



EUGENE HÖN

*Manufactured Distractions and Intersections:
Digital Ceramic Transferware
2016-2020*

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2016-2020

For my mom Emily.



Eugene Hön
Ceramic artist and academic

Manufactured Distractions and Intersections:

Digital Ceramic Transferware



Various themes and styles intersect throughout the body of work. A series of ceramic statements incorporate transfers as simulated fragments, in a way evocative of a world fragmented through multiple simultaneous forms of communication.



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Preface

Written by Carl Landsberg

Eugene Eugene Hön is a ceramic sculptor and artist who appears always to have been preceded by a reputation for exquisitely crafted, original and daring artistic statements with a strong conceptual as much as decorative bias. His Masters in Fine Art exhibition at the Michaelis Art School UCT in 1983 was already a sensation. Approaching four decades of artistic endeavour he has produced a large portfolio of unique ceramic sculptures and drawings, limited edition photolithographic prints, and hand decorated and transfer decorated plates, vases and sculptural forms as well as installations with animation and projection; Eugene Hön continues to innovate and delight. The present exhibition of ceramics is a showcase for the decorative possibilities of transferware. It is equally an aesthetic statement highlighting the complex nature and associations of detail and ornament in contemporary ceramic design, a consideration of the nature of surface decoration. The idiomatic expression *The Devil is in the Detail* is apposite.

The American academic Naomi Schor in her book *Reading in Detail Aesthetics and the Feminine* observes that we live in an age when the detail enjoys a rare prominence, however from a historical perspective the detail has had bad press. I quote “as any historian of ideas knows, the detail has until very recently been viewed with suspicion if not downright hostility”. Detail in Art as an Aesthetic category is a 19th Century legacy, a product of the decline of Classicism and the rise of Realism. Prejudice against the detail however has persisted well into the 20th Century. She writes: “the equation of an excess of details and decadence is an essential tenet of Neo-Classical doxa.” A decadent style is inherently ornamental, valorising the minute, the particular and the marginal. The ornamental inevitably has connotations of decadence and femininity, the prosaic, the everyday and domestic, the superfluous.

As an introduction to Eugene Hön's new work a brief historical digression is illuminating. The development of transfer printing on ceramics is considered a British achievement of the mid 18th Century from the County of Staffordshire. Initially transfer patterns were copied by artists and engravers from much revered Chinese hand painted blue and white porcelains in an approximation of the Oriental style which became known as Chinoiserie. The designs were etched by hand on copper plates from which paper decals were made to be transferred on to earthenware bodies. Eugene Hön's new ceramics extend this tradition with artworks of striking beauty which explore the artistic and expressive potential of transferware, decals which are digitally or laser printed and derived from the artists own drawings and sketchbooks rather than historical sources.

Eugene Hön's latest body of work is a visually coherent, thematically linked, refined and beautifully decorated series of porcelain ready-mades with transferware images derived from the artist's own exquisite ballpoint drawings. The digitally printed decals derived from the drawings are skilfully transferred by hand to the surfaces of various porcelain blanks, vases and platters; advances in digital printing and scanning techniques allow for the individual drawings to be miniaturized, enlarged, re-coloured and variously altered as well as endlessly replicated to produce a luxuriant, intricately detailed and profuse decorative vocabulary. The delicate cross hatching technique of the ballpoint drawings is faithfully reproduced creating a visual semblance of etching and engraving printmaking from earlier centuries. Hön has given free rein to a highly developed aesthetic impulse using replication, symmetry, mirroring, cropping and splicing of images, and overlaying of images to produce vibrant patterns which have the beauty and unpredictability of kaleidoscopic views. The particularity of the images/iconography and details however, as much as their unusual configurations and placement produce a disquieting and intellectually challenging dimension. Superficially the images with their primarily blue and white contrasting designs appear familiar and decorative; upon closer inspection they are jarring. The melange of images includes traditional Chinese Imperial decorative motifs such as a five clawed dragon, flaming pearl and stylized depictions of water but contrasted with anomalous imagery such as soccer balls, chain links, umbrellas, house flies, dung beetles, tulips and irises and barn swallows; individual motifs are also repeated as patterns in standard or graduated sizes or multiplied to form swathes and blocks

of decoration resembling brocade or textiles. The artist's blog provides a detailed account of the literary and visual sources which inspired his choice of imagery used in the portfolios of work exhibited and also explicates the artist's interpretation of the iconography.

Hön has selected the title Manufactured Distractions and Intersections to describe his latest body of work; he hints at the subverting of traditions and practices inherent in ceramic series ware or production ware; ceramic decorative practices associated with famous large manufactories such as Royal Doulton who have relied on transferware decoration to reduce the cost of decoration and to optimize a large output and supply a mass market of consumers with their products. The title highlights the aspects of fabrication, industrial production rather than the artisanal which is subverted by artifice and cunning, drawing the viewers attention away from the familiar or every day, distractions suggests teasing irritants or agitation (an apt metaphor for the current disarray of the world and the arts) while intersections implies contrast a convergence or synthesis of styles, motifs and influences and cultures. Hön has deployed white porcelain blanks or ready-mades for this exhibition, plates round and ovate as well as vases and jugs with elegant and timeless classical shapes. His use of transferware imagery however is transgressive and polemical as well as decorative. Amongst the most striking of the work on show are the Japanese Kintsugi style vases deliberately shattered and re-assembled with garish gold fillers/joins and with seemingly arbitrary and mismatched decal transfer patterns of tulips, irises and barn swallows applied to the fragments creating a beautiful but jarring aesthetic mirroring the incipient violence and psychic disturbance retained in the broken and repaired forms of the ceramic bodies. These works recall the iconoclasm of the famous Chinese Conceptual artist Ai Weiwei in projects such as Dropping the Urn (a photo document of the artist dropping a 2000 year old Han dynasty urn) or re-painting/obliterating the surfaces of Neolithic era Chinese vases in garish household paint or overpainting a decorated Neolithic vase with a scrolling Coca Cola emblem. In a recent Guardian UK interview Ai Weiwei is quoted saying: "An artist must also be an activist – aesthetically, morally, or philosophically. That doesn't mean they have to demonstrate in street protests, but rather deal with these issues through a so-called artistic language. Without that kind of consciousness – to be blind to human struggle – one cannot even be called an artist."

