

Ajar
Philip Eglin

Ajar

This catalogue was published by Monique Deul Consultancy on the occasion of *Ajar*, a solo exhibition of work by Philip Eglin, presented by Taste Contemporary at artgenève 2019, Rue François-Peyrot 30, 1218 Le Grand-Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland

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30 January – 03 February 2019



Handle made of three straps strung together
C. 75-1927

Foreword

I remember very clearly my first visit to Philip Eglin's studio in Wales a number of years ago. Phil met me at the train station. He was instantly recognisable wearing his favourite hat, which I had seen in so many images taken by his son Oliver. When we arrived at his home I was given a pair of boots and we went straight out for a long walk accompanied by his loyal dog Nelson, taking in the beautiful and dramatic Welsh landscape along the way. On our return his wife Jennet welcomed us into their kitchen with tea and Welsh cakes warm from the AGA stove. I felt completely at home and very happy.

In her wonderful essay, written especially for this catalogue, Alison Britton suggests that Philip Eglin's work derives from vivid and unexpected collisions. I agree. It is a splendid cacophony that stems from his playful cheekiness and his compulsive juxtaposing of both abstract and human forms alongside perceptive commentary on politics, religion, history and even sport. The resulting works are presented to us through forms that require a rigorous and deep understanding of the materials with which he chooses to express these ideas.

Philip Eglin has entitled this solo exhibition '*Ajar*'.

Now we open the door and invite you to consider these expressive forms and reflect on the ambiguity inherent in their challenging and playful transformation. For me it's also a reminder of recent months, a period in which I was privileged to gain glimpses of the work to come.

Enjoy.

Monique Deul, Founder & Director,
Taste Contemporary





Slip-sliding narrative and evolving form in Philip Eglin's new works Alison Britton

I think it is the right moment to reflect on this splendid group of new pots as *landmarks* that exhibit Philip Eglin's mature work; and it is a jolt to discover that he will be sixty next year. The art historian John Christian wrote of his 'subversive humour, his almost schoolboy larkiness',¹ and this chirpy aspect of his character is still active. As a Royal College of Art student, (I was Eglin's tutor at the time), he once dangled distracting objects from the floor above Ceramics, seen through the window as his friend was having an exam review of work. A big part of his demeanour then involved cheek and punning play, and it still does. This sits alongside his great seriousness and passion for the history of paintings and objects, high and low culture, and the field of ceramics as a whole. But there is always a thread of wit or humour in his drawing, in the juxtapositions of subject matter, and in the almost innocent directness of both his image making and his forms.

What is special about his work? He understands making so thoroughly, and works with daring across a great range of skills. Whichever difficult process he is currently excited by is seen through the apparent ease of his explorations. Some of the big works look loose and casual, sloppy even. But working in wet clay at this large scale raises physical challenges that have to be strategically managed, and deserve a lot of respect.

Throughout his making, the *wholeness* of his vision for the object is supported by an attachment to complexity of various kinds. His love of art history, religious sculpture and painting, fashion and the way clothes and colours move over bodies, the culture of football, graffiti in the street, the directness of children's drawing, slogans; all these ingredients are stored in his imagination. He also has a collection of old watering cans and metal buckets, and appreciates the dents that time has bashed into them. These and other seams of inspiration, in vivid and unexpected collisions, are seen in his images or loosely sprawling patterns.



¹ Gallery essay for Eglin exhibition in 2013 at Marsden Woo Gallery, London

Eglin was recognised in the early years of his practice for making long-limbed earthenware female figures, colourfully painted. Human bodies, both sacred and profane, are still a significant feature of his practice. In 1992 I wrote about his female figures, hand built from clay, and their surprising graphic presence and postmodern language: 'Not just painted, he has slapped and sloshed fierce coloured metal oxide pigments over their bodies in great strokes and dribbles and scrawls of words. Why is this necessary, why has he messed them up? Unpainted they would seem like attempts at reproduction, too daunted by the past. As they are, they link the characteristic palette of ceramics, and traditions of Staffordshire popular figures, with homage to Cranach and the aggressive deconstructive dash of a modern urban upbringing.'²

Although he still works with the figure, this new exhibition is entirely focussed on Eglin's large pots. First the bucket, which is an imposingly plain cylindrical form, a bold alternative, perhaps, to the fine details of figure making.

