Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery 1910 - 1940

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Abstract

This interpretative historiography investigates and examines the precepts and critical writing on English Studio pottery between 1910 and 1940. It argues that Roger Fry's Formalist theories provided the critical framework for the appreciation of early studio potters such as William Staite Murray, Bernard Leach, and Reginald Wells. Through his inclusion and appreciation of Fauve ceramics in the exhibition *Manet and the Post Impressionists* to his primitivist interpretation of early Chinese and English mediaeval pottery, Fry identified the main idioms of early studio pottery. This realigned individual artistic ceramic practice from being the focus of Antiquarian appreciation to being a subject of contemporary understanding.

Herbert Read's ideas of Mediaeval pottery as 'plastic art in its most abstract form' augmented Fry's Formalist theories and facilitated the Modernist appreciation of pottery as a form of non-representational art during the 1920s and early 1930s. William Staite Murray, in particular, adopted these ideas and his monumental stoneware pottery and membership of the Seven & Five Society led to Read describing him as 'a canvas free artist.'

In parallel to Read and Staite Murray, Bernard Leach's advocacy of neo-vernacular slipware and 'Sung Standard' stonewares promulgated Ruskin and Morris's social concerns and ideas on utility and craft. This led to the emergence of the Leach school in the late 1920s with the work of Michael Cardew, Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie and Norah Braden. Leach positioned this production of innovative domestic pottery as a bridge between English handicraft and design and it became part of the discussion about English national identity which culminated in the exhibition *English Pottery Old and New* at the V & A in 1935.

Beginning with the critical response to *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* in 1910, and concluding with the reviews of Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book* in 1940, this thesis has undertaken a comprehensive literature search of writing on studio pottery in the English art, design and national press. The primary texts reveal the voice of critics and potters over three decades, and chart the development of studio pottery from a nascent discipline in 1910 to a coherent movement at the outbreak of the Second World War.

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Author's declaration

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Chapter 1

A Brief Overview of English Pottery in the late 19th Century

> 'The Classical Revival lumbered on through the century, a wounded chimera. Its lingering death was caused by successive attacks of the neo-Gothic, neo-Rococo, neo- Renaissance, neo-Baroque and neo-Celtic styles, culminating in the fatal onset of what Walter Crane called 'the strange decorative disease'-*art nouveau*.[1]

Jennifer Opie described ceramic production in Europe at the end of 19th century as artistically driven by 'A sense of searching urgency'.[2] The great porcelain factories of Meissen and Sèvres continued to produce luxury goods while artistic stoneware work was being created by individual French potters such as Ernest Chaplet and Jean Carriès. In England, the industrial and aesthetic legacy of Josiah Wedgwood dominated 19th century pottery production and had established an international reputation built on the 'practicality and low cost'[3] of earthenware.

Mass-production had shaped the character of English pottery throughout the 18th and 19th century. However, in an attempt to overturn an identity built on the production of cheap transfer printed pottery, the large factories also brought in artists to design fashionable work for the luxury market. Minton, for example, employed the French designer M. L. Solon in 1870 who had trained at Sèvres and Wedgwood employed Emile Lessore, a pupil of Ingres,

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[1] Hillier, B., *Pottery and Porcelain 1700-1914*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968, p. 217.
[2] Opie, J., 'The New Ceramics : Engaging with the Spirit', in *Art Nouveau* catalogue, ed, Greenhalgh. P., London, V & A, 2000, p. 193.
[3] Hildyard, R., *European Ceramics*, London, V & A Publications, 1999, p. 92.

while Doulton employed Cazin and the English artists Hannah Barlow, George Tinworth and Frank Butler. [4]

During the last thirty years of the century a group of independent potteries began experiments in 'mass-producing art pottery of the type shunned by the major Staffordshire manufacturers.'[5] These small concerns included William Howson Taylor's Ruskin Pottery, Linthorpe Pottery, Burmantofts Pottery and the Della Robbia Pottery, which Hildyard remarked was built on 'the socialist principles of the arts and crafts movement'[6]. Art pottery offered an alternative to the conformity of industrial products. It has been described as 'a genre of ceramics which was produced under smaller scale conditions than those of the mainstream industry and, broadly speaking, according to Arts and Crafts Ideals.'[7] Exploiting a wide range of technical processes and materials, art pottery varied aesthetically. In 1974 E. L. Thomas wrote it 'was not characterised by any particular shape, or type of decoration ... but more by the spirit in which it had been made.'[8]

Some historians argue that, in contrast to European ceramics, Art Nouveau made little impact on English pottery. Opie writes that 'Art Nouveau was

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[4] The Aesthetic Movement's interest in Japonisme[4] contributed to a fashion for collecting Japanese pottery in the 1870s and also influenced ceramic pattern designs. The painter James McNeil Whistler, for example, created twenty-one illustrations for a catalogue of a collection of blue and white printed pottery. Hillier, 1968, p. 212

[5] Hildyard, 1999, p. 119.

[6] Hildyard, 1999, p. 119.

[7] Vanke, F., 'British Cultural and Aesthetic Relationship with Decorative Arts of the Islamic Orient, with Special Reference to Ceramics, unpublished PhD thesis, The London Institute, 1998, p. 240.

[8] Thomas, E. L., *Victorian Art Pottery'*, London, Guildart, 1974, p. 3.

widely resisted'[9] while Hildyard states it was 'viewed with great suspicion'[10], although the Secessionist Ware designed by Leon Solon and J. W. Wadsworth for Mintons in 1902 shared 'the linear, stylised organic surface decoration'[11] of Art Nouveau. Although France may have been the main centre for Art Nouveau ceramics, Opie states it was 'rivalled by long-established factories in Denmark, Germany and Sweden' while Holland, Hungary and the American potteries of Greuby and Rookwood in America also made distinctive work.

In the 18th and 19th century ceramic production had been dominated by the 'superiority' of porcelain, but the experiments of Art Nouveau potters established a new artistic credibility for stoneware. Opie writes ' By the end of the century, in France at least, the material had achieved a sort of mythical status which recalled the hunt for the perfect porcelain begun some four centuries earlier in Italy.'[12] In consequence, 'Earthenware was now considered to be at the bottom of the hierarchy of ceramic mediums'.[13] English earthenware was now seen as little more than a material that offered the possibilities of quick profit.

1.1 Early 20th century responses to 19th century English pottery

Writing on pottery at the turn of the century was typified by the view that the English were 'only good' at making earthenware. Charles Holme, the

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[9] Opie, 2000, p. 194.
[10] Hildyard, 1999, p. 116.
[11] Hildyard, 1999, p. 116.
[12] Opie, 2000, p. 193.

founder and editor of *The Studio*, was one of the first influential critics to voice dissent. In his article *The Potter's Art-Object Lessons from the Far East* in 1901 he explained

> 'It is evident to those who follow the changes that are taking place in the manufacture of the better classes of earthenware that a revolt has set in against objects depending for their sole interest upon the painted decoration applied to them.'[14]

He also condemned Art Pottery, describing the work as 'unornamental "ornaments" with which thoughtless people crowd their living rooms.'[15] This view was not typical though and Arthur Hayden, the author of *Chats on Old Earthenware* published in 1909, saw Art Pottery as a positive contribution to the poor condition of English pottery. He described the Ruskin Pottery as a 'bright spot in recent ceramic enterprise' in the 'triumphs...and sometimes ... the decadence of English pottery'.[16]

By the turn of the 20th century the international reputation of English pottery was beleaguered but some critics attempted a defence. In their important book *English Pottery : Its Development From Early Times To The End Of The Eighteenth Century* , V & A curators Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read responded to attacks on English pottery made by the widely respected Danish scholar Dr Emil Hannover who had written '"The development through more than a thousand years of *all* the ceramic arts, porcelain not excepted, was brought to a standstill by the great English

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[13] Opie, 2000, p. 202.
[14] Holme, C, 'The Potter's Art - Object Lessons from the Far East', *The Studio*, Vol. XXIV, No 103, Oct. 1901, p. 48.
[15] Holme, 1901, p. 50.
[16] Haydon, A., *Chats on English Earthenware*, London, Fisher Unwin, 1919 (1909), p. 466. One of a series of popular titles on Art and Design.

industry".[17] While not defending current production, Read and Rackham replied that Wedgwood's neo-classical pottery was a valid product of its time and that 'Wedgwood must be excused ; the circumstances were too much for him.'[18] However, in 1905 in his first known article on ceramics Roger Fry reviewed an exhibition of historical Wedgwood pottery in which he discussed the company and its industrial legacy.

> 'Wedgwood's work ... probably contributed to the final destruction of the art, as an art, in England, since it set a standard of mechanical perfection which to this day prevents the trade from accepting any work in which the natural beauties of the material are not carefully obliterated by mechanical means.'[19]

But by the 1920s negativity about English pottery of the 19th century - a 'century of revivals'[20] as it has been called - was widespread. Frank Rutter wrote of 'the factitious ornamentation which passed for beauty in Victorian times'.[21] John Adams condemned it as 'some of the most atrocious ceramic design the world has ever seen'[22] and in the preface to *Old English Porcelain* (1928) the V & A curator, W. B. Honey, wrote of the 'unattractive' artistic merit of 'nineteenth-century wares'[23]. Even those within the industry eventually concurred. Gordon Forsyth, the Principal of Stoke-on-Trent College and a designer for the Royal Lancastrian Pottery, wrote in 1936

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[17] Hannover, E., *Keramisk Haandbog, Vol. 1*, Copenhagen, 1919, quoted in Rackham, B. & Read, H., 'English Pottery: Its Development From Early Times To The End Of The Eighteenth Century", London, *Ernest Benn*,, 1924, p. 124.
[18] Rackham and Read, 1924, p. 124.
[19] Fry, R., *Wedgwood China*, The Athenaeum, No 4055, July 15, 1905, pp. 88-89.
[20] Hillier, 1968, p. 216.
[21] Rutter, F., *Modern English Pottery and Porcelain*, Apollo, Vol. 2, No. 9., Sept. 1925, p. 133.
[22] Adams, J., *Modern British Pottery*, The Architectural Review, Vol. LIX, Jan-June 1926, p. 190.
[23] Honey, W. B., *Old English Porcelain , A Handbook for Collectors*, London, Bell & Sons, 1928, p. ix.

'The artistic decline of pottery began in the nineteenth century. ... To look through an illustrated catalogue of the great Exhibition of Industrial Art of 1851 is forcibly to realise this truth. It was a colossal chamber of horrors, an exhibition of misapplied art.'[24]

1.2 Arts and Crafts Pottery

Despite the success of the Arts and Crafts Movement in revitalising handicraft in the late 19th century, pottery did not enjoy the success of woodwork, textiles, metalwork or bookbinding. The Movement had little impact on pottery production in England, for the technical difficulties and the massive scale and success of industrially produced ceramics were difficult to overcome. Although capable of embodying the immediacy of hand work, the transformation of the artist craftsman's sensibility into clay proved elusive, as Alan Crawford wrote: 'pottery and weaving... before the War, had been somehow less spectacular than the Movement's furniture and metalwork'[25]. This low profile is evident in an anthology of *Arts and Crafts Essays* [26] by leading Arts and Crafts practitioners including William Morris, Walter Crane and W. A. S. Benson. Of thirty-five essays, totalling over four hundred pages, five were devoted to furniture and nine to textiles, while pottery, under the title of 'Fictiles', only merited six pages. This homily on the virtues of pottery was by G. T. Robinson, one of the members of 'Fifteen', an organisation which Gillian Naylor described as one of

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[24] Forsyth, G., *20th Century Ceramics*, London, The Studio, 1936, p. 31.
[25] Crawford, A. 'ed', *By Hammer and Hand*, Birmingham, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1984, p. 23.
[26] *Arts and Crafts Essays*, Rivington, Percival & Co., 1903, (1893).

several groups of 'architect/craftsmen' [27] who later joined to form the Art Workers Guild. With familiar Arts and Crafts rhetoric Robinson lamented the loss of vernacular pottery and the potter's wheel. He made a plea that 'the craftsman and the artist should, where possible, be united, or at least should work in common'[28].

The Arts and Crafts ideal, to unify design and practice, became a central tenet of studio pottery from the 1920s onwards. During the 19th century, however, the programme had been less clear for, ironically, much of Arts and Crafts handwork was only achieved through a division of labour. Tanya Harrod discussed the contradictions between William Morris's philosophical writing and his business practice in *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century.*

> 'he never made a shibboleth of handwork. Neither did the founders of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, who were primarily designers who turned over their designs to commercial firms or to professional trade craftsmen or women.'[29]

While it was possible for both 'professionals' and 'amateurs' to achieve satisfactory results in many craft disciplines, the technical difficulties of pottery were beyond the reach of most.[30] During the height of the Arts and Crafts movement small communal pottery workshops were rare, although Naylor mentions one particular experiment in keeping 'with the nascent

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[27] Naylor, 1990, p. 120.
[28] *Arts and Crafts Essays* , 1903, p. 63.
[29] Harrod, 1999, p. 17.
[30] The decline in regional potteries (due to the centralisation of the industry in Staffordshire) led to a lack of skilled artisans available to assist Arts and Crafts designers in the revival of pottery as a viable craft.

ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement'[31], a collaboration between students from the Lambeth School of Art school and Doulton's 'throwers and turners'.

> 'George Wallis, Keeper of the Art Collections at South Kensington, deemed the decoration 'thoroughly well considered and especially adapted to the material, the mode of production and the use of the object' ... in spite of the 'division of labour'[32]

The problems of overcoming the 'division of labour' in the late 19th century were tackled by the most original pottery concern of the 19th century, the Martin Brothers[33] and William De Morgan. The Martin brothers remained independent of the Arts and Crafts community[34] which meant that Arts and Crafts pottery was effectively dependent on William De Morgan, a close colleague of William Morris. De Morgan's company provided an alternative to industrial ceramics between the 1870s and early 1900s. Operating out of various small workshops based in London he achieved prominence with prestigious commissions which included tiled interiors for Lord Leighton's and Ernest Debenham's extravagant houses, the Russian Czar's yacht *Lividia* and five P & O liners. De Morgan's revival of Hispano-Moresque styles and lustre techniques were described by Hildyard as 'unparalleled in Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century'[35]. However, by De Morgan's own admission, pottery making came low on his list of priorities, as May Morris recounted from his diaries.

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[31] This began in the 1860s. Naylor, 1990, p. 149.
[32] Naylor, 1990, p. 149.
[33] Wallace was the modeller, Walter the thrower, Edwin the decorator and Charles the manager.
[34] despite being described by Charles Holme - arguably the first critic and exponent of craft pottery - as 'Among the honoured names' of European potters. Hildyard, 1999, p. 107.

"The work actually carried on now at the factory is as follows, taking the items in the order of their importance:
1. Decorative painted panels. ..
2. Stove tiles and other patterned tiles for various purposes. ..
3. Plain coloured tiles. ..
4. Miscellaneous decorated pots-good for wedding presents and the like, but of no use except to put flowers in when they do not run-as indeed now and then they do not. It is very possible that a little further evolution of this work might have really satisfactory results."[36]

Although he has been described as 'a master potter ... [producing] some of the most influential ceramics of the late nineteenth century[37]' Crawford confirms De Morgan's own words, describing him as '... essentially a decorator of pottery...the vases, dishes, bowls and tiles he produced were vehicles for his ... Isnik motifs, his Morris-like foliage, and his grotesque animals'[38]. De Morgan was beset by financial and technical problems in a career that, in May's words, 'was doomed to failure'.[39] Losing £500 on the Leighton commission and famously burning down an early studio at 40 Fitzroy Avenue, De Morgan eventually gave up pottery after a long period of ill-health, and went on to become successful novelist.

There was little critical or aesthetic overlap between De Morgan and the later studio potters. Although Bernard Leach was to adopt many of the Arts and Crafts ideals (to be discussed in Part II & III) he and his contemporaries were dismissive of the work of De Morgan and the Martin Brothers because of the

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[36] May Morris, William De Morgan, *'Burlington Magazine'*, No CLXXVIII & CLXXIX, Vol. XXX1, 1917, p. 77.
[37] Greenhalgh, P., 'Le Style Anglais', catalogue *Art Nouveau* Greenhalgh. P. 'ed', London, V & A, 2000, p. 133.
[38] Crawford, 1984, p. 12.
[39] May Morris, 1917, p. 78.

gulf between Arts and Craft and studio pottery practice rather than its philosophy. Leach wrote

> 'The attempted revival of lustre painting under pre-Raphaelite influence by William de Morgan led as one might expect to nothing fresh and vital in form, or for that matter in decoration.'[40]

Cardew concurred, writing of the Movement in his autobiography, *A Pioneer Potter,* 'The trouble was that the products of all this good craftsmanship usually looked laboured and mannered.'[41] His views on Martinware were similar - introduced to their work by the architect Sidney Greenslade he 'was obliged to be polite about them.'[42]

1.3 Pottery and Arts and Crafts theory

De Morgan was more of a typical Morrisian designer than precursor of the studio potter as designer maker. As Naylor wrote of Morris' approach to design

> 'The cardinal principle upon which all his theory rested centred round his convictions that the designer (or architect) must have a personal knowledge of the potentials and limitations of the materials he is working with if he is to produce work of any validity, and such understanding of the process of design must be learned at first hand;'[43]

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[40] Leach, B., 'Towards a Standard', *A Potter's Book,* London, Faber & Faber, 1977, (1940), p. 18.
[41] Cardew, M., *A Pioneer Potter,* London, Collins & Sons, 1988, p. 89.
[42] Cardew, 1988, p. 27.
[43] Naylor, 1990, p. 104.

Ironically, William Morris established a critical agenda that was eminently suitable for a revival of hand made pottery, which he referred to in his public lectures.

> 'Try to get the most out of your material, but always in such a way as honours it most. Not only should it be obvious what your material is, but something should be done with it which is specially natural to it, something that could not be done with any other.'[44]

Morris challenged an artistic hierarchy that discriminated between the Fine and Applied Arts and although his credo was never fully realised in ceramic terms during his lifetime, a later generation of craftspeople and critics would draw upon his ideas despite rejecting Arts and Crafts work. Although the idea of separating design and making was in principal alien to William Morris, his ideas did set the agenda for a new generation who would rise to this challenge. Bernard Leach stated that 'beauty will emerge from a fusion of the individual character and culture of the potter with the nature of his materials - clay, pigment, glaze - and his management of the fire'.[45] Even during his most ardently Modernist phase Roger Fry declared in an Omega catalogue that pottery 'should express directly the artist's sensibility'[46] and reject 'sand-papering .. down to a shop finish'[47].

The legacy of the Arts and Crafts has been the subject of continual debate and revision within the field of Design Theory. Crawford is critical of the way

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[44] William Morris, '*Art and the Beauty of the Earth*', a lecture delivered at Burslem Town Hall on 13 Oct. 1881, 1898 ed., p. 22. quoted by Hillier, B, *Pottery and Porcelain, 1700-1914*, p.263, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968
[45] Leach, 1977, p. 6.
[46] Roger Fry, 'Pottery' Omega pamphlet, 1915, p. 10.
[47] Fry, 1915, p. 4.

that 'Historians have been preoccupied with showing the links between the Arts and Crafts and the Modern Movement in architecture and design'[48] and argues 'there is scarcely a style'; this is echoed by Paul Greenhalgh who refers to the Arts and Crafts movement as 'an attitude rather than a style'.[49] Naylor takes a similar position, warning that 'the interpretation of the Arts and Crafts generation as Pioneers of Modern Design, or at least anticipating modernism, is reductive as well as misleading'[50].

In G. T. Robinson's modest chapter on pottery, 'Fictiles', he expressed regret that 'Fictile Art was no more a vernacular one'[51]. Robinson's closing remarks seem prophetic, for his description of 'faiences decorated with simple glazes or with "slip" decoration'[52] and the simple beauty of stoneware glazes without 'meretricious ornament'[53] seems prophetic, for he could be describing the typical 'anglo-oriental' stoneware or slipware pot of the 1920s. The triad of artist, potter's wheel and early Oriental pottery came to identify the character of English studio pottery.

> 'In the East where the clay is native, the art is native...the potter's hand and the wheel maintain the power of giving the potter his individuality as the creator and the artist'[54]

Arts and Craft pottery partially achieved its aim of revising 'good design' but was unable to unify the dual roles of design and making by an individual

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[48] Crawford, 1984, p. 24.
[49] Greenhalgh, 2000, p. 137.
[50] Naylor, 1990, p. 6.
[51] *Arts and Crafts Essays*, p. 64.
[52] *Arts and Crafts Essays*, p. 66.
[53] *Arts and Crafts Essays*, p. 65.
[54] *Arts and Crafts Essays*, p. 65.

artist. Despite its material richness, expressive potential and suitability for communal or Guild work, hand made pottery never became closely associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, or one of its core disciplines, but established a rich legacy which was taken up by later generations.

Chapter 2

Pottery and the exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*

> 'Among professional artists there is... a vague idea that a man can still remain a gentleman if he paints bad pictures, but must forfeit the conventional right to his Esquire if he makes good pots or serviceable furniture.'[1]
>
> 'Judge the art of a country, judge the fineness of its sensibility, by its pottery ; it is a sure touchstone. Pottery is pure art ; it is art freed from any imitative intention. ... pottery is plastic art in its most abstract essence.'[2]

In 1910, the critic and painter Roger Fry took part in a 'vigorous' discussion at a meeting of the Society of Arts concerning the relationship between the fine and applied arts. He noted the 'contempt'[3] shown by some of the members for utilitarian work, which they apparently associated with 'a lower kind of faculty'. Twenty years later, a major change had taken place. An essay by Herbert Read in the catalogue for William Staite Murray's first solo show at The Lefevre Galleries depicted studio pottery as a confident discipline at the forefront of avant-garde concerns in English art. Fry's worries about the craftsman forfeiting his right to the 'Esquire' had ended, along with the era of the *amateur* or *gentleman* artist, to be replaced by the contemporary idea of the artist potter. Roger Fry and Herbert Read's comments (above) span the gestation and birth of studio pottery and illustrate how, in the course of two decades, pottery progressed from being a

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[1] Fry, R., 'A Modern Jeweller', *The Burlington Magazine* , no LXXXVII, Vol. XVII, June 1910, p. 169.

[2] X. X. (Read, H.), 'The Appreciation of Pottery' catalogue of *Pottery, Paintings and Furniture* by Staite Murray, London, Lefevre Galleries, Nov. 1930.

marginalised adjunct of Edwardian cultural life to becoming, briefly, a creative form that could epitomise abstract ideals of fine art.

The emergence of studio pottery as a movement which began as a 'vague idea' in 1910 but became a 'pure art'[4] form during the inter-war years is the subject of this thesis. Roger Fry's inclusion of contemporary French pottery in his exhibition *Manet and the Post Impressionists,* his Formalist theories[5] and the application of his ideas about the regenerative force of primitive art to painting and early Chinese and English pottery were an important influence on the development of the studio pottery movement in Britain. Fry's critical theories of pottery will be discussed in Chapter 3 and his ideas of primitivism and pottery are discussed in Chapter 4.

2.1 An overview of Fine Art

To examine the factors which precipitated this development it is useful to look beyond turn-of-the-century pottery to the wider field of fine art criticism of the time in Britain. The cultural life of the fine arts in the 1900s was dominated by a series of artistic groups and alliances. At its core was The New English Art Club, formed in 1885, in opposition to the inherently conservative Royal Academy. The art historian Gruetzner Robins states that The New English Art Club was 'founded by young artists who wanted an

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[3]Fry, 'A Modern Jeweller', 1910, p. 169.
[4] Read, 1930.
[5] Formalism is the name applied to Fry's theories of art which were concerned with the arrangement of form as opposed to content or representation. His phrase 'emotional disinterestedness' was the precursor to Herbert Read's 'objectivity'.

exhibition forum for their "French-influenced" painting.'[6] Most young English artists in the first decade of the century were at some point members of the group, including Fry, who joined in 1893 when Walter Sickert and Philip Wilson were senior members. Factional infighting and changing ideas of modernity created an ebb and flow of further groupings within British art. In 1908 the Allied Artists Association was founded and organised by the art critic Frank Rutter 'on the pattern of the French Salon des Indépendants'[7], with support from Spencer Gore, Walter Sickert and Lucien Pissaro. It held annual exhibitions at the Royal Albert Hall and was notable for first exhibiting Wassily Kandinsky in 1909. By 1911, fragile alliances had again changed and, 'in face of the conservatism of the NEAC {New English Art Club]'[8], The Camden Town Group was formed. Established artists such as Gore, Pissaro and Augustus John were joined by those of a younger generation, such as Harold Gilman and Wyndham Lewis.

In addition to these various avant garde sets there were many conservative groups who received institutional support and represented the artistic ideals of the previous century. These included the all-powerful Royal Academy, The Royal Society of British Artists, The Royal Society of Miniature Painters, The Royal Institute of Oil Painters and The Royal British Colonial Society of Artists. Official organisations with cosmopolitan aspirations were rare, although Auguste Rodin was the president of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers. This conglomerate of official and

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[6]Gruetzner Robins, A., 'Father and Sons', *Art Made Modern*, London, Green., C. 'ed.', Courtauld Institute of Art, London 2000, p. 46.
[7] Harrison, 1994, p. 30.

unofficial artistic organisations was the immediate backdrop to a four year period which dramatically challenged the continuity of English art.

2.2 The exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*

According to A. Gruetzner Robins a series of exhibitions held between 1910 and 1914 (six in London and one in Leeds[9]) showed 'virtually the entire canon of modern art'[10]. They included work by the Italian Futurists, young artists from the French school such as Bonnard and Vuillard[11] and, with the Allied Arts Association first showing of Brancusi in 1914, accelerated artistic cultural exchange between England and Europe.

Fry's exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists,* held at the Grafton Galleries in London in 1910 forms the major subject of this chapter. The significance of this exhibition to studio pottery is crucial and the year of its launch ('The Art Quake of 1910'[12]) determines the starting date of this thesis.[13] The historian Stella Tillyard has written at length on both the

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[8] Harrison, 1994, p. 37.
[9] An Exhibition of Pictures by Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin, 1911, Paintings by the Italian Futurist Artists, 1912, The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, 1912, Post-Impressionists and Futurists, 1913, Post-Impressionist Pictures and Drawings, 1913, Twentieth-Century Art : A Review of Modern Movements, 1914, see Gruetzner Robins.
[10] Gruetzner Robins, A., *'Modern Art in Britain 1910-1914'*, London, Merrell Holberton in association with the Barbican Art Gallery, 1997, p. 7.
[11] For a detailed account of this period see Greutzner Robins, *Art Made Modern.*
[12] MacCarthy , D., 'The Art Quake of 1910', *The Listener*, London, Feb. 1 1945, pp. 123 - 129.
[13] *Modern French Art at the Brighton Art Gallery* curated by Robert Dell earlier in 1910 featured many of the same artists, but Fry is credited with introducing late Impressionist (henceforth referred to as Post-Impressionist) French painting to Britain.

repercussions of *'Manet and the 'Post-Impressionists'* and Fry's critical theories. In her introduction to *The Impact of Modernism*[14] she states

> '... along with the paintings, drawings and sculpture, [Fry] also supplied a language in which Post-Impressionist works could be judged.'[15]

Fry is credited with introducing late Impressionist (henceforth referred to as Post-Impressionist) French painting to Britain. The exhibition encouraged the widespread adoption of the term 'Post-Impressionism'[16] to describe the late 19th and early 20th century French painting of Cézanne and his contemporaries, and the work of English painters Clive Bell, Duncan Grant and Roger Fry himself. Although Charles Harrison is dismissive of English Post-Impressionist painting, he acknowledges the impact Post-Impressionist theory made on English art

> 'the controversies of the period are of decided relevance for the development of the concept of modern art in England. In particular the terms in which art was promoted and interpreted are of significance for the subsequent history of English art.'[17]

Controversially, Fry positioned Cézanne at the centre of Post-Impressionism, and French theories at the heart of English painting. Herbert Read recalled this decisive moment a half-century later.

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[14] Tillyard, S., *The Impact of Modernism : The Visual Arts in Edwardian England,* London & New York, Routledge, 1988.
[15] Tillyard, 1988, p. xiv.
[16] Fry preferred the term Expressionism but chose Post-Impressionism for reasons of expediency.
[17] Harrison., C., *English Art and Modernism 1900 - 1939,* New Haven and London, Yale, revised 'ed' 1994, (1981), p. 51.

> 'There is no doubt that what we call the modern movement in art begins with the single-minded determination of a French painter [Cézanne] to see the world *objectively*.'[18]

Fry's intention in *Manet and the 'Post-Impressionists* was to create a historical overview of recent French painting. Tillyard argues that Manet was included to provide a safe antecedent to Gauguin, Van Gogh and Cézanne, who were Fry's primary interest. Fry also took the opportunity to introduce a new generation of French painters such as Cross, Signac, Picasso, Vlaminck, Marquet, Flandrin, Maillol, Girieud, Matisse, Friesz and Derain.[19] *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* inevitably drew vociferous criticism from conservative elements. Fry's Formalist ideas were also a challenge to other modern groups such as Gore and Gilman's 'Neo-Realism' (described by Harrison as one of this century's very few successful, modern, realist movements.'[20]) who subscribed to a different critical and aesthetic agenda.

