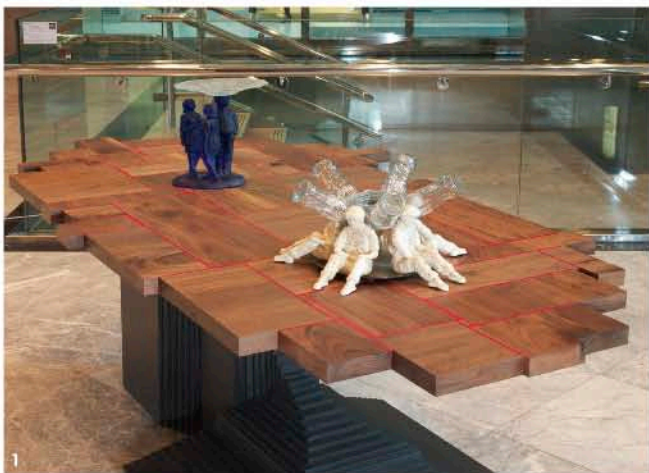


Review

EXHIBITIONS



CLAUDIA CLARE: AN EXTRAORDINARY TURN OF EVENTS

FRANCIS KYLE GALLERY, LONDON
7-29 NOVEMBER 2012

PIECES TOGETHER: CERAMICS BY CAROL MCNICOLL AND FURNITURE BY SAM SCOTT

LOBBY, ONE CANADA SQUARE, CANARY WHARF
24 SEPTEMBER-16 NOVEMBER 2012

Tall classically shaped jars have a distinguished history in the Far East and in Europe as bearers of stories. In more recent times Michael Frimkess and Grayson Perry stand out as two of the most confident exponents of the narrative jar. Claudia Clare's approach is more painterly than either artist as her recent show *An extraordinary turn of events* makes plain. Clare uses the handbuilt jar as a vehicle for highly personal narratives that investigate the complexities of present day Iran, friendships made there, and her sorrow and puzzlement at recently being denied the chance to return to a country that she clearly loves. As visual records they reminded me of the graphic novels of Marjane Satrapi and of the haunting films that have come out of Iran over the past twenty years directed by figures like Abbas Kiarostami and Jafar Panahi. But unlike Satrapi's graphic novels, Clare's pots glow with harmonious colour and tender brushwork. There is not an ironically recycled image to be seen. In that sense they are remote from Grayson Perry's savage commentaries on contemporary values and Frimkess's playful historicising allusiveness. Clare's Iranian pots are closest in spirit to French faience tin glaze experiments of painters like Dufy, Bonnard, and Vuillard, and, more recently, sublimely painted earthenware plates and tiles by the self-taught potter Ann Stokes.

Although Clare's Iranian pots are moving, the stars of the show are four jars at the back of the gallery that focus on things British – the Royal Wedding, the river pageant on the Thames to mark the Queen's Jubilee, the banking crisis, and the death of Mark Duggan at the hands of the police in 2011. Clare's extraordinary *Pageant* should surely be bought by a major museum as the best record of that sodden unforgettable riverine day. As in all four of these pots about Britishness Clare exploits the curved jar surface with great ingenuity, offering a playful perspectival viewpoint that puts us, the spectators, at the base of the pot, gazing over the massed ships and water and up into an unrelentingly rainy sky. In *Wedding Procession* the base includes us in as a frieze of hands holding mobile phones aloft to snap the event – neat shorthand for the behaviour of contemporary crowds, at once spectators and news-gatherers.



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The political charge of Clare's commentary on banking, *End of the Rainbow*, takes us neatly over to Canary Wharf where Carol McNicoll's ceramics hold their own in the distractingly lavish lobby of One Canada Square. A capacious space like One Canada Square might seem to demand large work. Big pieces by the likes of Felicity Aylieff and Lawson Oyekan have, however, ended up looking dwarfed. But McNicoll's domestic-sized sculptures positioned on colourful and occasionally massive pieces of furniture designed and made by Sam Scott hold their own and draw the viewer in.

There is much to study in these reflections on the interrelationship of big business and war that double up disarmingly as over a dozen handsome jugs, bowls, and centrepieces. In *Freedom and Democracy* a circle of weary soldiers covered in decals of roses sit, heads bowed, holding up a circle of Coca-Cola bottles and wire that form a bowl. As in all her recent work McNicoll's use of decals in particular is subtle and heartfelt – cleverly using decoration to highlight the disjunction between what we are told and the grim *actualité* of events. In effect they comment on the metaphoric camouflage that undermines democracy and truth. This is a triumph of a show.

Tanya Harrod

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