

Untold Stories: Paul Scott *New American Scenery*, 'American' Transferware and the Museum Collection

*Palimpsest: something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form; something having usually diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface*¹

September 2002. A visitor to the ceramics gallery stops in front of one of the cases and stands quietly for a few moments. She bends to read the label then turns and beckons for her friend to join her. 'You have to see this!' she says excitedly.

They are looking at Paul Scott's seamless reworking of the familiar Willow Pattern; a run of the mill dinner plate at first glance. (Figure 1) It takes a few moments to register the nuclear reprocessing station tucked into the stylised landscape, the skull and crossbones and the symbols for radioactivity lurking in the decorative border. A wolf in sheep's clothing, an act of technical magic and of perfect mimicry. And a palimpsest of a kind, for the transformation does not efface the viewer's memory of the original, or dispel the host of associations that it evokes.



FIGURE 1 Paul Scott *The Scott Collection, Cumbrian Blues(s) A Millennium Willow for Sellafield (or Plutonium is forever, well 24 Millennia anyway)* 32cm dia. In-glaze screen print and gold on Royal Worcester bone china. (2000)

FIGURE 2 *Remember Me When This You See* (detail of installation) UWA ceramics gallery 2002

The exhibition was *Remember Me When This You See*: ceramics by Paul Scott with selected pieces from the collections at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion Museum and the Beacon Museum and Art Gallery, Whitehaven. It was a milestone in Paul's development, his first opportunity to show his work in close, considered juxtaposition with the family of objects that it references; that is to say, alongside factory-made, transfer-printed domestic wares.² Fast forward nearly twenty years and this

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/palimpsest> 5/4/2021

² The publication that accompanied the exhibition is available here: <http://museum.aber.ac.uk/about-us-publications-rememberme.php> and here: https://www.academia.edu/50223394/Remember_me_when_this_you_see

approach is still at the heart of his practice; albeit with the making processes developed and diversified, the ideas deepened and informed by his ever-increasing research and scholarship.³

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How do we measure cultural value? The more familiar the object, the more widespread the use of it, the lesser the significance? So it might seem. In conventional versions of the ceramics canon, factory-produced tablewares do not figure large. And as bearers of narrative meaning, popular transferwares like the Willow Pattern have been ignored. Following the demise of the ceramics industry in the West, some contemporary practitioners - amongst whom Paul Scott is a leading figure – have adopted (and adapted) both the production methods and the look of industrial wares. In Paul's hands such objects become vehicles for observations on our life and times. This essay explores aspects of his current *New American Scenery* project; in particular, his response to a group of historical, factory-made ceramics known as 'American' transfer-printed earthenwares.

'American' transfer-printed earthenwares (henceforth American transferwares) can be regarded as a discrete sub-genre of the transferware that was produced in Staffordshire, England, during the first half of the nineteenth century. Their illustrations set them apart. Made solely for export to the emerging American republic, American transferwares tell the story of an historical moment: they celebrate the dawning of a new era. Luscious decorative borders frame heroes of the battles for independence, new municipal architecture, technological achievements, romantic landscapes... All spoke to (and perhaps still speak to) a sense of pride, a social righteousness. They were not intended to challenge the status quo - far from it.

Their illustrations brought a new world into the pioneer home. But American transferwares also belonged to visual systems beyond the home and the private decorative sphere, and as part of those systems they were complicit in wider aspects of meaning construction. The pioneer dresser was a shrine to settler ideals.⁴

³ Paul Scott has published widely on Ceramics. He is the author of *Ceramics and print* London: Bloomsbury and Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania 2013 (1994). His PhD thesis (2010) recuperates a lost (or disregarded) history of transferware. Paul Scott *Ceramics and Landscape, Remediation and Confection – a Theory of Surface* Online here: <http://www.cumbrianblues.com/pdfs/CLRC.pdf>

