



Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s) and RE, Re-animate, Repair, Meld and Mend



Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), Alberta No:9. In-glaze decal collage and gold leaf on glued Hycroft China earthenware plate. Paul Scott 2011/2013, Medalta, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada and Blencogo, Cumbria, UK

On Cracks, Chips and Blooms:

I buy old, sometimes patterned, plates on e-bay, in junk and antique shops, and these live with me - often for months or years. Some stay with me in my studio, whilst others make it into the house where they are used for serving food. When the time comes, I add to them - a mark, a line, a gold edge, or I compose, collaging with in-glaze decals. Then I re-fire them to give them a new life.

Contemporary attitudes to the re-use of existent material are generally very positive - re-cycling wood for example in contemporary furniture has become commonplace, and the patina of age a pre-requisite for selling much 'Country Living' type craft. If it does seem to be less acceptable with chipped, cracked or crazed ceramics then I'm not exactly sure why - perhaps it's because Antiques Road Show valuers frown upon them. However, I habitually collect glazed tableware - from e-bay, junk and antique shops. Some of it may have crazed glazing, some may be cracked, chipped, or the gold lustre

worn from the edges. At first I was reluctant to use these pieces in work for sale, being aware that they are seen by some as flaws and devaluations, but over time I have grown very fond of these imperfections - I realized that it is because they evidence the object's history. For me these characteristics are no longer flaws or reasons to reject the form - in fact quite the opposite - they allude to the object's previous life, it has already been used and handled, it already has a history. For me this evidence of wear is an enhancement to a piece. When re-working the ready-made I acknowledge, bring attention to the mark, chip or crack. If it is on the rim of a plate or the lip of a jug I fill with lustre so it is quite obvious. Crazed glaze and dirty cracks often fuse in the kiln with unexpected results within the glaze - a bloom of grey or pink on a plate or bowl adds to their richness. These uncontrollable marks and fissures also often allude to the conceptual reasoning behind certain works.

eBay sellers are not all experienced in packing and posting ceramics, so sometimes purchased plates arrive in pieces. At first I would get quite upset when lovely objects arrived as shards, but I soon became pretty philosophical about it - after all I am used to kiln 'surprises'. My work is always fired at some stage (sometimes several times) so risk is built into working processes - dunts, cracks, over-fired bubbled glazes happen. So I have been collecting and saving these assorted broken pieces for some time now.

In recent times I have gone further than the simply distressed, chipped or cracked. Work in *RE* was selected for use because plates have been physically broken (in some cases into several pieces), cut up and collaged.

Medalta and Hycroft:

In the autumn of 2011, I spent several weeks at Medalta¹ in Medicine Hat Alberta working on an artist residency.

In spite of its relative remoteness from urban customers and markets the city was once home to Canada's ceramics industry - its answer to Stoke on Trent. Medicine Hat had clay and fuel (gas) for firing in abundance, as well as the Canadian Pacific Railroad. In its heyday Medicine Hat ceramic wares were exported around the world, but the decline set in after World War Two and Medalta Stoneware folded in 1954. The last pottery factory closed in 1989. Many of the sites and buildings were simply abandoned. The Medalta project, including a museum and artist residency programme is housed on one of the remaining factory sites.

¹ www.medalta.org



Unused wares in the Hycroft factory, Medicine Hat Alberta September 2011.



In 2011 I was invited to take part in a print focussed Artist Residency at Medalta by Laura McKibbon.² During my time there I was able to visit other mothballed industrial sites in the area and chose to work with plates from the extant Hycroft factory. There were boxes full of plates, shelves with stacks of unused wares as well as skips with broken forms. I collected a variety of objects to work with but was increasingly drawn to the seconds, cracked and imperfect pieces. I created prints that reflected Alberta's flat dramatic landscapes and skies and these were applied to a variety of forms from cistern lids to chunky mugs. In time the broken wares formed a distinct body of work with horizon lines being defined by the cracks or breaks in plates.

