

Frances Priest Unfixing 3 - 31 August 2024







Meet (detail), triptych  
Handbuilt black clay, inscribed line, relief surface and vitreous slip, 48 x 60 x 5 cm

**Frances Priest**

Unfixing

3 - 31 August 2024

*Join us for the opening on Saturday 3 August from 2 - 4pm*

We are looking forward to welcoming Frances Priest to the gallery this August for her debut solo exhibition, Unfixing. The exhibition will showcase wall and plinth based ceramic pieces, as well as a series of work on paper.

Marking a new departure in her practice, Frances has focused on a collection of universally familiar pattern structures. Through a process of deconstructing and reconfiguring the component motifs, she has pushed into abstraction, exploring movement, space and colour.

Cover: *Scale* (detail)

Handbuilt black clay, inscribed line, relief surface and vitreous slip, 48 x 48 x 5 cm

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Pace

Handbuilt clay, inscribed line, vitreous slip, 50 x 12 x 5cm

### Frances Priest: Unfixing

*Things taken together are whole and not whole,  
something which is being brought together and  
brought apart, which is in tune and out of tune:  
out of all things can be made a unity, and out of  
a unity, all things. 1*

(Heraclitus, lived c.500BC)

The influential ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus wrote only one manuscript, which is now lost. The only extant writing is to be found in The Cosmic Fragments, a modern compendium of quotations ascribed to him in other ancient Greek philosophical texts. Curiously, this fashioning of literary splinters into a volume parallels the politics of Heraclitus' own philosophy. As observed in the opening quotation, Heraclitus considered that anything complete was, out of necessity, constituted by the incomplete. Furthermore, the incomplete could only be transformed into the complete with a force of change. Because of this, Heraclitus considered change to be fundamental to cosmology. His most quoted passage – "it is impossible to step twice into the same river"<sup>2</sup> – has become emblematic of the conviction that all things – life included – exist only through change. We may swim in the same river every day, but we will touch a singular molecule of water just once. To be unfixing is thus to recognise the true nature of things. Change is the only constant.





If change is the only constant, Frances Priest is a remarkably consistent artist. In accordance with Heraclitus, Priest uses the verb 'unfixing' to describe how unity is comprised of the incomplete and change is a force of constancy. In *Unfixing*, pattern is pushed to its breaking point across a new vocabulary of striking forms. Yet, with the usual masterful control, Priest curtails its collapse. Her work teeters on the edge of systematisation and spontaneity, producing a visual complexity that surprises as much as it delights. An intuitive use of colour across diptychs and triptychs – forms more associated with painting than ceramics – capture the movement of pattern from its conception, via dissolution, to reassembly.

For Priest, 'unity out of incompleteness' is in one sense temporal. Historical frames of reference – the ornamental details collected by Owen Jones in his 1856 publication *The*

*Grammar of Ornament*, the wallpaper and textile design drawings of William Morris, and the pattern books found in the tile and linoleum factories of Craven Dunnill in Ironbridge and Barry's of Kirkcaldy – are unfixing from the past and deployed in the contemporary to remind us of the transitory nature of the moment; that we are formed by the past but are not bound by it. Indeed, the rectangular ceramic wall panels evince a strong sense of agency in the here and now, as if seeds are scattering in the wind, birds are flocking across the sky, insects have fleetingly gathered, or an ice shelf is slowly melting. These works ask us to critically recognise the inconsistencies of the world around us; for the sensations of a fleeting moment are here produced through a comparatively long production process, only to be suspended in fired clay, a material as fragile as it is durable.



*Release*  
Handbuilt black clay, inscribed line, relief surface and vitreous slip, 48 x 20 x 5 cm





Meet, triptych  
Handbuilt black clay, inscribed line, relief surface and vitreous slip, 48 x 60 x 5 cm

Change becomes constancy in the material shifts between two- and three-dimensions, where Priest explores how different media can manifest similar but different compositional relationships. For instance, the space around each individual motif is highlighted as significant, but in discrete ways. As smooth as the vitreous slip of Priest's ceramics, the gouache paintings activate the brightly coloured Murano paper as an essential part of the overall composition. By consciously maintaining them in outline, each shape is individually marked out from the others and from the background. This makes the space between as expressive as the motifs themselves. The same is true of the free-standing pieces, where the gaps between objects is equally charged. However, the background is no longer Murano paper but a room, a much more dynamic, three-dimensional, context of display.