2.3 Pottery in *'Manet and the Post-Impressionists'*

Most critical assessments of *'Manet and the 'Post-Impressionists'* have justifiably concentrated on the paintings which constituted the majority of exhibits in the show. However, the exhibition also included bronzes, modelled terracottas and Fauve 'vases en faience' (glazed pottery) made by Derain, Vlaminck, Friesz, Gireud and Matisse (unknown in England at the

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[18] Read., R., *A Concise History of Modern Painting*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1961 (1959), p. 13.

[19] Fry had difficulty accepting Matisse's work in 1910 and decided to show only a limited quantity. However, Fry came to appreciate Matisse's painting during the exhibition. He showed Picasso's earlier work only, ignoring his later Cubist phase.

[20] Harrison, 1994, p. 41.

time). Derain and Vlaminck showed three pots each, Gireud two, Friesz and Matisse one. Of a total of 228 exhibits 155, or 67% were paintings, 51, or 23% were drawings, 13, or 6% were sculptures and 9, or 4% were pots. The juxtaposition of pots with paintings by an artist of Manet's stature was unprecedented.[21] The exhibition catalogue does not list prices, but it is unlikely that the pots would have competed with the sum of £800 for Cézanne's *Viaduct at L'Estaque* or the reputed insurance value of £10,000[22] for Eduard Manet's *Un bar au Folies Bergères*.

Just as Gauguin had experimented with clay works in the 1880s, so a new generation of French painters was working with ceramics in the first decade of the 20th century. Fry's inclusion of Fauve pottery in the exhibition reflected French developments in artist-made ceramics for he was a regular visitor to dealers and artists' studios in Paris and would have been fully aware of this development in the relationship between ceramics and contemporary painting. The exhibition and book *La Céramique Fauve* (1996)[23] explains how the dealer Ambroise Vollard arranged for a group of Fauve painters, including Vlaminck and Matisse, to work with the potter André Metthey between 1906 and 1907. Vollard was an important art dealer who represented Picasso in 1910 and was credited with establishing Cézanne's career in the mid 1890s. He was an avid collector of Metthey's pottery and later bequeathed his collection to the Ville de Paris, Musée du

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[21] Although thematically related, pottery was seen as an adjunct to the painting in the English art world. The Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society was established in 1887 after the Royal Academy rejected craft work for its annual summer exhibition. In institutional, academic and raw economic terms, pottery was still a marginal discipline.

[22] Greutzner Robbins, 1997, p. 21.

Petit Palais. Jean Puy said 'Metthey gave us vases, plates, cups, tiles covered with powdered glaze for us to paint.'[24] The painters responded to the brightness and intensity of ceramic colours but it was the formal differences between working in the round and on the flat that mainly preoccupied them. Jacqueline Munck quotes from Préaud and Gauthier's book of 1982 *La céramique, art du XX' siecle.*

> 'The decoration on ceramics enabled them to openly break with perspective and the illusion of three-dimensionality, at the exact time when their paintings were tackling this fundamental problem ... another reason could have been related to the colour that they were in the process of liberating in their painted work.' [25]

Matisse worked with Metthey between March and September in 1907 but preferred not to sell his pots, using them as props in paintings such as the important canvas *L'Atelier rouge* (The Red Studio) of 1911. Xavier Girard discusses how blue was used to enhance the white background, echoing Oriental ceramics. Matisse also responded to the spatial qualities of the pots writing: 'This art suggests a bigger space, a veritable plastic space.'[26] The Fauve potters exploited the three dimensional nature of their pottery to enhance the volume of their painted figures. Munck wrote of Derain 'The human figure which gave life to the painted work became the favourite theme for [his] vase, plates, platters and tiles.'[27]

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[23] *La Céramique Fauve* , Nice, Cahiers Henri Matisse Musée Matisse, 1996.
[24] Munck, J., La céramique Fauve (1906-1909):peinture sur céramique? *La Céramique Fauve*, 1996, p.93
[25] Munck, 1996, p.100.
[26] Giraud, X., 'Matisse : l'œuvre céramique', *La Céramique Fauve*, 1996, p. 83.
[27] Munck, 1996, p. 93.

The precepts of many of Fry's Formalist theories were established in Paris, and Fauve experiments in ceramics anticipated themes that he would later identify in his writing on pottery, including abstraction, primitivism, synthesis in design and the accidental qualities of glazing.

> 'The production of the primitives, Rhodes, Crete, African and pre-Columbian art was inspiring for them. They didn't care much for symmetry but the great greenness, the knowledgeable savagery of the line or the splash was giving a charm and unpredictability to the rustic pieces.'[28]

Although the inclusion of pottery in a Fauve exhibition would not have been unexpected in Paris, Fry's selection was unusual by English exhibition standards. Chapter 3 will discuss the formal theories for including the pottery but Munck raises an issue that ties into pragmatic issues and Fry's concerns for the social role of art, evident in the establishment of the Omega workshops later. She quotes the author Michael Hoog from his book *Peintres et céramistes en France au début du XX siecle*, 1971[29] who described ceramics as 'more capable than easel painting in re-establishing contact with the public'[30]. This confirmed Fry's point that he was educating an audience for modernist art through the popularity and familiarity of Arts and Crafts ideas and products.

There has not been a definitive survey of published literature on the pottery in *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* and it was therefore essential to document critical responses to the exhibition particularly in terms of its

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[28] Munck, 1996, p. 93.
[29] Munck, 1996, p. 98
[30] Munck, 1996, p. 98.

pottery. The following section describes Fry's status as a critic in 1910 and evaluates his exhibition through the eyes of the broadsheets, popular press and specialist journals of 1910.

2.4 Critical responses to *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*

Fry was a moderately successful painter and a well respected critic when he organised *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*. A graduate of Kings College, Cambridge, by 1888 he had established an international reputation as a scholar of Italian Renaissance painting as well as writing contemporary art criticism for various magazines including *The Athenaeum*. Frances Spalding wrote in her biography *Roger Fry - Art and Life* 'If Fry's career had ended in 1903 he would be remembered as a critic whose tastes favoured the Old Masters and a painter of mock seventeenth-century landscapes.'[31] Spalding entitled her chapter covering the five years leading up to Fry's exhibition 'New Foundations' and described it as a period when his

> 'ideas on art gradually crystallised into a theoretical framework capable of embracing both his love for the Old Masters and his growing appreciation of Post-Impressionism.'[32]

A term as Deputy Director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York between 1905 and 1910, and the offer of two posts, Director of The National Gallery in London[33] in 1910 and Keeper of the Tate in 1911 (both of which he declined) reveal the high regard in which Fry was held. His reputation

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[31] Spalding, F., *Roger Fry - Art and Life*, Norwich, Black Dog Books, 1999 (1980),p. 71.
[32] Spalding, 1999, p. 103.
[33] see Collins, J. *Art Made Modern*, p.71.

within the contemporary art world was established by his general art criticism and role in establishing *The Burlington Magazine* (which he co-edited from 1909). Such connections in the press meant that Fry was well equipped to generate advance interest in the Post-Impressionist exhibition. On October 8th 1910, the 'Fine Art Gossip' section of *The Athenaeum* magazine previewed what was provisionally entitled 'The Post-Impressionists of France'[34]. As a result of this attention, especially in *The Burlington,* response to the exhibition was immediate. The press launch was held three days before opening and the first reviews were published the day before, which helped to generate public interest.

Critical responses to the show were immediate and divided, with headlines such as 'Maniacs or Pioneers'[35], 'The Revolt in Painting'[36] and 'Paint Run Mad'[37]. *The Times, Morning Post, and Daily Graphic* published negative reviews. *The Times* took issue with the term 'primitive' being used in connection with the 'deliberate' nature of the painting, making the analogy that 'Like anarchism in politics, it is the rejection of all that civilisation has done, the good with the bad.'[38] The correspondence that followed in *The Morning Post* was mainly negative and included criticism from Philip Burne-Jones that 'standards must be generally acknowledged ... if the temple is to be safeguarded from the invasion of the savage and the frankly

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[34] Fine Art Gossip, *The Athenaeum*, No 4328, October 9 1910.
[35] 'Maniacs or Pioneers?', *Daily Chronicle*, Nov. 7, 1910.
[36] 'The Revolt in Painting', *Pall Mall Gazette*, Nov. 7, 1910.
[37] 'Paint Run Mad, *Daily Express*, Nov. 9. 1910.
[38], 'Post-Impressionist Painting', *The Times*, November 7, 1910.

incompetent.'[39] However, a cautious letter of support from Walter Crane argued that 'every generation demands a fresh interpretation in Art.'[40] In the first of two reviews the art critic of the *Daily Mail*, P. G. Konody, agreed with Fry's views on the inherent problems of representation in painting.

> 'Their simplification of nature and their symbolic use of colour are really an admission that nature cannot be mirrored by pigment, and at the same time a bold assertion that art has a nobler function than the mere holding up of a mirror to nature.'[41]

As the exhibition's notoriety grew, satirical sketches appeared, notably in *Punch* and *The Westminster Gazette* and a substantial number of letters of condemnation were published in various newspapers; one made a comparison between the decorative traits of the painting and the 'common pottery'[42]. Blanket coverage declined during December but the monthly literary magazine *The English Review* published a thirteen page review by C. L. Hind, one of the exhibition's most vocal supporters. Hind wrote, perhaps with Fry himself in mind,

> '"Can one who loves a nude by Botticelli or a landscape by Giorgione feel anything but disgust before a nude by Friesz or a geometrical cubical landscape?" The answer is : "Everything is possible to one who will give." But the point of view must be shifted.'[43]

Frank Rutter, the art critic for *The Sunday Times* and *Art News*, was the first critic to refer to the pottery in the exhibition. He was well aware of

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[39] Burne-Jones, P., correspondence 'The Post-Impressionists', *Morning Post*, November 18, 1910, p. 10.
[40] Crane, W., letters page *The Morning Post*, Nov. 18, 1910.
[41] Konody, P. G., 'Shocks in Art', *Daily Mail*, November 7, 1910, p.10.
[42] Blanch, J. E., letters page, 'The Post-Impressionists', *The Morning Post*, November 30, 1910, p. 15.

contemporary French art and, through his part in organising the Allied Artists Association, had established a reputation as one of England's leading contemporary critics. Greutzner Robbins described him as 'one of a triumvirate of critics to be blessed by Wyndham Lewis in his journal *Blast No. 1.*'[44] the most radical of all pre-war avant-garde publications. Rutter's reference to pottery was not particularly auspicious however

> 'It would have been better to have represented fewer painters and represented them more fully. ... Derain and Vlaminck's pottery is better represented than their painting, and should help to convince people of the merit of their purely decorative principles.'[45]

A passing reference to the pottery was also made in a negative review in *The Academy* about those 'who endeavour to give rational expression to their ideas, both in paint and clay.'[46] Only Walter Crane attempted to broaden any discussion of the pottery by linking it to Arts and Craft practice[47]. In a letter published in the *Morning Post* he wrote

> 'There is certainly a feeling for a kind of decorative effect in most of these painters, more particularly Maurice Denis, Gauguin, and Flandrin, some suggest a mistaken material or medium, and that the painters ought to have been weavers, mosaic workers, or pottery painters. There are, by the way, some painted pots having a bold barbaric effect.'[48]

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[43] Hind, C. L., 'The New Impressionism', *The English Review,* December 1910, Vol. VII, pp. 180-192.
[44] Gruetzner Robbins, 1997, p. 10.
[45] Rutter, F., 'Success de Scandals', *Sunday Times*, November 13, 1910, p. 14.
[46] Anon, 'The "Post-Impressionists" at the Grafton Galleries', The Academy, December 3, 1910, p. 546.
[47] Tillyard interprets the letter as an attempt to recruit the apparently sympathetic Post-Impressionists to the Arts and Crafts cause. Tillyard, 1988, p 109
[48] Crane, W., correspondence 'The Post-Impressionists', *The Morning Post,* November 18, 1910, p. 10.

2.5 Frank Rutter and Sir Charles J. Holmes's responses

The impact of *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* was such that two books were published in response to the exhibition, *Revolution in Art*[49] by Frank Rutter and *Notes on the Post-Impressionist Painters*[50] by Sir Charles J. Holmes. The similitude of the authors' approach suggests that Fry's ideas were accepted as part of a wider consensus among the critical elite. In *Revolution in Art* Rutter talked of the painters as revolutionaries, radicals and 'pictorial anarchists'[51]. Although rhetorical in tone, his approach mirrored Fry's, whose definition of the role of modern art was that it existed 'to communicate an emotion, and the more simply that emotion is conveyed ... the purer and higher is the art.'[52] Rutter dismissed skill and representation as ineffectual 'canons and standards of art'[53] and promoted emotion channelled through design instead, which he described as the 'most effective weapon'[54] of the visual arts. Like Fry, he also advocated primitive art as an antidote to the inertia of contemporary art : 'Now and again one toys with pre-historic Greece, with China, Egypt, or Turkestan, but the real enthusiast finds even the art of these ancients too sophisticated.'[55] [56]

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[49] Rutter, F., *Revolution in Art*, London, Art New Press, 1910.
[50] Holmes, C. J., *Notes on the Post-Impressionist Painters*, London, Philip Lee Warner, 1910.
[51] Rutter, 1910, p. 53.
[52] Rutter, 1910, p. 4.
[53] Rutter, 1910, p. 8.
[54] Rutter, 1910, p. 14.
[55] Rutter, 1910, p. 49.
[56] Rutter's book touches on the underlying rivalry between avant garde critics regarding the extent of their support of various cosmopolitan groups such the Parisian Société des Artistes Indépendants, writing of 'the hyper-civilised cosmopolitan coterie' (amongst which he presumably included himself) who 'looked to the 'strange gods from the Pacific and Soudan ... Polynesian and negro curiosities.' *Revolution in Art* p.49.

Notes on the Post-Impressionist Painters[57] was written by Sir Charles J. Holmes, Director of the National Gallery and one of Fry's Executive Committee for the exhibition. Holmes's support was circumspect, and he cautioned against regarding Post-Impressionism as a separate movement, and challenged the positioning of Manet as 'the father of the new movement'[58]. However, he did regard the exhibition as a 'stimulus'[59], arguing that all great art possessed 'rhythm and vitality.'[60] Echoing Fry's enthusiasm for the regenerative effect of primitive art, Holmes argued that the Post-Impressionists should 'be approached from the Oriental side' with its 'deliberate simplification' and "synthesis" but argued that such work should avoid 'effects of strong chiaroscuro, of obtaining decorative effect by flat colour and strong outlines'[61]. Unlike Rutter, he briefly discussed the pottery 'some effective faience' and the 'well designed' vases. He echoed Walter Crane's view that Derain and Vlaminck were better at painting on pottery than on canvas and 'would produce good results ... in mosaic, or pottery, or stained glass.' [62]

2.6 Contemporary critical responses to the Fauve Pottery

The omission of the pottery or bronzes in most reviews of *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* is matched by the neglect of more recent historians. As pottery had, and still has, a low standing within fine art criticism, it is

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[57] Holmes, 1910.
[58] Holmes, 1910, p. 9.
[59] Holmes, 1910 p. 7.
[60] Holmes, 1910 p. 38.

tempting for contemporary art historians to write it out of scholarly work. The pottery went unnoticed in the Royal Academy's 1979 exhibition and book *Post-Impressionism* [63] and in Greutzner Robins' comprehensive exhibition and book *Modern Art in Britain 1910 - 1914* [64], which identified and discussed many of the individual paintings in the exhibition. Exceptions exist. Christopher Green, the curator and editor of *Art Made Modern : Roger Fry's vision of Art*, an exhibition held at the Courtauld Gallery in 1999, discussed pottery in the exhibition catalogue under the title 'Low Art' (which included vernacular pottery rather than the Fauve pottery of 1910). [65]

> 'Fry's formalist theory opened the way to a relativism that brought together within the same framework of aesthetic values both work from different cultures and work conventionally given a different status as either "high" or "low" art, the latter including the folk or 'popular arts' of any culture.'[66]

Contemporary critic and historian Christopher Reed also acknowledged the pottery in *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*. Perhaps Reed's training as a potter [67] increased his awareness, for he wrote in the essay 'A Room of One's Own' [68] 'art historians have overlooked an entry in the 1910 Post-Impressionist show .... Ignored amid the riot of avant-garde painting and

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[61] Holmes, 1910 p. 8.
[62] Holmes, 1910, p. 34.
[63] *Post-Impressionism : Cross-Currents in European Painting*, London, Royal Academy & Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979.
[64] Gruetzner Robins, 1997.
[65] Green, C., 'ed', *Art Made Modern : Roger Fry's Vision of Art*, London, Courtauld Gallery, 1999.
[66] Green, 1999, p. 184.
[67] Christopher Reed is described by his publisher (Thames & Hudson) as having worked as a potter and received a year's training as an architect.
[68] In which he discusses the influence of Matisse's imagery in Duncan Grant's painting.

sculpture was a selection of painted ceramic vases commissioned from modernist artists, including Matisse'[69].

This controversial exhibition marked a modern era of painting, and Fry's theories (called from now on 'Formalist' theories, see earlier definition) established a new form of criticism in English art. Fry's promotion of a decorative, formal and non-hierarchical approach to art established a language sympathetic to studio pottery, thereby helping to raise its status as a credible art form. These ideas also provided the critical means to assimilate early Chinese and English pottery into the modern idiom of studio pottery.

[69] Reed, C., 'A Room of One's Own', *Not at Home*, 'ed' Green, C., London, Thames and Hudson, 1996, p. 153.

Chapter 3

Roger Fry, Modernism, the Arts and Crafts and pottery

Fry's theories on contemporary painting were a composite of his broad interest in art from cultures as diverse as Byzantine, Oriental, African, Near Eastern and European, an interest that crossed 'cultures and periods with a global thrust'[1]. Christopher Green, the curator and editor of *Art Made Modern* (1999) which examined Fry's critical legacy commented on the impact of Fry's writing

> 'in the role of connoisseur and critic, and as a writer, his range was enormous, taking in Chinese or Persian pottery, Mayan or African sculpture, Giotto or Piero della Francesca or Fra Bartolommeo, as well as Daumier or Cézanne or Matisse.'[2]

As a pivotal figure in early 20th century English Modernism, Fry has been the subject of extensive study and one of the most comprehensive accounts of Fry during this period is Stella Tillyard's *The Impact of Modernism*[3]. Because of the substantive nature of Tillyard's research this thesis will acknowledge her views on a variety of issues. One of Tillyard's core arguments is that early Modernism, and Fry's theories in particular, share the language and values of the Arts and Crafts rather than the two movements being distinct, as many historians claim. She asserts that Fry intentionally co-opted Arts and Crafts ideas and language in order to

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[1] Green, C. 'ed.', *Art Made Modern*, London, Courtauld Institute of Art, London 1999, p. 9.
[2] Green, 1999, p. 9.
[3] Tillyard, 1988.

establish an audience for Post-Impressionism. Tillyard identifies many similarities between Fry's writing and Arts and Crafts theories. These include a rejection of prevailing trends in fine art, an emphasis on the structural coherence of objects as opposed to surface detail and concern with materials, including ceramics.

> 'Modernist writers concurred with the Arts and Crafts belief that these fundamentals required 'truth to materials', purity and simplicity, and concentration of form rather than content.'[4]

3.1 Arts and Crafts and Modernism

It is widely agreed that 'Modernism' as a term has been assigned retrospectively, to describe a specific critical approach to art, architecture and design. The self-referential nature of works of art is taken to be a defining feature of Modernism, defined by Harrison as 'a self-conscious point of view or ... the articulation of a purportedly consistent critique or theory.'[5]. Tillyard supports this view stating 'It is a construction which is the 'aggregate' of the styles and aesthetics which are at any moment selected by artist, critics and art historians for inclusion within it.'[6] In a later paper, Harrison develops an argument especially relevant to the role of Fry in *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* where conceptual emphasis is placed on the critical framing of the artwork, not the artwork itself.

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[4] Tillyard, 1988, p. 47.
[5] Harrison, 1994, p. xi.
[6] Tillyard, 1988, p. xxii.

> 'A Modernist, in this sense, is seen not primarily as a kind of artist, but rather as a critic whose judgements reflect a specific set of ideas and beliefs about art and its development'[7].

Fry's early formalism of 1910 was a self-consciously constructed view of painting that later became included within the Modernist canon. His rejection of factual representation or 'the appearance of things'[8] constituted a pivotal contribution to the development of Modernist art criticism in England, for he moved the conceptual emphasis of the art work from the external world to the interpretation of the object itself. The focal point of the painting shifted from the natural world, to be replaced by the painting and its constituent parts, a phenomenon described by Desmond MacCarthy as '*synthesis* in design.'[9]

MacCarthy , the young journalist who was Fry's assistant for *'Manet and the 'Post-Impressionists'* wrote the catalogue essay from Fry's notes, and attempted to balance Fry's scholarly admiration for Renaissance art with his new Formalist ideas. Most controversial of these ideas was the view that representational, naturalistic painting inhibited the expressive potential of art. Although Impressionism was still being absorbed into English painting in 1910, Fry dismissed it as a product of the scientific attitudes of the 19th century, a 'receptive, passive attitude towards the appearances of things.'[10]

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[7] Harrison, C., 'Modernism', *Critical Terms for Art History*, Nelson, R., & Shiff, R., 'eds.', Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 147.
[8]MacCarthy, D., 'The Post-Impressionists', catalogue *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, London, Grafton Galleries, November 1910, p. 10.
[9] MacCarthy, 1910, p. 12.
[10] MacCarthy, 1910, p. 8.

As a consequence of Fry's *'synthesis* in design' the art work became self-contained. Criteria of success or failure were now no longer external, but contained within the intent of the painting or object. His ideal was to restore the expressive power of art through abstract or decorative design and return to the fundamental principles of primitive art[11]. These principles would determine Fry's critical writing for the rest of his life and, although ghosted by MacCarthy, this essay was integral to the formation of Modernist critical theory in England.

Fry's rejection of representation, seen at the time as inviolable, has a significant implication for this thesis. Although primarily intended to discuss painting, Fry's theories provided a universal critical rationale transferable to all work in the exhibition, including the sculpture and pottery. This can be seen particularly in relation to his favouring of an aestheticised approach to formal design. Fry described how the artist affected the viewer's appreciation of the work of art through 'the rhythm of line, by colour, by abstract form, and by the quality of the matter he employs.'[12] By intent and association all were placed on an equal par , as Harrison implies

> 'it was not merely a question now of what was going on in art, but of what criteria were to be considered appropriate in the modern period for identifying an endeavour as a work of art in the first place.'[13]

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[11] Primitivism has a complex etymology which will be discussed in Chapter 4.
[12] Fry, *The Fortnightly Review*, p. 862.
[13] Harrison, 1996, p. 46.

3.2 Fry, the Arts and Crafts and *The Nation*

In the same year that *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* opened Fry published two articles and gave a public lecture in which he discussed the Fauve pottery in the exhibition within the context of his overall theories. The first article was published in *The Nation* and it was significant in consolidating his new critical ideas. Fry opened with a surprising claim. In the face of criticism that his celebration of 'ancient art'[14] was inconsistent with his modern approach, he argued that the Post-Impressionists were 'true pre-Raphaelites' as both movements rejected the 'photographic vision'[15] of the 19th century. This echo of the Gothic revival supports Tillyard's view that Fry appealed directly to disillusioned Arts and Crafts supporters by adopting ideas and a language that they would be familiar with. However, in *The Nation* article Fry was not sympathetic to the political ambitions or the aesthetic identity of the Arts and Crafts movement. He rejected the flood 'of uninspired rhetoric' and the importation of 'moral considerations into a field where they do not apply' and was equally dismissive of its 'conscious archaism'[16].

Although representational painting as a whole may have been under trial with Fry, he singled out the painting of the 19th century, with its link to mass materialism, as 'the hopeless encumbrance of its own accumulations of science'. Emphasis on skill was described as 'perilous', and 'chiaroscuro'

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[14] Fry, R., 'The Grafton Gallery - I', *The Nation*, November 19, 1910, p. 231.
[15] Fry, *The Nation* , 1910, p. 232.
[16] Fry, *The Nation* , 1910, p. 232.

was portrayed as mechanical and 'powerless to say anything of human import'. Fry again repeated that the driving force of Post-Impressionism was to re-invigorate art and facilitate the expression of 'emotional ideas'. He described its painters as 'expressive' and 'primitives'[17]. Although dismissive of the social concerns of the Arts and Crafts movement in this context, he was not opposed to drawing on its crusading spirit through rhetoric. Art had to be re-built 'with passionate zest and enthusiasm' and the means of doing so was through 'the difficult science of expressive design'. This emphasis on 'design' is also a key factor in Tillyard's argument for it was 'antithetical to the representation of natural fact'[18].

> 'These ideas of purity and limitation implied, in Modernist and Arts and Crafts thinking alike, a concentration on structure.'[19]

Tillyard argues that the utilitarian nature of much Arts and Crafts work made it unable to rely on conventions of naturalistic representation, so ideas and content were expressed through handling and material.

> 'The form and the message were, in the case of Arts and Crafts objects, one and the same. That meant that the object was in itself a signpost to the new society. Madox Brown's own bedroom set was a physical embodiment of the moral qualities which would inform the society towards which the movement was striving. It was simple, rugged, obviously handmade, and it was the very image of respect for materials because it so closely mirrored the form of the tree from whence it came. In its simplicity it stood as a condemnation of the luxury and comfort represented in the heavily upholstered mid-Victorian bed.'[20]

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[17] Fry, *The Nation*, 1910 p. 232.
[18] Tillyard, 1988, p. 49.
[19] Tillyard, 1988, p. 48.
[20] Tillyard, 1988, p. 20.

Because highly naturalistic subject matter was inappropriate for practical objects, so their design, the combination and relationship of constituent elements, assumed a greater importance in expressing ideas. Tillyard points out that Selywn Image, a founder member of the Century Guild, regarded art and design as interdependent elements, as 'the inventive arrangement of lines and masses, for their own sake, in such a relation to one another that they form a fine, harmonious whole.'[21]

Tillyard argues that Fry outlined his means for re-building art in familiar terms for an Arts and Crafts audience. Fry claimed *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* had the 'most purely decorative quality'[22] of recent painting exhibitions and described the work in terms of 'completeness of pattern', 'abstract elements' and 'harmony'. Fry suggested that a precedent for Post-Impressionist painting could be found in 'Oriental art' and the work of the 'early primitives', terms notoriously vague in 1910. The early Renaissance Italian painters so favoured by the Pre-Raphaelites were often referred to as the Italian 'primitives' and De Morgan's Isnik motifs were commonly described as 'Oriental'[23].

Fry presented some of the individual artists in *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* as case studies to support his theories. Cézanne was portrayed as the most important artist, 'the great classic of our time'[24] and

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[21] quoted from Tillyard, 1988, p. 27.
[22] Fry, *The Nation*, 1910 p. 232.
[23] Fry, *The Nation*, 1910 p. 232.
[24] Fry, R., 'Post-Impressionists—II', *The Nation*, Dec. 3, 1910, p. 403.

Fry regarded the 'architectural'[25] quality of his painting to reflect a return to the Italian primitives, the 'great monumental quality of early art, of Piero della Francesca'. Fry also credited Cézanne with breaking out of the 'cul-de-sac' of representation and reviving 'the fundamental elements of design'[26] . In contrast Van Gogh epitomised 'the romantic temperament'[27]. Appealing to Arts and Crafts supporters through a Ruskinian rhetoric, Fry described Van Gogh as a visionary and 'portrayer of souls' and talked of the

> 'souls of things—the soul of modern industrialism seen in the hard splendour of mid-day sun upon the devouring monsters of a manufacturing suburb'[28]

Although Fry found Gauguin's work difficult at this early stage, he discussed his work as characteristic of 'primitive instincts' and 'supernatural fear'. He was portrayed as a raw artist, a 'designer ... of new possibilities in pattern' who was able to handle 'complex colour harmony' with an 'elemental simplicity of gesture'. Matisse was presented in ethereal terms, a 'sense of pure beauty—beauty of rhythm, of colour harmony, of pure design' more Oriental than European. Picasso's work, although not well represented in the exhibition, was seen by Fry as a development of Cézanne's, with his 'geometrical abstraction' of 'an almost desperate logical consistency'.