⁴ 'Early European settlement in North America was, first and fundamentally, a land grab, as native peoples were killed or driven out. With the rationalization of the land grab came claimed rights, natural or chartered, to practice slavery and circumvent trade, tax, and settlement regulations. The historiography of the political thought of the thirteen colonies ... has airbrushed out this unappealing reality. It has been written as the story of the high-minded pursuit of settler ideals ...' JCD Clark, review of Craig Yirush *Settlers, Liberty, and Empire: The Roots of Early American Political Theory, 1675–1775* in *Journal of American History*, Volume 98, Issue 4, March 2012
Evelyn Nakano Glenn (amongst others) argues that settler colonialism is "an ongoing structure rather than a past historical event ... " 'Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation' *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 2015, Vol. 1(1) 54–74 © American Sociological Association 2014



FIGURE 3 Enoch Wood and Sons *Entrance of the Erie Canal into the Hudson at Albany* (10" diam)
1820-1846 Yale University Art Gallery

Take for example a plate titled *Entrance of the Erie Canal into the Hudson at Albany*, one of several pieces from the factory of Enoch Wood that commemorate the completion of the canal. (Figure 3) The source was an engraving after an 1823 watercolour by James Eights. (Figure 4) This was a popular subject and the same image was also used by other Staffordshire potteries, often appearing as a cartouche within the decorative border.

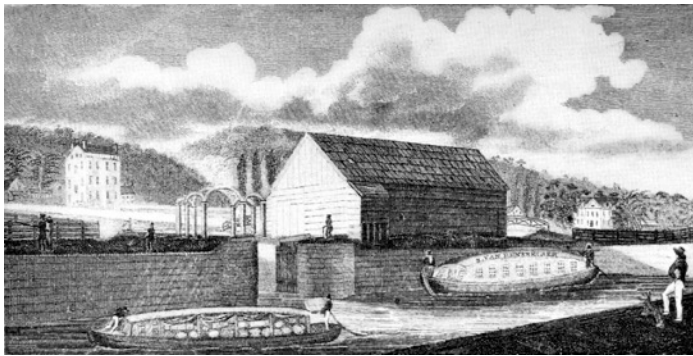


FIGURE 4 *Entrance of the Canal into the Hudson at Albany*. Engraved by Rawdon, Clark & Co., Albany, after watercolour by James Eights. Printed by W.A. Davis and published in the Memoir Prepared at the Request of the Committee of the Common Council of the City of New York, by Cadwallader D. Colden, New York, 1825. (Albany Institute of History and Art collection).⁵

⁵ <https://www.albanyinstitute.org/details/items/the-entrance-of-the-canal-into-the-hudson-at-albany-taken-in.html> This memoir, with speeches and an account of the festivities, was presented to the mayor of New York at the celebration of the completion of the Erie Canal. <http://collections.rmsc.org/BritishPottery/84.46.1.html>