Interestingly, the wall reliefs sit in-between these two and three dimensions, utilising elements of the free-standing objects against a flat wall reminiscent of the Murano paper. In her movements across media, Priest demonstrates that a linear outline in painting can become a shadow in a relief, and even a three-dimensional shifting space. In all cases, Priest manipulates how we make sense of pattern to show that objects have resonance and expression precisely because they are spatial objects. Our changing views of these works remind us that whilst perception might seem a static activity – that there is only one way of seeing an object in the world – it is in fact changeable and varied; it is unfixed.

1 Kirk, Geoffrey Stephen. *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 168.

2 *Ibid*, 381.



The reliefs are the most radical formal departure for Priest. Neither paintings, nor tiles, nor mosaics, nor sculptures, they are all four combined into one. They speak as much to the relief paintings of Constructivism as they do to the history of ceramics. Thus, the aesthetic politics underpinning *Unfixing* is to disregard what seems to be an increasingly redundant distinction between fine art and craft. Eschewing simple categorisation, Priest instead asserts the interdisciplinary vitality and power of ceramics as a material rather than an ideology, and its ability to respond to both painterly and sculptural approaches.

*Ashley Thorpe*

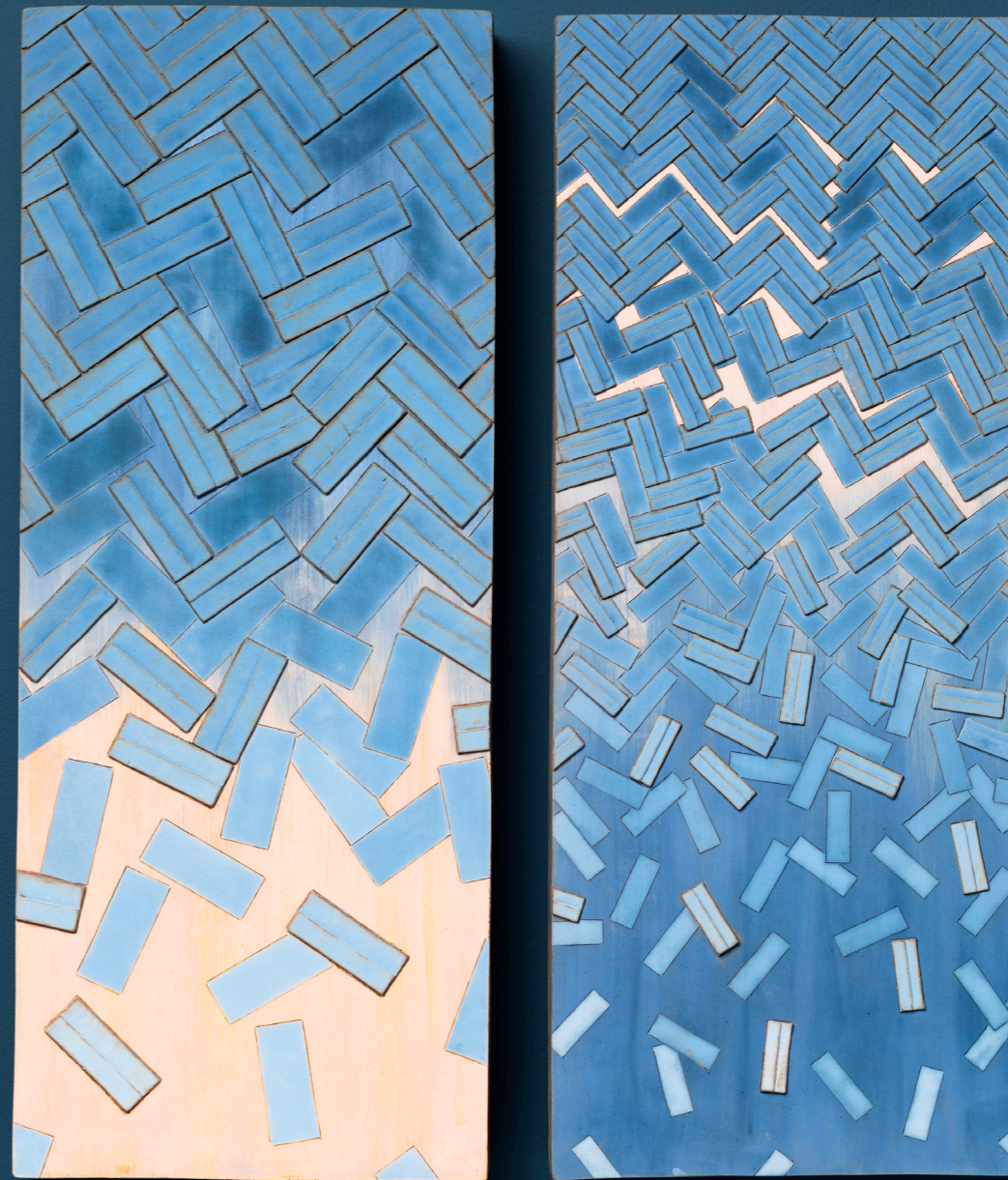
Ashley Thorpe is a Reader in the Department of Drama, Theatre & Dance at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is a collector of ceramics and author of *Contemporary British Ceramics: Beneath the Surface* and *Contemporary British Studio Pottery: Forms of Expression* (both published by The Crowood Press), and *Julian Stair: Memory, Material, Ceramics* (published by Yale University Press).