This first article in *The Nation* marked the beginning of Fry's mature Formalist writing, with its amalgam of pan-cultural and pan-material interest in historic art, and its relationship to contemporary painting. He

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[25] Fry, 'Post-Impressionists—II', p. 402.
[26] Fry, *The Nation*, 1910, p. 232.
[27] Fry, 'Post-Impressionists—II', p. 403.

concluded the article by describing the work of the less well known artist Vlaminck and emphasising the importance of pottery to Post-Impressionism

> 'Vlaminck is a little disconcerting at first sight, by reason of the strangely melancholy harmonies he affects, but he has the power of inventing admirably constructed and lucid designs, a power which is perhaps even more clearly seen in his paintings upon *faïence*. I would call special attention to these, since, if the group of artists here exhibited had done nothing else, their contribution to modern art would be sufficiently striking, in that they have shown the way to the creation of entirely fresh and vital pattern designs, a feat which has seemed, after so many years of vain endeavour, to be almost beyond the compass of the modern spirit.'[29]

3.3 Painting & pottery in the *Fortnightly Review*

Fry's second follow up to the exhibition was a public lecture delivered in the Grafton Galleries, published soon after as a transcript in the *Fortnightly Review*. Expanding on his views of design and imagination in art, Fry drew an analogy between art the abstract nature of music. He continued to reject the 'evolutionary' model of increasing sophistication in representation in Western art and challenged the 'lip service' given to the 'real primitives', 'Cimabue and the Byzantines'.[30] As in *The Nation* article, art was now a matter of expressing 'the feelings and sentiments of humanity', 'those feelings which belong to the deepest and most universal parts of our nature'.[31] However, unlike in *The Nation,* Fry did not look to individual case studies of artists to illustrate practical examples of how imaginative art

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[28] Fry, R., 'Art. The Post-Impressionists- II.', *The Nation*, Dec. 3, 1910, p. 403.
[29] Fry, 'Post-Impressionists—II', p. 403.
[30] Fry, R., 'Post-Impressionism', *The Fortnightly Review*, Vol. LXXXIX, Jan. 1911, p. 859.
[31] Fry, *The Fortnightly Review*, p. 861.

could deliver emotional energy. Instead, he offered pottery as an ideal model

> 'And now I must try to explain what I understand by this idea of art addressing itself directly to the imagination through the senses. There is no immediately obvious reason why the artist should represent actual things at all, why he should not have a music of line and colour. Such a music he undoubtedly has, and it forms the most essential part of his appeal. We may get in fact, from a mere pattern, if it be really noble in design and vital in execution, intense aesthetic pleasure. And I would instance as a proof of the direction in which the post impressionists are working, the excellence of their pure design as shown in the pottery in the present exhibition. In these there is often scarcely any appeal made through representation, just a hint at a bird or an animal here and there, and yet they will arouse a definite feeling. Particular rhythms of line and particular harmonies of colour have their spiritual correspondence, and tend to arouse now one set of feelings, now another. The artist plays upon us by the rhythm of line, by colour, by abstract form, and by the quality of the matter he employs.'[32]

As previously suggested, Fry's Formalist criticism was significant for its ability to express a critical evaluation of other art works, notably pottery. His defining criteria, for example *'synthesis* in design[33]' 'harmony of line' 'abstract form and colour[34] and 'simplification of planes'[35] were broad, and transferable. Crucially, because Fry relegated the importance of representation - the narrative or anecdotal aspects of painting - this critical approach was particularly applicable to pottery, which rarely drew on the literary themes of painting. It was now feasible to discuss pottery within the same terms of reference as painting, which had been difficult within the structure of fine art criticism. Although the inclusion of Fauve ceramics in the exhibition was an important marker in the process of establishing parity

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[32] Fry, *The Fortnightly Review,* p. 862.
[33] MacCarthy, 1910, p. 12.
[34] MacCarthy, 1910, p. 11.

of status for applied art, Fry's critical writings on pottery after the exhibition had a longer-term and more significant effect in reducing the critical divide between pottery and painting. As Tanya Harrod writes in her important book *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century* in 1999 'Fry ... created an aesthetic standard for the studio pottery movement through his writings'.[36]

In the Grafton Galleries lecture Fry, using pottery as a bridge to abstraction, maintained that it was an ideal medium to illustrate the principles of 'pure design' because of its innate decorative properties. Pottery, he maintained, helped his audience 'transfer the shared parts of the aesthetic to the paintings around them.'[37] In short, it became a physical embodiment of his Formalist theories. The natural abstraction of line, colour and form of pottery, and a graphic language which did not rely on figurative representation, were all key elements in his theories of Post-Impressionist painting. The factors in painting which Fry saw as a constraint on the imagination, for example chiaroscuro, atmospheric colour and pictorial space, the 'holes in the wall, through which another vision is made evident'[38] were not applicable to pottery. As Tillyard argues, abstraction was more readily accepted in the pottery than the painting.

> 'Pottery was particularly useful for the audience, because the efforts of Arts and Crafts writers as well as the productions of painters and sculptors had given it a status bordering on that of a fine art.'[39]

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[35] MacCarthy, 1910, p. 10.
[36] Harrod, 1999, p. 22.
[37] Tillyard, 1988, p. 62.
[38] Fry, 'The Grafton Gallery - I', *The Nation*, 1910
[39] Tillyard, 1988, p. 128.

Pottery may have aided Fry's critical re-evaluation of painting but in 1911 it still had no clear identity. Fry's Formalist theories provided the immediate critical means of writing about the pottery in the exhibition, and persisted within general criticism, influencing the material identity of studio pottery during the 1920s.

'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' is considered by historians to be one of the most important English exhibitions of the 20th century. Although Fry was part of a wider critical consensus seeking to enliven English art he provided a voice which temporarily unified the disparate views of modernist groups in pre-war England. This achievement was reflected by the breadth of support he received from establishment figures such as Sir Charles Holmes to critic Frank Rutter, the supporter of the avant garde. As Harrison states 'The first Post-Impressionist exhibition provided a flag [for the progressive minority] to rally round.'[40] It is widely agreed by historians that amongst the emerging, and often competing, modernist groups (such as Sickert and Gore's Neo-Realism and Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism) Post-Impressionism came to dominate English art over the next two decades.

The catalogue essay and two articles in *The Nation* and *Fortnightly Review* launched Post-Impressionist theories in England (supported by publications such as Clive Bell's book *Art*[41]). Over the next decade Fry developed these

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[40] Harrison, 1994, p. 84.
[41] Bell, C., ', *Art*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1914.

ideas through a Second Post-Impressionist exhibition and further articles. [42] As Clive Bell claimed in the catalogue to the second Post-Impressionist exhibition 'The battle is won.'[43]

Historical opinion may be divided about the effect of Fry's critical theories but there is (sometimes reluctant) agreement that he became the 'most influential art critic in Britain.'[44] Greutzner Robbins writes that

> 'without ever remotely gaining a revolutionary edge, the exhibition at the Grafton Galleries became both a radical cultural arena and a free marketplace.'[45]

While Tillyard claims that

> 'Fry's presentation of Post-Impressionism attracted the allegiance of the Arts and Crafts audience, and it was then that the story of his dominance within the avant-garde began.'[46]

For Fry, the Fauve *vases en faience* and an understanding of historic pottery raised issues that shaped his ideas and contributed to his re-appraisal of art. He had written elegiacally about early Chinese pottery five months before the opening of *'Manet and the Post-Impressionists'* and continued to be interested in historic pottery, writing in 1914 on early English ware at the time when he was making and designing a range of pottery during the early days of Omega.

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[42] Fry did not include pottery in his Second Post-Impressionist exhibition. In the two years between exhibitions he consolidated his theories and arguably no longer needed pottery to illustrate his ideas.
[43] Bell, C., 'The English Group', catalogue *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, London, Ballantyne, 1913 (1912), p. 21.
[44] Cork, R, 'From "Art-Quake" to "Pure Visual Music"', *Art Made Modern*, London, Green., C. 'ed.', p. 57.
[45] Gruetzner Robbins, 1997, p. 7.

The premise that critical appreciation of studio pottery was built on Fry's Formalist theories is central to this thesis. But it is also arguable that Fry's appreciation of pottery contributed to the formation of his theories, and therefore its role in this early phase of English Modernism warrants consideration. The importance of pottery to Fry was not in the specificity of material, nor in its various historical traditions, but in its formal properties - the 'music of line and colour' - which became an effective way to illustrate his new Formalist theories. Fry used the example of pottery making as one of many tactical tools in his strategy of promoting Post-Impressionist theories in painting. Among these characteristics were the 'purely geometrical manifestations'[47] of 'Mohammedan Art', 'the human love' of Giotto[48] and the 'plastic freedom'[49] of African sculpture. From his wide choice of options, pottery from the outset was the single non-traditional means Fry chose to illustrate his ideas. As Tillyard puts it, 'It was explicit in Post Impressionist theory that an object could stand side by side with a painting as a work of art. Pottery had a prominence in 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' and in Fry's early Formalist ideas because of its formal strength.'[50]

Staite Murray emerged during the 1920s to become one of the new heroic figures of Modernism, and his abstract pottery with its expressive decoration

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[46] Tillyard, 1988, p. 76.
[47] Fry, R., 'The Munich Exhibition of Mohammedan Art' (originally pub. 1910), Vision & Design, Oxford University Press, 1981 (1920), p. 83.
[48] Fry, 'The Grafton Gallery - I', *The Nation*, p. 232.
[49] Fry, R., 'Negro Sculpture (originally pub. 1920), Vision & Design, Oxford University Press, 1981 (1920), p. 71.
[49] Tillyard, 1988, p. 63.

was defined by Fry's ideas of the new artist whereby 'genius alone succeeds in expressing itself'[51]. Although Staite Murray's work had little in common with the brightly painted glazed Fauve pottery of *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* Staite Murray himself acknowledged the full legacy of Fry's theories in 'Pottery from the Artist's point of View' in 1924 , when he wrote 'Pottery as a means of expression in Art has within the last few years been re-established.'[52]

[51] Fry, *The Fortnightly Review,* p. 862
[52] Staite Murray, W., 'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View', *Artwork,* Vol. 1., No. 4., May.-Aug. 1924, p. 201.

Chapter 4

Primitivism and Pottery

As the intention of this thesis is to further an understanding of critical ideas pertinent to pottery between 1910 and 1940, an ahistorical analysis of Fry's ideas of primitivism through the lens of contemporary thinking would be beyond the boundaries of this research. Discussion of primitivism in this thesis will be within the terms of reference contemporaneous to Fry's own understanding of the expression 'primitive'.

4.1 Roger Fry's theory of primitivism

As discussed in the previous chapter, Fry rejected what he saw as the 'tempered realism' of turn of the century painting. He proposed a return to 'the principles of primitive design'[1] instead, viewing 'primitive' art as a way for contemporary art to 'regain its power and to express emotional ideas' and overcome 'the accumulations of science'. Fry's ideas were built on his respect for French painting; primitivism had been a central concern in avant-garde circles from the Synthesists to the Nabis and the Fauves. English critics such as Clive Bell and Frank Rutter were also aware of these continental developments, and welcomed what Fry described as 'strange gods from the Pacific and Soudan ... Polynesian and negro curiosities'[2].

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[1] Fry, R., 'The Grafton Gallery —1', *The Nation*, November 19, 1910, p. 232.
[2] Rutter, *Revolution in Art*, 1910, p. 49.

'Primitive' as a critical term was nascent during the 1910s, and not associated specifically with African or Oceanic art until the 1920s. Whether used by modernist or conservative critics, both camps regarded 'primitive', 'savage' and 'barbaric' as interchangeable terms in the early part of the century but, by the time of the *Nation* articles of 1910, Fry differentiated, using 'savage' and 'barbaric' sparingly. He applied the term 'primitive' descriptively rather than quantifiably, using it to describe a sense of mind or approach to art, rather than to specify particular cultures or periods in history. As Robert Goldwater states, a 'common desire to create an art of simple fundamentals, ... is in itself a particular kind of primitivism.'[3] During 1910 Fry employed the word 'primitive' frequently, using it to describe a variety of art forms, from the paintings of Cézanne, Matisse and Gauguin[4] to Sung pots[5], drawings of the Kalahari bushmen of South Africa[6], children's drawings[7], Islamic sculpture of the Sassanian period[8] and Piero della Francesca's paintings[9].

Defending Fry's ideas of primitive art Green argues that Fry's Quaker background imbued him with anti-imperialist and liberal political views stating his language was a 'rhetoric much more of cultural conjunction–

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[3] Goldwater, R., *Primitivism in Modern Art*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, 1966, (1938), p. 164.
[4] MacCarthy, 1910, pp. 10-11.
[5] Fry, R., 'The Chinese Exhibition', *The Nation*, July 23, 1910, p. 594.
[6] Fry, R., 'The Art of the Bushmen, *Vision & Design*, (originally pub. 1910), Oxford University Press, 1981 (1920), p. 68.
[7] Fry, 'The Art of the Bushmen' , 1981, p. 61.
[8] Fry, R., 'The Munich Exhibition of Mohammedan Art' (originally pub. 1910), *Vision & Design*, Oxford University Press, 1981 (1920), p. 86.
[9] Fry, R., 'Post-Impressionism', *The Fortnightly Review*, Vol. LXXXIX, Jan. 1911, p. 865.

similitude ... [where] he accepts cultural difference. '[10] Green argues that Fry's respect for *Quattrecento* Italian painting lay at the heart of his interest in primitive art, dating this to when Fry became aware of the beauty of early Christian painting. Fry realised that the Christian paintings in the catacombs of Rome had a symbolic strength despite an evident decline in representational skill or 'cultural reversal'[11]compared to immediate Roman precedents. An extract from Fry's journal of 1897 reveals his early questioning of the evolutionary nature of art.

> 'We see there in fact the transition from the art of grown up people to the elementary symbolism or a child's drawing.' I do not say this was a misfortune for art, it is scarcely possible to see what new development could have come from the sophisticated accomplishment of the later Roman painters, who knew so much more than they felt; moreover it was only by such a return to elementary symbolism that the great painting of Italy could be provided with that basis of rigid and traditional formalism which so far as we know is the necessary antecedent of all great periods of artistic development: indeed if the art of to-day could take such a backward step without the help of barbaric invasions and without having to wait a thousand years for the process of expansion to begin again I for one would not be discontented.'[12]

Fry used 'primitive' as a term to refer to earlier periods of history, just as other critics did but, significantly, he also used it to describe artistic practice, irrespective of cultural achievement. As his journal reveals, his interest in primitive art lay in the belief that it offered regenerative powers that could counter the high naturalistic art of the 20th century which Fry regarded as a continuation of a decayed classical tradition. The transformation of Roman

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[10] Green, C., 'Expanding the Canon', *Art Made Modern: Roger Fry's Vision of Art*, London, Courtauld Gallery, 1999, p. 126.
[11] Green, 1999, p. 124.

painting by early Byzantine art provided a historic precedent for these ideas, and Fry hoped for an equivalent shift in contemporary European art. His Formalist approach to art enabled him to separate art from the cultural context of its origins, or, as Harrison describes it 'the separateness of 'art' from 'life' '[13]. Fry wrote in 1920 in *An Essay in Aesthetics* of the need to confine criticism to an aesthetic debate, free of Ruskin and Morris' social agenda.

> 'We must therefore give up the attempt to judge the work of art by its reaction on life, and consider it as an expression of emotions regarded as ends in themselves.'[14]

In his search for regenerative art, Fry was able to draw upon a wide variety of art and artefacts from many cultures. His ideas of critical disinterestedness and detached emotion freed him to refer to art, which, by most turn-of-the-century notions of the civilised, lay outside the realm of acceptable aesthetic or cultural standards. With an emphasis on pure aesthetics, and without 19th century moral constraints or 20th century allegiance to the idea of scientific progress, Fry was able to draw upon art which was regarded as 'primitive' in both social and aesthetic terms. As he wrote in *An Essay in Aesthetics*

> 'The imaginative life of a people has very different levels at different times, and these levels do not always correspond with the general level of the morality of actual life. Thus in the thirteenth century we read of barbarity and cruelty which would shock even us; we may, I think,

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[12] Fry's papers 1/65, quoted by Green, 1999, p. 124.
[13] Harrison, 1994, p. 48.
[14] Fry, R., *An Essay in Aesthetics*, *Vision & Design*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981 (first pub. 1920), p 20.

> admit that our moral level, our general humanity is decidedly higher today, but the level of our imaginative life is incomparably lower'[15]

By relying on an objective assessment of its 'imaginative' content, Fry was able to refer to art irrespective of its cultural context, for example, labelling both Sung pottery and the paintings of Henri Rousseau[16] as 'primitive'. Fry's belief in the aesthetic purity of primitive art was evident from the Omega catalogue, where he described the workshop's aim 'to keep the spontaneous freshness of primitive or peasant work'.[17] Comparing primitive with Western industrial pottery he argued that 'the pot ... made by a negro savage ...[is] of greater value and significance' in comparison to 'a piece of modern Sèvres china'[18]. Just as he had done with painting, Fry sought historical precedents in 'primitive' forms of pottery. He did not delve too deeply into ceramic history however, but relied on exhibitions, in particular those of early Chinese and English pottery presented by the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London in 1910 and 1914.

4.2 Antiquarian pottery

Antiquarian and critical interest in early Chinese and English pottery increased dramatically during the first two decades of the 20th century. In order to understand how a field that was quite independent of contemporary art criticism became involved in the genesis of a modern movement it is

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[15] Fry, *An Essay in Aesthetics*, 1981, *p 16.*
[16] French naive painter Fry included in the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition 1912, b. 1844, d. 1910.
[17] Fry, R., 'Preface', brochure for Omega Workshops, London, undated (McCarthy states 1914),
[18] Fry, 'Pottery', Omega Workshops, 1914, p. 3.

necessary to examine the links between the Formalist ideas of writers like Fry and Clive Bell, and Antiquarian curators and collectors such as R. L. Hobson and George Eumorfopolous[19]. Although it is doubtful whether two such diverse groups could have independently created the conditions for studio pottery to emerge, critical theory and Antiquarian research combined to unite contemporary interests with historical precedents which in turn created the climate for the early studio pottery movement, with its mix of avant-garde aspirations and traditional craft practice.

Again Fry's critical writing played a significant role. The impact of his Formalist theories has been discussed in the previous chapter, but he was also instrumental in identifying the aesthetic value of early Chinese and English pottery which became part of the re-invigorating canon of the primitive that he formulated for contemporary art during the 1910s - a ceramic equivalent to Giotto's painting and Byzantine enamels. Fry's Formalist theories provided a method for interpreting pottery, while his elevation of Chinese Sung Dynasty and early Mediaeval English pottery provided the aesthetic means.

Fry's reliance on the Burlington Fine Art Club's[20] exhibitions of re-discovered pottery reveals the importance of Antiquarian circles and their contribution to raising awareness of early English and Chinese pottery. Fry's approach to modern practice differed considerably from curators and

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[19] The role of collectors will be examined in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7.
[20] The Burlington Fine Arts Club was an organisation of art collectors based in Savile Row, London.

collectors who were content to simply discuss the provenance of these early works. Fry, however, was prepared to include them within his theories, and offer them as inspirational examples for current practice and the regeneration of ceramics. While the pre-eminent Oriental ceramic curator of the period R. L. Hobson was discussing kiln sites and specifics of material and technique, Fry was commenting on the formal integrity of Sung Dynasty pottery. Within collectors' circles M. L. Solon was writing about the rarity value of English medieval pottery; Fry chose to discuss its structural design. In 1920, Fry wrote an article about the French collector R. Kelekian who he described as 'the greatest collector and dealer in Oriental textiles and pottery'[21] whose eyes were opened to contemporary art. The article constituted an almost autobiographical account of Fry's feelings about the relationship between historic and contemporary art. In it he reflected on the beginnings of the 'modernist movement'[22] and discussed the importance of primitive art in mediating an understanding of contemporary art.

> 'The case of Mr. Kelekian, therefore is one of great interest. Here is a man whose whole life has been spent in the study of early art, who at a given moment had the grace to see its implications, to see that principles precisely similar to those employed by early Persian potters and Fatimite craftsmen were being actually put into practice by men of the present generation. He had the sense to put modern French artists beside Romanesque sculpture and Byzantine miniatures and to feel how illuminating to both the confrontation was.'[23]

With its emphasis on near and far-Eastern art, Fry's article (written ten years after the first Post-Impressionist exhibition) did not explicitly discuss

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[21] Fry, R., 'Modern Paintings in a Collection of Ancient Art', *The Burlington*, Vol. XXXVII, No CCXIII, Dec. 1920, p. 303.
[22] Fry, 'Modern Paintings in a Collection of Ancient Art', 1920, p. 304
[23] Fry, 'Modern Paintings in a Collection of Ancient Art', 1920, p. 304

primitive art, although Fry referred to the way in which Byzantine enamels and Coptic textiles were regarded as 'curiosities'. However, Fry applied his Modernist theories and appreciation of Fauve pottery to early Chinese stoneware and mediaeval English earthenware in two following articles to be discussed. Within ten years these theories helped to establish the critical foundation of studio pottery and dominated its aesthetic identity for the next twenty years, in part still doing so today.

Fry started his 1914 review of the exhibition of 'Early English Earthenware' at the Burlington Fine Arts Club by discussing the problems of appreciating such undervalued work. One of the most important collector/writers Charles Lomax had described medieval pottery five years earlier as 'uncouth'[24] and of 'barbarian appearance'. Fry wrote 'our aesthetic standards vary so much that what one age rejects as barbarous stammering another finds to be the climax of human expression'[25] Applying his Formalist criteria he praised the medieval pottery for its exquisite 'structural design' and argued that it revealed a 'great refinement of taste, that it shows a real appreciation of form and texture, that it is expressive of what we instinctively recognise as a right state of mind.'[26] Leading collectors such as M. L. Solon or J. W. Glaisher were at best discussing its rustic charm and quintessential English character and Fry's claim that the pottery was 'noble and serious' constituted a dramatic reversal of critical standards.

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[24] Lomax, J., 'Quaint Old English Pottery', London, Sherrat and Hughes, 1909, p. xi.
[25] Fry, R., 'The Art Pottery of England', *The Burlington*, Vol. XXIV, No CXXXII, March 1914, p. 330.
[26] Fry, 'The Art Pottery of England', 1914, p. 335.

This review was written during the second year of the Omega workshop and reflected his own immediate concerns with the social nature of art, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Fry also extolled the social nature of pottery 'First of all, we must premise that pottery is of all the arts the most intimately connected with life'.[27] While Omega's pottery may have had little in common with later studio pottery, Fry's mix of modernist theory and traditional craft ideology provided theories that were starting to bridge historical and current practice, unlike the self-contained groups of Antiquarian curators and collectors who were not so interested in contemporary pottery in the 1910s and would define the approach and ideas of studio potters such as Leach, Cardew, Pleydell-Bouverie and Braden a decade later. Reginald Wells's early revival of slipware at Wrotham in the first decade had aroused little interest within Antiquarian circles and even Bernard Rackham, the Keeper of Ceramics at the V & A was warning against reviving earthenware on the grounds of 'social customs and hygiene'[28] as late as 1921.

4.3 Early Chinese pottery as primitive art

Placing Chinese pottery within the canon of 'primitive' art posed a theoretical difficulty. Even at the turn of the century China was acknowledged to be a highly cultured and civilised society which had produced sophisticated visual art and literature over the previous two

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[27] 'The Art Pottery of England', p. 330.
[28] Report of Bernard Rackham's, 'English Pottery: Its Place in Ceramic History', *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, December 1, 1921, p. 1797.

millennia. But since Fry's interest in primitive art was solely defined by aesthetics he was able to classify art as primitive irrespective of whether it originated from sophisticated or 'backward' cultures. This point was illustrated by two articles written in 1910. In *A Modern Jeweller* Fry described Chinese art as having a 'barbaric vitality and precocity [which] has always marked the best products of Chinese art, even in comparatively recent times'[29] while in *The Chinese Exhibition*, a review of the Burlington Fine Art's Club exhibition of early Chinese pottery, he described the making of a Sung bowl.

> 'All the astounding skill of hand of the potter is here devoted to the refinement of the rough, primitive pot, not to its elaboration into something quite different, as happened in later ceramics.'[30]

Fry did not regard 'barbaric vitality' or 'primitive' pottery as incompatible with advanced cultures or sophisticated art. He had a great respect for the Chinese civilisation describing it as 'so extreme in its refinement, so perfect at once sensually and intellectually.'[31] The pottery exhibited at the Burlington Fine Arts Club ranged from the Han Dynasty (206 BC) to the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644 AD) and the appreciation of this early Chinese pottery by Antiquarian groups will be discussed in depth in Chapter 6. But in his review, Fry chose only to discuss the pottery from the Sung Dynasty (960 - 1126 AD) writing 'The specimens of Sung pottery there collected were a revelation of the utmost possibilities of the potter's craft.'[32]

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[29] Fry, R., 'A Modern Jeweller', *The Burlington*, No LXXXVII, Vol. XVII, June 1910, p. 173.
[30] Fry, 'The Chinese Exhibition', 1910, p. 594.
[31] Fry, 'The Chinese Exhibition', 1910, p. 593.
[32] Fry, 'The Chinese Exhibition', 1910, p. 594.

This review was written before the first Post-Impressionist exhibition and while Fry's critical ideas were still unfolding but it is still representative of his later writing. Praised for its 'extreme simplicity of form' Fry felt the Sung bowl epitomised a 'purest plastic sense' in how 'perfectly the two planes are related'. The irregularities of glaze were discussed as 'elementary decoration' because of the 'accidental thickening towards the base'. Fry regarded these qualities as highly aestheticised: 'no elaboration, but only a refinement—but what a refinement!' Given Fry's generally straightforward prose, the glaze was described in poetic terms as 'a shimmer of intensest moonlight-blue ... fungoid crystallisations of strange, bitter reds or violets.' Despite this lyrical description he ascribed the pottery's beauty to a 'consummate science, controlled by an exacting taste', in contrast to current Western attitudes to science which he believed were undiscriminating evolutionary attitudes. This mixture of oppositional elements, the means whereby the Chinese could balance 'accident and purpose ... [in] undreamt-of perfection' lay at the heart of his high respect for their art. Fry regarded the simplicity and immediacy of the materials and the primitive character of handling as high refinement. Revealingly, Fry presented this as much a product of connoisseurship as of the potter's skill. Fry's speculations on Sung Dynasty connoisseurship revealed his belief that in the right conditions art could exist and remain aesthetically pure in cultured surroundings.

> 'What other rich men and lovers of luxury have ever been so ascetic and so intellectual in their sensuality as these patrons of the Sung potters? Only men of a gentle and contemplative habit could have been satisfied with the shy discretion of this art. It is an art in which taste is supreme, and yet taste of a kind that implies an active

> imagination. These men must have contemplated material beauty with an almost religious fervour.'[33]

Sung Dynasty patrons, and later, the dealer Kelekian, became Fry's models for a new form of Modernist connoisseurship. In this, interpretation relied upon the knowledge of the viewer as critic to validate the work of art. Harrison was to describe this kind of Modernist as a 'critic whose judgements reflect a specific set of ideas and beliefs about art and its development'[34]. For Fry, there was an important prerequisite : the interpretation of an art work required a sophisticated understanding that was not provided by the producer. It was not 'the Sung potters' but the civilised patrons with their 'ascetic ... intellectual ... sensuality' and their 'active imagination' who were responsible for cultivating the art of the 'primitive' Sung pot. Fry reflected the racist views of early 20th century European culture through his view that 'uncivilised' cultures such as the Fang carvers of Africa could produce primitive art, but were not able to appreciate it for themselves, as Green was to explain in *Art Made Modern* in 1999.[35] They 'might produce 'Art", but they did so for magical purposes irrelevant to ' "Art": they literally could not experience the "Art" in their "art".' Green wrote that, for Fry, such ideas of 'emotional detachment' and critical disinterestedness were '*the* precondition of aesthetic experience, without which such experience was beyond reach.' This high degree of self-conscious knowledge depended, as it did with the Sung patrons and Kelekian, on sophisticated cultures and individuals. Green states

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[33] Fry, R., 'The Chinese Exhibition', *The Nation*, July 23, 1910 p. 593.
[34] Harrison, C., 'Modernism', *Critical Terms for Art History*, Nelson, R., & Shiff, R., 'eds.', Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 147.

> 'The regression of the English Post-Impressionist around Fry was a step taken self-consciously with the critical disinterestedness he understood as the mark of the "civilised". It had nothing to do with beating a retreat from civilisation, quite the reverse; ... [it] led to a kind of painting that was unequivocally "civilised", a European painting that asserted its difference from all that could be called "barbaric".[36]

This 'civilised' appreciation of what Fry referred to as 'primitive' principles of design in sophisticated art provides the means to understanding his appreciation of Sung pottery, and the establishment of a highly aetheticised connoisseurship of Chinese pottery.

