. "On the first day the tutor came in wearing a deerstalker, carrying a suitcase, with a pocket square and a clay pipe. It was all ceramic. If you could make things like that, I wanted to do that."

Nowadays, Scott has developed a following, but forty years ago he couldn't get his work shown because the ceramics world was still dominated by the legacy of the studio pottery movement. "It was all about function and form," he recalls. "And they looked down on anything printed or associated with industrial production. Art galleries wouldn't show my work because it was on a plate. Contemporary ceramics places looked at my work with disbelief and horror. There was a sort of incomprehension of what I was doing. I would be told 'Your work doesn't consider the form.' And I would have to say, 'But I'm not interested in the form.'"

With his background in painting and printmaking, Scott was drawn to investigate the archives of Europe's great ceramic makers, including Copeland/Spode, Egersund, Gustavsberg, and Rörstrand. At first, some of the manufacturers were reluctant to let him in, fearing that he was a spy who would make off with their trade secrets and intellectual property. But as many of these factories fell on hard times they began to allow him access. His subsequent



Facing page:

A Lover of Old China by Edward Lamson Henry (1841–1919), 1889. Oil on academy board, 14 by 12 inches. *Shelburne Museum, Vermont.*

This page:

"Sellafield the Decommissioning Series," 2014, from Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), English Scenery series by Paul Scott. In-glaze decal on a Poultney and Company, Bristol, earthenware platter of c. 1900; length 18 inches.

"Pastoral," 2014, from Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), English Scenery series. In-glaze decal collage and gold luster on plate by Alfred Meakin c. 1960; diameter 9 7/8 inches.

"Fukushima," 2014, from Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s) series. In-glaze decal collage on broken and re-assembled Willow pattern platter marked "Japan," c. 1965, with wave insert from "erased" Willow platter, c. 1840. Brass pins, gold leaf, tile cement, and epoxy resin; length 18 1/4 inches.



“Castle Buddleia,” 2015, from Scott’s Cumbrian Blue(s) series. Transfer-ware collage, *leintsugi*, and gold leaf; length 20 ¾ inches. In this platter Scott fused together pieces of two early nineteenth-century Spode patterns, “Castle” and “Buddleia.”

“Palestine, Gaza,” 2015, from Scott’s Cumbrian Blue(s) series. In-glaze decal collage and gold luster on a Staffordshire “Palestine” platter by William Adams, c. 1840; length 15 inches.

“Temple” pattern platter, Spode, c. 1815. Transfer-printed earthenware, length 15 ¾ inches. Scott takes inspiration from this strikingly contemporary-looking piece made in the early nineteenth-century and now in his personal collection.

work has enabled others to see the value in this historic material and work to rescue it.

Scott has pioneered the idea of collage in ceramics. He has made platters that are fused mash-ups of two or three old patterns. “I’m intrigued by the juxtaposition of familiar patterns,” he says. “It’s interesting to slice a pattern in half and put it next to another and you can still recognize them. People are so familiar with transfer ware—overly familiar with it—that they often don’t really see it anymore.”

He also makes use of found objects. For his Cuttings series he harvests details from shards of old transfer ware and then embeds them in new pieces, or simply lets the cutouts stand on their own.

Some of his most powerful work is created in response to an individual piece he’s picked up somewhere. For many of these, he infuses idyllic pastoral landscapes with modern structures like wind turbines. “When I first inserted a nuclear power plant into a transfer-ware plate, people were gobsmacked,” he says.

On a plate printed with a classic nineteenth-century pattern showing a fantasy Middle Eastern



scene called “Palestine,” he erased part of the pattern and added in an image of bombed out Gaza. On another similar pattern he simply added a jet fighter flying overhead.

He was struck by the fact that people who weren’t really interested in contemporary art, would look at his work. And people versed in contemporary art were also interested. “Transfer ware and blue-and-white are safe and comfortable, so it feels approachable, but then there’s a surprise. You can grab people’s attention with it.”

Scott recently received a grant from the Alturas Foundation to pursue a long-term project updating the theme of American Scenery, a once popular subcategory of designs for British manufacturers.