Eglin has been making the bucket form since the mid 1990s, though they have got much bigger in recent years. His bucket is a wide straight-sided form for carrying beautifully layered images, where portraits meet patterns of equal exuberance. The drug jar is a new development, reflecting on pots he saw in the Bargello Museum in Florence. Some of these recent works approach 70 cms in height. Two distinct approaches to surface are being explored in these series. Both are technically complex, and different kinds of bravado are needed in their development.

Unlike the pages of a book, pictures on the wall of a cylindrical pot can be seen in any order, '...no start no finish, like a loop tape', he says. The narrative can have ambiguous open-ended readings, depending on what meets the eye first.



² Essay in exhibition catalogue, *Beyond the Dovetail, Craft, Skill and Imagination*, Crafts Council 1991

Just as it is normal for artists to comb through junk shops for forgotten objects that inspire their work, so Eglin currently also trawls for old prints and photographs on e-bay. He is drawn to ones that have been defaced, some human scrawl with a comment. One print image used recently is an engraving for a Victorian Staffordshire plate, called *The Beekeeper*. It is copied from a 18thC. watercolour by George Robertson called *Swarm of Bees*. Displaced parts of this image, loosely redrawn, appear on several of his new forms, subtly recoloured in the mood of this moment.

Years ago Eglin developed a way of hand building and press-moulding forms with slabs of clay on which he had already picked up a fine line drawing, in a dark coloured slip, often in cobalt blue. The image was made by scratching into a flat block of plaster, and splodging the lines full of slip. The drawing was cleaned back to the lines after it had dried a bit. A sheet of soft clay was rolled over the plaster bat. These images on clay slabs were then assembled into larger forms, using a press mould, in which they were pieced together and joined at the flexible stage.

These 'pages' of imagery on separate slabs of clay have become more elaborate paintings by now, and are done with a more complex process in many colours. The thin lines that define the details of the figures, need to go onto the plaster first; followed by solid colour areas that fill the spaces of their clothes. Then a big clay slab, perhaps 50 x 50 cms, is pressed over it and rolled firmly to attach the slip to the clay. A large bucket form, within its huge plaster mould, is usually made up from three main painted slabs. Further ornamentation continues when the piece has firmed-up enough to have the mould removed.



In 2011 Eglin moved away from town life in Staffordshire, once the heart of Britain's ceramics industry. He had taught at the university in Stoke-on-Trent for many years, and moved to a house in deep country in Wales. Here he has a studio that is just a stroll across the garden, and few distractions except an energetic dog. His wife came from the area, and Eglin began to research Welsh ceramic history to settle himself in his surroundings. A research trip to see the Buckley Slipware pots in the Aberystwyth University Ceramics Collection was important. There he saw the swift and lively fluidity of patterns trailed in one liquid clay (slip) onto a wet slip surface of another colour. The wild moments of a basic rural tradition.

This new mode of working with fluid loop patterns, white and sepia brown for instance, slithering together, and settling as the trailed colours flatten onto the clay, set

new challenges for the large forms Eglin wanted to make. But he learnt to scale up the preparations to make buckets with this method. He also dramatically shifted the colour range to include lime green or brilliant red on white, (unthinkable for the Italian drug jar makers of the Renaissance) or yellow and brown. Recent pieces include curvaceous jars with wildly spiralling trailed surfaces, such as *Banana Drama*, or *Twombly's Jar*.

It is like writing – there are almost narrative curls on these buckets and jars – and some of Twombly's paintings *seemed* like script in the same way. The wet gets dry, in time; fluidity settles into hard fact. These lively liquid expressions set firm for ever. The two-part story of soft wet materials becoming hard like glass underlies all of ceramic art – and Eglin's bravura exploits these material capacities to powerful effect.