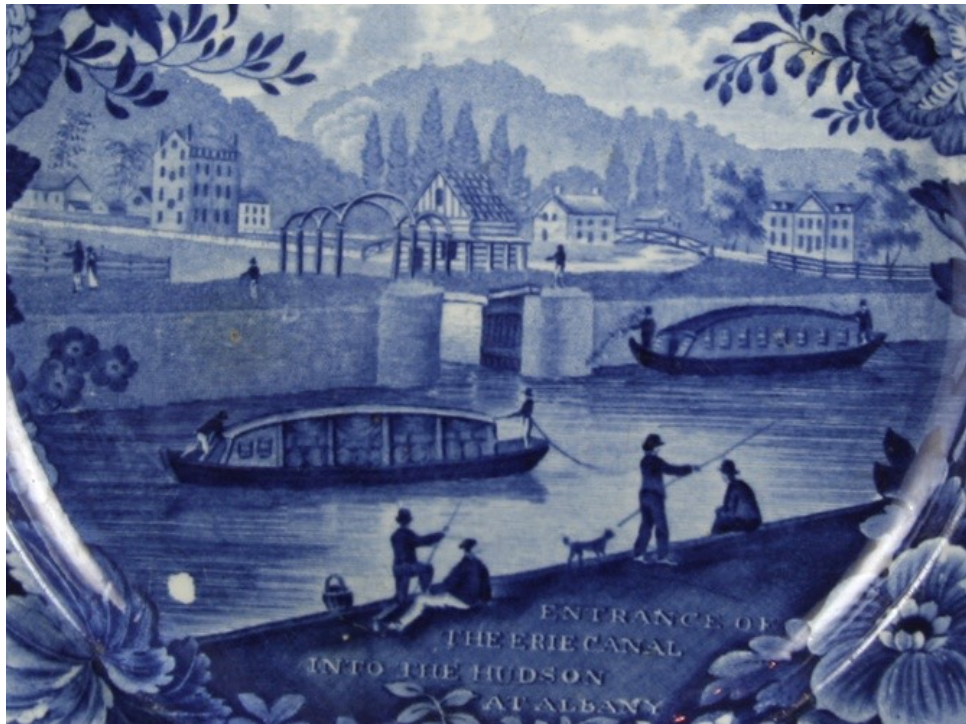


FIGURE 5 Detail of Figure 3, Enoch Wood and Sons *Entrance of the Erie Canal into the Hudson at Albany*

On the right hand side of the plate, the manor house in the middle distance belonged to the Van Rensselaer family, whose name can be seen on one of the barges in Figure 4. From this house, between 1768 and 1875, the Van Rensselaers ruled over a large feudal patroonship – Rensselaerswyck - that included all the land surrounding what is now the city of Albany: 23 miles along both sides of the Hudson river, extending back 24 miles.⁶ The same house was the subject of a painting by Thomas Cole, which is in the collection of the Albany Institute; in 1931 its grand central hall was recreated in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum, New York. (Figure 6 and Figure 7)

⁶A patroon was 'a person who held an estate in land with certain manorial privileges granted under the old Dutch governments of New York and New Jersey.' <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/patroon> This land had to be bought from the Indians: 'we find van Rensselaer as early as January 12, 1630, giving instructions to Bastiaen Jansz Krol, the company's commis at Fort Orange, to buy land in the neighborhood of the Fort. Purchases were made in August, 1630, and May, 1631, of land extending along the west bank of the Hudson from a little below Coeymans to the Mohawk...' A. J. F. van Laer THE PATROON SYSTEM AND THE COLONY OF RENSSELAERSWYCK. Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association, 1909, Vol. 8 (1909), pp. 222-233 Fenimore Art Museum.



FIGURE 6 Thomas Cole *The Van Rensselaer Manor House* 1841 oil on canvas (24" x 35 ¾") (Albany Institute of History and Art collection).

FIGURE 7 Entrance hall from the Van Rensselaer Manor House, recreated in the Metropolitan Museum, American Wing, New York 1931

The gardens of the manor house have been described as ‘among the most beautiful and extensive in all of America, with elegant lawns, flower beds, ponds, and majestic trees.’⁷ Who tended those lawns? Who weeded the flowerbeds? The census of 1790 counted 21,193 enslaved people in New York State, of whom 3,722 were in Albany County, where 217 households owned five or more enslaved servants each.⁸ According to Professor Michael E Groth, ‘Africans and African Americans were a visible presence in local fields, homes, mills, and shops and on the region’s roads and riverfront landings.’⁹

None of the images shown above depict enslaved people, not even as distant fieldworkers.¹⁰ They rarely appear in representation, but they were surely there, in the Hudson river valley; they have simply been subtracted from the view. Enoch Wood’s *Entrance of the Erie Canal into the Hudson at Albany* is part of a visual continuum: a link in a chain of mythologizing imagery, ‘white-washing’ the national heritage. Paradoxically, the canal towpath was the penultimate leg of the Underground Railroad to Canada.¹¹

⁷ <https://www.albanyinstitute.org/details/items/gardens-of-the-van-rensselaer-manor-house.html>

