



American Scenery



The Dam and Water Works, Philadelphia, Henshall & Co 1824.

During the early nineteenth century, Staffordshire transferware depicting North American scenery was hugely popular in the United States. At the end of the eighteenth century writing about American landscape became as fashionable as painting it and illustrated books became immensely popular in Europe. These travel books provided raw material for most of the images depicted within patterns. Using engraved illustrations as reference material, 'with that keen insight which has given to the English manufacturer the markets of the world, several of the Staffordshire potters.... sent to this country views of well-known buildings and scenes that were regarded with pride'¹ They were a perverse mixture of pristine, seemingly untouched landscapes alongside topographies, graced by exemplars of industrial and architectural might, asylums and prisons.

In 1899 William Prime reflected an affection for these nostalgic images, and alludes to their association with patriotism and nationality:

¹ Haines Halsey R. T. (1899) *Pictures of Early New York on Dark Blue Staffordshire Pottery*, p xi. Dover Publications New York, 1974 (reprint of 1899 book published by Dodd Mead and Co., New York).

'Transfer-printing has abundant illustration in old specimens, exhibiting art in the last century. Later on, as our country began to have a history, the Ceramic Art began to do, what it has done in all ages and all civilized countries, illustrate with permanent pictures the events of history. With whatever disdain the collector of Dresden and Sèvres may now look down on the blue-printed crockeries of Clews and Wood and Ridgway, the day will come when ceramic specimens showing our first steamboats, our first railways, the portraits of our distinguished statesmen, soldiers and sailors, the openings of our canals, the various events of our wars, and our triumphs in peace, will rank in historical collections with the vases of Greece. And whatever be the estimate of the art they exemplify, men will say: "These show the tastes, these illustrate the home life, of the men and women who were the founders and rulers of the American Republic"'.²



Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), American Scenery, Hudson River, Indian Point No. 2. Inglaze decal collage, gold luster on KT&K S--V China (Knowles Taylor and Knowles, Liverpool, Ohio) platter, c. 1920.

Prime's assertion that Staffordshire transferware would take its place alongside Sèvres and Greek vases from antiquity is born out in the twenty first century. Staffordshire wares with 'Harmonious depictions of rural towns gleaming with the prosperity brought to them by the economy of agriculture and technology'³ can now be found in American Art Museums, including New York's Metropolitan, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In September and October 2014 during residencies at the Clay Studio

² Prime, William C in the introduction to Trumbull Slosson, Annie *The China Hunter's Club*, quoted by Haines Halsey R. T. (1899) *Pictures of Early New York on Dark Blue Staffordshire Pottery*, p 21. Dover Publications New York, 1974 (reprint of 1899 book published by Dodd Mead and Co New York).

³ Ibid.

Philadelphia and Project Art, Cummington, Massachusetts, I spent time researching prints and transferwares in these museum collections. Others institutions included The Flynt Center of Early New England Life (Historic Deerfield), Erie Art Museum, Boston Museum of Fine Art, Winterthur, Peabody Essex in Salem and The Michele & Donald D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield. I also visited the Brimfield Antiques Market, and Dennis and Dad Antiques.



Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), American Scenery, Fracked No. 1. Inglaze decal collage, gold luster on cracked feather edged pearlware platter c. 1820.

I travelled during my research visits, becoming acutely aware of a dramatic disjuncture between the idealised imagery of early transferwares and the corresponding twenty first century landscape I was journeying through. It is against this backdrop that *Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), American Scenery* seeks to update the original tableware designs for the twenty first century.

Using antique, feather edged platters and original transferware plates purchased from antique dealers or eBay, I have started a contemporary *American Scenery* series, depicting the real landscape of the twenty first century. In many cases the wares I have acquired have been chipped or cracked, or the gold lustre worn from the edges. Seen by some as flaws and devaluations by collectors I have grown very fond of these imperfections, 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. Evidence of wear is an enhancement to a piece. When re-working the ready made I usually acknowledge and bring attention to the mark, chip or crack. If it is on the rim of a plate or the lip of a jug I will fill in with lustre so it is quite obvious. Craze glaze and dirty cracks often fuse in the kiln with unexpected results, I really like these - 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. One of the attractions of re-working damaged wares is that these artistic interventions give new life and added value. The artefact is upcycled, from junk or kitsch to a piece of contemporary art.



Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), American Scenery, Windturbine No. 1. Inglaze decal collage, gold luster on Johnson Bros Late Pankurst Co., Ironstone platter c. 1890.

Attraction to damaged wares has meant my leaving perfect exemplars alone, but I this is beginning to change. The devastating effect of modern industrialisation and consumption on once pristine landscapes is pervasive and degrading. The notion of using perfectly well preserved printed platters and wares to depict the contemporary seems increasingly logical. Continuing to destroy the environment in a quest for pointless consumption and 'economic growth' could perhaps be more accurately reflected in interventions to pristine antiques.



Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), American Scenery, (Untitled). Inglaze decal collage, gold luster on partially erased Lozere Ironstone plate c. 1840.

Paul Scott, March 2014