Eugene Hön's Refuse series with barn swallow motif printed on ceramic shards, plates and bowls is a striking metaphor for migration, cultural displacement and the remnants of quotidian life which survive. The surfaces of some of these pieces are decorated with decal patterns resembling shattered glass; the surface of one of the porcelain bowls is etched with a Dremel device to create a starburst pattern. There is something anarchic in this aesthetic as well as in the choice of imagery which includes tulips severed from their stalks, barn swallows truncated in mid-flight, flies and dung beetles, images used in the Vicissitude series of ceramics which are visually complex with spliced mismatched designs. In Bruce Chatwin's novel *Utz* the eponymous central character is an obsessive Meissen collector; one of his cohorts Dr Orlik is a retired entomologist who collects and studies house flies endemic to Prague. The character Orlik declaims that the house fly is an anarchist and individualist, a Don Juan unlike other species of social insects which arrange themselves in regimented communities.

In Eugene Hön's latest work he explores the disintegration or fracturing of the whole both literally and metaphorically; ceramic forms and surface decoration are reconstituted with an unfamiliar logic and impulse to create new artistic statements; there is a tension and dis-ease implicit in the increasing autonomy of parts, a bewildering anarchic mass of details and a play on the significant and insignificant detail. The Activist Series references the turmoil and political unrest presently unfolding in Hong Kong with motifs such as umbrellas and chains serving as ciphers for the street riots and student protests. Eugene Hön's work is at the forefront of cutting edge conceptually based ceramic art. His present body of work is a fascinating counterpoint to the work of leading British ceramic artists Robert Dawson and Grayson Perry both of whom have made original use of decals in their artwork.

The British artist Robert Dawson in the early 90s produced a much acclaimed body of work which comprised limited edition blue and white transfer decorated ceramics based on the famous Willow pattern chinoiserie transferware decoration utilised by companies such as Spode and Minton. He produced a range of designs which were printed onto white ceramic plates - "blanks"; the designs however were radically altered using

computer technology i.e. they were enlarged and heavily pixilated, distorted in perspective and cropped to produce a completely new and unfamiliar repertoire of designs derived from historical ceramic sources. These designs comprised *In Perspective Willow* from 1992 and a subsequent commission from Wedgwood *After Willow* pattern from 2004. Eugene Höns' *East meets West*, *Just a beautiful Game* and *Refuse* series have a striking visual congruence with Dawson's range of ceramics but further develop the technical innovation, imagery and iconography in making use of Eugene Hön's own drawings as a source for the imagery albeit with a strong implicit historicising aspect as well as introducing colour, lustre glazes and subtle social and political comment and innuendo.



The British artist Grayson Perry was awarded the prestigious Turner prize in 2003, the first ceramicist to achieve this accolade. His display of large highly decorative hand coiled pots was decorated with outré and unusual imagery, designs which explored universally human topics such as gender, identity, sexuality, and social status with abundant references to contemporary culture and politics. Eugene Hön's ceramic output has pursued a similar thematic path over a number of years with an entirely different body of work and aesthetic. It is frequently noted that in Grayson Perry's pots the form and content are incongruous, for example Grecian-like classically shaped urns are decorated with bizarre friezes of imagery sourced from contemporary media. The pots have complicated glazing techniques, seductive lustres and a chic elegance to appeal to consumer culture, seductively beautiful items that convey challenging themes with a narrative/text and figurative slant.

Eugene Hön is an artist of rare craftsmanship, superlative skills as a draughtsman and uncompromising intelligence. In my estimation his latest body of work is of comparable stature and import to the ceramic art produced by Dawson and Perry. Eugene Hön's latest body of work merges or blurs the distinctions between fine and applied art, art and craft, effortlessly incorporating industrial design and manufactured bodies with the artists own refined aesthetic. It's beauty resides in the idea of the work, its iconoclasm and the mercurial surface decoration with a magical preternatural precision in the delineation and placement of the images/ decorative motifs and artful balancing of colour. Like the stellar Ai Weiwei Hön is obsessive about technical control of his medium; there is no margin for error. However unlike the artists Dawson and Ai Weiwei who subcontract the manufacture of their work to studios and craftsmen Hön is decidedly hands-on. His signature seal-like boxed monogram EH in pillar box red on the blue and white transfer decorated East meets West and Just a beautiful Game series is surely a proclamation of intent, a self-declared brand of luxury goods with a witty irreverence which recalls his Instagram moniker HonGenius. This is an artist who is perfectly assured in his control of his medium, his purpose and evident talent - in combination a rare delight. Eugene Hön's new work continues his attraction to aggressive experimentation and ever heightened aesthetic achievement; it recalls the ground – breaking experimentation of Peter Voulkos, and Kenneth Price, Los Angeles based

ceramic artists from the mid 20th Century whose work garnered almost immediate recognition as fine art of the highest standard, they were rule-breakers whose work seemed to transcend the limitations of the ceramic medium and shift the canon of aesthetics. Eugene Hön's work is in the same league of technical accomplishment and aesthetic beauty; his output doesn't look like anything else in the contemporary ceramic world despite precedents, the hallmark of artistic achievement.