Slipshod, 2018

Hand built earthenware, slip
painted, transparent lead glaze,
53H x 45W x 45D cm



This Way Up, 2018

Hand built earthenware, slip
painted, transparent lead glaze,
55H x 46W x 46D cm



Inamorata, 2018

Hand built earthenware, slip
painted, transparent lead glaze,
67H x 63W x 52D cm



Red Swirl, 2018

Hand built earthenware, slip
painted, transparent lead glaze,
53H x 45W x 45D cm



Loop the Loop, 2018

Hand built earthenware, slip
painted, transparent lead glaze,
51H x 44W x 44D cm



Reproduction Interdite, 2018
Hand built earthenware, slip
painted, transparent lead glaze,
54H x 44W x 44D cm



Blue Nude, 2018

Hand built earthenware, slip
painted, transparent lead glaze,
55H x 43W x 43D cm



Twombly's Jar, 2018

Hand built earthenware, slip
painted, transparent lead glaze,
68H x 71W x 71D cm



Banana Drama, 2018

Hand built earthenware, slip
painted, transparent lead glaze,
66H x 68W x 52D cm





'I see myself as continuing a strong ceramic tradition of borrowing ideas, for both form and surface, from examples found in other media. I enjoy being flippant and subversive, making fusions of seemingly disparate historical and contemporary subjects in an attempt to achieve a balance between the high and the lowbrow, the reverent and the irreverent, the sophisticated and the crude.'

Philip Eglin

Education

1983–1986 Royal College of Art
1979–1982 Staffordshire Polytechnic

Selected Collections

British Council

Victoria and Albert Museum,
London, England

Fitzwilliam Museum,
University of Cambridge, England

National Museum of Scotland,
Edinburgh, Scotland

National Museums Liverpool,
England

Birmingham Museum and
Art Gallery, Birmingham, England

Mint Museum, Charlotte,
North Carolina, USA

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

Middlesbrough Institute of Modern
Art, Middlesbrough, England

The Houston Museum of Fine Arts,
Houston, Texas, USA

La Piscine Museum, Roubaix, France

The Sèvres National Ceramics
Museum, Paris, France

National Museum Wales,
Cardiff, Wales

Gibraltar b.1959

Crafts Study Centre,
University for the Creative Arts,
Farnham, Surrey, England

Aberystwyth University, Wales

Glynn Vivian Art Gallery,
Swansea, Wales

Solo Exhibitions

2019 *Ajar*, artgenève [presented
by Taste Contemporary],
Geneva, Switzerland

2017 *Unfinished Business*, Scottish
Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland

The Wakelin Award,
Glynn Vivian Art Gallery,
Swansea, Wales

2016 *Kick the Bucket*, Marsden
Woo Gallery, London, England

2015 *Slipping the Trail* [touring
exhibition], Aberystwyth Arts
Centre, Aberystwyth, Wales

2013 *Nice Pair of Jugs*, Marsden
Woo Gallery, London, England

2011 *Mould Store*, Spode Factory
Site, British Ceramics Biennial,
Stoke-on-Trent, England

Mixed Marriages, Blackwell
The Arts and Crafts House,
Cumbria

2009 *Popes, Pin-ups and Pooches*,
Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh

