

## Introducing Dawn Youll

My Introduction to, and first meeting with Dawn was to be in a disused police horse stables in Glasgow, 1999. \*

There and then at the start of her career I came upon the early outsized, scaled-up animal toys, memories of her Sunderland childhood, skilfully made, so skilful that the ceramic surface was convincingly plastic. But this was not the whole story, nor was it simply that these copies of small inexpensive plastic toys, objects of a child's desire, had been elevated by appropriation. Or, that these commonplace toys had been given the importance they had for the child and then reinvented for us, the adults; somehow these were emotionally charged, but certainly not with sentimentality, the life raft of popular ceramics. Placed on the gallery floor, I expected the arena of a suburban living room carpet to underlay the drama.

Twelve years on and with an impressive expanding professional practice and artistic presence, Dawn now observes our world not as memory, but the world in which we live now. There is history here but less personal recollection than before. It is part of a long tradition of clay, recording the contemporary and everyday from Tang Dynasty tomb sculptures and the wish list for the after-life, to the oddities of First World War tanks and ambulances produced in Stoke-on Trent by Goss crested china. Each from a time when to model the everyday had symbolic significance. An autonomous history of making, the necessary production and recording of 'things' to communicate, celebrate and make sense of the world around us.

Twigs, polypropylene rope, mattresses, traffic cones, inanimate objects are modelled but not copied, interpreted into her material of choice. The modelling is pared down sparingly, so that of these

objects become signs and symbols of Dawn's own creation. These are purely and can be only ceramic objects; you cannot call them just clay, as they seem to know about their glaze and saturated colour at inception. Dawn cites the U.S.A.'s Ron Nagle as an important influence. His 'fetish finish' glazed ceramics are a natural affinity for her, but I would describe Dawn's deep glaze surfaces as maybe more of a 'fit for purpose finish'.

Dawn combines the often overlooked but familiar, the forms and surfaces of the modern urban atmosphere and landscape. They are similar to the street signs and the commands of the information graphics of the age, often recalling the contemporary culture of health and safety, the street style of warning and refurbishment. These separate forms collide and pair in strange compositions but avoid the surreal. I liken this not to chaos, but to the ordering of the workplace and the building site. I also think of sculptor Richard Wentworth's on-going project, the recording of improvised, but unconscious creations of the everyday entitled 'Making Do and Getting By'. Somehow there is logic here: Dawn's pieces are propped and wedged, hung, and find their own place. They are part of a long tradition of ceramic sculpture for the interior: portable, complete, domestic in scale and accessible.

\* The site of the Glasgow School of Art ceramic studios, I was External Examiner for Ceramics, 1998–02

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