Carl Landsberg

Wits alumnus, BAFA and History of Art postgraduate qualifications. Long-standing collector beguiled by ceramics, especially fine art and applied art.



Introduction

Written by Eugene Hön

I am a ceramic artist, yet my passion for drawing with the humble ballpoint pen has opened up many new creative possibilities, also in clay.

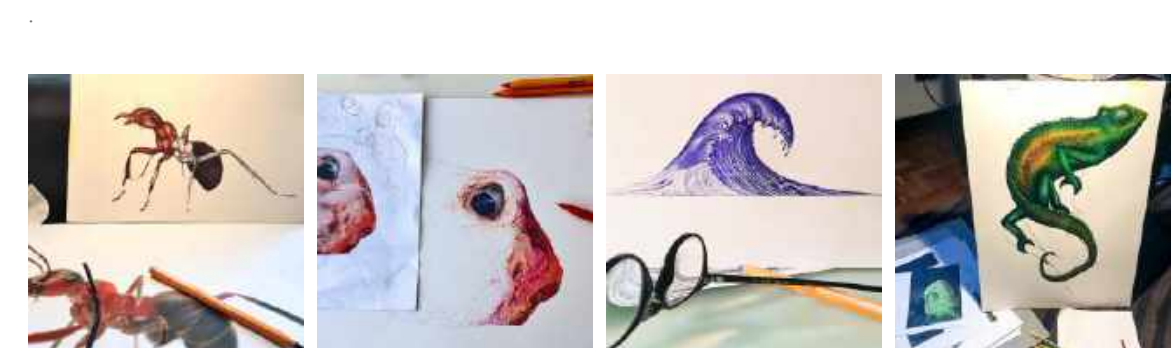
In the past I have used my ball point drawings primarily as a design tool towards creating ceramic sculptures, whether they be modelled, press-moulded or hand built figurative sculptures. As ballpoint ink fades with time and exposure to direct light, I execute my drawings on acid free paper, bound in book form.

Thanks to current advances in both ceramic and digital technology, I have been able to extract much more from my ballpoint drawings by making digitally printed ceramic transfers which can both be fired on to a range of ‘ready-mades’, or on to more expressive ceramic statements. This was a breakthrough for me. When the first batch of digitally printed ceramic transfers was test-fired on commercially produced ceramic plates, my ‘impermanent’ ballpoint drawings were instantly immortalised! Intricate crosshatching detail was perfectly visible in the fired transfers, even when the rendered image was radically reduced in size.

My fascination with decoration, especially pattern making, originated in the 1970s, at the Tygerberg Art Centre in Cape Town, while I was attending high school. In my Grade Eleven year I chose to take a second art subject, titled Textile Design. Looking back, it has taken nearly thirty-five years for my passion for drawing and its surface development potential to realise. That is the focus of this work, which sheds light on techniques involved in producing digitally printed ceramic transfers, focusing primarily on creative drawing opportunities within the field of ceramics.

During my university years at Fine Arts institutions, decoration was considered a crime. Yet for me, being able to explore a wide range of options in surface development, both decorative and expressive, remains enticing and liberating.

A wide range of subject matter is explored here, as outlined in the introductory paragraphs preceding each series. Reference is made, for example, to various themes related to blue and white ceramic ware surface decoration and the fine draughtsmanship embedded in zoological and botanical studies. The work, to my mind, of the ultimate artisan is also celebrated: Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) was not only a painter, printmaker and engraver, but also a mathematician and theorist.



Series One

Manufactured Distractions and Intersections I - VI

Various themes and styles intersect throughout the body of work presented in this exhibition and its catalogue. A series of ceramic statements incorporate transfers as simulated fragments, in a way evocative of a world fragmented through multiple simultaneous forms of communication. There is, indeed, not one way of looking at things anymore. Decorative compositions initiated with my ballpoint drawings were digitally printed to become ceramic transfers and subsequently fired on to 'ready-mades' in various shapes and forms. The transfers are applied in varying arrangements, to emulate shattered or restored ceramic vessels. The broken fragments fit together, yet the decoration on each juxtaposed shard contrasts sharply with the next one. This contradiction was achieved by slicing through an underlying, transfer-applied theme or style, making way for another and resulting in a jarring visual effect. In contemplating the vessel, the viewer thus encounters both decorative and rather distracting elements.

Manufactured Distractions and Intersections I (vase). November 2019, 365mm height.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, a flaming pearl, a football, mist, a tulip, flies, dung and a dung beetle, in a variety of compositions to illustrate the titled theme. Fired onto a thrown porcelain readymade vessel.





Manufactured Distractions and Intersections II (vase). December 2019, 270mm height.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five-clawed dragon, a flaming pearl, a football, mist, a tulip, flies, dung, a dung beetle and a barn swallow, in a variety of compositions to illustrate the titled theme. Fired onto a thrown porcelain readymade vessel.



Manufactured Distractions and Intersections III (vase). December 2019, 270mm height.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a tulip, flies, dung and a dung beetle, in a variety of compositions to illustrate the titled theme. Fired onto a thrown porcelain readymade vessel.