⁸ [Albany's long, neglected history of slavery \(timesunion.com\)](https://www.timesunion.com) and see: Christy Mikel Clark-Pujara *Slavery, Emancipation and Black Freedom in Rhode Island, 1652-1842* University of Iowa, PhD thesis 2009

⁹ Michael E Groth *Slaves and Slavery in the Mid-Hudson Valley* State University of New York: 2017, p.1

¹⁰ In the case of the painting by Thomas Cole, William Coleman argues that ‘This required careful selection of perspectives by 1839, with the Erie Canal passing close by the house’s eastern wall, a bustling lumber district growing on the opposite bank, and an expanding Albany encroaching from the south and west.’ William Levine Coleman ‘Something of an Architect: Thomas Cole and the Country House Ideal’ PhD thesis University of California, Berkley 2015

¹¹ <https://eriecanalimpacts.weebly.com/underground-railroad.html> ‘churches all along the canalway provided stations’ <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2017/08/16/did-erie-canal-help-put-end-slavery>

By the end of the nineteenth century American transferwares had captured the interest of a wealthy white intelligentsia, who saw their illustrations as a form of historical evidence. 'To the Staffordshire potters we are indebted for more than two hundred faithful views of our country, many of which have been perpetuated in no other way' pronounced influential collector and author RT Haines Halsey in 1899.¹² These ceramics may open windows onto the past, but do they really offer 'faithful views'?

A leading voice in the collecting community, Haines Halsey believed that immigration was a threat to American society and feared 'an influx of foreign ideas'.¹³ He thought the 'spirit of early Americans' could be experienced in 'objects they had once used'.¹⁴ For him, American transferwares were honorary Americana, showing 'scenes which were regarded with pride;' it was honourable – and patriotic - to collect, study and interpret them.¹⁵ He told their stories in his book *Pictures of Early New York on Dark Blue Staffordshire Pottery* – his personal specialism (a whole chapter is devoted to the Erie Canal). Haines Halsey was instrumental in the development of the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum, where a group of American transferwares with views of New York was installed 'On the walls under the stairway in the first floor exhibition gallery... All [depict] important elements in the life of the city in that early period.'¹⁶

Figures 8-11 show two of Paul Scott's *New American Scenery* views of New York and the American transferwares whose illustrations they reference and update. RT Haines Halsey owned both of the historical pieces and both were hung in the American Wing. His account of *New York from the Heights Near Brooklyn* (Figure 9) assiduously unpacks the view, describing a lively industrial river scene with a skyline of church spires: a scene of work and faith.¹⁷ He is equally assiduous on *The City Hotel New York*,

¹² RT Haines Halsey *Pictures of Early New York on Dark Blue Staffordshire Pottery*, New York: Dover publications 1974 p.xi (1899)

¹³ "The tremendous changes in the character of our nation and the influx of foreign ideas utterly at variance with those held by the men who gave us the Republic threaten, and unless checked, may shake, the foundations of our Republic." Haines Halsey *The Homes of Our Ancestors*, in Wendy Kaplan *R. T. H. Halsey: An Ideology of Collecting American Decorative Arts* Winterthur Portfolio, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1982), pp. 43-53 University of Chicago Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1180763> Kaplan argues that Halsey was 'representative of the wealthy, northeastern, Protestant men responsible for the establishment of American antiques as an art form and, consequently, for the interrelationship of political convictions and aesthetic sensibility.'