Fry's appreciation of Chinese art was shared by Clive Bell, who included reproductions of a Persian dish, a Peruvian pot, a Chinese Wei sculpture and a Byzantine mosaic with two paintings by Cézanne and Picasso in his book *'Art'*. Clive Bell had become Fry's main critical ally since the first Post-Impressionist exhibition and had supported Post-Impressionist art through his writing in *The Athenaeum*. Bell's themes and critical language, using terms such as 'simplification' and 'plastic expression' echoed Fry's, but his approach differed in one important respect. Bell shifted the emphasis of appreciation away from the artist's intent to the work of art itself. Taking Fry's statement that 'All art depends upon cutting off the practical responses to sensations of ordinary life, thereby setting free a pure and as it were disembodied functioning of the spirit'[37] Bell pushed the idea further and coined the phrase 'significant form' to explain the artist's attitude to the content of his work. 'He regards it as an end in itself, as significant form

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[35] Green, 1999 p. 131.
[36] Green, 1999, p. 132.

related on terms of equality with other significant forms.'[38] Bell's rationale for all art was based on its ability to convey 'significant emotion' and he wrote

> 'No one ever doubted that a Sung pot or a Romanesque church was as much an expression of emotion as any picture that ever was painted.'[39]

If primitive art provided the model for Fry's attempts to re-invigorate English painting, then early Chinese art should be recognised as part of his equation. If this argument holds true then the reverse should also apply; Chinese art, and specifically Chinese pottery, should be included within the primitive canon.

4.4 Primitivism and the press

> 'The readers of THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE will probably be somewhat surprised at a subject like the present being thought worthy to come within the scope of an artistic publication. The art ...is not only too remote ... but, as a rule, its manifestations are so strange, so widely different in motive, that even the cultured and observant amateur dismisses such objects from his mind, without even going so far as to fix his attention upon them. In almost all cases he is justified. The canons of primitive art in ancient America are so foreign ... that the study must be taken up from an entirely different standpoint, generally archaeological or ethnological rather than artistic.'[40]

The dismissive nature of the 1910 Burlington review above, prompted by the sale *Ancient Peruvian Pottery* typifies popular critical attitudes towards

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[37] Fry, R., 'The French Group', Catalogue *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, London, Ballantyne, 1912, p. 27.
[38] Bell, C., 'The English Group', Catalogue *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, London, Ballantyne, 1912, p. 21.
[39] Bell, C., *Art*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1914, p. 58.
[40] Read, C. H., 'Ancient Peruvian Pottery', *The Burlington*, No LXXXV, Vol. XVII, April 1910, p.22.

primitive art in the English art press before Post-Impressionist theories entered the critical debate. *The Connoisseur's* response was equally reserved, describing the work as 'quaint art-products of a forgotten race'.[41] However, as a result of Fry's theories of the primitive, non-European pottery became gradually accepted within the cautious world of Antiquarian ceramics, and press coverage became more frequent and positive. By 1912, even *The Connoisseur* was discussing early English slipware within the category of primitive art, writing 'they have that freshness and naiveté characteristic of all primitive art.'[42] In early 1913, *The Athenaeum* acknowledged this growing trend with a review of a book on archaic art under the title 'Primitive Art'[43]. And in contrast to its stand on Peruvian pottery three years earlier[44] *The Burlington* discussed it in 1913 as possessing 'a strangely up-to-date appearance ... [which[might suggest ... this class of pottery was comparatively modern.'[45]

In 1914 *The Athenaeum* acknowledged the connection between pottery and primitivism with a review of the exhibition of Early English Pottery at the Burlington Fine Arts Club.

> 'Not that there is any fear of a modern critic, however destitute of the collector's interest, despising a rude and primitive school as such. "A rustic imagination untrammelled by the rules of art" is the ideal of the younger generation of European artists.'[46]

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[41] 'Ancient Peruvian Pottery, The Connoisseur, Vol. I, October 1910, p.32.
[42] 'Wolliscroft Rhead, G., 'The Collection of Slip Wares formed by Dr. J. W. L. Glaisher', *The Connoisseur*, Vol. XXXIII, No 130, June 1912, p. 75.
[43] 'Primitive Art', book review, *The Athenaeum*, No. 4445, January 4, 1913.
[44] see footnote 40.
[45] Joyce, T. A., 'On an Early Type of Pottery from the Nasca Valley, Peru', *The Burlington*, No CXIX, Vol. XXII, February 1913, p. 255.
[46] 'Early English Earthenware', The Athenaeum, No. 4494, December 13, 1913, p. 17.

The significance of this review is that, for the first time, a connection between historic pottery and contemporary practice was established through using the concept of primitivism. In establishing a connection between a 'younger generation of European artists' this critical endorsement of historic pottery was given a contemporary relevance. Prior to Fry, critical discussion of 'historic pottery' had been the preserve of the specialised world of curators and scholars with the exception of a few designers such as Christopher Dresser[47] and Howson Taylor of Ruskin Pottery who had based their work on Chinese and Japanese stonewares.

By the middle of the decade, primitivism was firmly established as a valid concept in the press. *The Burlington* published a series of nine articles on 'English Primitives' written by W. R. Lethaby which concentrated on English painters although one article included the mediaeval tiles of Westminster and Chertsey.[48] Fry continued to write about a wide variety of subjects. In reviewing a book on South American Archaeology he expressed caution for the first time in responding emotionally to primitive art. This was in response to the known brutality of human sacrifice and dismemberment in Aztec art

> 'In looking at the artistic remains of so remote and strange a civilisation one sometimes wonders how far one can trust one's aesthetic appreciation to interpret truly the feelings which inspired it. ... are we, one wonders, reading in an intention which was not really present?[49]

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[47] Dresser donated a collection of Peruvian pots to the V&A.
[48] Lethaby, W. R., 'English Primitives - IV, The Westminster and Chertsey Tiles and Romance Paintings', *The Burlington*, Vol. XXX, No. CLXIX, April 1917, pp. 133-140.
[49] Fry, R., 'American Archaeology', *The Burlington*, Vol. XXX, No CLXXXIX, November 1918, p.156.

By the time Fry published his most famous essay on primitive art 'Negro Sculpture' in 1920, ten years after the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, all signs of hesitancy had disappeared. He interpreted the lack of supporting cultural indicators such as archaeological remains, painting and literature in African civilisations as indicative of an uncivilised culture which in turn freed his 'imaginative' powers of interpretation. Describing African sculpture as 'great sculpture ... They have indeed complete plastic freedom'[50] he opened his review with confidence, celebrating the emergence of a new artistic world inspired by primitive art.

> 'What a comfortable mental furniture the generalisations of a century ago must have afforded! What a right little, tight little, round little world it was when Greece was the only source of culture, when Greek art, even in Roman copies, was the only indisputable art, except for some Renaissance repetitions!'[51]

The celebration and inspiration of anonymous Oriental peasant stonewares and English earthenware to early studio pottery has usually been ascribed to Bernard Leach and Yanagi's mediation of William Morris's ideas.[52] As later chapters will demonstrate, Leach and Yanagi undoubtedly shaped studio pottery from 1920 onwards, but Fry's primitivist ideas pre-dated their contribution by over a decade. As Leach frankly acknowledged in 1929 'Upon my return to England I found that the basis of criticism of pottery had shifted. America and Europe had become familiar with earlier work.'[53] The

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[50] Fry, R., 'Negro Sculpture'. *The Athenaeum*, April 16, 1920, p. 516.
[51] 'Negro Sculpture' , 1920, p. 516.
[52] Theories which argue the debt of *Mingei* to Morris' ideas and how these shaped Occidental views of the Orient will be discussed in Chapter 6.
[53] Leach., B., 'From the Hand of the Potter', *Homes & Gardens*, Nov. 1929, pp. 225.

'rough, primitive pot'[54] of the Sung dynasty, with its characteristic 'accidental' glaze and 'elementary decoration' which Fry identified in 1910 came to typify English studio pottery during the inter-war years, persisting until the present. In applying his primitivist theories to early Chinese and English pottery exhibited by the Burlington Fine Arts Club, Fry transformed the academic enquiry of historical pottery into a subject of contemporary relevance and shaped the climate of appreciation for the first studio potters. Other critics adopted his ideas, most notably Herbert Read, who in the mid 1920s offered Chinese stoneware and Medieval English earthenware as the epitome of formal values and abstract art.[55] Ultimately it was the studio potters who realised the potential of Fry's ideas, but significantly there were no major figures between 1920 and the early 1950s who worked outside the Oriental or English neo-vernacular tradition.[56]

Early Chinese and English ceramics became exemplars for studio pottery through two channels, Modernism's celebration of primitive pure design or via the Arts and Crafts ideal of pre-industrial art. The chameleon-like identity of studio pottery can seem paradoxical; it does not easily fit into orthodox artistic classifications of modern art, with its tension between 19th and 20th century values. The conflict that progressively grew between studio pottery and Modernism will be explored throughout this thesis although it

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[54] Fry, 'Chinese Art', p. 594.
[55] See Part 2 Chapter 12.
[56] Gwendolene Parnell and other modellers produced small scale figurative ceramics and were initially included in studio pottery exhibitions during the late 1920s. The relationship of their work to studio pottery will be discussed in Part 2. A few minor studio potters such as Dora Lunn and Rosemary Wren took a different approach but the lack of press recognition for their work was a further testament to the dominance of Fry's ideas.

is perhaps best explained by the conflicts within Roger Fry himself. Studio pottery reflected Roger Fry's ideas at this emergent stage of English Modernism, partly appropriating objective means of formal analysis while simultaneously demanding a conflicting social and domestic role.

Early Chinese and English pottery appealed to Fry as primitive art because he regarded its aesthetic character as intact and uncorrupted. Staite Murray's interest in the 'timelessness' of early Oriental pottery, and Leach's stoneware and slipware can be examined within the context of Goldwater's[57] theories that the Modernist tendency was to 'primitivise' through expression, material and technique, rather than 'archaizing'[58] as artists did in the 19th century. The expressive treatment of form and decoration, the emphasis on unrefined materials and the reverence for throwing became the defining features of studio pottery. While primitivism became one of the defining canons of Modernism, the hybridity of studio pottery meant that its presence was less obvious, because it was mainly built on the premise of Chinese art as primitive, a view which fell away from inclusion in the primitive canon during the 1920s.

Green argues that Fry's interest in primitive art 'led to a kind of painting [and pottery] that was unequivocally "civilised", a European painting that asserted its difference from all that could be called barbaric.'[59] Fry identified with Chinese art because its art combined the primitive and rational

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[57] Goldwater, 1966.
[58] Goldwater p. xxii.
[59] Green, 1999, p. 132.

qualities he was hoping for in Western art: 'in the Chinese he finds at the same time a "sensitivity" and a vitality in the apprehension of form much closer to his ideas of the "primitive"'. Fry's elevation of Chinese art arguably had a greater effect on pottery than it did on painting. Through his writing, he encouraged the appreciation of Chinese pottery among his fellow critics, which in turn encouraged a sympathetic response to the emergence of studio pottery. But perhaps Fry's most important contribution to the nascent discipline was his belief in the aesthetic linking of East and West. Green writes: 'It was just such a fusion of the rational and the "sensitive" that was his hope for the future of Western art, and he actually pictures that fusion as a coming together of East and West.' Green quotes Fry: "In these two centres civilisation developed almost independently. Perhaps we are to-day witnessing the process of the joining up of these two poles into a single world-wide system – indeed this may be the great hope for the future." '[60]

However, not only did Fry champion Sung pottery for the Modernist cause, but, in his utopian vision of re-invigorating Western art through primitivism with his pan-cultural openness, argued for a congruence of Eastern and Western art. When Leach returned to England in 1920 he became one of the principle beneficiaries of Fry's critical priming of Oriental pottery in the English art world as his time in Japan enabled him to capitalise on this interest. Despite his anti-Modernist approach (this will be discussed in Chapters 10 and 21) Leach has been widely credited with defining the agenda of Oriental and Occidental relationships in studio

[60] Green, 1999, p. 132.

pottery through his unfettered admiration for Chinese, Korean and Japanese pottery. Untill this and Michael Cardew's interest in English vernacular pottery and later work in Ghana and Nigeria[61] are furthered researched, the precise nature of the relationship between studio pottery, Modernism and primitivism will remain obscure.

[61] As Watson outlines in *Studio Pottery*, 1990, Cardew was a pottery instructor at Achimota College in Ghana 1942-45, established the Vumé pottery 1946-48 and was a Pottery Officer at Abuja Pottery in Nigeria 1950-65.

Chapter 5

The Omega Workshops

Since the history of The Omega Workshops has been extensively documented in important publications (Collins, 1984; MacCarthy, 1984; Anscombe, 1981 and recent essays Collins, 1999; Green, 1996) this chapter will focus instead on the small quantity of critical writing published on Omega pottery between 1914 and 1917. It will also draw on the conclusions of the above authors concerning Omega's relationship to wider ceramic practice.

As previous chapters have discussed, Fry's ideas soon dominated critical theory within the English art world and 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' turned from being a *'succès de scandale'*[1] to being a *'succès d'estime'*. Fry's objectification of art, rejection of naturalistic representation and emphasis on formal values set in motion a new phase of art criticism in England, described by Harrison in 1981 as 'the assertion of the autonomy of aesthetic experience'[2]. The founding of the Omega workshops by Fry in 1913 can be considered on the one hand as a broadening of Post-Impressionist ideas to include the domestic arena or, as Tillyard describes it, another example of Fry's 'dextrous juxtaposition of Arts and Crafts and Post-Impressionism'[3]. In his catalogue essay for the 'Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition', Fry presented the concept of 'detached emotion' as a prerequisite for appreciating

[1] Harrison, 1994, p. 61.
[2] Harrison, 1994, p. 48.

art. He declared that 'All art depends upon cutting off the practical responses to sensations of ordinary life, thereby setting free a pure and as it were disembodied functioning of the spirit'[4]. Fry seemed to adopt a different tack when he founded the Omega workshops. His reflections in the catalogue to the 'Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition' of 1912 reviewed the impact of his critical theories and provided an insight into his changing views after 1910.

> 'When the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition was held in these Galleries two years ago the English public became for the first time fully aware of the existence of a new movement in art, a movement which was the more disconcerting in that it was no mere variation upon accepted themes but implied a reconsideration of the very purpose and aim as well as the methods of pictorial and plastic art.'[5]

Fry had explained in his *Nation* article of 1910 that he perceived Post-Impressionism as the first stage in the regeneration of art: 'it will, no doubt, be built up again one day, but with a passionate zest and enthusiasm.'[6] With the establishment of the Omega workshops Fry continued to expand his vision, in a project that addressed the purpose of pictorial and plastic art. Fry's 'belief in the separateness of 'art' from 'life'[7] (as Harrison explains it) and denigration of traditional representational techniques of painting do not sit obviously with Omega's social role, nor with the more useful wares such as pottery. However, as Tillyard explains in her analysis of the fundamental ideas which underpinned the work of Omega, 'It was implicit in Post-

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[3] Tillyard, 1988, p. 98.
[4] Fry., R., 'The French Group', catalogue to *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, Grafton Galleries, London, 1912, p. 28.
[5] Fry, 1912, p. 25.
[6] *The Nation*, Nov. 19, 1910, p. 232.
[7] Harrison, 1994, p. 48.

Impressionist theory that an object could stand side by side with a painting as a work of art because of its formal properties.'[8]

5.1 Omega and the Arts and Crafts

From 1913 until 1919, when Omega went into receivership, Fry oscillated between the apparently contradictory roles of arch moderniser and Arts and Crafts entrepreneur. Historians have responded very differently to Fry's decision to enter the field of applied art. Tillyard argues that, although it seems 'to contradict Fry's statements about the nature of art itself....This does not make Fry any the less 'modern' in the English context of 1910 – 14, it simply prompts us to re-examine what the nature of his modernity was.'[9] Although Fiona MacCarthy concedes Fry's early friendship with C. R. Ashbee and his previous involvement in 'minor Arts and Crafts activities'[10] she does not regard Omega as an Arts and Crafts venture since it was not concerned with the rights of the working man, and to Omega, ideas of skilled craftsmanship were not seen as integral to creativity; aesthetics were prioritised over technique. Harrod verifies this, writing that 'Omega was essentially a job creation scheme for fine artists who painted objects rather than making them. There were few craft principles operating'.[11]

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[8] Tillyard, 1988, p. 63.
[9] Tillyard, 1988, p. 67.
[10] MacCarthy, F., 'Roger Fry and the Omega Idea', catalogue to *The Omega Workshops 1913-19*, London, Crafts Council, 1984, p. 9.
[11] Harrod, 1999, p. 20.

Christopher Reed describes the 'Bloomsbury' circle which fed Omega as driven artistically by the desire to create a new type of domestic life but that 'Bloomsbury' suffered from the Modernist 'prejudice against the domestic as an arena for artistic accomplishment in the modern era.'[12] Characterised by a rejection of 19th century conservative values, Bloomsbury 'relied on imaginative recombinations of available conventions'[13] to create alternate cultural spaces.

Anscombe also rejects the idea that Omega was built on Arts and Crafts principles, arguing rather that it was modelled on the 'Wiener Werkstätte, a decorative arts workshop started in 1903 by the artists and architects of the Vienna Secession.'[14] On the other hand, although acknowledging Fry's statement that Omega was modelled on the Ecole Martine workshop in Paris[15] Tillyard argues that Fry started the workshops in an attempt to take advantage of the space created in the art market by the demise of the Arts and Crafts movement. Furthermore, the early Modernists 'had more than just theoretical links with the Arts and Crafts Movement. There were also extensive if unacknowledged practical concerns.'[16] These concerns have been raised by Collins, who discussed the philanthropic aspect of the Workshops and Fry's role as 'the animator and advocate of the younger British painters'[17] whose work was supported with a weekly wage. Fry did not

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[12] Reed, 1996, p. 153.
[13] Reed, 1996, p. 149.
[14] Anscombe, I., *Omega and After, Bloomsbury and the Decorative Arts,* London, Thames & Hudson, 1981, p. 9.
[15] Tillyard, 1988, p. 66.
[16] Tillyard, 1988, p. 60.
[17] Collins, J., 'Roger 'Fry's Social Vision of Art', *Art Made Modern* Green., C., 'ed.', London, Courtauld Gallery, 1999, p. 73.

automatically refer to Morris in his discussion of the communal workshop. Instead, he cited an earlier historical precedent, 'Something of a return to the methods of the shops or studios of the Italian Renaissance'[18]

Nevertheless, Fry was concerned with the social role of art and Omega was reacting impatiently 'against the slowness and sententiousness'[19] of the Arts and Crafts. In *Art and Socialism* (1912) written for George Bernard Shaw's collection of essays, *Socialism and the Great State* Fry discussed the importance of past artistic collaboration. He also insisted on anonymity for Omega's products, just as the Arts and Crafts architect Mackmurdo had done with his Century Guild in 1882.

> 'what the history of art definitely elucidates is that the greatest art has always been communal, the expression - in highly individualised ways, no doubt - of common aspirations and ideals.'[20]

This was not a political or moral position for Fry declared 'I am not a Socialist'[21]. However, he did draw upon Arts and Crafts values by expressing a belief in crafts' redemptive powers for society

> 'Ultimately, of course when art had been purified of its present unreality by a prolonged contact with the crafts, society would gain a new confidence in its collective artistic judgement, and might even boldly assume the responsibility which at present it knows it is unable to face.' [22]

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[18] 'A Visit to the Omega Workshop', *Drawing & Design*, Vol. 5, Aug. 1917, p, 76.
[19] MacCarthy, 1984, p. 9. Fry was describing the visit of some members of the Arts & Crafts Society in a letter to his mother.
[20] Fry, R., 'Art and Socialism', *Vision & Design*, Oxford, Oxford university Press, 1981 (first pub. 1920), p. 43
[21] Fry, 1981, p. 39.
[22] Fry, 1981, p. 54.

5.2 Fry's attitude to industry

Fry shared the Arts and Crafts poor opinion of industrial products although his dislike was based on aesthetic rather than moral grounds. In an earlier review of the 1905 Wedgwood exhibition he claimed that industry 'probably contributed to the final destruction of the art, as an art, in England'.[23] While not belittling Josiah Wedgwood's achievements, Fry objected to the 'progressive' decline of the company after Wedgwood's death. He felt the 'mechanical perfection' of production and 'the negative perfection' of the 'extremely correct patterns' and modelled figurines had degraded the classical tradition. Fry's opinion of Wedgwood's figurines with their 'cold excellence and negative perfection'[24] was that they were the ceramic equivalent of the academic, 'deadening tyranny of David and Ingres' mirroring 'the hopeless encumbrance of ... science', 'chiaroscuro' and 'perilous skill'[25] of their painting.

Collins points out that despite this, Fry later defended applied art from the late 17th century onwards arguing that unlike painting of the 18th century 'nearly all our architecture and applied art showed supreme distinction and a quite specifically English tact and delicacy of taste.'[26] In a statement which Fry wrote for the Omega catalogue of 1914, the balance had shifted between his Arts and Crafts values and the Formalist critique that defined his Post-

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[23] Although this review is anonymous , Stella Tillyard and Judith Collins both credit it to Fry. 'Wedgwood China', *The Athenaeum*, No 4055, July 15, 1905, p. 87.
[24] Fry, 'Wedgwood China', 1905, p. 88.
[25] Fry, R., 'The Grafton Gallery —1', *The Nation*, p. 232.

Impressionist writing. In it he emphasised the importance of making objects, rather than focusing on a discussion of the objects themselves. Fry wrote of the value of craft handwork, comparing an imaginary 'pot or a woven cloth made by a negro savage'[27] to 'a piece of modern Sèvres china or a velvet brocade from a Lyons factory'. Adopting the prose style of the Arts and Crafts, he lauded the 'joy in creation' of the 'savage's' handiwork which he saw as being of greater value and consequence than quality of finish. Comparing the virtue of the 'negro's' work with the financial motivations of industry he wrote 'the modern factory products were made almost entirely for gain, no other joy than that of money making entered into their creation'[28]. Giving priority to the 'joy' of handwork rather than to the aesthetic value of the object suggests, as Tillyard believes, that Fry was appealing to a prospective audience for Omega through familiar Arts and Crafts ideas. He also capitalised upon Morris' dictum of 'truth to materials', describing the workshop artists' refusal 'to spoil the expressive quality of their work by sand-papering it down to a shop finish'[29] concluding with a rhetorical swagger 'the public has at last seen through the humbug of the machine-made imitation of works of art. '

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[26] Fry, R., *Reflections on British Painting*, London, Faber and Faber, 1934, p. 34, quoted in Collins, *The Omega Workshops*, 1999, p. 28.
[27] Fry, R., 'Pottery', *Omega Workshops* pamphlet, London, undated (MacCarthy states 1914), p. 3.
[28] Fry, *Omega Workshops*, 1914, p. 4.
[29] Fry, *Omega Workshops* , 1914, p. 4.

5.3 Fry's writing on Omega pottery

Fry's modest description of the pottery in the same catalogue (quoted in its entirety below) recalls the prose of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition in its attempt to strike a balance between Formalist ideas and his new social concerns.

> 'Of all crafts none has suffered more than pottery from the application of scientific commercialism. We now use almost entirely articles which have lost all direct expressiveness of surface and modelling. Our cups and saucers are reduced by machine turning to a dead mechanical exactitude and uniformity. Pottery is essentially a form of sculpture, and its surface should express directly the artist's sensibility both of proportion and surface. The Omega pottery is made on the wheel by artists and is not merely executed to their design. It therefore presents, as scarcely any modern pottery does, this expressive character. It is made for the most part with a white tin glaze analogous to that of the old Delft.'[30]

Here Fry is discussing pottery in the same language that he used to describe the paintings in 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists', revealing the ease with which he applied his universal theories to art, irrespective of medium. The 'accumulations of science'[31] from the first *Nation* article became the 'scientific commercialism'[32] of industry; 'representationalism mechanism'[33] translated into 'mechanical exactitude and uniformity'[34]; painting as 'design' became 'pottery ... a form of sculpture' and the 'expression [of] mass, gesture'[35]

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[30]Fry, *Omega Workshops* , 1914, p. 10.
[31] The Grafton Gallery, *The Nation* p. 232.
[32] Fry, *Omega Workshops* , 1914, p. 10.
[33] The Grafton Gallery, *The Nation* p. 232.
[34] Fry, *Omega Workshops* , 1914, p. 10.
[35] The Grafton Gallery, *The Nation* p. 232.

became the 'expressiveness of surface modelling.'[36] Significantly, with the exception of the reference to Delft tin glaze, these criteria became the critical principles for the studio pottery made by Bernard Leach, William Staite Murray, Michael Cardew and Reginald Wells in the inter-war years. (The adoption of Fry's Formalist language by studio pottery will be discussed in greater detail in Part 2). The formal values of Omega pottery and Fry's description of pottery as 'a form of sculpture' are congruent with Staite Murray's demand that pottery should be regarded as abstract sculpture and with Wells' concern with proportion and surface. Common to both concerns is the unifying theme of pottery as an expressive medium.

Surprisingly, Fry's most animated commentary on pottery in 1914 was not about Omega pottery but in a review of the exhibition 'Early English Earthenware and Other Works of Art' at the Burlington Fine Arts Club. In *The Art Pottery of England* Fry expressed his personal views on pottery, providing an insight into the aims of Omega. As MacCarthy writes

> 'it was produced partially as a review ... but he also used the article to put forward his crusading views about the value of good and noble pottery, which if made with the right form and texture, would be able to work subtly for the public good.'[37]

Although he discussed its formal values, unusually Fry also emphasised the pottery's historical social role. He praised 13th to 15th century work in particular because of its social inclusiveness, for it 'was made apparently

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[36] Fry, *Omega Workshops* , 1914, p. 10.
[37] MacCarthy, 1984, p. 63.

alike for rich and poor.'[38] In contrast, the later work with its 'cheerful brutality ...and empty elegance' embodied the 'profound division between the culture of the people and the upper classes'.

He concluded

> 'First of all, we must premise that pottery is of all the arts the most intimately connected with life, and therefore the one in which some sort of connexion [sic] between the artist's mood and the life of his contemporaries may be most readily allowed. A poet or even a painter may live apart from his age, and may create for a hypothetical posterity ; but the potter cannot, or certainly does not, go on indefinitely creating pots that no one will use. He must come to some sort of terms with his fellow-man.'[39]

5.4 Omega's Pottery

Fry's early ambition for the Omega Workshops was that the 'new movement was not to be restricted to the art of painting only.'[40] The bold claim that Post-Impressionism 'has brought the artist back to the problems of design so that he is once more in a position to grasp sympathetically the conditions of applied art'[41] was more achievable in the two-dimensional realm of murals and painted furniture than in the making of actual objects. The technical complexities of making and firing pottery were at first beyond the artists at Omega and 'they began to decorate commercial plain white plates and

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[38] Fry, R., 'The Art Pottery of England', *The Burlington*, No CXXXII, Vol. XXIV, March 1914, p. 335.
[39] Fry, 1914, p. 330.
[40] From Virginia Woolf's biography of Roger Fry quoted in Collins, 1999, p. 33.
[41] quoted in Collins, *The Omega Workshops*, 1999, p. 30.

vases'[42] by over-painting with ordinary paint. Later, Fry imported decorated French majolica that was in keeping with other Omega products. As the most technically capable, Fry threw a limited series of table ware which was angular in form and glazed in plain white. He then commissioned Poole pottery to make casts from the prototypes (a collaboration which did not survive the closure of the workshop). Although it was difficult to link the worlds of ceramic design and production, Fry's decision to ask Poole to manufacture the pottery followed much of Arts and Crafts practice, where the artists often 'turned over their designs to commercial firms or to professional trade craftsmen or women.'[43] In an interview in *Drawing & Design* he discussed the problems of the modern craft worker acknowledging that it was not 'absolutely necessary that a designer should be able to actually do all the work.'[44]

Just as G. T. Robinson had done in his essay 'Fictiles'[45] (Chapter 1) Fry imagined a time when it would be possible for the Workshops to combine the process of design and production of artistic pottery. 'Some things' he wrote, 'such as pots, are always better when actually produced by the artist-craftsman. Work from even the best of drawings has not the same vitality.'[46] Fry attempted to expand the range of Omega's pottery through the use of coloured glazes. Initially white, black and turquoise (to emulate celadons),

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[42] MacCarthy, 1984, p. 65.
[43] Harrod, 1999, p. 17.
[44] 'A Visit to the Omega Workshop', *Drawing & Design*, Vol. 5, Aug. 1917 p. 76.
[45] *Arts and Crafts Essays*, Rivington, Percival & Co., 1903, (1893).
[46] *Drawing & Design*, 1917, p, 76.

yellow and purple glazes were developed later. Collins describes one contemporaneous response.