*Manufactured Distractions
and Intersections IV (platter).*
February 2020, 415mm height.
Digitally printed ceramic
transfers of my ballpoint
pen drawings of a five
clawed dragon, a flaming
pearl, a football, mist and
water, a tulip, flies, dung
and a dung beetle and a
barn swallow, in a variety
of compositions to illustrate
the titled theme. Fired
onto a readymade platter.



*Manufactured Distractions
and Intersections V (platter).*
February 2020, 415mm width.
Digitally printed ceramic
transfers of my ballpoint
pen drawings of a tulip, flies,
barn swallow dung and a dung
beetle, in a variety of compositions
to illustrate the titled theme.
Fired onto a readymade platter.



*Manufactured Distractions
and Intersections VI (platter).*
March 2020, 415mm width.
Digitally printed ceramic
transfers of my ballpoint pen
drawings of a tulip, flies, dung,
a dung beetle and a barn swallow
photoshopped with shattered
bullet glass imitations, in a
variety of compositions to
illustrate the titled theme.
Fired onto a readymade platter.



Series Two I

Vicissitude I - III

This series of ceramic pieces depicts 'beauty in the ugly', inspired by the evocative narratives captured in the book, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* written by Matthew Desmond (1). The book documents the shattered lives of mothers and their children who have been evicted from their homes. It presents their ongoing struggle to find cohesion in life; something which eludes them with every new trial they encounter. The fragmented circumstances of their lives are evoked through images of dung beetles laying their eggs in dung. The dung beetles are encircled by flies. The symbols of disintegration and decay represent landlords, amongst others, who prey on the vulnerable and poor. The images of depravity are juxtaposed with tulips, elusive and ephemeral symbols of beauty and dreams, which nevertheless wither away amidst the vicissitudes of life.

1. Desmond, M. 2016. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Milwaukee Wisconsin: Crown Books.





Vicissitude I (vase). December 2018, 380mm height.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a tulip, flies, a dung beetle and dung.

Fired onto a readymade vase.





Vicissitude II "vase restored Kintsugi style". December 2019, 200mm height.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a tulip, flies, a dung beetle and dung. Fired onto a Voster and Braye readymade vase. Restored by Werner Scheepers (The Restorer).



Vicissitude III (platter). October 2019, 380mm height x 300mm width.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a tulip, flies, a dung beetle and dung. Fired onto a shattered readymade platter. Exhibited on a gold leafed plinth emulating the Kintsugi style restoration.



Violent Vicissitude I, June 2020, 425mm width.

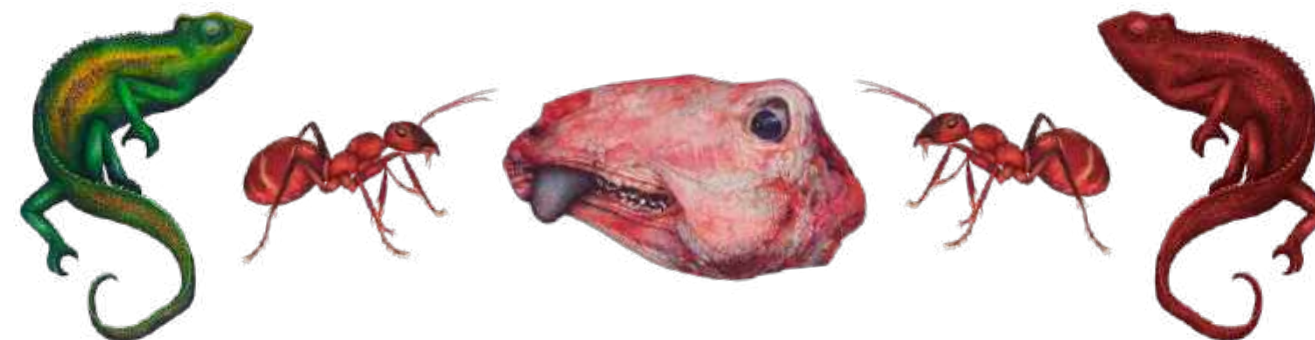
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a tulip, houseflies, a dung beetle and dung, a skopo, sheep's head, ants and chameleons. Fired onto a readymade platter.

Series Two //

Violent Vicissitude

This series, in the words of Claudia Lehner-Jobst (2020:72), “Plenty of space is left for the luminance of the white porcelain to shine through, a stylistic device of the late Baroque”, I have borrowed this device to reflect white privilege as it contrasts sharply with the iconography of the destitute.(1) The work makes reference to a prayer written on the wall of a derelict building in the Maboneng Precinct, as told by one of the residents.

“My Lord, please help me not to be like a chameleon. To have a single heart that is faithful. Not to have a bad heart that’s filled with anger, so I can be a truthful person before you, Holy Spirit,” (2)



1. Tsoumis, Karine (ed). 2020. A passion for Porcelain. Germany: Arnoldsche.

2. The resident, Siyabonga Dlodla makes his living as an informal trader selling skopo, sheep's head, to commuters at a public transit hub. The space he shares in The Hercules with his girlfriend is very small, just big enough for a single mattress and a fridge. The prayer was written on the wall in Zulu by a previous occupant. Serina, K. 2015. Gentrification in Johannesburg isn't good news for everyone. [O]. Available: <http://america.aljazeera.com/multimedia/2015/3/Gentrification-in-Johannesburg.html> Accessed 17 July 2020.

Violent Vicissitude II (vase).
 July 2020, 310mm height.
 Digitally printed ceramic
 transfers of my ballpoint
 pen drawings of a tulip,
 houseflies, a dung beetle and
 dung, a skopo, sheep's head,
 ants and chameleons. Fired
 onto a readymade vessel.