Might the literal and metaphorical dissolution of pattern in *Unfixing* allude to broader changes; socially, politically, culturally, environmentally? For the better? For the worse? Each must decide for themselves; this is not polemical art. For me, Priest's work is a call to unfix how we classify artistic practice, and to recognise the mutability of what objects have meant in the past, what they mean in the present, and what they might mean in the future. In this regard, *Unfixing* stands as a stark reminder that change is the only constant.

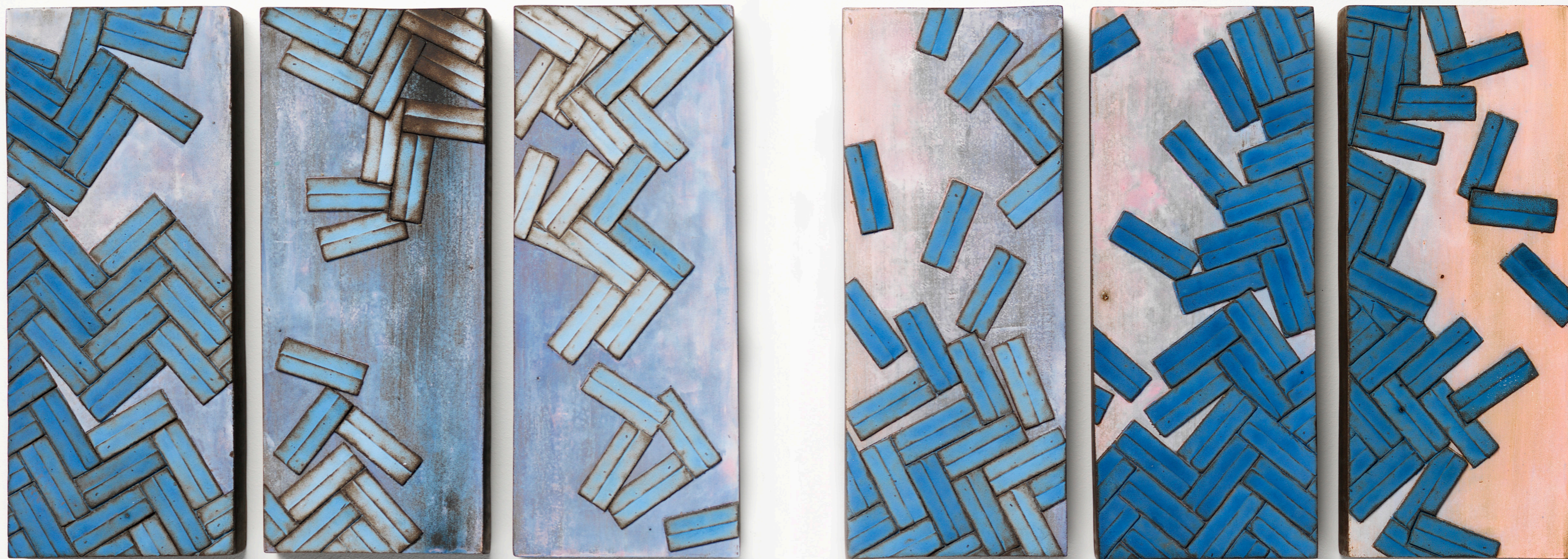




*Untitled / Canvas i, diptych*  
Handbuilt black clay, inscribed line, relief surface and vitreous slip, 48 x 40 x 5 cm