Most of the work was eventually shipped back to me in England and some pieces variously exhibited since then. The broken wares were shown in Keynote (or Powerpoint) presentations as part of talks or lectures. I liked them very much, but I wasn't actually sure that they were finished.

Riveting and Kintsugu:

Some of my earliest works, based on research into Minoan Faience in Crete, imitated the stapled, riveted and wired antiquities in the Stratigraphical Museum at Knossos using porcelain modelling and metal lustres. I had already begun to investigate the actual material and craft processes involved in what are now obsolete, (and in some cases

² www.culdesacdesign.com



Detail of *The Town Mosaic Collage No:14*. Inglaze decal and painted underglaze on handbuilt form 35cm dia.,, Paul Scott 1987

unacceptable) conservation methodologies of ceramic repairs. The intent then was to add these repertoires of re-making to my artistic practice, actually using riveted and wired 'repairs' to forms rather than creating the tromp l'oeil effects of my earlier works.

The processes I researched are no longer acceptable methodologies of conservation or repair. Because riveting and wiring involve physically drilling wares, the processes 'interfere with the integrity of the object'. One conservationist told me that even if she knew how riveting was done she wouldn't tell me because it was such bad practice. Eventually I found the handbook *China Mending and Restoration* by Parsons and Curle.³ This provided step by step instructions for a huge variety of ceramic repairs, including riveting. With the help of colleague Ingjerd Hanevold, Jewellery Professor at Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO) I managed to work out how to do prepare hard brass wire, drill holes and insert 'half round' staples to hold cracked pieces of plate together with no glue. My efforts are probably not quite up to Parsons' and Curl's expert craft skills and I'm quite sure they are not suited for daily utilitarian use, but they do work.

Another ceramic repair technology that I became aware of is Kintsugi, the Japanese art of fixing broken ceramics. The process involves the gradual building up layers of laquer, fixing, sanding and final dusting with gold. A contemporary take on Kintsugi is a kit marketed by *Humade*⁴ run by sisters Gieke and Lotte Dekker. Their process involves the use of epoxy resin and

³ Parsons, C.S.M, Curl, F.H., *China Mending and Restoration*, Faber and Faber, London 1963.

⁴ <http://humade.nl/products/new-kintsugi-1>



Kintsugi repaired bowl, Laing Museum, Newcastle Upon Tyne

cosmetic gold dust. I enjoyed the spontaneity of Lotte Dekker's 'repaired' forms. In my versions I added real gold leaf to the sticky glue.

A commission linked with the exhibition *The Nature of Mending*⁵ enabled me to add riveting and kintsugi-like processes to my artistic vocabulary. The *Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s) Alberta* artworks were my first completed pieces using stapling and contemporary Kintsugi.

Collage and Cuttings:



Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s). - **WILLOW** Collage, Willow pattern Staffordshire transferware, sliced with brass pins, tile cement, epoxy resin and gold leaf. 40cm x 31.5cm. Paul Scott 2014.

⁵ <http://www.natureofmending.co.uk>

In 2014 I began to actually cut and collage plates themselves. The process of physically editing historical transferwares in some ways mirrors the way I have long cut, torn and collaged paper, then digital images. The physicality of slicing fired ceramic is of course very different to the ease of cutting, cloning, collaging and layering in Adobe Photoshop. In the digital realm, joining disparate images and sources produces a seamless graphic, confecting new trees, vegetation, cities, or landscapes for collaging as transfers. In the physical realm, after working with visible repairs, it seemed more appropriate to emphasize the places images are joined.

In other new works the extraction of graphic detail from tablewares has taken a more detailed twist with select details of transferware designs removed as 'cuttings' which are then 'planted' into the glazed surface of plates, platters and small tiles.



Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), Willow Cuttings (the Oslo Series) No:1. Collage of cut fragments from assorted Willow pattern plates, with gold on earthenware plate 2015.

Paul Scott, October 2015