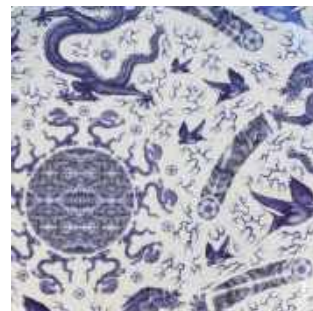


Violent Vicissitude III (vase).
 July 2020, 370mm height.
 Digitally printed ceramic
 transfers of my ballpoint
 pen drawings of a tulip,
 houseflies, a dung beetle and
 dung, a skopo, sheep's head,
 ants and chameleons. Fired
 onto a readymade vase.

Series Three

East Meets West

This series of works sees the application of the digitally printed transfers of my blue ballpoint drawings. A variety of subject matter is applied to a single work. With reference to traditional and classical blue and white transfer ware, I explored creative ways to integrate eastern and western symbols, including graphic elements, synonymous with global interconnectedness.



East Meets West I (platter). June 2019, 400mm width.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a barn swallow, a five clawed dragon, flaming pearl, football, mist and water, fired onto a 'readymade' platter.



East Meets West II (vase). June 2019, 450mm height.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a barn swallow, a five clawed dragon, flaming pearl, football, mist and water, fired onto a 'readymade' porcelain vase.



Series Four

Activist Platters and Vases

For centuries, artists have used the ceramic arts, both decoratively and expressively, to commemorate events and create social or political awareness. In 2008, Judith Swartz published her ground-breaking book, *Confrontational Ceramics*, in which she documents artists' approaches, in clay, to such contentious topics. In the demanding here and now of our interconnected global world, social media demands our awareness of social issues as never before. The titles of the individual works in this ceramic series address particular issues: xenophobia, migration and the refugee crisis, including the Hong Kong Umbrella Revolution.



Proudly South Africa I (platter). August 2019, 400mm width.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, a barn swallow, mist and water, digitally enhanced into patterns and cutout into positive and negative shapes. Fired onto a readymade platter.



Mean-while I (platter). September 2019, 400mm width.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, a football, a barn swallow, mist and water, digitally enhanced into patterns and cutout into positive and negative shapes. Fired onto a readymade platter.



Xenophobia I (platter). September 2019, 400mm width.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a barn swallow and water, digitally enhanced into patterns and cutout into positive and negative shapes. Fired onto a readymade platter.



Umbrella Revolution III. September 2019, 320mm height.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, mist and water, digitally enhanced into patterns and cutout into positive and negative shapes. Fired onto a readymade vase.



Umbrella Revolution I. October 2019, 410mm diameter.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, water, digitally enhanced into patterns and cutout into positive and negative shapes. Fired onto a readymade platter.



Umbrella Revolution II. September 2019, 400mm diameter.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, water, digitally enhanced into patterns and cutout into positive and negative shapes. Fired onto a readymade platter.

Series Five

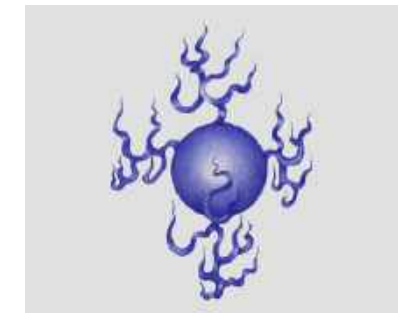
Just a Beautiful Game

This series is a response to the enormous investments China is currently making locally in the development of football and its anticipated long-term effect on the country's cultural industries, notably ceramics.

In China, before starting their formal schooling, young girls and boys of just four and five years of age are taken to museums and local ceramic centres of excellence, as part of a much-anticipated initiation into the world of clay. This foray lies at the very heart of the nation's cultural development programme and its economy. China's current president, an ardent supporter of 'the beautiful game' himself, hopes the country will in the not too distant future host the football World Cup and perhaps win it!

In this series a five clawed dragon, as the national cultural symbol of China, is playfully shown engaging in a game of choice between the traditional flaming pearl and a football, here presented as a Western symbol.

China seems to be cultivating a culture of sport rather than craft, at present. I am lamenting the coming of Western cultural ideas to China and the danger of its indigenous heritage being neglected or ultimately suppressed.





Just a Beautiful Game I (vase). January 2018, 200mm height.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, water,
a flaming pearl and a football. Fired onto a slip cast Voster and Braye readymade vase.



Just a Beautiful Game II (vase). January 2019, 500mm height.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, water,
a flaming pearl and a football. Fired onto a porcelain readymade vessel.



Just a Beautiful Game III. January 2019, 320mm height.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings
of a five clawed dragon, water, a flaming pearl and a football.
Fired onto a pair of thrown celadon glazed porcelain readymade vases.



Just a Beautiful Game IV. January 2019, 370mm height.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings
of a five clawed dragon, a flaming pearl, a football, water and mist,
fired onto a pair of celadon glazed readymade porcelain vases.





Just a Beautiful Game V (vase). February 2019, 285mm height.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, a flaming pearl, a football, water and mist, fired onto a readymade porcelain vase.



Just a Beautiful Game VI (platter). February 2019, 460mm length.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, water, a flaming pearl and a football, fired onto a readymade platter.



Just a Beautiful Game VIII (platter). June 2019, 405mm diameter.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, a flaming pearl, water and mist, including a football. Gold luster was applied with a brush to represent movement, on a round readymade platter.



Just a Beautiful Game VII (platter). August 2019, 400mm diameter.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, a flaming pearl, water and mist, including a football. Transfers applied Robert Dawson style on a round readymade platter.