> 'Imagine how perfectly gorgeous tomato soup would look in a black soup-tureen! Why, one would have tomato soup every day! And the plates are obviously waiting for salad — vivid green lettuce, shy radishes, and magenta beetroots! Fruit would be a Futurist feast in those black bowls, and macaroni most amusing; but in the subdued lights of these nights one would have to feel for the prunes in one's plates![47]

MacCarthy describes Omega as a 'puzzle, an anomaly'[48] with its 'revolutionary levity ... [and]... Ruskinian morality'. Although beyond Fry and Omega's ability at the time, the union between design and creation would become the identifying character of studio pottery in the 1920s. Fry was unable to capture for Omega the 'nervous tremor, that sensibility, in all its dimensions'[49] that was characteristic of hand made pottery, but his critical writing laid the foundation for others to do so.

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[47] 'Phrynette's Letters to Lonely Soldiers' Troly-Curtine, M., Sketch, 4 October, 1916, quoted in Collins p. 130.
[48] MacCarthy, 1984, p. 22.
[49] quoted in MacCarthy, 1984, p. 63.

Chapter 6

Antiquarianism, Oriental Pottery and Charles Holme

This chapter will examine the influence of early Oriental ceramics on the critical precepts and material identity of studio pottery during the 1910s. Only Chinese stoneware from the Tang and Sung Dynasties, and to a lesser extent Japanese *chajin* or tea ware, as this pottery was referred to in later critical writing, will be examined in this thesis. The arrival of the first examples of early Tang and Sung Dynasty stoneware in England in the 1900s is particularly important to the emergence of studio pottery. From Leach's 'Sung Standard'[1] to Fry's claim that Tang Dynasty pottery was 'some of the greatest ceramics in existence'[2], this early work exercised a major influence on the first generation of studio potters and became the most important benchmark for potters and critics, against which all other pottery was compared.

This chapter will also examine Antiquarian writing on early Oriental ceramics. The majority of books and articles were written by curators and collectors and they provided the foundation for an appreciation of Oriental ceramics by Modernist critics such as Roger Fry and Clive Bell whose critical writing on Chinese pottery, especially in relation to his ideas of primitivism, has already been discussed.

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[1] see Chapter 2.
[2] Fry, *The Art Pottery of England*, 1914, p. 335.

6.1 Porcelain and Orientalism in 19th century England

To appreciate the impact of the early Chinese stoneware it is necessary to review existing attitudes to Oriental pottery, particularly porcelain, in the 19th century. Since trading had started in the late mediaeval period Chinese porcelain had been highly valued in Europe. Hildyard writes

> 'In Europe, as late as the sixteenth century, even the poor export-quality hard-paste porcelain was regarded with reverence, so much so that better pieces were sometimes richly mounted in precious metal.'[3]

Hillier also records that in the 17th century 'Porcelain was sold in the same shops as gold and silver, and was kept in royal treasuries with precious metal and jewels.'[4] After Johann Friedrich Böttger found out how to make porcelain in 1708 in Saxony ('The entire spread and artistic development of hard-paste porcelain can be attributed to this discovery,'[5]) a new wave of interest in porcelain began in Europe. Factories such as Meissen and Sèvres received generous royal patronage and aristocrats began a phase of obsessive collecting. Collections known as porcelain rooms became highly fashionable, the largest being Augustus the Strong's 'Japanese Palace' built to 'contain his collections which grew in the 1720s to 57,000 pieces.'[6] Hillier argues that 18th century porcelain 'encapsulated qualities which succeeding factories in the century would strive ceaselessly to reproduce'[7] and established a high level of appreciation that lasted to the turn of the 20th century. English factories

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[3] Hildyard, 1999, p. 46.
[4] Hillier, 1968, p. 66.
[5] Hildyard, 1999, p. 46.
[6] Hildyard, 1999, p. 64.
[7] Hillier, 1968, p. 63.

such as Chelsea, Bow and Worcester began making porcelain but, while important, these products did not dominate ceramic production in England to the same extent as that of the European porcelain factories. Hildyard argues the lack of royal patronage in England was a positive factor since it did not encourage 'crippling monopolies such as ... Sèvres [and] the absence of glamorous patrons allowed the potter-proprietors to be respected in their own right, not just reflectedly glorified as the servants of a prince.'[8] These cultural differences between continental and English potters led, as discussed in Chapter One, to efficient techniques of mass production in England. Earthenware and bone china rather than porcelain came to dominate national and international markets.

Oriental porcelain still retained its high prestige however, and in 1842 the English merchant Nathan Dunn exhibited a collection of 'goods' which he had collected in China over a twelve year period. Anna Jackson writes in *The Victorian Vision* 'Interest in China was extremely popular'[9] in mid-century England and Dunn's 'Chinese Collection' exhibition 'stressed either the stagnation of Chinese civilisation compared with the progressive West or emphasised the exotic'. By the 1860s, the view of a stagnated culture came to eclipse ideas of exoticism and China became 'regarded as a moribund nation, unable to rely any longer on past glories.'[10] Basil Gray supported this theory of Chinese decline in his lecture to the Oriental Ceramic Society *'The Development of Taste in Chinese Art in the West 1872 to 1972'* referring to

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[8] Hildyard, 1999, p. 37.
[9] Jackson, 'Art and Design: East Asia', *The Victorian Vision*, 2001, p, 298.
[10] Jackson, 2001, p. 306.

'the interim period between the failing taste in Chinoiserie ... and the beginning of direct knowledge of China by scholars and collectors in the last half of the century.'[11]

The first major showing of Japanese exhibits at the London International Exhibition of 1862 was described by the art historian Toshio Watanabe as 'An epoch-making event in the history of Japanese art in the West'[12] The display of what was then called' industrial art' established a new era of trading built on exchange between Western industry and Japanese art. Jackson writes that late 19th century England experienced a 'craze for all things Japanese'[13] and Gray discusses the vogue for Japanese art 'which rose in crescendo to a popular peak in the late eighties.'[14] It now became a central feature of European 19th century artistic activity; moreover, 'Japanese art ... [was] ... to prove a catalyst for the Art Nouveau movement'[15] which encouraged experiment in form and materials. Jackson argues that Oriental and Japanese art in particular was a liberating force for western artists and 'was to be the principle agent of Western Modernism.'[16] By the late 1880s 'Chinese art was subsidiary in taste to Japanese art.'[17] The popularity of Japanese art inspired the founding of Liberty's in Regent Street and Japonisme became the fashionable movement of late Victorian England and the Aesthetic Movement. But if China had lost prestige, her ceramic work was 'admired,

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[11] Gray, B., 'The Development of Taste in Chinese Art in the West 1872 to 1972 ', Transactions of the Oriental Society, London, 1972, p. 20.
[12] Watanabe, 1997, p. 89.
[13] Jackson, 2001, p. 307.
[14] Gray, 1972, p. 20.
[15] Jackson, A., 'Orient & Occident', *Art Nouveau* , Greenhalgh. P 'ed.', London, V & A, 2000, p. 106.
[16] Jackson , 2000, p. 111.

and still much collected.'[18] Accounts in the late 19th and early 20th century charted the ebb and flow of appreciation for Oriental art but naturally it was less distinct at the time. Nor were the differences between Japanese and Chinese always clear. Gray writes

> 'It was however seldom before 1914 that Chinese art was considered independently of Japanese : and this had a very significant corollary, that Chinese art was viewed through Japanese spectacles.'

Western Oriental scholarship was still in its infancy since China and Japan were relatively inaccessible. The situation was similar for ceramics. Bernard Rackham, writing in his unpublished '*notes on a career in the SOUTH KENSINGTON (VICTORIA AND ALBERT) MUSEUM (1898 - 1938')* recalls giving a talk in 1923 'on early Chinese wares at South Kensington, especially some reputedly pre-Ming wares which had been lurking largely unobserved ever since they reached the Museum in 1882.'[19] The Oriental Ceramic Society was founded in 1921 by nine collectors, including George Eumorfopolous[20], and three museum curators (R. L. Hobson, B. Rackham and W. King) in order to address the growing interest in Chinese art. Gray explains 'that it was only in London that the potter's art was held to be so pre-eminent that it was adopted as the title of our Society.'[21] Just as there was confusion surrounding the term 'primitivism' in the late 1910s and early 1920s so 'Oriental' was a very vague term, as Rackham later explained

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[17] Gray, 1972, p. 21.
[18] Jackson, 2001, p. 310.
[19] Rackham, B., notes on a career in the SOUTH KENSINGTON (VICTORIA AND ALBERT) MUSEUM (1898 - 1938), *unpublished*, 1962, p. 12.
[20] Eumorfopolous was the pre-eminent collector of Chinese antiquities in the early part of the century and his collection will be discussed in later chapters.
[21] Gray, 1972, p. 29.

> 'When the O. C. S. [Oriental Ceramic Society] began there seems to have been no clear understanding as to whether "Oriental" meant "Far Eastern" or, as certainly some of its members thought, coming from a region anywhere East of the Dardanelles.'[22]

Previous chapters have discussed the growth of Fry's interest in Fauve and early Chinese and English pottery. The next sub-chapter will survey the way that early Oriental pottery was introduced during the 1910s and how Antiquarian writing provided an understanding of the subject to Fry and the art world in general. It will describe how the first two decades of the 20th century saw the 'gradual supercession of Japanese art as a vogue, first by Muslim art and then by Chinese'.[23] By the post-war years pottery such as that of the Martin Brothers whose work was typified by a 'Naturalism which contained elements of Japonism'[24] was replaced by Sung pottery which 'became a general rage among all who were in the swim, or as we now say were 'with it'.[25]

6.2 Antiquarian and press responses to Chinese pottery

Up to 1910 appreciation of porcelain had changed little as a book review of Bernard Rackham's *A Guide to Porcelain* reveals.

> 'Of all kinds of pottery which are the object of the collector's quest, the one at the present day enjoying the most extended popularity is unquestionably porcelain, whether European or that of the Far East. '[26]

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[22] Rackham, 1962, p. 12.
[23] Gray, 1972, p. 28.
[24] Opie, J., 'The New Ceramics : Engaging with the Spirit', catalogue *Art Nouveau* Greenhalgh. P. 'ed.', London, V & A, 2000, p. 198.
[25] Gray, 1972, p. 27.
[26] Review of 'A Book of Porcelain : Fine Examples in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Painted by William Gibb, with Text by Bernard Rackham'. (A & C Black), *The Athenaeum*, No 4340, Dec. 31, 1910.

The explanation offered for this unassailable position was the perceived beauty of porcelain and the collector's primary criterion, accessibility. Historical pots were becoming rarer because they were 'finding their way into national museums' but Rackham saw the continued 'fabrication' of porcelain as a key element in ensuring the collector's future role. While the history of the European porcelain factories was well documented, Rackham acknowledged that European knowledge of Oriental porcelain was limited and looked forward to 'the time when a history of Chinese porcelain will be forthcoming'. Although *A Guide to Porcelain* was a minor book, the *Athenaeum's* review reflected the continuing influence of Oriental ceramics at the beginning of the 20th century. From an initial admiration of material and technique to an acquisitive consumption, Western appreciation of Oriental pottery had reached the stage where establishing historical provenance was the next objective.

An editorial published in *The Burlington* in 1910, probably written by Roger Fry,[27] expressed an opposing mood to such Antiquarian values, proposing Chinese painting, Japanese art and Indian sculpture as models for a new phase of Modernist appreciation.

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[27] Fry was most likely to have been the author because the Oriental references put forward for consideration such as 'representation of the obvious ... more spiritual, more expressive idea of design' were typical of his early formalist writing of 1910 and 'Manet and the Post Impressionists'. The editorial also previewed the 'great Exhibition of Mohammedan Art' to be held that summer in Munich which it was claimed would have great importance for the 'historian of Western Art', an idea Fry opened with in his article on the exhibition a few months later. 'It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this exhibition ... in the history of ... European art.' Fry, R, 'The Munich Exhibition of Mohammedan Art, p. 81-91, *Vision and Design*, London, Oxford University Press, 1981.

> 'There are signs that the present rapidly increasing preoccupation with Oriental art will be more intense, and produce a profounder impression on our views, than any previous phase of Orientalism. For one thing, we are more disillusioned, more tired with our own tradition, which seems to have landed us at length in a too frequent representation of the obvious or the sensational. To us the art of the East presents the hope of discovering a more spiritual, more expressive idea of design.'[28]

The timing of this editorial coincided with a series of six major articles on Sung pottery in *The Burlington* by British Museum curator R. L. Hobson. Thorough and cautious in tone, these articles were published to coincide with the exhibition 'Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain' held at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in Savile Row later in the year. As Gray wrote, Hobson was 'With the occasion, the man to exploit it.'[29] With extensive and knowledgeable contributions from a triumvirate of curators, collectors and modernist critics 'Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain' was arguably the seminal English exhibition of Far Eastern ceramics of the 20th century. It also established the tone for the English revival of Early Chinese stoneware at the core of studio pottery.

This important exhibition brought together a unique collection of previously unseen early Chinese pottery, including work from the Han to the Ming dynasty. There had been scholarly interest in such early work but the scarcity of examples in Western collections made it difficult to establish accurate provenance. R. L. Hobson's catalogue concentrated on establishing chronologies and historical provenance for this obscure work, but Edward Dillon's six column review in the *Burlington Magazine* revealed more about

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[28] Editorial Articles, 'Oriental Art', *The Burlington* , No LXXXV, Vol. XVII, Apr. 1910, p. 3.

its contemporary impact. He expressed his surprise on seeing two hundred Han, Tang and Sung pots

> 'to some of us it seemed to be a matter of doubt whether it would be possible to fill the small gallery of the club. ... that the number of genuine pieces in English or indeed Western collections generally might be almost counted on the fingers'[30]

Just as Japonisme had developed after the forced opening of trade in the 1850s had given the West access to Japanese art, access to China helped to regenerate appreciation of Chinese art. Jackson writes China 'was forced to open more ports, allow greater travel within ... and give Britain the right to an ambassador in Peking.'[31] This unrest culminated in the Boxer rebellion of 1898 when foreign troops 'for the first time penetrated the Forbidden City'.

> 'At the time of the sacking of the Summer Palace in 1860 there were many opportunities for those on the spot to acquire rare and beautiful specimens of Chinese Art.'[32]

With the subsequent building of railways and cutting of embankments, many new archaeological sites were discovered, and a wealth of early pottery was unearthed which was hardly even known in China itself. The Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition was the direct result of the first wave of artefacts to reach the West following 'the great opening-up of early China.'[33]

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[29] Gray, 1972, p. 24
[30] Dillon, E, 'Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain at the Burlington Fine Arts Club', The Burlington, No LXXXVIII, Vol. XVII, July 1910, p.210.
[31] Jackson , 2001, p. 299.
[32] *The Connoisseur*, Vol. 1, Nov. 1910, p. 198.
[33] Rackham, 1962, p. 14.

Curatorial 'interest in excavated things from China'[34] developed quickly for, as Dillon wrote in the Burlington of the collectors and curators 'They well understand that a critical moment has arrived'[35]. He reported that 'until the last two or three years it would have been absolutely impossible to bring together a collection of this character' and discussed kiln sites, classification of glaze and clay and chronology at length. Unlike Hobson, Dillon also discussed the aesthetic significance of the exhibition, describing Tz'u ware, a type of sgraffito pottery, before it had even been given a name. Dillon believed that far sighted connoisseurs such as George Eumorfopolous, George Benson and William Alexander[36] had in some part made the exhibition possible, since the majority of collectors had had more difficulty with these

> 'simpler and ruder early wares ... so different from the fully developed types of porcelain to which the English connoisseur had been accustomed... [they had] so far appealed to but a few collectors.'[37]

However, Dillon gave full credit to

> "Dr [Hercules] Read of the British Museum ... who first recognised that the psychological moment had arrived - that in fact the time had come to bring together the material evidence, and thus to make it possible to investigate critically both the claims to high antiquity and the intrinsic artistic merits of these various wares.'[38]

It is tempting to attribute the cause of this 'psychological moment' to the changes which had been taking place in contemporary art, although the Burlington exhibition was held four months before 'Manet and the Post-

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[34] Gray, 1972, p. 28.
[35] Dillon, 1910, p. 210.
[36] Eumorfopolous was the primary lender to the exhibition, supported by Alexander and Benson.
[37] Dillon, 1910, p. 211.

Impressionists'. Although at this early stage of the 1910s the relationship between Antiquarian interests and Modernist ideas of primitivism had not been established, Rackham comments on the importation of early Chinese pottery and describes how 'The effects in England made themselves felt at Bloomsbury somewhat sooner than at South Kensington.'[39] Gray notes the importance of Fry, stating the pre-war period was characteristic of

> 'the aesthetic approach, linking the appreciation of Chinese art with the *avant-garde* movements in contemporary art and with the widening of vision to include such things as Byzantine and negro art. In all this we already suggested, Roger Fry was a key figure.'[40]

Fry's first published reference to early Chinese pottery was his review of the Burlington exhibition so the 'psychological moment' that Sir Hercules Read describes is more likely to have been a reference to general artistic and scholarly interest in Chinese art before 1910 rather than to avant-garde theories. This 'psychological moment' had a further consequence. As a postscript to his review Dillon presented a radical view of the later Ming wares. In contrast to his enthusiasm for the simpler wares, he dismissed all but the first few decades of the Ming dynasty on the grounds of its 'decadence ... reflected in the decoration of the porcelain'[41] adding the caveat that 'of examples of Ming porcelain in European collections an overwhelming majority belong to this time.' The significance of the 'Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain' exhibition was far reaching for traditional craftsman and modern artist alike because it displaced the painted Ming porcelain pot as

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[38] Dillon, 1910, p. 211.
[39] Rackham, 1962, p. 14.
[40] Gray, 1972, p. 26.
[41] Dillon, 1910, p. 213.

undisputed canon of ceramic excellence for the monochromatic Sung dynasty stoneware pot - which in turn was to become a new icon of modernity. The pottery would be acclaimed by modernist critics such as Roger Fry, Clive Bell and later, Herbert Read in his publication *Art and Industry*. While these critics were looking to establish a new order of art, Bernard Leach would also acclaim the 'Sung standard' in his re-interpretation of Arts and Crafts values.

Discussion of Chinese pottery continued at a lesser pace during the remainder of the 1910s and was limited to digesting the implications of the exhibition. Hobson dominated scholarly debate with his series of six articles for *The Burlington*, and 'Wares of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties'[42] fulfilled a crucial role in disseminating this new research to a wider public. The first of the articles was devoted to Hsiang's Album, a translation of a Chinese connoisseur's record of a collection of early pottery. Until the Burlington Fine Art Club's exhibition, Hsiang's Album provided the sole reference to types of Sung pottery as yet unseen in the West and was the only accredited Chinese reference known. In true scholarly style, Hobson debated the accuracy of translation, the exact derivation of terms and location of kiln sites in a three page article. Five further articles dedicated to Ju pottery, Celadon, Ting Ware, Chün-Yao and others followed. Although the dominant authority on Chinese pottery, Hobson rarely deviated from descriptive writing. A rare exception was his description of Sung glazes which he called 'the keystone of their art. And what glazes they were! ... sometimes thick as 'massed lard,' smooth to the

[42] Hobson, R. L., 'Wares of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties' 1-VI, *The Burlington Magazine*, No LXXIII, Vol. XV May 1909 - No LXXXII, Vol. XVI, Jan 1910.

touch, soft and melting to the eye.'[43] With a later article 'On Some Old Chinese Pottery'[44] and a review of a translation of the T'ao Shuo[45] (an ancient 'encyclopaedia' of Chinese pottery from the 9th century on) Hobson and *The Burlington* had within a period of two years created a scholarly base for the appreciation of Sung pottery in the public domain.

Chinese art continued to be covered by the *Connoisseur, Burlington* and *Athenaeum* in the years following the Fine Arts Club exhibition. In a review of an exhibition of 'Old Chinese Porcelains'[46] at Gorer's Galleries in 1911 in New Bond Street *The Connoisseur* reinforced the notion of porcelain's superiority over other ceramic materials. The anonymous reviewer regarded the porcelains of the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries as the 'highest degree of excellence ... a poem in porcelain' and cited prices of up to £15,000 to underline this. The *Burlington* commissioned Roger Fry to review the same exhibition. Although Fry was complimentary, the article provided him with the opportunity to express for the first time his new respect for the stoneware pottery of Sung dynasty, especially in comparison to other ceramic work. The porcelains, he wrote, 'suffer, however, a little by their close proximity to the Sung specimens'[47]. He applied his new criteria about 'the balance and rhythm of the design' discussing how 'the strong plastic feeling that marks the earlier periods of Chinese pottery is still apparent - [it] was accomplished at the time

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[43]Hobson, R.L., 'Wares of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties-II', *The Burlington Magazine*, No LXXIV, Vol. XV, May 1909, p. 82.
[44] Hobson, R.L., 'On Some Old Chinese Pottery, *The Burlington Magazine*, No CI, Vol. XIX, Aug. 1911, p. 262.
[45] Hobson, R.L., 'Description of Chinese Pottery and Porcelain', *The Burlington Magazine*, No CIV, Vol. XVIII, Jan 1911, p. 240.
[46] 'Old Chinese Porcelains, *The Connoisseur*, Vol. XXX, May-Aug. 1911, p. 220
[47] Fry, R, 'Richard Bennet Collection of Chinese Porcelain', The *Burlington*, No XCIX, Vol.

when artistic feeling was distinctly lessening in intensity.' He became most animated however when discussing the anonymity of the 'superfine' craftsmen 'It may well have been a last refinement of aesthetic idealism on the part of the Chinese that led to such heroic self-effacement.'

Another Bond Street exhibition, this time at Paterson's Gallery[48], was reviewed in *The Athenaeum in* 1911 and the reviewer commented on the growing interest in Chinese art 'as an encouraging sign of the times'.[49] Although ignoring the pottery and bronzes in favour of painting he took on the new Post-Impressionist concern with 'illustrative' and 'representational' art in discussing the nature of figuration. A large exhibition of Chinese art at Manchester lent by the same collectors who had provided work for the Fine Arts Club exhibition drew two reviews that reverted to the old hierarchical categories. *The Connoisseur* claimed that the Chinese were 'the supreme potters of the world[50]' and during the Ming dynasty 'attained full mastery of the potter's craft.' The *Athenaeum* followed suit in a review written by Frank Rutter who despite his Modernist credentials and the extensive range of pottery on show judged that 'the artistic genius of China found its most exquisite utterance in porcelain.'[51] Given that this review was written three years after the Burlington Exhibition and despite the interest shown in early

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XIX, June 1911, p. 133-137.

[48] Paterson's Gallery was very important to the early history of studio pottery. A private gallery in Bond Street, it was owned by Mr William Paterson, an early supporter of studio pottery. Hamada visited the gallery in 1923 and asked if he could exhibit there. Paterson subsequently gave Staite Murray annual shows between 1924-29, and Leach showed there intermittently from 1925 onwards. Harrod, 1999, p. 128.

[49] 'Early Chinese Paintings, Pottery, and Bronzes', The *Athenaeum*, June 10, 1910, p. 665.

[50] 'Chinese Porcelain and Applied Art at the Manchester City Art Gallery', The *Connoisseur*, Vol. XXXVII, Sept.-Dec. 1913, p. 87-89.

[51] R., F., 'Chinese Art at Manchester', The *Athenaeum*, No 4470, June 28, 1913, p. 703

Chinese pottery by Antiquarian writers and Fry, Rutter was surprisingly dismissive and out of step with current thought, writing of Sung pottery 'It is not characteristically Chinese, but rather typical of the early pottery of most lands.' He also described Sung and Tang figurative ceramics as by 'no means impervious to foreign influence', citing Greek art as their source.

The flurry of exhibitions on Chinese art in the years leading up to the outbreak of war was accompanied by various scholarly articles. In a review of R. L. Hobson's comprehensive book *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain* published in 1915 even the conservative *Connoisseur* joined the consensus of approval for Sung pottery. In summarising Hobson's text the magazine repeated the fact that 'the Sung wares have always been regarded by Chinese connoisseurs as reaching the high-water mark of ceramic excellence'[52] quoting Hobson: '"The Sung wares are the true children of the potter's craft"'. In 1917 Bernard Rackham, the Keeper of the Ceramics Department at the V & A, entered the debate with a review of Chinese scholarly writing on ceramics, beginning with texts that had been collected by Jesuit missionaries in the early 18th century. In a war-delayed review, Rackham praised Hobson's book and summed up recent curatorial developments 'it is difficult to realise that the lapse of little more than a decade has so vastly widened our knowledge.'[53] Appropriately though, it was R. L. Hobson who closed the decade as he opened it, with a six part survey of George Eumorfopolous' collection up to the point of the Tang

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[52] 'Chinese Pottery and Porcelain', The *Connoisseur*, Vol. XLII, May-Aug., 1915, p. 37-41.
[53] Rackham, B, 'The Literature of Chinese Potter : A Brief Survey and Review', The *Burlington*, Vol. XXX, No CLXVII, Feb. 1917,p. 45-52.

dynasty wares.[54] Just as he had done ten years before, Hobson presented a series of articles in which he discussed the attribution and technical nature of this early pottery. Although he provided little critical comment or analysis, for example describing Tang dynasty as 'the Augustan age of China'[55] he helped to foster public appreciation of this newly discovered and culturally remote work.

6.3 Charles Holme *The Potter's Art*

Charles Holme, the founder, editor and publisher of *The Studio* and former business partner of Christopher Dresser was the first 20th century English critic to attempt to link historical Oriental pottery and contemporary practice. Holme travelled to the Far East in the late 1880s with his close friend Arthur Lasenby Liberty , returned to England, bought Morris's Red House at Bexleyheath and founded *The Studio*. Through his interest in the Aesthetic Movement, concern for Arts and Crafts values and knowledge of modern Japanese art and craft, Holme's article '*The Potter's Art. - Object Lessons from the Far East*'[56], published in 1901, was effectively a proto-manifesto for the still unformed discipline of studio pottery. Although strictly outside the period of this research, Holme's article warrants inclusion as it is one of the seminal ceramic articles of the century and a most important early 20th century critical publication. In this ten page article Holme acknowledged the superiority of

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[54] Hobson, R. L., 'The Eumorfopoulos Collection, II - VII', The *Burlington*, Vol. XXXIV, No CXCI, Feb. 1919 - Vol. XXXV, No CC, Nov. 1919.
[55] Hobson, R. L., 'The Eumorfopoulos Collection, - V', The *Burlington*, Vol. XXXV, No CXCVI, July 1919, p. 19-26.
[56] Holme, C, 'The Potter's Art.-Object Lessons from the Far East', The *Studio*, Vol. XXIV, No

Oriental pottery from 'China, Corea, and Japan.'[57] However, because Holme perceived Japan rather than China as maintaining its traditional pottery through the highly aestheticised tea ceremony, Japan became his model for the West. The article was a modernist summing up of turn the century ceramics; it predated the emergence and critical acclaim of Sung pottery by a decade and referred to the contemporary studio potters of France such as Chaplet, Delaherche and Bigot. The only obstacle to Holme's article becoming a manifesto for the next phase of ceramic development was the lack of potters capable of putting his ideas into practice.

In *The Potter's Art* Holme emphatically rejected decorative 19th pottery as 'the tawdry and vulgar bedizenment of our earthenware vessels. Flower-painting upon porcelain !'[58] Predating Staite Murray and Leach's early exhibitions by over twenty years, Holme was the first modern English critic to imagine the future of the studio potter, and he cited the French potters as unifying designing and making. Unlike the typical English art potter of this period who designed rather than made his work, he depicted the artist potter taking responsibility for all processes

> 'The true art of the potter, ... by the happy choice and manipulation of his clay and glazes, and his thorough understanding of the mysteries of firing, has rendered himself independent of the painter, or any other collaborator.' [59]

103, Oct. 1901, p. 48-57.
[57] Holme, 1901, p. 50.
[58] Holme, 1901, p. 53
[59] Holme, 1901, p. 48.

Like other British critics, Holme acknowledged China - 'Our best productions are but imitations of Chinese methods'[60] - but differed in that he referred to regional Japanese pottery from Shino and Oribé rather than Chinese porcelain as exemplary models. Unusually for this time, Holme also referred to Korean pottery, a subject Rackham notes 'on which the vaguest and most absurd notions were current until 1916'[61] when the first monograph in English was published.

> 'if we desire to be more fully enlightened with regard to the possibilities of the art we cannot do better than make a careful study of the features distinguishing some of the native pottery of China, Corea, and Japan.'[62]

This respect for Korean pottery was informed by a late 19th century appreciation of Japanese art and connected with the imperialist expansion of Japan and will be further discussed in the chapter on Leach. But, whether through his association with Dresser, Liberty and the Japonisme of the late 19th century, or his travels in the Far East, Holme was a confirmed Japanophile. His reference to the Japanese influence on European industry 'some thirty years ago' was made because of the London International Exhibition of 1862. Holme's main interest was pottery and he offered a new model for potters to emulate, the *chajin* or tea ceremony of Japan. He believed this ceremony was the perfect union of two essential attributes of good pottery, the unconscious character of native pottery and cultured taste.

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[60] Holme, 1901, p. 50.
[61] Rackham, 1962, p. 11.
[62] Holme, 1901, p. 50.