*Cadence*  
Hand-built black clay, inscribed line, relief surface and vitreous slip, 24 x 60 x 5 cm



*Direct*

Handbuilt black clay, inscribed line, relief surface and vitreous slip, 48 x 20 x 5 cm





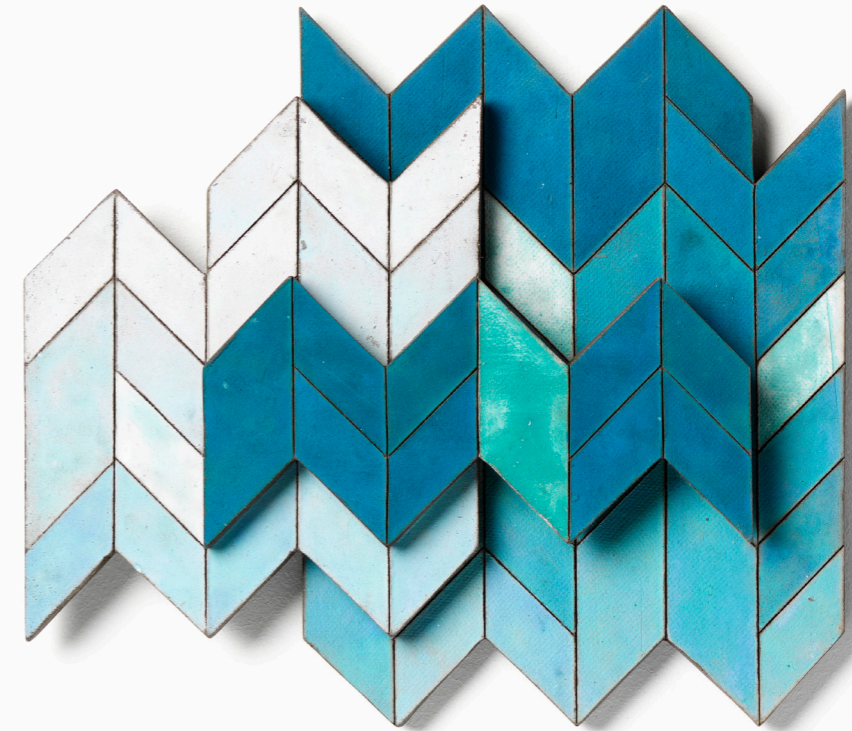


*Slack*  
Handbuilt clay, inscribed line, vitreous slip, 70 x 12 x 5 cm





*Overlay ii*  
Hand-carved black clay, inscribed line, vitreous slip, 24 x 40 x 5 cm



*Overlay i*  
Hand-carved black clay, inscribed line, vitreous slip, 24 x 40 x 5 cm



*Untitled / Canvas iv, diptych*  
Handbuilt black clay, inscribed line, relief surface and vitreous slip, 48 x 40 x 5 cm