Just a Beautiful Game IX (platter). March 2019, 480mm diameter.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, a flaming pearl, water and mist, including a football. Fired onto a round readymade platter.



Just a Beautiful Game X (platter). March 2019, 480mm diameter.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawings of a five clawed dragon, a flaming pearl, water and mist, including a football. Fired onto a round readymade platter.

Drawing and Ceramics:

Pioneering a Digital Solution

Written by Eugene Hön

I am a ceramic artist with a passion for ballpoint pen drawing. In the past, I used my drawing as a design tool to create modelled, press-moulded and fired figurative ceramic sculptures. The renderings were executed on acid free paper in bound books as ballpoint drawings fade with time when exposed to direct light. With the advances in ceramic and digital technology, I am now able to capitalise on my ballpoint drawing skills to create digitally printed ceramic transfers, which can be fired onto a range of ‘readymades’ as well as expressive ceramic statements. This was a real breakthrough for me. When the first batch of digitally printed ceramic transfers was test fired onto commercially produced ceramic plates, my ‘impermanent’ ballpoint drawings were instantly immortalised. The intricate crosshatching detail was perfectly visible in the fired transfers, even when the rendered image was radically reduced in size. This article sheds light on the techniques involved in producing digitally printed ceramic transfers, focusing on creative drawing opportunities in the field of ceramics.

I am a lecturer in ceramics to Industrial Design students at the University of Johannesburg. Through my work, I am exposed to the latest 3D printing and manufacturing technology. Although I wholeheartedly embrace the advances in digital technology, I do not lose sight of my creativity, rooted in ceramic craft traditions. I consider myself a ceramic artist who celebrates the handmade whilst exploring a range of digital creative options – seeking new possibilities for this art form. My first ceramic installation featured a projected animation of my ballpoint drawings entitled *and the ship sails on*. My latest work rises to the challenge voiced by Paul Scott in the ceramic handbook series, *Ceramics and Print*.



Manufactraction IV (shard). September 2017, 540mm length, 290mm height.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of a barn swallow fired
onto a press-moulded shard (earthenware).



Untitled I. January 2019, 405mm diameter.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of a barn
swallow fired onto a readymade platter.

The advent of microprocessors and the dawning of the Computer Age has resulted in new developments industrially, many to do with mechanization, but also to do with image production. Much of the development appears to be heavily based on investment in machinery, hardware and software. How much of it is of use to the small-scale producer, or the artist/ceramist printmaker remains to be seen (Scott 31, 1994).



And the ship sails on.... 2011, 1365mm x 1700mm x 600mm.
Animated projection of my ballpoint pen drawings onto a ceramic installation
of slip cast decoy-ducks. Exhibited at the Taiwan Ceramic Biennale in 2014.

My ballpoint drawing technique resembles the etchings and engravings of printmakers, reproducing images and illustrations before the advent of photography (Scott 18, 1994). My greatest inspiration is Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), the ultimate ‘artisan’, who was not only a painter, printmaker and engraver but also a mathematician and theorist. It was therefore fitting that my first set of digitally printed ceramic transfer tests was of my detailed drawing of an iris. Rendered in red, orange and pink ballpoint pen ink, it was an interpretation of Dürer’s *Iris Troiana* (1508), depicting a bruised flower. The drawing was one of three separate components for an artist’s book installation titled *Read, Peep Reap*.



Drawing Component, Read Peep Reap. July 2014.

Ballpoint pen drawing of Albrecht Dürer's *Iris Troiana*, a component in an artist book installation. Titled Read, Peep, Reap. Ginsberg Collection.

When I first mooted the idea of digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint drawings to colleagues, I had no knowledge of the quality of reproduction of the original rendering. There were no printing machines in the area where I live and work and there was no opportunity to discuss the printing technology and view possible samples. My only option was to consider the printing lab in Cape Town, 1,500 km away. At the time, this was the only local printer in South Africa. Not having access to proper technicians and engineers associated with developing the technology, I started a series of tests based on their recommendations. The first set of tests, completed a year and a half ago, showed enormous promise. The detail of the rendered image was remarkable.

Locally I could get A4 size transfer sheets with a satin or gloss finish. Once the images are printed, the supplier applies a clear or fluxed coat to protect the rendering during the application phase. The gloss gave a better result in terms of image reproduction, however, it required cutting exactly around the image to avoid leaving an unwanted outline after firing. The local printer could not promise an exact colour match and could not print white.

The digitally printed transfers render white transparent to reveal the colour of the ceramic ware beneath it after firing. These transfers therefore work best on a white surface. At first I followed the standard firing recommendations that were specified by the agents for the specific digital transfer machines. However, I obtained the best results firing the gloss-coated transfers to 770 degrees Celsius at 100 degrees per hour.

It is important to note that my first tests were of a ballpoint drawing consisting of warmer colours – pinks, oranges and reds, with small areas of blue and black ink. The original drawing was photographed (due to its size), the colour compared and validated before creating the A4 printing layout sheets. The image was copied in various sizes and configurations using Photoshop to alter colour and, more importantly, to create elaborate, digitally enhanced floral patterns exploring reflection symmetry (see image of transfer layout sheets). The test results were enormously successful and could finally be applied to a press-moulded ceramic shard in a variety of image sizes to good effect. The beauty of the digitally printed ceramic transfer is that it is possible to order one sheet with a bespoke quality for each specific ceramic statement, making it extremely cost-effective.

