

Nao Matsunaga:  
Lost and Found  
(Standing Stone  
and Rest of  
My Life), 2011,  
British Ceramics  
Biennial,  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Jeremy Theophilus



"I like work that often challenges or disturbs before it actually appeals to me and this is a great example. It's slightly unsettling and you feel compelled to keep looking in order to work it all out.

There's a clear sense here of someone who is able to manipulate the tension that exists between controlling an essentially uncontrollable material and giving it the leeway to move and fold naturally.

Nao Matsunaga was born in Osaka and, as a cultural 'outsider', he's responding to neolithic influences that we recognise but that he would not have experienced back home in Japan.



Jeremy Theophilus is the co-director of the British Ceramics Biennial

He has also studied architecture and you can see in the tripod of branches a reference to an archway.

The British Ceramics Biennial is all about the old and the new. The idea grew out of the city council's long-term plan to regenerate the centre of Stoke. I think the authorities had taken their eye off the ball, as the ceramics industry was declining and were unsure how to react.

When we did the first show in 2009, a lot of people in the city didn't know what a biennial was; many saw it only in relation to trade fairs but they have kept the faith.

We are concentrating activities on the former Spode

factory site, a fantastic industrial space that is now owned by the local authority. There has been a lot of bureaucracy involved and our nerves were jangling as we endeavoured to clean it out, install electrics, make sure it was asbestos-free and secure it for three or four different shows of new work such as this piece.

It's a big task and we're doing it on half the budget we had last time around.

These remain difficult times for the council, having to manage how this event is seen by the taxpayers and wider world while it lays people off.

Slowly but surely, however, a lot of the industry is

beginning to realise what a biennial is and what it can do for them. There is some money about, probably thanks to the Royal Wedding.

The industry will never recapture its former glories but the Portmeirion company, which bought the old Spode brand, for example, has brought the manufacture of its blue ware back to Stoke from the Far East.

It recognised the quality was better and it simply had to be made in the Potteries once again."

*Interview by John Holt.  
The British Ceramics Biennial is at venues across Stoke-on-Trent until 13 November*