Holme saw native pottery, especially that from the East, as being free from the contamination of Western Art Pottery, the 'unornamental "ornaments" which thoughtless people crowd into their living rooms.'[63] The importance of Ruskin's ideas 'Never encourage the manufacture of any article not absolutely necessary, in the production of which *Invention* has no share.'[64] were expressed through Holme's belief that Eastern work was pure because of its lack of conceit and its concern with utility: 'they are entirely practical, and they possess nothing that can be eliminated without diminishing their usefulness.'[65] For Holme, the unification of making and materials 'to render it as simply serviceable as possible' when directed towards a true function and purpose created an unadulterated art. 'Art often exists in her truest form ... where her presence has least been courted.'[66] Although the use of the pot was integral to this artistic process, Holme's views were not just a homily to function, since he distinguished between utility and usefulness. In a discussion of the appropriate criteria for the creation of flower vases, Holme crucially described function as 'subordinate', meaning that the function of the flower vase was less important than its primary role of enhancing the beauty of the flowers. For although Holme continually stressed terms such as 'use', 'usefulness', ' practical', 'functions', 'serviceable' he was not setting up a 'functional verses decorative' argument (as would later dominate the studio pottery debate) but arguing for a symbiotic relationship of utility and aesthetics.

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[63] Holme, 1901, p. 50.
[64] Naylor, 1990, p. 28.
[65] Holme, 1901, p. 50.
[66] Holme, 1901, p. 50.

Despite his lavish praise for the virtues of the native potter, Holme was aware of the modern potter's dilemma, which was how to acknowledge the past yet still progress forward

> 'The work, then before us is to discover that which is refined and legitimate in the potter's craft, in order that we may thoroughly master the nature of its excellencies and apply the principles to the manufacture of those objects for which there is a demand.' [67]

Holme again looked to Japan, offering the tea ceremony and its aestheticisation of folk pottery as an example. With the confidence of the 19th century European connoisseur he distinguished between native pottery of Japan and the self-consciously made pottery inspired by it.

> 'Village pottery, however good, does not entirely fulfil the demands of cultured taste. A higher order of intellect than is usually to be found in the peasant craftsman is necessary for the production of works of art;'[68]

Significantly, he placed the connoisseur as the central figure in the tea ceremony because the pottery was commissioned 'under the influence and guidance of men of the highest knowledge and taste in artistic matters'.[69]

In *The Potter's Art* Holme applied Ruskin and Morris's theories of design and craft to Oriental pottery and laid the foundation for studio pottery's development. He advanced a highly cultured and aestheticised appreciation of peasant pottery from England, France, Spain and Egypt and particularly Japan. This was a critical endorsement of vernacular pottery, predating Leach and Yanagi's *Mingei* theory of the 1920s and Fry's Formalist acclaim of

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[67] Holme, 1901, p. 50.
[68] Holme, 1901, p. 50.

mediaeval English pottery in 1914 . Holme wrote 'It is from wares made solely for native use, and especially from those produced under the influence of the *chajin* in Japan that lessons of value may be drawn.'[70] The relevance of Holme's ideas to later arguments on studio pottery was that aesthetic appreciation was not a neutral process but should be informed by a set of ethical guidelines based on utility, honesty of workmanship and lack of ego. He wrote of tea wares

> 'it is these wares which are ethically the most perfect, following as they naturally do in every process of their manufacture the laws most essential to their being.' [71]

To understand Holme's idea of Japanese pottery as the continuation of an unbroken peasant tradition, it is necessary to look at earlier theories that propounded the virtue of Oriental craft. The anthropologist Brian Moeran, and historians Watanabe and Kikuchi, for example, have written extensively about the cultural exchange between the Orient and Occident and how Morris' ideas and the Gothic revival of the late 19th century were central to the initial romanticisation of Japanese culture. Moeran states that 'The whole idea of 'folk art' first received public recognition in Japan in the late 1920s, when Yanagi published his first book, *The Way of Crafts*'[72], and argues that Yanagi's critical lineage went back to late 19th century Arts and Crafts concerns, writing 'Yanagi's theory of *mingei* was not an independent development, but owed

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[69] Holme, 1901, p. 50.
[70] Holme, 1901, p. 50.
[71] Holme, 1901, p. 50.
[72] Moeran, B., *Folk Art Potters of Japan : Beyond an Anthropology of Japan*, Richmond, Curzon, 1997, p. 24.

much to the work of William Morris.'[73] He notes the similarities between the two men, for both their

> 'themes centred on the new 'commercialism' and all the 'evils' that went with it : the division of labour and breakdown of co-operation as a result of the introduction of machinery, which separated man ever further from his real place in nature,'[74]

Watanabe argues that the Orient was important to the Gothic revival because it apparently maintained a lifestyle which had changed little since the mediaeval period. As the furniture designer William Burgess wrote, Japan 'presents us with so many articles of domestic use, and [is] so nearly allied to the Middle Ages'[75]

Although Holme identified the specific characteristics of Japanese pottery Yanagi admired, it would be mistaken to regard these ideas as the same. *Mingei* was a Japanese adaptation of Morris's ideas and incorporated ideas of Confucianism and religious beliefs from Shinto. Despite the similarity of Holme's and Yanagi's approach to pottery they are products of two different centuries and cultures. Holme's views were fashioned by the first phase of Japonisme established in the 19th century whereas 'Orientalism' as Kukuchi claims, was a Western construction of the Orient[76].

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[73] Moeran, 1997, p. 40.
[74] Moeran, 1997, p. 37.
[75] William Burgess 1862, quoted in Watanabe, 1997, p. 167.
[76] Kikuchi, Y., 'The Oriental Orientalism of Yanagi Sôestu and *mingei* Theory', *Obscure Objects of Desire*, 'ed.' Harrod, T., London, Crafts C., 1997, p. 78.

6.4 Charles Holme *The Cha - no - yu Pottery of Japan*[77]

The reverence for Chinese pottery was so widespread during the 1910s that it overshadowed coverage of all other Oriental ceramics. Articles and publications on Japanese and Korean pottery were in the minority and if it had not been for the attention drawn to Japanese pottery by Holme and Leach during the 20s and 30s it would have been even more marginalised. *The Potter's Art* was followed by Holme's article *The Cha - No - Yu Pottery of Japan* for the *Studio* in 1909. Written in a relaxed manner, fifteen pages long and copiously illustrated, Holme's appreciation of Japanese pottery and the tea ceremony became the key article on Japanese ceramics to be published in the pre-war period. Unlike the inspirational tone which he took in *The Potter's Art* in 1914 Holme provided a straightforward historical overview of tea ceremony pottery. The article was published in the same year that Hobson began his epic series 'The Wares of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties' and the congruity of publication is indicative of the re-evaluation of Oriental pottery that was taking place at the end of the first decade.

In *The Cha - No - Yu Pottery of Japan* Holme provided a detailed history of Japanese tea wares. He traced the character and progression of Japanese pottery from the middle ages to the modern era, explained the differences between the major kiln sites and gave accounts of the first individual potters Toshiro, Kenzan and Ninsei and the Raku family. Holme demonstrated a sympathetic

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[77] Tea Ceremony wares

appreciation of the asymmetrical, partially glazed and irregular forms of the pottery.

> 'in spite of the common absence of applied decoration, individuality may be traced in almost every example we take in hand. Differences in the character of the clay, differences in form or in the treatment of enamelled glazes continually strike us.'[78]

Commenting on the indifference of Western collectors to Japanese tea wares Holme speculated that this neglect was caused by the fact that it was 'apparently humble and generally unornamented ware ... its unpretentiousness and simplicity.'[79] This was in contrast to the more desirable fields of Japanese painting, decorated pottery, lacquer, carved ivory, swords and armour. Holme felt that the rarefied aesthetic needed to appreciate Japanese tea wares was beyond the remit of the 'amateur ... collector of old "Nankin" or of "*famille verte* or *famille rose*"'[80] and suggested that their rarity in the West was because they were so esteemed in Japan. The notion that Western appreciation of Eastern art was unlocked by an informed aesthetic was also cited later, when the early Chinese stoneware, previously so unappreciated, was shown at the Burlington Fine Arts Club.

Holme's most emphatic point was a plea for autonomy for Japanese pottery. The issue of autonomy was a key factor in Holme's interest in Japanese ceramics because his regard was not for the work in isolation, but as a composite of cultural, religious and aesthetic factors. He argued that the social and cultural differences between Japan and China had placed the two

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[78] Holme, C., 'The Cha-No-Yu Pottery of Japan', *The Studio*, Vol. 46, 1909, p. 33.
[79] Holme, 1909, p. 29.

countries at 'variance'. This was in contrast to Basil Gray's statement that Japan and China were normally viewed as one: 'It was however seldom before 1914 ... that Chinese art was viewed through Japanese spectacles.'[81] Holme gave a further account of the civilising effects of 'Zenism - a branch of Buddhism'[82] and the teachings of the philosopher Laotze in the 13th century. Holme continued to introduce ideas that would have a profound influence on British studio pottery. He argued that the mix of Japanese art and elevating religion could act as a spiritual restorative for the alienated Western soul and 'inculcate the advantages of simplicity, of gentleness, of humility'[83] and the 'exaltation of spirit above mere naturalism.'[84] As well as establishing an ethical dimension for pottery in *The Potter's Art,* Holme was the first critic to establish a spiritual dimension in modern pottery practice by revealing the connection between the tea ceremony and Zen religion.

With his portrayal of Japan as a thriving and civilised country Holme was the first 20th century critic to establish a continuity between historical and contemporary Oriental pottery. The image of Japan as a sophisticated society that had nurtured a highly aestheticised connoisseurship of the tea ceremony over a four hundred year period gave a picture of a culture that was still connected to its past. Despite Japan's exoticism, its culture, art and social structure were still recognisable and offered an alternative model for Western artistic practice.

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[80] Holme, 1909, p. 29.
[81] Gray, 1972, p. 21.
[82] Holme, 1909, p. 32.
[83] Holme, 1909, p. 42.
[84] Holme, 1909, p. 32.

Although Holme's ideas were progressive, his understanding of Japanese pottery was framed by 19th century views. His emphasis on morality, simplicity and nature was a mix of Arts and Crafts values informed by Aesthetic appreciation. In Japan, he wrote

> 'Luxury was turned to refinement, the abasement of self was taught as the highest virtue, simplicity as its chief charm, Laws of art were derived from a close study of the life of nature, and an intimate sympathy with it in all its phases. ... in its exhalation of spirit above mere naturalism. Never, perhaps, in the world's history had the doctrine of high thought and simple living become so materialised as under the influence of that cult.'[85]

Holme was not able to impart a widespread understanding of Japanese ceramics single-handedly, and early Chinese pottery would take precedence in the English press coverage of ceramics over the first few decades of the century. Japanese pottery did not enjoy the benefits of institutional support, museum curators or important collectors such as George Eumorfopolous. Although collectors of Japanese pottery were rare, certain individuals did support some Japanese potters. Wyndham Lewis, for example, included the Japanese potter Koetsu under the 'BLESS' category in his Vorticist publication *Blast 2*[86] while Staite Murray discussed individual Japanese pots in *Pottery From An Artist's Point of View*[87]. Wider support would materialise later and Holme's discussion of the 'unique collection' of Kenzan's bowls owned by Frank Brangwyn, Bernard Leach's teacher at the Slade was a portent. An anonymous article *Some Recent Developments in the Pottery Ware of the*

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[85] Holme, 1909, p. 32.
[86] Lewis, W., *Blast 2*, London, John Lane, 1915, p. 98.
[87] Staite Murray, W., 'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View', *Artwork*, Vol. 1., No. 4., May.-Aug. 1924.

Martin Brothers[88] (1908) was almost certainly written by Holme. In a comparatively lacklustre way it reiterated Holme's general views on pottery and discusses the Martin Brothers work in the context of Japanese techniques and processes. Although none of the later studio potters publicly acknowledged Holme's writing, the prominence of *The Studio* and his position as publisher and editor make it likely they were aware of his critical writings.

6.5 Antiquarian responses to Japanese & Korean pottery

Throughout 1910 and 1911 Holme published a series of articles on contemporary Japanese art, covering the disciplines of painting, textiles, wood and ivory carving, temples, treasures and metalwork. These articles were written by H. Shuggio and contributed directly from Japan. *Japanese Art and Artists of To-Day. - II. Ceramic Artists* opened with the statement that 'Japan is as full of potters now as it has been since the very early days'[89]. This poorly written and conceived article conformed to the Japanese hierarchical ranking of the time, describing and illustrating the work in order of its importance, starting with the Imperial Court potter Miyagawa Kozan and ending with a list of over thirty names given in the style of an awards ceremony.

Limited coverage of Japanese related events also occurred in the wider press, and the *Athenaeum* reviewed the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition at White City.

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[88] Anon (Charles Holme), 'Some Recent Developments in the Pottery Ware of the Martin Brothers'.
[89] Shugio, H., 'Japanese Art and Artists of To-Day. - II. Ceramic Artists.', *The Studio*, Vol. 50,

The overall response was one of disappointment at the modern work and regret at the lack of examples of older or folk art. It 'hardly satisfies the expectations ... as the one country in which, in modern times, art has been in some sort indigenous.'[90] The reviewer concluded gloomily 'that contact with Western civilisation has ruined a national tradition without satisfactorily replacing it.' In a later review of Chinese and Japanese paintings the *Athenaeum* revealed a wider shift in the appreciation of Oriental art which laid 'stress not, as has often been done, on the differences between Eastern and Western art, but on their essential unity.' [91] The article went on to discuss the popularisation of Japanese prints 'it is from this source that European art of the next generation is most likely to be fertilised, but we see few signs as yet that the process has passed the initial stage of vague aspiration.' The interests of the collector were catered for in the *Connoisseur* with an eight page article on a collection of Japanese pottery. Unfortunately the text consists of less than a quarter of a page with illustrations filling the rest but it provides an insight into the collector's mentality for, referring to a forthcoming catalogue he was preparing, the author wrote 'the owner is engaged in making a somewhat elaborate catalogue, illustrated with water-colour drawings of his own, done at odd moments of leisure.'[92]

Korean pottery, while occasioning general references, had only two articles devoted to it during the 1910s. The first was translated from the French in the

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No 210, Aug., 1910.
[90] 'The Japan-British Exhibition', *The Athenaeum*, no. 4309, May 28, 1910, p. 647.
[91] 'Oriental Art', *The Athenaeum*, No. 4313, June 25, 1910, p. 767.
[92] 'Sir William van Horne's Collection of Japanese Pottery', *The Connoisseur*, Vol. XXXIV, Sept-Dec 1912, p. 9-14.

Burlington and attempted to chart Korea's various dynasties and foreign invasions. Scholarly research on Korean pottery was rudimentary at this time and the author discussed the complicated provenance and the ebb and flow of styles and influences between China, Japan and Korea. The donation of a collection of pottery to the V & A in 1919 prompted a reference to Korean ceramics in *The Connoisseur* seven years later. But even by the end of the decade, Korean pottery was ranked a poor third in public awareness, although *The Connoisseur* described it as 'a valuable addition to the museum as including types of Oriental ceramic art little known in Europe.'[93]

Japanese pottery finished the decade with a stronger if varied public identity. In contrast to the rural idyll of peasant workers portrayed by Charles Holme, two articles were published which revealed the complexity of Japanese culture. *The Studio* devoted a three page article to a sale of pottery which celebrated the confident state of Japanese connoisseurship. A collection of three hundred works of art was sold for the total of £393,000 [94] with a tea caddy realising a price of £10,000, an extremely high figure by British standards. In *The Connoisseur* W. G. Blaikie Murdoch revealed a rather unromantic view of Japan writing that it was 'True that much of modern Tokio is painfully like Chicago, and that much of it has a strong resemblance to Glasgow.'[95] The charismatic pairing of Leach with Shoji Hamada would add further layers to

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[93] '"Catalogue of the Le Blond Collection of Corean Pottery in the Victoria and Albert Museum" by Arthur Rackham.', The Connoisseur, Vol. LIII, No. 210, Feb. 1919, p 119.
[94] Harado-Jiro,*The Studio*, Vol. LXXII, No. 298, Jan 1918, p. 168.
[95] Blaikie Murdoch, W, 'The Imperial Museum Tokyo', *The Connoisseur* , Vol. LI, No. 201, May-Aug., 1918, p. 4.

the complex identity of Japan in Britain and continue to fuel a preoccupation that would augment the emergence of studio pottery.

This chapter has examined changing Antiquarian attitudes to Oriental pottery during the 1910s. The surge of interest in early Oriental pottery stretched the limits of critical appreciation beyond painted porcelain to include the stoneware of the Tang and Sung dynasties. This expansion initiated by collectors and curators presented critics such as Fry and Bell with new material at a prescient time (as Chapter 4 has discussed) and enabled them to incorporate Chinese pottery into their pan-cultural Modernist view of art. Within a period of ten years, curators, collectors and critics had placed early Chinese pottery at the centre of ceramic debate, although this was still mainly confined to historical debate. The groups had not yet melded together and no ceramic designer makers emerged to fulfil Charles Holme's visionary ideas. Omega as a vital force for ceramics had failed and the mass of critical and Antiquarian study left a vacuum waiting to be filled. The contrast between the insularity of ceramic debate in the 1910s and the vitality of fine art typified by the exhibition of 'virtually the entire canon of modern art'[96] between 1910 and 1914 accentuated the cultural, geographic and time difference between early Oriental and contemporary English pottery. Chapter 8 will discuss the small number of potters who, working independently of industry in England, attempted to incarnate this critical flux of new and old ideas within their work.

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[96] Gruetzner Robins, 1997, p. 7.

Chapter 7

The Vernacular Revival

> '...concerns with disappearing customs, national identity, the unchanged forms of expression of an indigenous master race, traditionally usually agriculturally based, and their integration into mainstream culture prevailed in progressive intellectual circles at the turn of the century.'[1]

In *National Romanticism : Vernacular Expression in Turn-Of-The-Century Design* Nicola Gordon Bowe describes some of the great preoccupations of inter-war studio pottery. This chapter will discuss the theories and chart the precepts that, from 1910, led to the emergence of a neo-vernacular tradition in studio pottery in the 1920s.

The sources for this neo-vernacular movement are, as ever, complex and rather than emerging from a single group, constitute an accumulation of ideas and interests. Gordon Bowe defined this turn-of-the-century Romantic vernacularism as consisting of 'the Arts and Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, national forms of Revivalism and the roots of Modernism'.[2] With the exception of 'Revivalism' these sources have already been discussed in relation to the formation of Modernist attitudes to pottery and interest in early Oriental stonewares, with the addition of Antiquarianism. Although a continuum of this process, the ideas that generated the neo-

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[1] Bowe, N. Gordon, 'ed.', 'National Romanticism : Vernacular Expression in Turn-Of-The-Century Design', *Art and the National Dream*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1993, p.7.

vernacular revival were not just theoretical debates about remote countries, but involved the cultural roots of the critics and commentators themselves. Self-identity, nationalist concerns and issues of pride permeated discussion of English vernacular art. The result was that provincial pottery traditions from Devon and Staffordshire were re-located to the centre of cultural life, and vernacular pottery came to symbolise a particular form of romantic pastoralism whereby the English temperament was represented through the 'homely, and unsophisticated'[3] aesthetics of slipware. Nationhood was literally embodied in the robustness of simple clays and glaze - 'home grown and racy of the soil.'[4]

7.1 Vernacularism

To appreciate how, after 200 years of decline, rural earthenware pottery came to represent quintessential Englishness it is necessary to examine the rise of vernacularism. In *Pioneers of Modern Design,* Nicholas Pevsner wrote of the dramatic social changes and growth of industrial manufacture in the 19th century

> 'In the midst of this breathless race, no time was left to refine all those innumerable innovations which swamped producer and consumer. With the extinction of the medieval craftsman, the shape and appearance of all products were left to the uneducated manufacturer.'[5]

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[2] Gordon Bowe, 1993, p. 7.
[3] Hobson, R. L., 'Catalogue Introduction, Early English Earthenware, London, The Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1914, p. ix.
[4] Hobson, 1914, p. ix.
[5] Pevsner , N., *Pioneers of Modern Design,* New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1949. p. 24.

As the first country to industrialise, Britain was also the first to face a post-industrial cultural fallout. With the emergence of the Arts and Crafts movement and the Gothic revival, craft came to represent an indigenous pre-industrial world, fuelled by a highly romanticised vision of rural pre-industrial life. As MacCarthy writes 'The belief in Englishness was essential to the ideas for the New Fellowship so bound up with the craft movement in its back-to-the-land period in the 1890s and early 1900s'.[6]

In his essay *A Slipware Dish by Samuel Malkin*[7] Darron Dean examined the historiography of vernacular design. Although the term vernacular was associated with architecture it then was used by Gilbert Scott for objects. Dean suggests that Gilbert Scott (the designer of the Albert Memorial and St Pancras Station) was the first to apply the term vernacular to design in 1857 after which it 'became almost synonymous with what has been called the 'English rural myth.'[8] He discusses the construction of this rural myth through literature and argues

> 'In this way vernacular traditions are presented in a historical and physical vacuum, undefined and inadequately conceptualised for understanding the various forms of material culture they produced.'[9]

Many references in early 20th century critical literature support Dean's view that vernacular English pottery was presented as a stable continuum. In

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[6] MacCarthy, F., 'The Inheritance of Diffidence : Crafts in Britain between the Wars', Howes, J., & Coatts, M., 'eds.', *Craft History One*, Bath, Combines Arts, 1988, p. 38.
[7] Dean, D., 'A Slipware Dish by Samuel Malkin : An Analysis of Vernacular Design, *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 7 No. 3 1994.
[8] Dean, 1994, p. 153.
[9] Dean, 1994, p. 153.

Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read's *English Pottery*, the definitive inter-war book on the subject, Rackham states

> 'In every case the objects were made to supply an entirely local demand; they were not articles of export, but utensils for use in the humble surroundings in which they were produced.... we believe that the decorative elements which give to such similarities their appearance of convincingness [sic] are elements naturally evolved wherever the materials came into the hands of craftsmen competent to use them.[10]

Dean's examination is constructed within the analytical framework of 'material culture'.[11] His analysis of the pottery is based on patterns of consumption and 'commodity' value, informed by an historical and social outlook. Through this he challenges the late 19th century ideas of the 'rural myth.' Although the perceived aesthetic purity and rural associations that vernacular pottery assumed was an important factor in its revival, an equally important motivation which Dean does not fully acknowledge was the rejection of 19th century industrial values.

On aesthetic grounds this represented an antidote to decorative Victorian taste, the 'unornamental "ornaments"' [12] condemned by Holme. For Modernist critics such as Fry and Bell a form of primitive pottery which made no concessions to norms of aesthetic beauty was an original example of what Goldwater has described as primitivising through expression, material and technique. It was also seen as a rejection of the immorality of mass production and rampant commercialism, 'the modern factory products

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[10] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 21.
[11] Dean, 1994, p. 165.
[12] Holme, C, 'The Potter's Art.-Object Lessons from the Far East', *The Studio*, Vol. XXIV, No 103, Oct. 1910, p. 48.

[which] were made almost entirely for gain '[13] which were condemned first by the Arts and Crafts movement and later in the critical writings of Fry.

While Fry and Holme were international in their outlook, Antiquarian interest in English vernacular pottery was often decidedly Nationalist. Apart from a pride in industrial innovation ('many processes were invented in this country'[14]), the history of English pottery up to this point had been presented as that of an industry indebted to continental invention 'the imitation of the leading foreign types has been, at all times, the main object.'[15] This ranged from John Dwight's emulation of German stonewares and the Dutch Elers brothers copies of Chinese red stonewares, to English copies of Delft and Meissen porcelain. Even the Keeper of Ceramics at the V & A, Bernard Rackham titled his chapters in *English Pottery* on the grounds of national identity as late as 1924 with titles such as 'The English Tradition', 'Foreign Strains : Maiolica and Delft' and 'Foreign Strains : Stoneware'. Slipware pottery was seen to have no significant precedents and the most important early collector M. L. Solon celebrated its 'essentially national' character by claiming 'that it is only in England that such attractive effects have been obtained by the use of such simple means.' If slipware was to be celebrated on nationalist grounds then its simplicity, lack of sophistication and vitality had to be celebrated as virtues. Ironically modern research now reveals that slipware was not indigenous to England. Dean writes it was 'a

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[13] *Omega Workshops* p. 4.
[14] Hayden, H., *Chats on English Earthenware*, London, Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1909, p. 36.
[15] Solon, M. L., preface *'Quaint Old English Pottery'*, London, Sherratt and Hughes, 1909, p. xiii.

Dutch import of the early seventeenth century'[16] while Hildyard states 'Influence from the Continent—from the imported pottery and the potters of the Netherlands, Northern France and Germany—is discernible in the first slipwares which emerged about 1600.'[17]

Finally, slipware was important in establishing individual identities for what was generally considered anonymous pottery. During the 1920s studio potters such as Leach would build on the individually signed plates made by potters such as Thomas Toft and Ralph Simpson but even at the early stage of the vernacular revival it was apparent that collectors valued this work. Signed and dated slipware pottery may been part of an English rural myth but these individual potters became a type of folk hero, establishing tangible identities in a medium normally devoid of individuals.

7.2 Critical responses to the vernacular revival

Vernacular English pottery had been collected in major museums for some time, but it was a subject that received relatively little curatorial attention until the turn of the century. It could be argued that collectors as a group prompted 20th century appreciation of vernacular pottery, the 'collecting brotherhood'[18] as M. L. Solon described them. Motivated by the excitement of a new type of pottery to collect after other areas had been exhausted, the fact that this pottery was inexpensive, and the ease of access to new sources

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[16] Dean, 1994, p. 165.
[17] Hildyard, 1999, p. 16.
[18] Solon, 1909, p. xi.

in the home market led to this hobby being derisively likened to 'stamp-collecting'[19] by Clive Bell. Collectors such as Solon and Lomax may have popularised this work through writing books about it but, as with the appreciation of early Oriental pottery, later critics validated these advances. Nevertheless it is without doubt that a major re-evaluation of early English pottery took place at the beginning of the 20th century.

One of the most influential ceramic writers of the last quarter of the 19th century and first two decades of the 20th century was M. L. Solon, the collector, author and father figure of early English pottery who appreciated Early English pottery before most. His definitive book, *The Art of the Old English Potter*, was written in 1883. [20] A fifteen page article 'The Solon Collection of Pre-Wedgwood English Pottery ' based on his personal collection was published in *The Connoisseur* in 1901.[21] The article provided an insight into what was generally regarded as very unfashionable work. Solon specifically wrote his article for an audience of collectors whom he described as 'the mighty phalanx ... who have still much to learn on the subject'[22] . He acknowledged the lowly standing of these early pots.

> 'Disregarded or neglected, they have not yet gained admittance into the chief museums and galleries - particularly abroad, where they are absolutely ignored - in which, we feel sure, choice examples of them would figure with credit.'[23]

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[19] Anon (Bell, C.), 'Early English Earthenware', *The Athenaeum*, No 4494, Dec. 14, 1913, p. 710.
[20] Solon, M. L., *The Art of the Old English Potter*, London & Derby, 1883.
[21] The use of the prefix 'pre- Wedgwood' in the title is a reminder of the prevalent view that 18th century pottery was the aesthetic benchmark by which all other English pottery should be compared.
[22] Solon, M. L., 'The Solon Collection of Pre-Wedgwood English Pottery'', parts 1 & 2, *The Connoisseur*, Vol. 1, December 1901, pp. 244-251, Vol. 2, February 1902, pp. 77-85.
[23]Solon, 1901,p. 244.

As with many articles written for collectors, financial considerations featured prominently. Solon acknowledged that 'English pottery happens to be one of the last remaining fields of research ... with a fair prospect of [the collector] turning his labour of exploration to good profit'. However, unlike the majority of collection based articles of the early 20th century Solon's interpretation rose above mere commercial evaluation to stress the historical and aesthetic value of these creations and 'the important place they should occupy in the general history of art.'

In his article Solon passed relatively quickly over medieval pottery, although his writing was laced with references to the pots and 'rare jugs, covered with green glaze'. His predilection for medieval ware was hindered by its scarcity, and he regretted the past destruction of so many examples. Solon attributed the decline of this pottery to a lack of domestic interest and the availability of technically superior foreign imports.

> 'To the indifference often shewn by the Englishman for the productions of his native country may be ascribed the disappearance of the earthen vessels which filled the houses of their ancestors during the Tudor and Elizabethan periods.'[24]

Solon stressed the Englishness and natural qualities of slipware ingredients 'these native clays and metallic ores, made use of almost in their natural state' and argued that the purity of such materials matched the purity of the potters themselves. Such work, he maintained, became a physical manifestation of the virtues of modesty, anonymity and innocence, echoing

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[24] Solon, 1901, p. 248.

the Arts and Crafts movement's concern for 'truth to material'. One particularity of slipware was that it was often signed by the maker, or used to commemorate or celebrate personal events such as weddings and other festive occasions, since slip trailing under glaze provided a calligraphic medium. The cult of the individual potter was an important factor in the appreciation of slipware and the signing of individual names such as Thomas, Ralph and Charles Toft, William Taylor and Ralph Simpson in the 17th century provided a rare authentication of authorship and date. Solon gives a rather offhand account of Thomas Toft, the early 17th century potter who later became an icon in the revival of English slipware.