¹⁴ Elizabeth Stillinger *The Antiquers* New York: Alfred A Knopf (1980) p.205

¹⁵ RT Haines Halsey *Pictures of Early New York*, p.xi

¹⁶ '...the city from Brooklyn, old Fort Clinton and the City Hotel with the pump from which the people in the neighborhood drew their drinking water. ... the City Hall... Columbia College, Scudder's Museum on the northwestern corner of City Hall Park, with the buildings which housed our first public school and savings bank.' RTH Haines Halsey and Charles O Cornelius *Handbook of the American wing* New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (6th edition 1938 p.246)

¹⁷ Haines Halsey *Pictures of Early New York*, p.166

emphasising the role of the building 'as a rendezvous for those kindred spirits who at the present time throng our political and social clubs.' (Figure 11) Clearly he imagined it as a venue for like-minded patriots; perhaps he imagined himself amongst them, celebrating the revolutionary sea battles of 1812 at the 'famous dinner... given by the citizens to the officers of the "Constitution" and "United States" in honor of the closely consecutive victories of these vessels...' ¹⁸



FIGURE 8 Paul Scott *Cumbrian Blue(s), New American Scenery, New York from Brooklyn* (After Beth Katleman). 14 x 18.5 x 1.75" (2019) in-glaze screen print (decal), on shell edged pearlware platter c.1820

FIGURE 9 Andrew Stevenson *New York from the Heights Near Brooklyn* (12 ½" x 16") (1823-29) Yale University Art Gallery



FIGURE 10 *Cumbrian Blue(s), New American Scenery, Fleurs.de.sel's New York, Hot Dogs* (2019) 11 x 11 x 1" (one of a set of twelve plates). In-glaze screen print (decal) on salvaged Syracuse China with pearlware glaze. Paul Scott 2019.

FIGURE 11 Ralph Stevenson & Williams *The City Hotel New York* c. 1830 8.622" (Dia) RISD collection (8 ½" diam gift of Edward B Aldrich)

¹⁸ Haines Halsey *Pictures of Early New York*, p.75. Elizabeth Stillinger compares Haines Halsey to Henry Erving, another prominent collector, 'who liked to sit amongst his antiques and imagine the original owners still moving about the room.' Stillinger *The Antiquers* P.205

*One of the things that happen when you're an artist is that you do things, then layers and meanings become obvious at a later date. ... I expect that happens all the time ... but I think it only happens if you're continually moving and innovating ... and researching and thinking and moving your practice. Finding out that Haines Halsey set up the American wing of the Metropolitan Museum and then his link with these conservative views is like adding a layer to American transferwares that I was completely unaware of before...*¹⁹

From the Staffordshire factory to the pioneer kitchen, to the attic, the private collection, the museum collection, and finally, consigned to museum storage. Such was broadly the trajectory of very many American transferwares between c1820 and c1945, each phase imbuing them with further layers of meaning. In some sense this is like a palimpsest in perpetual construction, a constant process of notional overwriting; Paul Scott develops it as an active, deliberately open-ended strategy that inscribes creative practice with archival research, and vice versa.



FIGURE 12 Paul Scott *Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), New American Scenery, View of Albany, New York (1)*, 2019 Salvaged Syracuse China plate with pearlware glaze and in-glaze screenprint decal. (size)

FIGURE 13 Enoch Wood and Sons *City of Albany, New York (1825-40)* diameter 10" (RISD collection, gift of Edward B Aldrich)

He studied American transferwares in museum collections and where possible followed up by visiting places they illustrate.²⁰ Figure 12 shows a plate depicting the modern city of Albany from across the Hudson. The view was taken in 2019, close to the view shown on an antique plate from Enoch Wood's factory, discovered in the collection at Rhode Island School of Design Museum (RISD). (Figure 13) As Paul remarks, 'The only view I could find across the river which was not obscured, was above the city refuse

¹⁹ Dialogue between the author and Paul Scott 25/3/2021.

²⁰ See also: Jo Dahn 'On the Threshold: Paul Scott New American Scenery' <https://cumbrianblues.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/OnTheThreshold.R.2.3.pdf>

dump.’²¹ Juxtaposing the two plates does more than record environmental change and the passage of time: it is teasing and exploratory; it sets up - stirs up - cross-currents.