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|----------------------------|--|--------|---|------|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| 2008 | <i>Hands Off Berbatov</i> , Barrett Marsden Gallery, London, England | 2017 – | <i>Things of Beauty Growing</i> , <i>British Studio Pottery</i> , Yale Centre for British Art and touring to Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England | | <i>Motifs places figures libres</i> , Hélène Aziza Gallery, Paris, France | 2000 | <i>British Ceramics 2000</i> , Grimmerhus Ceramics Museum, Middelfart, Denmark |
| | <i>Spiritual Heroes</i> , Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, Wales | | | | <i>Meister der Moderne</i> , Galerie Handwerk, Munich, Germany | Selected publications and catalogues | |
| 2007 | <i>Borrowings</i> , Nottingham Museum and Art Gallery, Nottingham, England | 2016 | <i>Vase: Function Reviewed</i> , National Craft Gallery, Kilkenny, Ireland | 2013 | <i>Juggling</i> , Hélène Aziza, Paris, France | 2019 | <i>Ajar</i> , Philip Eglin solo exhibition, artgenève 2019, Monique Deul Consultancy |
| | Dean Project, SOFA, New York, USA | | artgenève [presented by Taste Contemporary], Geneva, Switzerland | 2010 | <i>Modern British Potters</i> , Goldmark Gallery, Uppingham, England | 2017 | <i>Unfinished Business</i> , Sara Roberts, Scottish Gallery |
| 2006 | Barrett Marsden Gallery, London, England | | artmonte-carlo [presented by Taste Contemporary], Monte-carlo, Monaco | | <i>Double Take</i> , Philip Eglin & Tony Hayward, Marsden Woo Gallery, London, England | 2015 | <i>Slipping The Trail</i> , David Whiting, Aberystwyth University |
| 2005 | Franklin Parrasch Gallery, New York, USA | 2015 | <i>Ceramix: Ceramics in Art from Rodin to Schütte</i> , Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, The Netherlands and La Maison Rouge, Paris, France | | <i>Inscription: Drawing</i> , <i>Making, Thinking</i> , Jerwood Arts Space, London, England | 2011 | <i>Mixed Marriage[S]</i> Philip Eglin, Tony Hayward, Lakeland Arts Trust |
| 2004 | Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland | | <i>Some English Pots</i> , Crafts Study Centre Farnham, England | | Taiwan Ceramics Biennale, Taipei Ceramics Museum, Taiwan | 2009 | <i>Popes, Pin-Ups and Pooches</i> , Scottish Gallery |
| 2003 | Garth Clark Gallery, New York, USA | | <i>Many a Slip</i> , Group show Marsden Woo Gallery, London, England | | Contemporary British Studio Ceramics: Grainer Collection, North Carolina, USA | 2008 | <i>Eglins’ Etchings</i> , Philip Eglin, Tony Hayward, Eglin Hayward |
| | Barrett Marsden Gallery, London, England | | <i>Blue and White</i> , British Printed Ceramics at the V&A Museum, London, England | 2009 | <i>Still Life</i> , Galerie Handwerk, Munich, Germany | 2007 | <i>Borrowings</i> , Philip Eglin Tony Hayward, Notts Museum and Art Gallery |
| 2001 | Barrett Marsden Gallery, London, England | | <i>Fragile</i> , National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, Wales | 2006 | European Ceramic Context – Group Exhibition, Art Museum of Bornholm, Denmark | 2006 | <i>The Ceramic Narrative</i> , Matthias Ostermann, Pennsylvania Press |
| | Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England | | artgenève [presented by Taste Contemporary], Geneva, Switzerland | 2005 | <i>Crafts Council Shop at the V&A: Celebrating 30 Years</i> , Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England | 2003 | <i>Sexpots – Eroticism in Ceramics</i> , Paul Mathieu, A&C Black |
| 2000 | Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland | | | 2001 | <i>Poetics of Clay</i> , Philadelphia Art Alliance, Pennsylvania, USA | 2001 | <i>Postmodern Ceramics</i> , Mark Del Vecchio, Thames & Hudson |
| | Garth Clark Gallery, New York, USA | 2014 | <i>Teabowls: Form, Function, Expression</i> , Oxford Ceramics Gallery, Oxford, England | | <i>Blur</i> , Acquisitions from previous two years by Stedelijk Museum, The Netherlands | Awards | |
| Selected Group Exhibitions | | | | | | 2017 | The Wakelin Award |
| 2018 | <i>Oxford Pioneers: marking 50 Years from the founding of the Oxford Gallery</i> | | | | | 1996 | Jerwood Prize for Applied Arts |
| | | | | | | 1993 | Arts Foundation Fellowship |

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Alison Britton
for an insightful and beautifully
written essay.

Sincere thanks to Philip and
Jennet for their warm welcome
and generous hospitality.

Photography

All images by Oliver Eglin
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