Wait  
Handbuilt clay, inscribed line, vitreous slip, 50 x 12 x 5 cm



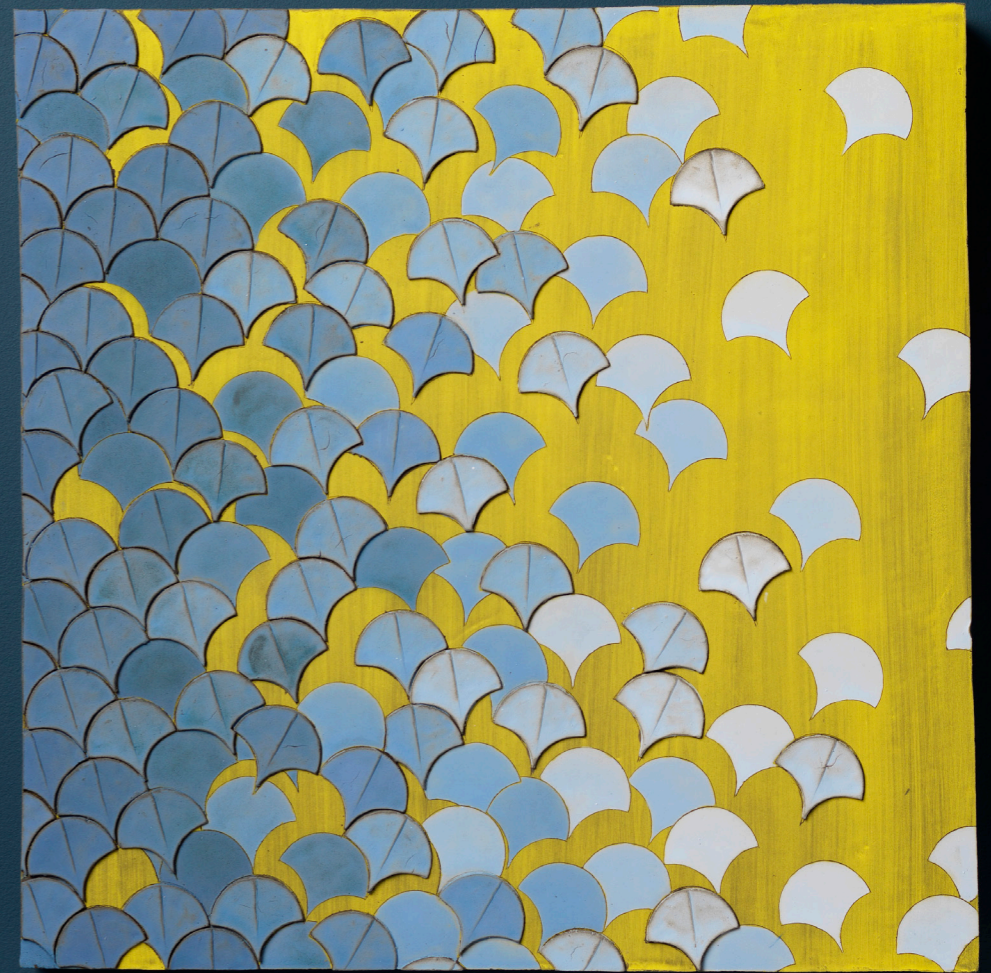


*Flow i - iv*  
Hand-carved black clay, inscribed line, vitreous slip, 24 x 10 x 4 cm each



*Scale*

Handbuilt black clay, inscribed line, relief surface and vitreous slip, 48 x 48 x 5 cm