Most of my drawings are rendered in blue or black ballpoint ink. It was therefore inevitable that I would explore expressive surface development options referencing the blue and white ware of the Ming Dynasty – cobalt brushed on surface decorations, produced for global trade. Especially digitally printed transfers of my blue ballpoint drawings applied to shards, ready-mades or up-scaled, moulded and press-moulded expressive ceramic statements. Shards are critical in research into cultural migrations – particularly relevant today in a global society with its problems surrounding the displacement of people (migrants and refugees).

I could not match the ballpoint pen blue ink I required locally. I therefore printed the transfers abroad. The results were hugely successful. I was also able to order images in A3 size, increasing the options of the images enormously. However, the best test results were obtained by firing the cold colour ink-based transfers to 860 degrees Celsius at 150 degrees an hour, no soak. I was informed by the agents that printers are calibrated to produce transfers for either warm or cold colours.

The transfers worked best on vitrified ware (readymades), fired to stoneware temperatures – above 1,200 degrees Celsius. Applied to ceramics fired below 1,200 degrees Celsius (earthenware), one runs the risk of ‘spitout’.

Laser-printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint drawings, produced in a wide range of colours and sizes, digitally enhanced and applied to ceramics, create new opportunities. The transfer captured drawing marks like brush strokes, present a wide range of decorative and expressive options, with far greater image clarity and detail, hereto unobtainable with a brush. Through my drawing and design, and by referencing ceramic craft tradition, I was able to create a new and tangible interpretation of this art form.



Series Six

Refuse

This series derives its title from the migration of the barn swallow, here representing the droves of migrants and refugees who flee their homes each year in search of a better life. The swallow is a Palearctic-breeding, summer migrant with a wide distribution range. Its travel zone spans Europe, America, Asia and South Africa, and especially Mount Moreland in KwaZulu Natal, which is the roosting ground of about five million swallows each year. Global migration amongst people occurs for a variety of reasons. These may be economic, social, political or environmental. Refugees make up about 10% of the international migration figure of 272 million. This series references ceramic shards as a poignant symbol of the cultural migrations even more prevalent in today’s global society with its displaced persons. The ceramic ‘readymades’ are either broken or restored; utilised as repurposed vessels instead of rejects. Hence the title *Refuse*, which reinforces the inherent subject matter of the series.





Refuse I. July 2018, 150mm height.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawing of a barn swallow.

A few are digitally altered to look shattered. Fired onto a shattered Voster and Braye readymade, restored Kintsugi Style. Restored by Werner Scheepers (The Restorer).



Refuse II. July 2018, 200mm height.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawing of a barn swallow. A few are digitally altered to look shattered. Fired onto a shattered Voster and Braye readymade, restored Kintsugi Style.

Restored by Werner Scheepers (The Restorer).



The Road Less Traveled. February 2018, 125mm diameter.

The jewellery installation piece featured here, capitalizes on Hön's detailed blue ballpoint pen drawings of a barn swallow, digitally printed as ceramic transfers and fired onto one of the shards of a broken bone china bowl. This work titled *The Road Less Traveled*, comprises the partially restored bowl with its missing shard, metamorphosed into a jewellery pendant. Hon references shards that are critical in the research into cultural migrations – even more prevalent today in a global society with its problems surrounding the displacement of migrants and refugees.



Refuse III. April 2018, 550mm length.

The ceramic installation featured here, capitalizes on Hön's detailed blue ballpoint pen drawings of a barn swallow, digitally printed as ceramic transfers fired onto readymades. The work titled *Refuse*, includes a partially restored broken bone china bowl with its missing shard, featuring a barn swallow, attached with a bird leg tagging device. Hon references shards that are critical in the research into cultural migrations – even more prevalent today in a global society with its problems surrounding the displacement of people (migrants and refugees).



Read Peep Reap

Artist book installation

Written by Eugene Hön



Consisting of three separate components, read peep reap could be understood as an artist's book installation that includes a drawing of an iris, a sculptural book and a 'visual label'.

Its first component, a drawing, is an interpretation of Albrecht Dürer's *Iris Troiana* (1508), which is rendered in blue, red and pink ballpoint pen ink and depicts a bruised flower. The iris also makes reference to the 1970s feminism movement as it features in Judy Chicago's work and is associated with her endeavours to elevate "craft" to the status of "art". My ballpoint drawing is set behind glass in a customized frame to accommodate an operational set of blinds, and fades with exposure to direct light: drawing the blinds and exposing the ballpoint rendering thus causes it to fade away, an act suggestive of the death of the handmade and crafts in a digital age. The viewer has the choice to peep though the blinds at the drawing or operate the mechanism to expose the entire work.

The second object, the "Visual Label", consists of a series of digital prints on acid free paper, folded concertina style as a sequential explication. It includes mind maps and reference material, including photocopies of the watercolour and ink drawing by Dürer. Towards its end is printed a series of elaborate complex digitally enhanced floral patterns exploring reflection symmetry which Graphic Design staff member, Christa Van Zyl, produced from the drawing.

The final component takes the form and shape of a sculptural book set between two transparent extruded plastic bookends. The spine is handcrafted and bound in dark brown leather. The title “read peep reap” (a Dewey decimal classification number) and my name as the artist/author are embossed and gilded in gold leaf. The individual pages are dye-cut into shapes of hundreds of blinds which are strung together with thin cotton ropes, simulating the mechanism of a set of blinds while also emulating the thread used to stitch the individual pages together in the craft of bookbinding. The digitally printed and dye-cut pages allude to the codex of a book, a title page, preliminaries, a colophon, frontispiece, dedication and epigraph.