*American transferwares are ... loaded objects ... to me they're very chameleon like – promiscuous - and they can go into all sorts of different places... they are decorative objects; they're functional objects but they're also objects which are disseminating imagery... and of course cultural values ... they link into all kinds of places within the visual and literary arts*²²

Figure 14 shows a case in the Lucy Aldrich porcelain gallery at RISD, installed with a series of juxtapositions.²³ At bottom right of the case, portrait medallions of President Washington and Governor Clinton overlay the upper border of an historical plate by Ralph Stevenson & Williams, thereby politicising the central image of Boston Hospital. (Figure 15) A cartouche in the lower border shows the *Entrance of the Erie Canal into the Hudson at Albany* – the same print as in Figure 4 above. Paul Scott appropriates the format to make heroes of the ‘Angola Three’ (Figure 16) with portrait medallions of Black Panthers Herman Wallace, Albert Woodfox and Robert Hillary King, who spent decades unjustly confined in solitary confinement at Louisiana State Penitentiary. Their story is told on the reverse of the plate.²⁴ (Figure 17)



FIGURE 14 Display case in the Lucy Aldrich porcelain gallery at RISD, installed by Paul Scott 2019 in *Raid the Icebox Now* exhibition. ([Raid the Icebox Now](#))

FIGURE 15 Ralph Stevenson & Williams *Washington and Governor Clinton Boston Hospital* (1825-1827 RISD collection gift of Edward B Aldrich) (8 3/8" diam.)

²¹ Personal e mail, 3 Jun 2021

²² Dialogue between the author and Paul Scott 25/3/2021.

²³ As part of *Raid the Icebox Now*, (2019) interventions by several artists commissioned to mark fifty years since Andy Warhol's first *Raid the Icebox* exhibition, 'a landmark show featuring idiosyncratic objects selected from the museum's basement storage by the iconic American artist.' <https://www.risd.edu/news/stories/raid-the-icebox-now/>

²⁴ <https://angola3.org/the-case/>



FIGURE 16 Paul Scott Scott's *Cumbrian Blue(s), New American Scenery, Angola 3* (11 x 11 x 1") in-glaze screen print (decal) on salvaged Syracuse China with pearlware glaze 2019
FIGURE 17 reverse of Fig 16



FIGURE 18 Paul Scott Scott's *Cumbrian Blues, New American Scenery, Souvenir of Providence, Cape Coast Castle*, in-glaze screen print (decal) on *Souvenir of Providence* by The Rowland Marsellus Co. 1894 (25cm diam.) 2019

FIGURE 19 Enoch Wood & Sons *Cape Coast Castle on the Gold Coast Africa 1820-1840* (16 5/8" x 12 7/8") impressed on back: Wood. (RISD collection Aldrich gift)

A deep blue platter from the RISD collection depicts Cape Coast Castle, a British slave fort on the West African coast.²⁵ It is juxtaposed with Paul's altered *Souvenir of Providence* plate (Figures 18 and 19). Rhode Island was the principal New England point of entry for enslaved Africans and this plate has become a palimpsest in the classic sense. Floating behind the grand municipal buildings of the state capital a ghostly image can be discerned: it is a scene from the slave trade, the illustration on the platter. Work like this, made in direct response to a selected historical piece, is tantamount to embodied argument.

²⁵ For more information, see Jo Dahn *The Cape Coast Castle Platter Ceramics in America* 2020

As a white English artist, I don't purport to represent the experience of Black or Native Americans, because I can't in any way do that. But what I can do is to rebalance transferware's whitewashing of subject matters and depictions so that they are more reflective of contemporary American landscape and society.²⁶



FIGURE 20 Paul Scott *Cumbrian Blue(s) New American Scenery Souvenir of Selma*.

In-glaze screen print (decal) on salvaged Syracuse China with pearlware glaze. 12" diam. 2019

In 2018 Paul Scott joined a re-enactment of the 1965 Selma Bridge Crossing, when Martin Luther-King led African American activists across the Edmund Pettus Bridge out of Selma on a march to the state capital of Montgomery in order to register as voters.