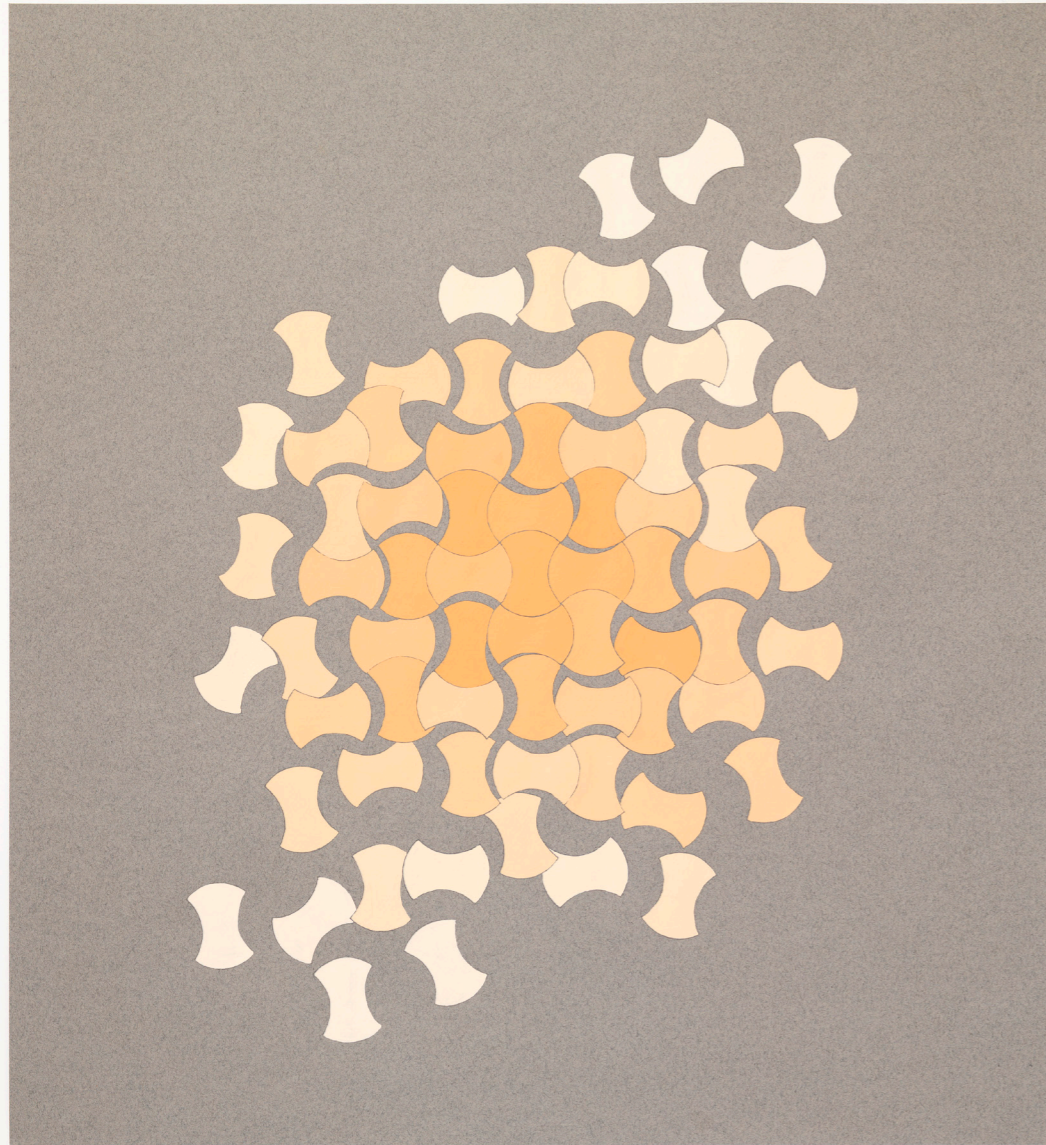




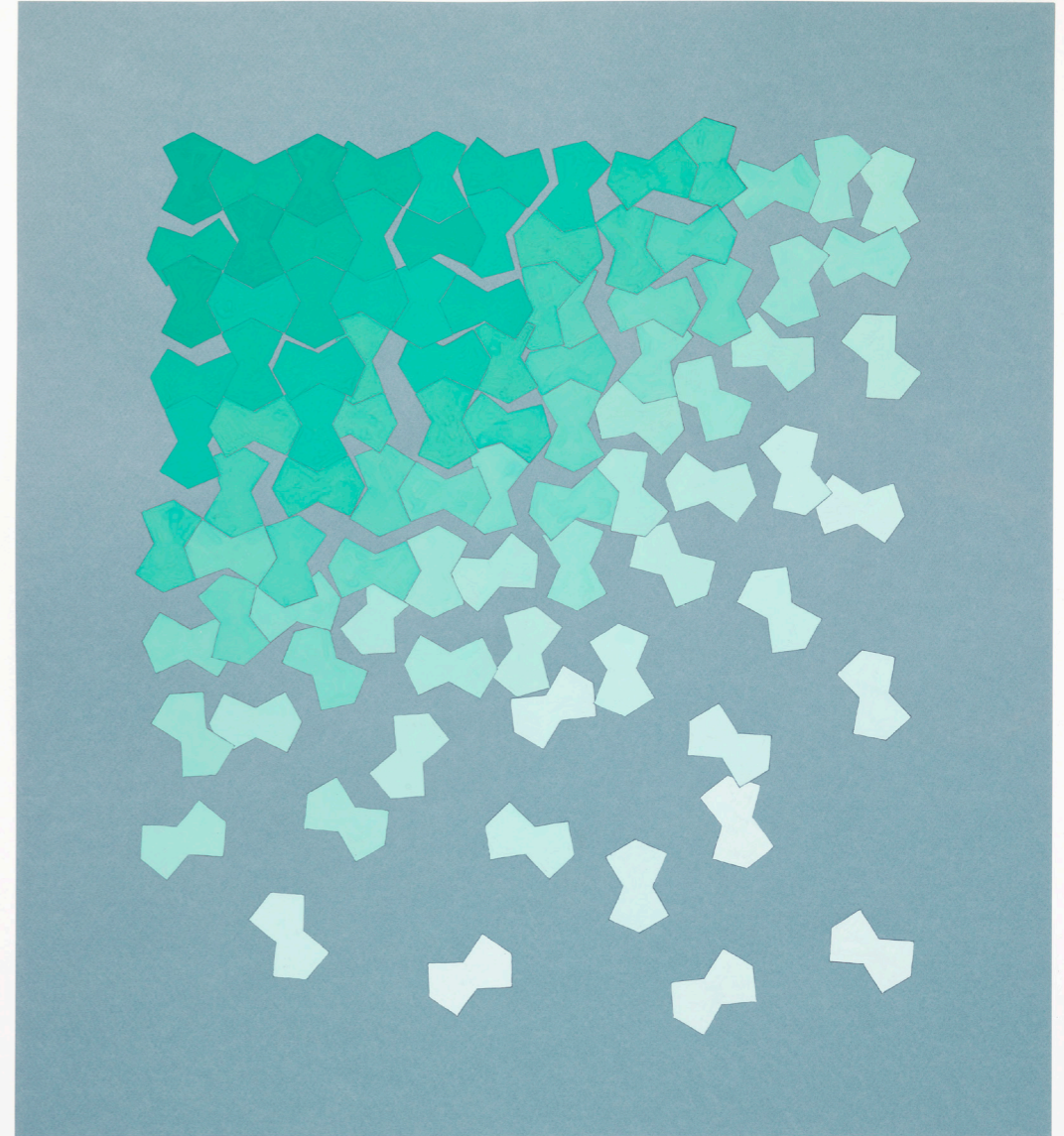


*Impression i - xii*  
Hand-built black clay, relief surface and vitreous slip, 10 x 10 x 4 cm each





*Draft iii*  
Pencil & gouache on, murano paper, 50 x 56 cm



*Draft iv*  
Pencil & gouache on, murano paper, 50 x 56 cm



Born Wakefield 1976

EDUCATION

1999 PGDip. Ceramics Edinburgh College of Art  
1998 BA (Hons) Ceramics (First) Edinburgh College of Art  
1995 Foundation Diploma Dewsbury College

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS AND FAIRS

2024 Collect, Cavaliero Finn at Somerset House, London  
London Art Fair, &Gallery, London  
2023 The Grit & The Glamour, Bard, Edinburgh  
Annual Winter Exhibition, &Gallery, Edinburgh  
Artefact, Cavaliero Finn, Design Centre, Chelsea,  
London  
Chevron | Stripe | Asanoha, &Gallery, Edinburgh  
Collect, Cavaliero Finn at Somerset House, London  
Dialogue, Galerie Biesenbach, Cologne, Germany  
30 :: 30, &Gallery, Edinburgh, UK  
2022 Annual Winter Exhibition, &Gallery, Edinburgh  
SSA 130 Years, Society Scottish Artists Annual  
