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**British Ceramics Biennial announces 10 artists competing for AWARD - the UK’s leading ceramics prize**

Ten ceramic artists have been selected to create new work for the British Ceramics Biennial’s (BCB) AWARD, the leading platform for contemporary ceramic art practice in the UK. They are Alison Cooke, Christie Brown, Cleo Mussi, Connor Coulston, Helen Beard, Ho Lai, Jin Eui Kim, Mawuena Kattah, Stephen Dixon and Tamsin van Essen.

The new work will range from an installation made using clay taken from below the North Sea to life size mosaic figures created from historic pottery and will form the focal point of the BCB festival in Stoke-on-Trent this September, when one of the artists will be awarded a £5,000 prize for excellence, innovation and creative ambition.

AWARD provides a snapshot and celebration of current activity in ceramic art. This year’s shortlist, selected from over 160 entries, features some of the UK’s most innovative contemporary ceramic artists and reflects a range of approaches - from vessels to mosaics, sculpture to installation art. By exploring geopolitical, environmental and social political themes in their work the artists are using ceramics to make sense of our changing world.

The judging panel was chaired by Alun Graves, Senior Curator in the Sculpture, Metalwork, Ceramics and Glass Department at the V&A, who comments: ‘*AWARD has established its position as the premier exhibition of contemporary ceramic art in the UK. A platform for ground-breaking and progressive practice, it provides an opportunity for artists to work with ambition, developing their work in new, exciting and challenging ways. In these extraordinary times, the desire to engage and communicate through the intensely physical material of clay has never been stronger. The shortlist for AWARD 2021 reflects the dynamism of contemporary ceramics, embracing artists of the highest international standing as well as others who have more recently broken through onto the scene.’*

**Alison Cooke** works with clay dug from interventions such as mining, engineering or scientific research, which she fires at extreme temperatures. For AWARD she will create an installation made from clay taken from below the North Sea following her collaboration with scientific research team Europe’s Lost Frontiers. This scientific research team have mapped this submerged Doggerland and given her fragments of sediment core.

**Christie Brown’s** figurative practice is informed by an interest in our relationship with objects and the significance and relevance of museum collections and archaic artefacts to contemporary art. For AWARD she will explore the connection between life drawings and 3D ceramics, creating a tableau of clay figures against a frieze backdrop of life drawing.

**Cleo Mussi** creates mosaics using ceramic tablewarefrom the last 200 years of British ceramic industry. She proposes a series of life-size 2D figures to create a timeline exploring the interaction of human life with the natural world. This work will explore how the British landscape has changed and evolved with movement of people, be it thanks to Brexit, covid, health, economics or climate change.

Inspired by kitsch charity shop and museum ornaments, **Connor Coulston** explores socio-political themes such as depression, masculinity, equality and loneliness in his sculptural work, using humour as a way of engaging his audience with these darker issues. His work for BCB AWARD includes a Christmas angel ornament belonging to his nan reimagined as a depressed single mother of four.

**Helen Beard** is a people watcher who uses illustration in her work and clay as her canvas. Her new body of work created for AWARD will see her document the world we live in now through a composition of hand-built porcelain and wheel-thrown pots.

**Ho Lai** explores the contemporary nature of ceramics in her work, experimenting with the materials and processes involved in its creation. Her AWARD proposal, *Fluxing Red*, is series of 50 red-stained bone china wall objects capturing the map outline of Hong Kong. It is a response to the government’s decision to allow British National Overseas passport holders from Hong Kong to become British citizens and the resulting identity crisis felt by many contemporary migrants.

In his practice, **Jin Eui Kim** explores how the perception of 3D ceramic forms can be manipulated by the application of different arrangements of tones on their surfaces. For AWARD, he will use computer technology to craft new, technically advanced ceramic tools that will enable him to explore a range of new techniques and original approaches to create tone in large-scale ceramic forms.

**Mawuena Kattah** brings people and pattern together in complex, vibrant immersive installations of ceramic vessels, friezes and table services. Her proposal for AWARD, *The Meal*, is a ceramic table setting for eight people inspired by her regular trips to Brixton market to buy the food and African fabrics that inspire her work. She has worked with chef and author Zoe Adjonyoh to create a bespoke menu for *The Meal*.

In his practice **Stephen Dixon** uses ceramics to investigate contemporary narratives. His proposed work, *Ship of Dreams and Nightmares*, will be a 4m silhouette of an overloaded and dilapidated Mediterranean refugee ship created from multiple hand-built and tin-glazed ceramic objects suspended with a scaffolding structure. The work is intended to highlight the ongoing tragedy of migration and further establish ceramics as a medium for social commentary and public commemoration.

**Tamsin van Essen’s** work is primarily concept driven, exploring notions of beauty and impermanence through examining scientific, medical and social historic themes. Following a recent residency in India, her AWARD proposal will see her creating a series of abstracted Ayurvedic surgical tools using porcelain and fine red earthenware, the resulting ambiguous, eroded forms exploring notions of function and value.

AWARD is the headline exhibition in the British Ceramics Biennial, an international contemporary ceramics festival that takes place in Stoke-on-Trent, the home of British ceramics. The festival returns for its seventh edition from 11 September to 17 October 2021. The full BCB festival programme will be announced in late spring.

[www.britishceramicsbiennial.com](http://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com)

**-Ends-**

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**Notes to editors**

**BCB AWARD 2021 judging panel:**

Alun Graves - Senior Curator Ceramics and Glass V&A (Chair)

Clare Twomey - artist, researcher and writer

Vicky Lindo and William Brookes - AWARD 2019 winners

Barney Hare Duke – Former Artistic Director, British Ceramics Biennial

Deirdre Figueiredo – Director, Craftspace

Anjani Khanna - artist and co-founding curator of the Indian Ceramics Triennale

Skinder Hundal - Director of Arts, British Council

**About the** **British Ceramics Biennial:**

The next British Ceramics Biennial festival takes places from 11 September to 17 October 2021.

The British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) is a prestigious and high-profile festival of contemporary ceramics that takes place in Stoke-on-Trent. BCB presents artworks from the UK’s leading ceramicists alongside work by international artists, in exhibitions and special events held across the city. BCB is underpinned by an exciting year-round programme of artists’ commissions, education and community engagement projects.

British Ceramics Biennial is a prestigious project that embraces the heritage of the Potteries as the home of British ceramics; that stimulates creativity and innovation across the breadth of its practice and sharpens Stoke-on-Trent’s creative edge as an international centre for excellence in contemporary ceramics.

Initiated in 2009, BCB has grown to be the single largest ceramics event in the UK, a flagship cultural project for Stoke-on-Trent City Council, and a catalyst for regeneration. BCB has been successful in bringing great art, creative energy and critical attention to the city, and has facilitated meaningful new public engagement with local communities, visitors and cultural tourists.

**British Ceramics Biennial funders:**

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