FIGURE 21 Paul Scott *Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s), New American Scenery, The Uranium*

Series No. 2, Farmstead Cove Az. 13 x 16 x 1.5" (2019) In-glaze screen print (decal), on shelledged pearlware platter c.1840 with uranium glass

One of several pieces that address the issue of uranium mining in the Navajo Nation and the ongoing struggle for compensation. The illustration shows a site in Arizona. Between the 1940s and the 1980s, more than seven million tons of uranium were extracted from this landscape.

The niceties of acquisitions and donations, of exactly how American transferwares entered museum collections, are beyond the scope of this essay. It is worth mentioning however, that the 'Cape Coast Castle' platter and two of the other historical ceramics featured above were part of a substantial bequest – some 250 pieces - given to RISD in 1938 by businessman Edward B Aldrich (1871-1957). In or around 1930 numbers of them were on display at Indian Oaks, the Rhode Island mansion built by Edward's powerful father, Senator Nelson Aldrich (1841-1915).²⁷ Following the bequest, most of the collection remained in museum storage for over eighty years.

Does it make a difference who the donor was? What if the wealth that bestowed these objects on the nation was improperly gained?²⁸ Edward B Aldrich was Vice-President of the International Rubber Company and President of the American Congo Company. The Aldrichs benefitted financially from

²⁶ Paul Scott, RISD Instagram post 21/2/2020

²⁷ Historic New England web site <https://www.historicnewengland.org/explore/collections-access/capobject/?refd=PC009.228H>

²⁸ In his 1937 account of the 'sixty wealthiest families' in America, Ferdinand Lundberg was scathing about 'Philanthropy or Non-Commercial Investment' and 'pseudo-benefactions' (preface). In his opinion, the real reason for benevolence was tax evasion. Of Nelson Aldrich, he wrote: 'Aldrich had as unsavory a record as one could conceive. ...' Ferdinand Lundberg *America's 60 Families* New York: Vanguard Press 1937 p.61

investments in the Congo rubber trade, notorious for working conditions that compared to the cruellest of enslaved labour.²⁹

Public art museums have long reflected and catered to the interests of privileged (wealthy, white, well educated) social groups.³⁰ To destabilise this tendency Margaret Lindauer, an early exponent of what is loosely called 'New Museum Theory and Practice', assumes the role of 'critical museum visitor'. She asks: 'what social relations of power are enacted through the presentation and interpretation of art works or artifacts – who has the most to gain and who has the most to lose from the particular ways in which aesthetic concepts, cultural phenomena, and historical events are represented (or left unspoken)?'³¹

Artist interventions can unsettle the routines and protocols associated with traditional curatorship and the preservation of an ideological status quo. Poised at the junction between studio and curatorial practice, Paul Scott's activities address Lindauer's questions, opening up new routes through the collection to enable shifts in focus that prioritise contemporary concerns while yet retaining the fascinations of historical context. *New American Scenery* speaks politics together with an eloquent appreciation of the visual qualities of American transferware. Paul's characteristic repurposing of patterns and motifs resonates with the historical pieces, mobilising what is sometimes called the 'blue and white semiotic' - like picking up a syncopated rhythm or singing descant. Placing contemporary work in dialogue with historical ceramics heightens a sense of theatricality: imagine the museum interior as a stage and the artefacts therein as actors, appearing, disappearing; now in the spotlight, now out of sight behind the scenes; a stage where untold stories interrupt the stasis of the traditional display, conjuring echoes, inspiring a riposte, triggering an amendment, a correction.... jogging memories.