Exhibition, Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh  
Formed at Future Heritage, Design Centre, Chelsea  
Harbour, London  
Imbrication New Media Scotland, Music Hall, Aberdeen  
Collect, Cavaliero Finn at Somerset House, London  
2021 London Craft Week - Crafting A Difference, Cavaliero  
Finn, The Argentine Ambassadors Residence, London  
Scratch & Scrape, Culture Object, New York, USA  
Crafting A Difference, Cavaliero Finn at Soshiro,  
London  
Collect, Cavaliero Finn at Somerset House, London  
2020 The Potential of Pattern, Sunny Bank Mills, Leeds  
Collect, Cavaliero Finn at Somerset House, London  
Lines From Scotland, Fife Contemporary, St Andrews  
2019 Alter, Cavaliero Finn at Fitzrovia Chapel, London  
Lines From Scotland, Fife Contemporary, St Andrews  
PAD London, Objet d'Emotion, London  
Design Exhibition Scotland, Lyon & Turnbull, Edinburgh  
Influences of The East, The Bowes Museum, Barnard  
Castle  
A Sense of The Familiar, Cavaliero Finn, London  
2018 Homo Faber - Best In Europe, Fondazione Giorgio Cini,  
Venice, Italy  
Re[a]d Bed, Edinburgh City Art Centre, Edinburgh