> 'A common potter of no better or worse ability than the majority of his mates, has, however, made his name almost famous in ceramic history by affixing it very frequently upon the works of his hand.'[25]

Although he praised 'the decorative instinct' and the soundness and integrity of slipware, such self-aggrandisement by Toft and others did not appeal to Solon. He preferred the 'modest order' of the anonymous earthenware pots. Using language which reinforced the ideals of honest artisanship he wrote that in 'the untutored hand of the potter, bent on embellishing his work ... we find a technical soundness coupled with an originality of treatment.'[26] The anonymity of mediaeval pottery was a disadvantage in terms of its financial value however, particularly when compared with signed work. A decade later, in 1910, Roger Fry's celebration of medieval pottery as a 'primitive' art would reverse the status of medieval pottery and slipware. By the 20s, however, Staffordshire potters such as Toft

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[25] Solon , 1902, p.78

and Simpson were elevated to heroic status by studio potters such as Leach and Cardew.

During this period, *Chats on Early English Earthenware*[27] by Arthur Hayden (one of a series of inexpensive books on art) was published. Out of 500 pages, only 6 were devoted to Medieval and slipware pottery. It received a lukewarm review in *The Burlington* from the British Museum curator R. L. Hobson. While noting that there was a growing interest in the 'minor' arts and a public 'anxious for information in an easily assimilated and inexpensive form'[28] Hobson dismissed the book because, in his opinion, it only ' condensed' existing information. *Quaint Old English Pottery* by the collector Charles Lomax was published in the same year (1909). Lomax added little to the critical debate on early pottery, simply expressing the evolutionary view that medieval pottery was a crude precursor to later and more important work.

> 'The potters [in] medieval times appear to have been content to produce crockery of simple form, and to have largely confined their efforts in the way of decoration to crude designs ... Gradual improvements were made throughout the Middle Ages, till at length we find the potters assuming more elegant shapes, and attempts being made to relieve plainness by applying ornaments of various kinds and the more frequent use of coloured slips.'[29]

The book inadvertently had an impact on the neo-vernacular revival for according to Watson 'Leach's attention had first been drawn to the English

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[26] Solon , 1902, p.77
[27] Hayden, 1909.
[28] Hobson, R. L., book review 'Chats on English Earthenware', *The Burlington*, No LXXVI, Vol. XV, July 1909, p. 251.

tradition in the book *Quaint Old English Pottery* ... which he had seen while in Japan'.[30]

A rather more coherent argument for the critical re-evaluation of early pottery was advanced by Solon in the extensive preface which he penned for Lomax's book. Solon acknowledged the difficulty of judging such work by contemporary standards:

> 'We may easily understand that anyone not familiar with their barbarian appearance may feel somewhat disconcerted when he looks at the representations of these uncouth vessels so far removed from all that is considered, by the collecting brotherhood, as the standard of ceramic excellence.'[31]

Enlarging upon the themes of his *Connoisseur* article of eight years earlier Solon assembled a set of criteria for the appreciation of slipware. Primarily he viewed the purity of the work as its redeeming feature. From the innocence of its makers to its quintessential English nature, he presented the pottery as pure in spirit and character. He turned the idiosyncratic nature of slipware to advantage and rather than apologising for its rudimentary materials and distinctive trailed and marbled decoration, presented it as unique and authentic work made by English innocents. Written before the advent of Fry's concept of primitive art, Solon, as before in his article of 1901, drew upon the critical language of the Arts and Crafts with its celebration of decorative, mediaeval artisanship

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[29] Lomax. C. J., 'Quaint Old English Pottery, London, Sherrat and Hughes, Manchester, 1909, p. 5.
[30] Watson, 1990, p18
[31] Solon, 1909, p. xi - xii.

> 'no distant imitations of those seen on works of a higher order, but resulted from the original conception of what an uneducated artisan considered as the highest form of decorative workmanship.'[32]

Solon reinforced the aesthetic probity of this pottery in biblical terms, writing of 'original conception' and 'temptation.' The fact that it was 'a true labour of love' placed the pottery above criticism for 'the sincerity of the effort captures our sympathy and dispels all temptation to criticise.' This discussion of the work as pure and uncorrupted was not only an aesthetic question but tied the work into issues of English national identity.

Press coverage of early English pottery in the first few years of the 1910s continued to be directed at the collector's market where issues of national identity were still prominent. *The Athenaeum's* review of *Quaint Old English Pottery* acknowledged these concerns in the first paragraph, quoting Solon's claim that the book would be of interest to collectors, 'especially in foreign countries'[33] while *The Burlington* described the book as 'a valuable addition to the literature on this interesting branch of native art.'[34]

An article *Early English Wares and their Design* published in *The Connoisseur* in 1910 emphasised the designs. They '... possess originality and individuality, which cannot be attributed in the same degree to the Early English porcelains'[35] In contrast, John Dwight's 17th century stonewares were seen as 'inspired by the desire to imitate and compete with German

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[32] Solon, 1909, p. xii.
[33] 'Quaint Old English Pottery', *The Athenaeum*, No 4325, September 17, 1910.
[34] C.L., 'Quaint Old English Pottery', *The Burlington*, No XCI, Vol. XVIII, October 1910, p. 64.

and Flemish stonewares'. Both types of pottery were credited with possessing a direct quality due to the methods of forming them and the nature of the materials, but the slipware took precedence in authenticity, for Scott described Toft and Wright's pottery as 'entirely original, evolving from the inherent nature of the medium.'

By 1912, two years after the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, a change in tone towards early English pottery began to emerge. In 1912 *The Burlington* noted the sale of L. M. Solon's private collection of '645 specimens carefully described with notes by Mr Solon himself '[36]. Capitalising on the growing interest in early individual potters, a biography of *The Wood Family of Burslem* was published in 1913, and R. L. Hobson's review noted 'If the broad outlines of our ceramic history are now fairly clearly defined, there still remain many gaps to fill'[37]. Instead of apologetic references to the crudity or barbarian appearance of the pottery, the virtues of slipware were being celebrated. The normally conservative *The Connoisseur* confidently declared it as a 'primitive art'.[38] With an eye for minor detail and provenance typical of collecting articles from this period, G. Woolliscroft Rhead adopted the language of Fry's Post-Impressionism for his article on the famous collection of the other great collector of the time, J. W. L. Glaisher. Woolliscroft Rhead described the qualities of slipware in

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[35] Scott, E. N., 'Early English Wares and their Design', *The Connoisseur*, Vol. XXVII, Sept.-Dec. 1910 , p. 167.
[36] 'Reviews and Notices', *The Burlington*, No CXCVI, Vol. XXII, Nov. 1912, p. 125.
[37] Hobson, R. L., review of 'The Wood Family of Burslem', The Burlington, No CXXIV, Vol. XX, July 1913, p. 241.
[38] Woolliscroft Rhead, G., 'The Collection of Slip Wares formed by Dr. J. W. L. Glaisher, F. R. S.', *The Connoisseur*, Vol. XXXIII, No 130, June 1912, p. 75.

unreservedly positive tones - 'that freshness and naïveté characteristic of all primitive art.' Descriptions of the potters as 'uninstructed peasants' played on Solon's notion of purity, and, like Fry's writing on French Post-Impressionist painters, Woolliscroft emphasised the expressive character of the makers themselves. A product of 'the spontaneous expression of the artists' own personality' their work had 'strength and virility', 'sound artistic judgement' and a 'true sense of decorative effect.' In this extract Woolliscroft Rhead approximated Fry's Formalist principles of good design and accorded Toft's plates the title of primitive art.

> 'these dishes ... though grotesque to the last degree, fulfil[s] all the conditions of good design, the all-important principle of even distribution being admirably observed, the storiation achieved with that naïve directness characteristic of all primitive art.'[39]

The extent to which Woolliscroft Rhead elevated such work was demonstrated by his unexpected comparison of early 17th century slipware with esoteric Japanese 'Hikime Kagihana' painting. The claim of primitive status for slipware was a critical breakthrough for collecting articles of this period while the suggestion that it shared a similarity to the highly cultivated field of Oriental painting was a form of flattery unimaginable prior to the first Post-Impressionist exhibition.

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[39]Woolliscroft Rhead, 1912, p.79

7.3 The exhibition 'Early English Earthenware'

The status and prominence of early English pottery within collecting and curatorial circles was dramatically changed by an exhibition mounted by the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1914. In much the same way as the Society's 1910 exhibition of early Chinese pottery initiated the first critical evaluation of Tang and Sung dynasty pottery, so its exhibition of *'Early English Earthenware'* heralded a re-appraisal of early English work that extended beyond the small circle of ceramic connoisseurs into the world of contemporary art. An extensive selection of pots was exhibited, ranging from mediaeval earthenware to early English stonewares of the late 17th century. The total of 647 pieces shown included 75 pieces of mediaeval earthenware, 153 of slipware, 163 English Delft pots from Bristol, Lambeth and Liverpool, 187 saltglaze and 69 stoneware pots by John Dwight, the Elers brothers and their contemporaries. *'Early English Earthenware'* was supported by an illustrated catalogue rather than a series of accompanying articles published in *The Burlington* and two authoritative figures were chosen to write the introduction, the curator R. L. Hobson, who was responsible for the general introduction and section on stoneware, and the scholar and an important collector of early pottery J. W. Glaisher who wrote on slipware.

Hobson's attitude to this early work was characteristically measured. His inclination to write descriptively about pottery and classify by process and material resulted in a conservative assessment, not suited to the strengths of

this unsophisticated pottery. Hobson seemed to view early English pottery as worthy but crude in comparison to more refined European wares. His essay was limited in scope, and only used two positive adjectives 'noble' and 'elemental'[40] to describe the work. Like Solon, he viewed this work as displaying a distinctive English character, but whereas Solon found a corresponding vigour and energy, Hobson found little compensation: 'speaking generally, the characteristics of our mediaeval pottery may be summed up as follows : Body of rough texture, and red, buff, or dark gray tint ; sometimes unglazed, but as a rule, partially coated with transparent lead glaze.'[41] Hobson reinforced the prevailing view that the main significance of this early work was its existence as a precedent to later, more refined pottery; it was to be acknowledged, not celebrated. His opening remarks set the condescending tone:

> 'The work of the old English potter, as illustrated in this Exhibition, is for the most part a purely native product, a rustic craft, home grown and racy of the soil. It is quaint, homely, and unsophisticated, and, if we except the phenomenon of Dwight's figures, it is without any lofty pretensions, but intended rather to supply the needs and to ornament the houses of simple folk. The mediaeval pottery was made for the kitchen and the cellar, the slipware for the ale-house and the cottage Delft is a cheap substitute for the plate and Chinese porcelain, and though the Staffordshire potters in the last fifty years of our period catered for the tea-table, the decorations of their wares, quaint and original as they are, were but the children of a rustic imagination untrammelled by the rules of art.
>
> On the other hand, some of the Delft and the finer stonewares made in London, and in the large towns of Bristol and Liverpool, are imbued with foreign ideas and betray a more cosmopolitan spirit.'[42]

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[40] Hobson, R. L. & Glaisher, J. W., catalogue '*Early English Earthenware*', London, Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1914, p. xviii.
[41] Hobson & Glaisher, 1914, p. x
[42] Hobson & Glaisher, 1914, p. ix

In contrast to his lukewarm response to early pottery, Hobson followed conventional taste and applauded mediaeval encaustic tiles. The combination of ecclesiastical influence and architectural context was a powerful influence on Hobson's assessment and he described the tiles as

> 'a class apart. They belong to the domain of Gothic architecture with the splendid spirit of which they are deeply imbued. At their best they take a high place in the art of the Middle Ages, besides the carved woodwork and stained glass windows of the Gothic buildings.'[43]

Hobson kept his critical response to a minimum. His description of the early earthenwares may have echoed Fry's description of primitive art, but Hobson studiously avoided wider contextualisation and contemporary references.

While more sensitive to the unsophisticated nature of early earthenwares J. W. Glaisher's writing was also limited to description and discussion of provenance. His section on slipware included a detailed comparison of processes and the historical development of the Staffordshire potters of Toft and the Kentish potters from Wrotham. Glaisher described the pottery as 'being attractive from their quaint shapes'[44] and acknowledged the 'individuality' of different potter's hands but like Hobson he avoided wider references to contemporary practice in the arts or industry. National character however was an issue and Glaisher was adamant in his rebuttal of claims for any continental influence on Wrotham ware. Although expressed less overtly than other writers of this period he continued to

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[43] Hobson & Glaisher, 1914, p. x
[44] Hobson & Glaisher, 1914, p. xxx

present such work as an inevitable, preliminary stage in the development of English pottery. He concluded his discussion of slipware by writing

> 'The early slip wares and some of the contemporary pieces where slip was not used are extremely interesting historically in the ceramic history of England, for they show the native English potter at his best when quite unaffected by foreign influence. But a few years before and the Staffordshire potter had made only butter pots, or possibly costrels and green glazed ware. In a few years more he was to make the delicate and refined salt-glaze ware.'[45]

While Glaisher may have been sympathetic and Hobson reserved, wider press coverage was enthusiastic. *The Burlington* previewed the show, approving of the opportunity 'of studying a subject which has yet received but little attention.'[46] A series of reviews followed which consolidated the appreciation of early pottery and revealed the beginning of a critical divide between the curatorial point of view, the world of the collector and the arena of contemporary fine art practice. While all camps were positive, the response to individual sections within the exhibition revealed a difference of opinion formed by opposing sets of critical criteria. This divide illustrated the difference between traditional ceramic criticism which adopted conventional criteria, valued skill and technique and was informed by an underlying nationalistic agenda and, on the other hand, Fry's Pan-European Formalism which rejected these values in favour of expressive and primitive art. The rise of interest in vernacular English pottery may have resulted from the combination of curatorial and collecting interests aided by contemporary criticism but it formed an uneasy coalition, working to two different agendas.

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[45] Hobson & Glaisher, 1914, p. xxxiv

Roger Fry and Clive Bell gave a contemporary interpretation shaped by Formalist criteria and French critical theory praising early mediaeval pottery for its strength, simplicity and expressiveness of treatment, while condemning the more popular slipware as gross and picturesque. The first to respond to the exhibition was Bell in his important preview of the exhibition in *The Athenaeum,* December 1913, in which he linked post-Impressionism, Primitivism and early English pottery. Bell condemned the collecting mentality supported by *The Connoisseur* and to a lesser extent *The Burlington,* on the grounds that it was little better than 'stamp-collecting.'[47] Placing his appreciation of this early work firmly within the critical framework of Post-Impressionism and Primitivism and drawing analogies between the spirit of the pottery and contemporary art, Bell relished inverting the accepted hierarchy of ceramic aesthetic values by mockingly quoting from Hobson

> 'Not that there is any fear of a modern critic, however destitute of the collector's interest, despising a rude and primitive school as such. "A rustic imagination untrammelled by the rules of art" is the ideal of the younger generation of European artists. If they have it not, they affect it, and it is not surprising to come upon a piece of work like the barbarously modelled *Roof Ornament* ... in a modern exhibition of sculpture; '[48]

He argued that the very early or mediaeval work displayed a simplicity and economy of approach that represented true artistic understanding ' a most delicate instinct for the use of a few simple processes ... a highly cultivated power of sustaining a sequence of form ... in an apparently simple task [that]

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[46] 'Notes', *The Burlington*, No CXXIX, Vol. XXIV, Dec. 1913, p. 177.
[47] Anon (Bell, C.), 'Early English Earthenware', *The Athenaeum*, No 4494, Dec. 14, 1913, p. 710.

marks the artist.' Bell echoed the universal approval of encaustic tiles - 'the severe art' - but differed from the consensus on slipware pottery. Likening the surface of this work to 'treacle' he dismissed the pottery of Toft and his contemporaries as 'merely picturesque.' Bell's objection was that these pots displayed a form of decorative treatment which did not conform to his and Fry's Post-Impressionist interpretation of decoration as a co-ordinated scheme unifying form, colour and expressive treatment. Instead, Bell classified these pots within what he would consider as a 19th century definition of decoration - a decoration which relied on superfluous and virtuosi surface treatments, technique for technique's sake.

> 'As a rule the decoration of sprawling smears, while undoubtedly bold and clever in a swaggering fashion, is really a trifle barbarous not in the sense of being limited in its means, but in being careless and approximate in the use of them.'[49]

Glossing quickly over the Delft section, Bell concluded by boldly comparing some of John Dwight's late 17th century modelled sculptures to Cubist sculpture arguing that their 'vividly simplified character ' would be 'acceptable to admirers of Post-Impressionist sculpture.'

Bell's approach to writing about early English earthenware reinforced the link between primitive art and Post-Impressionism. This early English earthenware epitomised the principles of 'primitive design' and abstraction that Fry was promoting as representative of European art before the degrading effects of cultural sophistication took effect. Bell's transferral of

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[48]Anon (Bell), p.710. The roof ornament referred to is a finial.

Fry's Formalist ideas to pottery was consistent with the universalist nature of their critical criteria. This is the first reference to pottery found so far in Bell's writing before 1913, and the article was a precursor to his comparison of a Sung pot and a Romanesque church in his book *Art* published in the following year.

In contrast to Bell's international outlook, the anonymous reviewer in *The Connoisseur* in a review 'Early English Earthenware' focused on issues of national identity throughout the whole of his review, from the opening description of the exhibition which, he wrote, demonstrated 'the beginnings of our native ceramic craft'[50] and the fact that John Dwight surpassed the Continental stonewares he initially 'emulated'. The individual sections of the exhibition were discussed in terms of their respective English ceramic character, with the exception of Delft ware which was passed over quickly, given its obvious debt to European and Oriental sources. This review portrayed the character of English pottery as a mix of primeval elementalism 'indigenous to the soil and little susceptible to foreign influence' combined with a reassuring benignity, 'quaint, homely, and unsophisticated'. Typically, the slipware drew the greatest praise and affirmation of Englishness: 'One does not get to what may be described as indigenous native pottery until the slipwares of the seventeenth century ', and he quoted from J. W. L. Glaisher's section which described their charm. The decorative treatment and use of colour was presented as such a high achievement that the reviewer claimed it elevated the slipware potters from 'mere craftsmen to

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[49] Anon (Bell), p.710

artists', and confirmed Toft's reputation as the designer of the 'greatest glory of slipware'.

This assessment of the Burlington exhibition as a confirmation of English ceramic character was clearly evident in a review by the V & A curator Bernard Rackham, published in the scholarly *Burlington* magazine. In his first major article of the 1910s on a subject outside his speciality (Italian majolica) Rackham echoed the nationalist sentiments of *The Connoisseur*. Largely ignoring the early work , he acclaimed slipware as the epitome of an indigenous English character and achievement, unsullied by foreign influences. Welcoming the first major showing for this pottery he wrote.

> 'The exhibition reveals in the ceramic craftsmen of our country a vitality and inventiveness, in design and technique alike, which will come as a surprise to those who have not made a special study ... when every allowance has been made for the possible presence of foreign intruders, the exhibition remains a wonderful display of the variety of our native pottery.'[51]

Despite his isolationist language (for it was 1914) Rackham's concern with identity was not motivated by populist or jingoistic concerns. The reason for Rackham's position was revealed in the conclusion to his review, and it was one he would repeatedly take over the next decade. Rackham felt that although English industrial pottery dominated the global market and was technically sound and practical in utilitarian terms, it was artistically inferior to the production of the major Continental factories, such as Meissen and Sèvres. In confirming the strong, if idiosyncratic character of early pottery, it

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[50] 'Early English Earthenware', *The Connoisseur*, Vol. XXXVIII, Jan-Apr., 1914, pp. 132-133.

became possible to refute the claims of aesthetic insipidness that were directed at industrial ceramics, which then dominated contemporary English identity. Rackham concluded that

> 'Shortly after that time the experiments of Wedgwood heralded the era of scientific potting with undoubted gain to the industry in the sphere of commerce and utilitarianism, and corresponding loss in its relation to art. In spite of their beauty of material and excellence of technique, the would-be-artistic productions of the Etruria works and of the firms that followed where Wedgwood showed the way leave us cold and unmoved, while the undisguised sincerity of the crudest of earlier wares arouse our sympathy and our interest.'[52]

Despite his claim for an English sensibility in the early pottery, Rackham's sympathy did not spill into enthusiasm. Of the review's fourteen columns, he devoted only one to mediaeval pottery. He made extravagant claims for encaustic tiles - 'never to be surpassed, or in some cases even equalled, in later times'[53] - but his response to comparative work from this period was subdued. Not only did mediaeval pottery lag behind the high standard of mediaeval tiles, it was unfavourably compared to English pottery made under the Roman occupation and dismissed generally in comparison with 'the more celebrated wares of other lands.' Rackham's emphasis on the establishment of provenance and his reliance on a descriptive style of writing about work and materials was more ambitious than his fellow curator Hobson's approach, but conservative when compared with the critical writing of Fry or Bell. Rackham also personalised his discussion, stating that the low standing of the work (occupying 'so humble a rank in

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[51] 'Rackham, B., 'English Earthenware and Stoneware at the Burlington Fine Arts Club', *The Burlington*, No CXXXI, Vol. XXIV, Feb. 1914, pp. 265-279, p.265
[52] Rackham, 1914, p.279
[53] Rackham, 1914, p.265

the hierarchy of the crafts')[54] was due to a 'lack of incentive' on the part of the potters rather than an 'inherent want of skill'. The only consolation, he felt, was that the pots 'all suggest that the imagination of their fashioners outran the technical resources at their disposal.'[55]

Unsurprisingly, Rackham was more positive about slipware, devoting two columns to it. Like other writers he felt it displayed a definite national character 'essentially English [with] little trace of extraneous influence'.[56] By relying on conventional criteria he found it easier to write about technique, discussing the 'excellent potting and the neatness of workmanship.'[57] The material abilities of the Toft family were fully approved for their 'masterly use of materials and control of technique'.[58] In contrast to the 'boorish character' of everyday pottery Rackham acclaimed the Toft's work as 'the greatest triumph' of this period. In the remainder of his review Rackham discussed English Delft ware and the early stonewares at length. Like Hobson, his concern for provenance, technique and individually identifiable work meant he found it easier to discuss this work.

7.4 *The Art Pottery of England* by Roger Fry

The last and most important review on the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition was written by Roger Fry and published in *The Burlington* in

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[54] Rackham, 1914, p.266
[55] Rackham, 1914, p.266
[56] Rackham, 1914, p.265
[57] Rackham, 1914, p.266
[58] Rackham, 1914, p.267

March 1914. (This article is also discussed in the primitivism chapter). *The Art of Pottery in England* was a modest review, a little over two columns in length, but one of the two most important pre-war articles on pottery for the emerging studio pottery movement, on a par with Charles Holme's '*The Potter's Art. - Object Lessons from the Far East*'[59]. Like Holme's article, Fry's review was ostensibly an appraisal of historical pottery but it had a critical sub-text relevant to contemporary practice. Fry's review was as much a social discussion of the role of potters and the placement of their work as it was an historical commentary or example of Formalist criteria applied to a new primitive genre. Although not openly acknowledged, the social nature of Fry's commentary reflected the concerns behind the founding of the Omega workshops which he had launched the previous year in 1913.

> 'we must premise that pottery is of all the arts the most intimately connected with life, and therefore the one in which some sort of connection between the artist's mood and the life of his contemporaries may be most readily allowed. A poet or even a painter may live apart from his age, and may create for a hypothetical posterity ; but the potter cannot, or certainly does not, go on indefinitely creating pots that no one will use. He must come to some sort of terms with his fellowman.'[60]

Fry's critical interest in the role of pottery was understandable given Omega's aspiration to produce a range of applied art for domestic use. Not since Holme had promoted the tea ceremony pottery of Japan as a model to

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[59] Holme, C, 'The Potter's Art.-Object Lessons from the Far East', The *Studio*, Vol. XXIV, No 103, Oct. 1901, p. 48-57.
[60] Fry, R., 'The Art Pottery of England', *The Burlington*, No CXXXII, Vol. XXIV, March 1914, p. 330.

be adopted in Britain had a critic written on the issue of hand made pottery and function.[61]

There are surprising parallels between Fry and Holme's careers that account for the similarities of their early interest and critical writing on pottery and use. Both were critics and both were involved in publishing, Holme as founder and editor of *The Studio* and Fry as a consultant to and member of the founding committee of *The Burlington*. But, like Fry, Holme's critical interest in objects extended beyond theory. As a former business partner of Christopher Dresser he had been involved in the practical issues of design and manufacture of Dresser's work and his career preceded Fry's new role at Omega by several decades. There was a critical divide between the two writers and the editorial stances of *The Studio* and *The Burlington* but irrespective of their differences, both critics made an imaginative leap in establishing links between historical and contemporary models of Oriental and vernacular English pottery, links that were deeply influential on the development of studio pottery.

In *The Art Pottery Of England* Fry presented mediaeval pottery as a socially and aesthetically uniform product, free of the class divisions that marked pottery of later periods. It was 'made apparently alike for rich and poor ; even if there was a difference of elaboration there was only one quality '. Fry claimed of the pottery that it demonstrated a right state of mind' in contrast

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[61] see Part 1.

to the later work which he viewed as degraded and made for a divided society

> ' There is pottery for the people - the coarse Staffordshire slip ware - and there is pottery for the well-to-do ... bad as the popular art of the 16th and 17th centuries is, it still retains a greater possibility of design than the elegant pastiches which were made for the upper classes'. [62]

After his discussion of 'social ' pottery, Fry applied his Post-Impressionist Formalist criteria confidently to the early earthenware. Although he did not directly use 'primitive' as a term to discuss the pottery, his introduction drew on previous writing on primitive art in its reference to the difficulties of appreciating archaic and non-western art

> 'our aesthetic standards vary so much that what one age rejects as barbarous stammerings another finds to be the climax of human expression. There was a time when not only the Bennin [sic] bronzes but the Elgin marbles were condemned in this way.'[63]

In common with other reviewers of the exhibition Fry distinguished between the mediaeval work and later slipware. Following the example of Bell but opposing the position of Hobson and Rackham, Fry praised the mediaeval work and was dismissive of the slipware. Calling the early potters 'men of serious and noble feelings and of a refined sensibility ' he described the tasteful refinement of form and texture of the 13th, 14th and 15th century pottery. Affording the ultimate accolade, Fry compared this early earthenware to Tang dynasty pottery which he described 'as some of the greatest ceramics in existence'. Despite the marked differences of critical opinion between Fry and traditional ceramic writers, Oriental pottery was

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[62] Fry, 'The Art Pottery of England', p. 331.

the universal benchmark for ceramic excellence. With praise bordering on hyperbole, Fry claimed close similarities between a mediaeval bottle and a Tang pot - 'it might almost be mistaken for one at first glance.' Although he felt the rhythm of the bottle's profile and decoration was less resolved he concluded that 'to be able to compare it at all ... is to show how exquisite a sense of structural design the English craftsman once possessed.'

Fry extended his endorsement of early earthenware to figurative mediaeval sculptural work. He praised a simplified face on a roof finial for its rhythm and proportions, concentrating on a discussion of the portrayal of the face, and adopting the arguments he applied to the paintings in the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions. Fry argued the primitive nature of the pottery was not simplistic but displayed a naive sophistication

> 'the interpretation of a face is the work not of a clumsy and farcical imitator of nature, but of a real artist, of one who has found within the technical limitations of his craft an interpretation of natural forms expressive of life and character. What many moderns accustomed to an art of merely realistic description fail to understand is that deformation (without which there is not artistic expression) is of infinite kinds.'[64]

In contrast to his positive response to mediaeval work, Fry was critical of the 17th century slipware. Traditional ceramic writers may have described this work as crude but found its quaintness endearing and consolatory. Fry, contradicting his earlier writing on the virtues of primitive art, described it as 'crude ' and 'barbaric' but used these terms negatively, finding no compensating factors. Following Bell's relatively mild criticism, Fry

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[63] Fry, 'The Art Pottery of England', p. 330.

condemned the work outright. Using its lack of 'structural sense and vital rhythm' as justification he criticised Toft's slipware for a 'really crude, barbaric and brutally clownish idea of deformation'. This criticism was extended to the potters themselves whom he described as 'gross' and 'clownish'. The reasons for the virulence of Fry's criticism are not obvious. He stated that the potters lacked 'any faculty of detached contemplation' but did not expand on this further. His concluding remarks in which he lamented the decline of the 'noble and serious work' of the mediaeval period into a 'cheerful brutality' suggest that he regarded the lighter and more decorative tone of Toft's slipware as a loss of aesthetic purity , which corresponds with Bell's more rounded criticism of the pottery as 'swaggering', overly decorative and lacking restraint.