In her introduction to *Navigating the BookScape: Artists’ books and the Digital Interface*, Robyn Sassen (2006) asks: “is the Artist’s book about reading, about looking, about thinking, or about all three?” The title of the installation, read peep reap, prompts the viewer to consider the death of crafts and the handmade in a digital age. Celebrating the art of drawing and fine craftsmanship in bookbinding, it pays homage to the ultimate ‘artisan’, Dürer, who was not only a painter, printmaker and engraver but also a mathematician and theorist. And, to use the words of Sassen (2006) in regard to artists’ books, it is about my “sense of wonder and exploration in creating an interactive thing that brings the audience as a collaborative participant in the experience of the work”.

Reference

Sassen, Robyn. 2006. Introduction. In *Navigating the Bookscape: Artists’ Books and the Digital Interface*, edited by David Paton. Online publication: http://www.theartistsbook.org.za/view.asp?pg=exhibitions&ex=ex2_001



Series Seven

Homage to Albrecht Dürer

This series derives its inspiration from my Artist Book installation titled, *read peep reap*. The installation includes a drawing, a sculptural book and a 'visual label.' The drawing is an interpretation of Albrecht Dürer's *Iris Troiana* (1508). It is rendered in blue, red and pink ballpoint pen ink, depicting a bruised flower. The iris references the 1970s feminist movement. The flower was a prominent feature of Judy Chicago's work and associated with her endeavours to elevate 'craft' to the status of 'art'. My Artist Book and ceramic series prompts the viewer to consider the death of craft and the handmade in a digital age, while celebrating the art of drawing and fine craftsmanship. The series pays homage to the ultimate 'artisan', Dürer, who was not only a painter, printmaker and engraver but also a mathematician and theorist.



Manufraction II. February 2017, 540mm length, 290mm height.

DDigitally printed ceramic transfers of Albrecht Dürer's *Iris Troiana* in ballpoint pen.

Fired onto a press-moulded shard (earthenware).



Death of the handmade. September 2016, 370mm diameter.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawing of Albrecht Dürer's

Iris Troiana and a cicada and fired onto a readymade platter.



Homage to Albrecht Dürer III. August 2017, 280mm diameter.

Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawing of Albrecht Dürer's *Iris Troiana*, digitally enhanced in a variety of symmetrical representations and fired onto a readymade plate.



Homage to Albrecht Dürer I.
August 2017, 150mm height.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawing of Albrecht Dürer's *Iris Troiana* and fired onto a pair of readymade vases, restored Kintsugi style.



Homage to Albrecht Dürer II.
August 2017, 150mm height.
Digitally printed ceramic transfers of my ballpoint pen drawing of Albrecht Dürer's *Iris Troiana* and fired onto a pair of readymade vases, restored Kintsugi style.



Artist's Curriculum Vitae

Education | Awards | Exhibitions

Hön was **BORN** in Bellville (Cape Town) in 1958, graduated from Michaelis, University of Cape Town with a Master's in Fine Art (Ceramic Sculpture) in 1986. He has received a number of **AWARDS**, including the Michaelis prize for the best body of work produced by a student in the final year of study, BAFA (1982), a Merit Award Winner at the APSA International Ceramic Biennale held at the Sandton Civic Art Gallery in 1998, the Claypot Award at the Glazecor Regional Ceramics exhibition organized by Ceramics SA in 2009. Recent **SOLO and GROUP EXHIBITIONS** include the Ceramics SA Regional Group exhibition held at BIGS (2018), 100% Clay at Decorex Exhibition held in Cape Town (2018); the Booknesses: SA Contemporary Artist's Books Exhibition at FADA Gallery – participating artist and curator (2017); Ceramics SA Biennale Exhibition held at the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery - participating artist and curator (2016). The 2014 Taiwan Ceramics Biennale held in the New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taiwan (2014); The Book Arts: Artists Books Exhibition held at Art on Paper. 44 Stanley (2014); a Solo Exhibition held at Elegance Jewellers, Melrose Arch (2012), a staff exhibition Collaborations/Articulations at FADA Gallery (2012), the Ceramics SA Ultra-Furn Regional Exhibition at Museum Africa, Johannesburg (2010), Ceramics Alumni UJ Exhibition at FADA - participated and curated the exhibition (2010), Art with a Pulse exhibition at 20-21 Visual Arts Centre, England (2010); the Ceramics SA exhibition held at the iStore Sandton (2010) and the Glazecor Ceramics SA Regional Awards Exhibition held at the University of Pretoria Art Gallery (2009). Hön's work is in the **COLLECTIONS** of the Johannesburg Art Gallery; the South African Constitutional Court; the Durban Art Gallery; The National Art Gallery; The Corobrik Collection; the Altech Collection and the Ginsberg Collection at WAM.

Artist’s Details

Eugene Hön is a ceramic artist with a passion for drawing, ballpoint renderings. With a master’s degree in Ceramic Sculpture, from the University of Cape Town, he has pursued a career as an academic and practicing artist for the past thirty-seven years. He is an artist that celebrates the handmade, developing concepts and ideas within the context of a globalized society. He embraces the advancement in technology and the impact of the digital, whilst living in an information age. His experience as an academic and commitment to the development of the crafts has expanded his knowledge and honed his broad skills to include the teaching and the making of ceramics, sculpture, drawing, artists books, digital printing, animation, video or digital projection installation and ultimately design; industrial design and jewellery design and manufacture. His latest career development expands his broad creative output to include curatorial practice, as the recently appointed director of the FADA Gallery at the University of Johannesburg.

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