2017 A Fine Line, Edinburgh City Art Centre & touring,  
Edinburgh  
2016 SOFA Chicago, Tansey Contemporary, Chicago, USA  
2015 SOFA Chicago, Tansey Contemporary, Chicago, USA  
2014 Art Aspen, Tansey Contemporary, Aspen, USA  
SOFA Chicago, Tansey Contemporary, Chicago, USA  
Wesley Barrel Craft Award, Wesley Barrell & Art in  
Action  
2013 SOFA Chicago, Craft Scotland, Chicago, USA  
2012 Made in Scotland, The Fleming Collection, London  
2011 Reflections: 15 Years of EVAAC, Edinburgh City Art  
Centre, Edinburgh  
New Manor Ware, Sheffield Manor Lodge Turret  
House, Sheffield  
Collect, The Scottish Gallery, The Saatchi Galleries,  
London  
2010 Meet Your Maker, National Museum of Scotland  
in association with Craft Scotland, Edinburgh  
Collect, The Scottish Gallery at The Saatchi Galleries,  
London  
2009 British Ceramic Biennial, The Potteries Museum  
and Gallery, Stoke on Trent  
Collect, The Scottish Gallery at The Saatchi Galleries,  
London  
Objects of touch & travel... , solo exhibition, The  
Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh  
The Drawing Room, National Galleries Scotland  
Education Gallery, Edinburgh  
2008 Making Spaces, FCA&C, MAC Mobile Museum, Fife  
Focus Show, Contemporary Applied Arts, London  
Collect, The Scottish Gallery at The V&A, London  
2006 European Ceramic Context, Grønbechs Gård,  
Bornholm, Denmark  
Different Ways of Expression, The Yard, Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
Collect, The Scottish Gallery at The V&A, London  
2005 Surface & Shape, solo exhibition, The Scottish Gallery,  
Edinburgh  
Collect, The Scottish Gallery at The V&A, London  
Surface, Texture Shape: British Crafts in Japan,  
The Crafts Council, Tokyo, Japan  
2004 SOFA Chicago, The Scottish Gallery, Chicago, USA  
Collect, The Scottish Gallery at The V&A, London  
SOFA New York Clay, New York, USA

2003 What is Craft, The Hub, Lincolnshire  
Line & Form, solo exhibition, The Scottish Gallery,  
Edinburgh  
2002 Material Matters, The Hub in association with The  
Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh  
2001 1st International Ceramic Biennial, International  
Museum of Contemporary Ceramics, Incheon, Korea  
52nd International Ceramic Competition, Faenza Int.  
Museum of Ceramics, Faenza, Italy  
Talente, International Competition in Crafts, Design  
and Technology, Munich, Germany

AWARDS

2021 Building Better Healthcare Awards, The Tiled  
Corridor, commendation  
2020 QEST Johnnie Walker Scholarship  
2016 Arts & Business Awards Scotland, Patterns of Flora  
commendation in Place-making  
2015 Injection Mentoring Scheme, Crafts Council/Craft  
Scotland  
2014 Artists Bursary, Creative Scotland  
2012 Inches Carr Trust Craft Bursary, Inches Carr Trust  
2009 Craft Makers Award Edinburgh, Edinburgh City  
Council & Scottish Arts Council  
Creative Development Award, Scottish Arts Council  
2008 Covepark Scottish Crafts Residency, Scottish Arts  
Council  
2005 Professional Development Award, Scottish Arts  
Council  
2004 Benno Schotz Award Young Scottish sculptor, Royal  
Scottish Academy  
2002 Award for Individual Development, Scottish Arts  
Council  
1998 Andrew Grant Scholarship for Postgraduate Study,  
Edinburgh College of Art

PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

2022 Imbrication, Alt-w commission for Music Hall  
Aberdeen  
2021 Kirkcaldy Patterns, Edinburgh Haematology Centre,  
NHS Lothian Charity & Round Table Projects  
2018 The Tiled Corridor, Royal Edinburgh Hospital, NHS  
Lothian Health Foundation  
2015 Patterns of Flora | Mapping Seven Raasay Habitats,  
Rassay House, Atlas Arts

2015 Wall Graphics, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Glasgow  
Children's Department, Ginkgo  
Tulips, Western General Hospital Breast Care Unit,  
NHS Lothian Charity

RESIDENCIES

2023 Hugo Burge Foundation Residency  
2013 Yorkhill Children's Hospital, Therapeutic Design & Art  
Programme, Ginkgo  
Covepark, Education Outreach Residency  
2011 St Johns Hospital, Artists in Hospitals, Artlink  
Edinburgh  
Yorkshire Artspace, Artist in Residence at Manor Oaks  
Studios  
2010 Fife Coastal Path Residency, FCA&C  
2008 Making Spaces, FCA&C  
Covepark, Scottish Crafts Residency  
2005-06 Regents International School, Artist in Residence

Essay - Ashley Thorpe  
Photography - Shannon Tofts  
Soundscape collaboration - Simon Kirby  
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