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²⁹Workers were subjected to horrendous punishments. See eg, Tim Harford "The Horrific Consequences of Rubber's Toxic Past" BBC News 23/7/2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-48533964> and Robert Wuliger "America's Early Role in the Congo Tragedy" The Nation 10/10/2007. <https://www.thenation.com/authors/robert-wuliger/> The American Congo Company was set up by the Guggenheim brothers in 1906. See: <https://failedarchitecture.com/2019/12/architectures-role-in-erasing-the-guggenheims-ongoing-legacy-of-violent-extraction/>

³⁰ 'A museum is not the neutral and transparent sheltering space that it is often claimed to be [...] To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and some of its highest most authoritative truths.' Carol Duncan 'Art museums and the ritual of citizenship' in Susan M Pearce (editor) *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, Routledge, London 1994, p.280-283.

³¹ Margaret Lindauer 'The Critical Museum Visitor' in Janet Marstine (editor) *New Museum Theory and Practice* Blackwell 2006, p.221.



FIGURE 22 Paul Scott Scott's *Cumbrian Blue(s), New American Scenery, Fleurs.de.sel's New York*. A group of contemporary New York views after photographs by Fleurs.de.sel that Paul Scott discovered on social media. The installation in the Bowes Museum, England, is reminiscent of late 19th/early 20th century domestic displays of American transferwares. They were often collected in themed sets and some collections included hundreds of pieces; as Anne Anderson has observed, they 'primarily acted as pictures; densely hung they substituted for wallpaper.'³²

One of the things that I'm quite clear about is that through my engagement with transferware as a contemporary artist, in dragging these objects out of museum collections to be put on display, alongside my own iterations, it has brought the genre to the attention of a completely new generation'³³

August 2021. This essay began with a memory. Almost twenty years have passed since the *Remember Me When This You See* exhibition. By now Paul Scott's work can be found in public collections across the world. *New American Scenery* artworks have now been acquired by American art museums.³⁴

Figure 22 shows a group of New York views after contemporary photographs by Fleurs.de.sel – a chance discovery on social media. There are echoes of the past in this mining of digital territory: as Paul has observed, 'The sheer scale of printed illustrative ceramics, means that they were part of the new mass-media of their time.'³⁵

³² Anne Anderson 'The Romance of Old Blue: collecting and displaying Old Blue Staffordshire China in the American Home c1870-1938' in *Interpreting Ceramics* 2013 issue 15. <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue015/articles/03.htm>

³³ Dialogue between the author and Paul Scott 25/3/2021.

³⁴ See: <https://ferrincontemporary.com/portfolio/paul-scott/#exhibitions>

³⁵ Paul Scott 'Willows, Windmills and Wild Roses: Recycling and Remediation' in Jorunn Veiteberg *Thing Tang Trash - Upcycling in Contemporary Ceramics* Bergen: National Academy of the Arts 2011 p.43

In 2002 social media as we experience it now did not exist and museum websites were in their infancy. Nowadays many ceramics collections can be viewed in virtual reality and both museums and artists communicate directly with an online audience. This corner of the digital realm is teeming with buzzwords that herald change: decolonising, repatriation, social impact, racism, discrimination.... E notifications arrive on a regular basis. 'We examine the role we can play in tackling the urgent issues of our day' declares an e mail announcing the 2021 annual conference of the Museums Association.³⁶

Paul Scott posts images of his *New American Scenery* work online; his accompanying narratives explain process, spell out contexts and arguments, sometimes at length. At times he is seen in studio.³⁷ He tells stories about American transferware and he has interested, engaged viewers, who in turn 'share' both image and text. Much as in the 'real world' of the museum Paul's work points up aspects of the historical collection, his social media presence chimes with current events. 'Every time y'all highlight one of these Paul Scott works,' writes a follower on RISD Instagram, 'I am inspired and moved by the story behind each piece.'



FIGURE 23 Paul Scott 'Cumbrian Blue(s), *New American Scenery*, *Sampler Jug No:7, (After Stubbs)*'. Decal collage on pearlware jug, 390mm x 350mm x 50mm. Paul Scott 2021.

³⁶ Museums Association conference 'Brave New World' 8-10 November 2021 e mail notification 14/7/2021

³⁷ See for eg, cumbrianblue_s Instagram posts, July 27-August 3 2019