Fry's rejection of slipware was not simply a case of its incompatibility with his Formalist criteria but was based on aesthetic and political grounds. While Mediaeval pottery represented an aesthetic and social unity slipware became the embodiment of a social divide caused by the Renaissance, for Fry a rare example of social conscience which also related to Ruskinian and Arts & Crafts morality, for normally he complained about the moralising of second generation Arts and Crafts supporters and avoided overt political commentary in his critical writing. Fry's conclusion (which could have been written by Morris) was emphatic

> 'That the art of pottery in England which began with such noble and serious work should thus have degenerated into cheerful brutality on the one hand and empty elegance on the other is surely deplorable,

[64]Fry, 'The Art Pottery of England', p. 331.

> and the indication of social conditions which it affords seems to suggest that the profound division between the culture of the people and the upper classes which the renaissance effected has been bad for both.'[65]

After *The Art of Pottery in England* was published the effects of the First World War were felt across all the arts. Following the flurry of curatorial and critical writing that generated the vernacular revival during the first four years of the decade, writing on its pottery declined. *The Connoisseur* published two specialised collecting articles 'Fuddling Cups and Puzzle Jugs[66] and 'Courtship and Matrimony in Staffordshire Pottery Figures'[67] but coverage of this type of work then ceased for the duration of the war. The next article on medieval work was a scholarly piece on mediaeval tiles published by *The Burlington* in 1918 by the Reverend P. H. Ditchfield[68] who did not refer to contemporary practice. The final reference of the decade to vernacular pottery in the art press was a notice in *The Connoisseur* of a sale at Christie's 'consisting of Oriental porcelain and decorative objects.'[69] Among a diversity of lots, including a Ming figure which realised £147 and a Louis XV writing table at £252, was a 'fine jug by Ralph Wood ... realised £630, the highest price on record'. English pottery had started the decade in relative obscurity amongst collectors and the general public, but it ended the decade as an established pottery genre.

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[65] Fry, 'The Art Pottery of England', p. 331.
[66] Reveirs-Hopkins, A. E. W., 'Fuddling cups and Puzzle Jugs, with some Notes on Wincanton Delft, *The Connoisseur*, Vol. XLI, Jan-Apr. 1915.
[67] Wooliscroft Rhead, G., 'Courtship and Matrimony in Staffordshire Pottery Figures', *The Connoisseur*, Vol. XLI, Jan-Apr. 1915.
[68] Ditchfield, Rev. P. H., 'English Mediaeval Tiles', *The Burlington*, Vol. XXXIII, No. CLXXXIX, Dec. 1918, pp. 221-225.
[69] 'Furniture, Porcelain, and Objects of Art', *The Connoisseur*, Vol. LI, May-Aug. 1918, p. 162.

Appreciation of this early work and record prices at auction prepared the critical ground for the revival to begin in earnest. Reginald Wells, one of the most important potters of the 1920s (whose work was inspired by Chinese pottery of the Sung dynasty) is usually regarded as a pioneer of stoneware pottery. However, his stoneware was predated by his slipware pottery of the 1900s made at Wrotham, Kent, a well known centre of slipware during the 17th century. There was no coverage of Wells' slipware during the 1910s, but Bernard Rackham later wrote about it when Keeper of Ceramics at the V&A in 1921 when he warned against reviving earthenware on the grounds of 'social customs and hygiene'[70]. Ironically, a few genuine country potters such as Elijah Comfort[71] were still working within the unbroken journeyman tradition of vernacular pottery in the first years of the century when this revival began in earnest. As most of these individuals worked outside of the intricacies of the art market they were ignored.

As the self-declared progeny of potters such as Thomas Toft, the studio potters of the 1920s would further romanticise and capitalise on the expressive and vigorous nature of this early work and establish it as a central tenet of their pottery. When Bernard Leach returned to England in 1920 he built on the receptiveness of the English market to earthenware pottery by producing bold and simple work, using native and natural materials. Despite Reginald Wells's abandonment of slipware pottery in 1909 in favour of higher fired work, Leach and Michael Cardew would give a new identity

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[70] Report of Bernard Rackham's, 'English Pottery: Its Place in Ceramic History', *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, December 1, 1921, p. 1797.

to vernacular pottery. Ironically, the revival they popularised would be built on Staffordshire slipware, the very pottery Fry dismissed. The 'beery jocularity'[72] and the 'clownish fancies' of English slipware were to become embedded in the psyche of British studio pottery despite Fry's low opinion of it and the fact that as the leading contemporary critic he had been instrumental in fostering the studio pottery movement through his critical agenda.

However, the vernacular revival would take a new twist and be further modernised. Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read's collaboration a decade later built on Fry's Formalist ideas and Read would claim that early English earthenware was a pure form of abstract art raising the prestige of vernacular pottery and transforming the critical appreciation of studio pottery which helped to establish it as an independent and modern movement.

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[71] Elijah Comfort originally worked at the Winchcombe Pottery and was employed by Michael Cardew when he re-opened the pottery in 1926.
[72] Fry, 'The Art Pottery of England', p.331.

Chapter 8

Proto-Studio pottery

This thesis will use the term 'proto-studio pottery' to refer to works of pottery made by individuals before 1923[1]. The term 'studio pottery' will be used to describe work made after 1923.

The 1910s was generally an undistinguished decade for proto-studio pottery in England and it received little attention in the press. Dominated by industrial products, the few advances made were disrupted by the First World War. These problems were compounded by a lack of critical awareness. In a short feature in *The Connoisseur* on the richly glazed stonewares of The Ruskin Pottery, the reviewer wrote 'a Japanese expert ... stated that this ware was equal to some of the best productions of the Ming Dynasty'[2] summing up the general level of misunderstanding in the press.

8.1 The Studio Year Book of Decorative Art

A useful indication of the recognition of studio pottery can be gathered from the number of illustrations included in the annually published *The Studio Year Book of Decorative Art* edited by Geoffrey Holme, although these do not accurately reflect the critical reputation of studio potters post-1923, or the

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[1] The first date so far discovered for the use of 'studio pottery' as a term. See Chapter 9.
[2] 'Current Art Notes', *The Connoisseur*, Vol. XLI, Jan-Apr., 1915, p. 110.

amount of critical writing[3] elsewhere in the press. Despite some inconsistencies, *The Studio Year Book of Decorative Art* chart provides a limited but useful impression of the rise and fall in popularity of studio pottery between 1910-1930 . An increase in the number of illustrations of pots, from a single one in 1921 to twenty five in 1925, indicates the increase in popularity of studio pottery following the first exhibitions by Hamada, Staite Murray, Wells and Leach in 1923 and 1924 . Conversely, the drop from forty two pots in 1930 to one pot in 1931 could indicate the sudden decline in studio pottery in the early 1930s. (See Appendix 1 for a chart of proto-studio pottery illustrated in *The Studio Year Books* 1910 -1919).

The Studio Year Book of Decorative Art also throws up some unfamiliar names such as Annie MacNichol and Ann MacBeth whose work was illustrated in the annuals for 1912, 1913, 1916, and 1918 although there are no reviews or features on either potter. Dora Lunn's work in contrast is of historical interest because she was working at a well known pottery, Ravenscourt, and was the daughter of Richard Lunn.[4] She had an exceptionally high number of pots illustrated in *The Studio Year Book of Decorative Art 1919* but, as there were no significant reviews or features of her work published in the critical press between 1910 and 1940, she is regrettably absent from the main body of this thesis. George Cox's pottery was illustrated once in 1914, in the year that his book *Pottery for Artists*

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[3] The critical relationship between Staite Murray and Leach is not reflected by the number of illustrations between 1920-1929, with 13 and 27 pots respectively.

[4] Richard Lunn was an early potter and head of the Royal College of Art's Ceramic Department. According to Watson, 1990, he modelled the ceramic staircase and gallery at South Kensington.

Craftsmen & Teachers[5] was published. Reginald Wells appears in 1913, shortly after his 1910 re-location to London.

Despite the fact that Ruskin had first raised the issue of handwork and its relationship to manufacture half a century before, the subject generated considerable copy during the 1910s, for these debates were still going on within the Design and Industries Association. Fry's practical attempts to unify the design and making of pottery in Omega was never fully realised, and Poole Pottery eventually produced the work. Fry's concern at the division between design and practice during the 1910s was shared by Charles Holme, the editor of *The Studio*, the magazine most sympathetic to the crafts during this period, as its sub title *an Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art* indicates. Holme could be described as representing the opposite end of the critical spectrum in his magazine's support for Art Nouveau. Despite Fry's caustic remarks on Art Nouveau which he described as 'the eczema' which 'spread from the offices of *The Studio* all over the world'[6] Holme and Fry, like Ruskin and Morris, were united in their concern to unite craftsman and designer.

> '"So long as our craftsmen are divided into two classes—designers and workmen—we can never hope to excel in artistic craftsmanship. Invention and production must be united in the same individual if the highest result is to be attained. Here is, I feel, the greatest responsibility for the craftsman ; he must know by actual experience, by the personal exercise of his own executive skill, whether the things he imagines can be realised, and he can only test the aesthetic value and artistic fitness of his design by seeing how he himself can carry it out. If he trusts the expression of his ideas to another man he enters upon a conflict between two types of temperament or between two types of ignorance ;

[5] Cox, G. J., *Pottery for Artists Craftsmen & Teachers*, New York, MacMillan, 1914.
[6] Fry, *Architectural Heresies*, p. 18, quoted in Tillyard, 1998, p. 49.

> he, ignorant of craftsmanship, has to depend upon someone who is ignorant of design. How can the product of such an unhappy partnership be anything but a lifeless and unmeaning compromise ? How can it ever be, in the best sense of the term, a work of art? Has it even a right to exist?"'[7]

This quote is taken from 'The Lay Figure,' a satirical monthly column in *The Studio.* In these sketches, imaginary characters such 'The Art Critic', 'The Man with the Red Tie', 'The Craftsman' or 'The Artist' would debate topical concerns. In the four months between March and June 1910, the problems associated with craft were discussed three times in *The Lay Figure : On the Chances of the Craftsman,*[8] *The Lay Figure : On the Responsibilities of the Craftsman,*[9] and *The Lay Figure : On the Hands of the Craftsman.*[10] It is worth noting the themes which caused concern at the outset of the period covered by this thesis ranged from institutional neglect, the relationship between craft and primitive art, the lack of commercial opportunities and poor standards of work—perennial concerns which would continue for the next thirty years.

As discussed in Chapter 1, ceramic production in England was dominated on the one hand by large scale industry and on the other by small Art Pottery factories such as The Ruskin Pottery. G. T. Robinson's call for artists 'to come, [and] take the lead'[11] seventeen years earlier had only been partially

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[7] 'The Lay Figure: on the Responsibilities of the Craftsman.', *The Studio,* Vol. 49, No 205, April 1910, p. 252.
[8] 'The Lay Figure : On the Chances of the Craftsman, *The Studio*, Vol. 49, No. 204 ,March 1910, p. 168.
[9] 'The Lay Figure : On the Responsibilities of the Craftsman, *The Studio*, Vol. 49, No. 205, March 1910, p. 252.
[10] 'The Lay Figure : On the Hands of the Craftsman', *The Studio,* Vol. 50, No 207, June 1910, p. 84.
[11] *Arts and Crafts Essays,* Rivington, Percival & Co., 1903, (1893), p. 67.

answered. However, his interest in Oriental pottery 'where the clay is native, the art is native'[12] had been prophetic, as interest in such work had developed extensively.

In the 1908 article ''Some Recent Developments in the Pottery Ware of the Martin Brothers" [13] Holme included the brothers as among the unspecified[14] but 'honoured' names of Europe and America who had the knowledge and 'aesthetic perception' of the Japanese potters. He approved of the Martin Brother's work as it conformed to the 'aesthetic qualities of the potter's craft'[15]

> 'the manipulation of clays of varied texture and of coloured glazes, and of such decorative treatment as essentially belongs to the potter's art, ... bears no resemblance to that of the other crafts'[16]

Holme limited his discussion to the textured and inlaid *Mishima* pottery of Edwin Martin, because of its Japanese character, writing that 'there is no reason why the potter should not in the future, as he has done upon rare occasions in the past, rise to the greatest distinction as an artist, and we cannot but feel that the Martin Brothers are on the right road to such an eminence.'[17] Unfortunately, the death of Charles Martin in 1910, Walter Martin in 1912 and Edwin Martin in 1915 deprived England of the only proto-studio potters that Holme felt to be worthy of coverage in *The Studio*.

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[12] *Arts and Crafts Essays*, 1903, p. 65.
[13] Anon., (Holme, C.), 'Some Recent Developments in the Pottery Ware of the Martin Brothers', *The Studio*, Vol. 42, 1908, p. 109.
[14] Apart from the Martin Brothers the only potters commended by *The Studio* during the 1910s were the French potters Chaplet, Carriès, Lenoble, Delaherche and Decoeur.
[15] Holme, 1908, p. 109.
[16] Holme, 1908, p. 109.
[17] Holme, 1908, p. 115.

Other press coverage of proto-studio pottery during the 1910s in *The Studio* was very limited. It covered educational exhibitions and briefly referred to The Sir John Cass Arts and Crafts Society at the Walker Gallery in 1910, mentioning the potter Reginald Wells as being among 'the most successful exhibitors'[18]. *The Studio* reviewed the National Competition of Schools of Art in 1914 , but the ceramics were poorly received. It was felt that the pottery designers 'did not distinguish themselves'[19] and the judges 'considered nothing worthy of a higher award than a bronze medal.'

The only other reviews or features published by *The Studio* during this period were from the continent, particularly France. From Ernest Chaplet and Jean Carriès's stoneware to the Fauve pottery of Matisse, Derain and Vlaminck 'Indisputably, France was the centre for artist ceramics'[20] and *The Studio* acknowledged this. An exhibition by the French potter Lenoble was briefly reviewed in 1914 and his work was described as 'powerful in execution and simple and harmonious in its decoration. M. Lenoble is becoming more and more the compeer of the great masters of the potter's art.'[21] Danish stoneware from Bing and Gröndhal was highly praised and compared to 'the best achievements of French ceramic artists such as Delaherche, Decoeur, Lenoble (to mention only three) whose merits are universally recognised.'[22]

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[18] 'Studio-Talk', *The Studio*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 202, Jan 1910, p. 313.
[19] 'The National Competition of Schools of Art, 1914', *The Studio*, Vol. 254, No. 256, Aug. 1914, p. 283.
[20] Opie, *2000*, p. 193.
[21] 'Studio-Talk', *The Studio*, Vol. LXL, No. 250, Feb. 1914, p. 67.
[22] 'Studio-Talk', *The Studio*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 321, Dec. 1919, p. 125.

8.2 Charles Binns and George Cox

English proto-studio pottery may have been at a rudimentary level during the 1910s but the publication of two books indicated a growing interest. Charles Binns' *The Potter's Craft*[23] and George Cox's *Pottery for Artists, Craftsmen & Teachers*[24] were two of the first of many 'how to do it' manuals published for a growing amateur sector. The introductions to these two books indicated a changing landscape, for the emergent phase of English studio pottery had now begun.

Charles Binns was a Superintendent in the Royal Porcelain Works, Worcester and published his book in England in 1910 before emigrating to the United States. His introductory chapter 'The Present Need'[25] identified the growing trend 'towards a personal and individual expression' in what he called the crafts or industrial arts. This concern with individual expression was rather more circumspect than Fry's avant-garde ideas, as Binns' background in industry and choice of an opening quote from Ruskin indicate. He nevertheless devoted twelve pages of his book to a mild questioning of industry and repetition of general Arts and Crafts sentiments. He criticised 'novelty' designs and tentative 'principles' and encouraged the making of pottery which possessed 'a sense of form'[26] and 'fitness' and 'vigour, strength and solidity,' for 'ruder pottery' revealed a move away

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[23] Binns, C., *The Potter's Craft : A Practical Guide for the Studio and Workshop*, London, Constable and Co. , 1910.
[24] Cox, G., *Pottery for Artists, Craftsmen & Teachers*, New York, Macmillan, 1914.
[25] Binns , 1910, p. 7.
[26] Binns , 1910, p. 17.

from decorative tendencies. Like many writers, Binns struggled to describe this new approach in ceramics and coined the term 'artist-artisan'[27] to 'draw the line between art and manufacture'.[28]

George Cox's *Pottery for Artists, Craftsmen & Teachers* has been described by Rice and Gowing as 'virtually the only technical manual for potters in English for more than twenty years and ... extremely influential on both sides of the Atlantic.'[29] Cox was American and established the Mortlake Pottery in 1911 before returning to the U. S. A. in 1914. The *faux* medieval woodblock print frontispiece and opening quote by Morris reveal Cox's Arts and Crafts sympathies. In contrast to Binns's vague homily, he clarified his ideas for making pottery by providing a set of aesthetic and practical guidelines, taking an anti-decorative stance, a 'corrective to any desire for unsightly *new* shapes or extravagance in decoration'.[30] In a brief and informed global survey of pre-industrial ceramics, ranging from pre-dynastic Egyptian pottery to Toft's slipware, Cox established a set of historical models for the craftsman to aspire to. Significantly, his 'study of the best work of the best periods' was built on primitive pottery which he believed demonstrated important principles which could be incorporated into new work

> 'Before turning to more sophisticated work it would be well to learn the lesson of simplicity and fitness here taught by primitive folks. The simple beginning leads to the simple, strong, and satisfying end. Much

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[27] Binns , 1910, p. 8.
[28] Binns , 1910, p. 11.
[29] Rice, P., & Gowing, C., *British Studio Ceramics in the 20th Century,* London, Barrie & Jenkins, 1989, p. 16.
[30] Cox, 1914, p. 3.

> of this primitive work is inspiring for its freshness or naïveté ; its unspoiled innate taste'.[31]

Cox's appeal to the virtue of 'loving patient craftsmanship' of previous eras was inspired more by the Arts and Crafts than the Formalist appreciation of primitivism allied to Fry. However, as has been argued, the critical overlap between the Arts and Crafts and Fry's Modernism was often blurred and Cox's essay typifies this new phase of combined philosophies. Whereas Fry's Modernism was informed by Arts and Crafts values, Cox's Arts and Crafts views were informed by modernist values. Cox's essay was contemporary in its celebration of early pottery and a challenge to the established canons of skill, finish and technique. Furthermore, his acknowledgement of Sung pottery allies him to the new modernists

> 'To the scientific critic I would offer a hundred books with a thousand different compounds ; amongst none of them will he find how to make a Sung bowl or a Rakka [sic] drug pot.'[32]

This was the first published reference to Sung pottery to be made within the field of practical ceramics since the time of the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition and Fry's own review. But Cox was not alone in his interest in early Chinese pottery. In the previous year *The Studio Year Book* had illustrated ten pots by Reginald Wells' from his London 'Caldrum Pottery' which, as Watson states, was 'inspired by Chinese stonewares.'[33] With Wells' work, Cox's proto-studio pots and introductory essay helped to define the aesthetic and critical characteristics which would identify the movement.

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[31] Cox, 1914, p. 3.
[32] Cox, 1914, p. viii.
[33] Watson, 1990, p. 18.

He dismissed the overly decorative and scientific approach of Art Pottery - 'we shall begin to beat back the manufacture of debauched "Art" pots'[34] - in favour of the individual potter 'the only attendant from the pot's inception to its finish'.[35] Function and aesthetics, or 'utility and art' were prioritised over 'Painting or Modelling'[36] and 'The wheel-made or thrown shape'[37] was preferred to 'the [hand]built shape'. Like Fry, Cox was well travelled and referred to collections of pottery in New York and Boston. He was better informed and able to refer to a wide range of historic pottery and to potters such as Della Robbia of 15th century Italy and Bernard Palissy of 16th century France. But, unlike the more esoteric Fry, he preferred later English slipware to the 'low ebb'[38] of medieval earthenware. Cox concluded with De Morgan and the Martin Brothers as exemplars for the modern potter but retained his highest praise for the simplicity of primitive pottery, expressing his unrivalled admiration for Sung pottery 'the summit of the potter's art'[39]

8.3 Staite Murray and the Arts League of Service

The pre-war period is described by Harrison as a time when artistic factions continually 'grouped and split'[40] and although he titled his post-war chapter 'Hiatus', new groups still continued to form. Whereas Cox's writings and work was Arts and Crafts in nature but informed by Fry's critical ideas, Staite

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[34] Cox, 1914, p. 16.
[35] Cox, 1914, p. viii.
[36] Cox, 1914, p. 12.
[37] Cox, 1914, p. 2.
[38] Cox, 1914, p. 9.
[39] Cox, 1914, p. 12.
[40] Harrison, 1994, p. 76.

Murray's 'Yeoman Pottery'[41] was the first work wholly inspired by avant-garde theories. This work was shown in 1919 at the first exhibition of the Arts League of Service (A.L.S.) an artist organisation founded in the wake of the First World War. The League's intention was described in the foreword to the catalogue, to show 'what the Artist—called to exercise his gifts for the things of everyday life could do'.[42] Mixing craft, fine art and design it included artists such as Paul Nash, Frank Dobson and Edward Wadsworth. Wyndham Lewis was also a founding member, although he did not exhibit in 1919. Yeoman pottery was the product of a collaboration between the painter Cuthbert Hamilton and Staite Murray of which Malcolm Haslam wrote

> 'it involved him with the core of the artistic avant-garde. Hamilton mixed freely with the most advanced painters, sculptors and poets in London at that time'[43].

Knowledge of Staite Murray and Hamilton's working relationship is limited. Haslam states that they made both individual and joint work, with Staite Murray probably throwing the pots although he notes that Hamilton described himself as an 'artist potter'[44] in 1916. Hamilton was in various artistic groups, including Omega, before he left with Wyndham Lewis to form the alternative and short lived Rebel Art Centre in 1914. Yeoman Pottery of this period is often referred to as 'Vorticist' because of Hamilton's association with Lewis. Harrison does not refer to the A.L.S., but instead

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[41] Catalogue, *Arts League of Service Exhibition of Practical Arts*, Twenty-One Gallery, London, Nov-Dec 1919.
[42] 'Foreword' *Arts League of Service Exhibition of Practical Arts*, 1919.
[43] Haslam, M., *William Staite Murray*, London, Crafts Council, 1984, p. 11.
[44] Haslam, 1984, p. 11.

discusses the X Group which, a year later, included most of the important names in the A.L.S. with the exception of Staite Murray. He writes of Hamilton's paintings that 'nothing significant of his survives from this period and latest examples are not particularly distinguished.'[45]

The significance of the A.L.S. was that it linked the avant-garde to the studio pottery movement, although the pottery's significance was not acknowledged at the time as Ana Berry notes in her account of the A.L.S. written in 1928 *A Survey: Some Younger Artists and the A. L. S*[46]. Describing the Yeoman Pottery she wrote that 'it attracted little attention at the time, though to-day it is prized by collectors'[47].

The combination of Vorticist painting and pottery could be considered the English equivalent of Fauve pottery of 1906/7 . While Vorticist art would not normally be associated with traditional craft concerns, a reappraisal of early Modernism could explain the juxtaposition of avant-garde ideas and pottery as Tillyard suggests in her assessment of the nature of early Modernism through Omega's activities. The purely abstract designs painted on the glazed earthenware pots of the Yeoman Pottery may have had little in common with traditional ceramic painting, but the widespread reappraisal of artistic theory during this intense period in English art opened up possibilities for new forms of artistic practice.

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[45] Harrison, 1994, p. 104.
[46] Berry, A., 'A Survey : Some Younger Artists and the A. L. S'., *Design and Art*, London, A. L. S., 1928, pp. 46-55.
[47] Berry, 1928, p. 51.

According to Haslam, Staite Murray later dismissed the work he did with Hamilton as not 'serious potting'.[48] However, it constitutes the first example of English Modernist pottery. Staite Murray, unlike Hamilton, was committed to making pottery and would continue to develop his ideas of Modernism and pottery in the next decade and open up a new series of debates.

[48] Haslam, 1984, p. 10.

Part 2 1920 - 1929

Chapter 9

A General Overview 1920-1929

The 1910s saw a growth of interest in early Oriental and English pottery and witnessed the rise and collapse of the Omega Workshops. In the 1920s a pottery movement emerged which was capable of taking historical concerns and fashioning them into a sustainable and contemporary form. Antiquarian scholarship, collecting and an engagement with the issues surrounding contemporary art coalesced into an amorphous but productive ceramic debate; the resulting amalgamation became the critical platform for studio pottery. A loose coalition of potters who aspired to the role of artists emerged during the first half of the decade and gave a tangible identity to these ideas. They included potters who were primarily throwers, such as Bernard Leach and Staite Murray, modellers such as Gwendolen Parnell and Stella Crofts and individuals such as Reginald Wells and Charles Vyse who did both. The identifying feature of this movement was that for the first time in modern English ceramic history the role of the designer maker or individual creative artist who alone conceived and executed a work of art in a ceramic process was established. As R. L. Hobson said 'The potter is complete master of all departments of his work'[1]. A secondary and vital feature of this movement was that it operated within the art market of galleries and exhibitions instead of the retail sector of trade and shops.

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[1] Quoted from R. L. Hobson, Rutter, F., 'Modern English Pottery and Porcelain', *Apollo*, Vol. 2, No. 9, Sept., 1925, p. 135.

These two factors combined to change ceramic practice in Britain and studio pottery emerged as a new and distinct movement. Industrial production of pottery continued to be segregated, with designers who 'designed' work which was manufactured by skilled artisans. The last of the remaining independent rural potteries that produced commercial products for local markets also continued production.

This disparate coalition of designer makers was troubled throughout the 1920s by questions about aesthetic character, critical rationales, institutional placement and nomenclature. While various earlier terms such as 'artist pottery', 'craft pottery' and 'art pottery' slowly died out, new terms such as Leach's 'artist craftsman' offered ideological alternatives. 'Studio pottery' and 'studio potter' came to express the independence and aspirations of this new discipline.

Bernard Leach's return to England in 1920 has come to generally symbolise the beginning of studio pottery. Although a prominent figure among the handful of studio potters working in the 1920s, Leach's reputation was not established in this decade. Staite Murray and Reginald Wells dominated early coverage in art journals. Leach's main impact in the early days of studio pottery was the introduction of his Japanese colleague Shoji Hamada who accompanied him to Britain in 1920. Hamada had the first significant studio pottery show in England, a solo exhibition of stoneware and slipware at Paterson's Gallery in Bond Street in May 1923. Initially described as a

technical assistant or 'thrower'[2] to Leach, he was introduced in the press as a Mr Hamada who had 'studied from the scientific side at the Kyoto Governmental Experimental Pottery Works.'[3] Hamada was soon promoted to the rank of 'co-worker'[4] after this successful exhibition and later earned the title of 'friend'[5]. Although Leach, Staite Murray and Wells were exhibiting before 1923, they were doing so in minor venues to limited press coverage. Hamada was the first studio potter to be given the honour of a Bond Street exhibition. The connection between early Chinese pottery of the Tang and Sung dynasties and contemporary pottery had already been made in the limited critical coverage preceding 1923. Paterson's selection of an 'authentic' Oriental potter to link contemporary practice with historical pottery married the two and kick-started the studio pottery movement.

Public and critical response to this exhibition in the prestigious environment of Bond Street was positive enough for Hamada to be offered a second exhibition in November of the same year which was reviewed in *The Times*[6], another first for a potter. Following this success Paterson's showed Staite Murray in 1924 and Leach in 1925. With Wells' exhibition at the Fine Art Society in Bond Street also in 1925, studio pottery came into vogue. After obscure beginnings, studio pottery had entered British art and

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[2] 'Home Arts and Industries Exhibition', Pottery and Glass Record, month unknown 1921, p. 18.
[3]Specially Contributed, An Art Pottery in Cornwall, *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, p 1661, December 1, 1920. This article was probably written by Leach. It was the first press reference to Leach after his return to England in 1920 and used photographs taken in Japan.
[4] Marriot, C., 'Chinese Art and English Pottery', *The Times*, June 9, 1925.
[5] Leach, B., 'Shoji Hamada', catalogue Exhibition of Pottery by Shoji Hamada', London, Paterson's Gallery, May 23, 1929, p. 5.
[6] Marriot, C., 'Anglo-Japanese Pottery', *The Times*, November 1, 1923, p. 12.

by the end of 1928 Charles Marriot *The Times* art critic was describing Wells as 'one of the most distinguished artists in Europe'[7]

This thesis will discuss critical responses to these important studio potters in separate chapters. Because of similarities in their work and underlying Arts and Crafts sympathies Leach and Hamada will be discussed together. Staite Murray and Wells share a chapter as critical response to their work centred around the ideas of Orientalism and abstraction. Two significant critical themes were consolidated during the 1910s, the English Vernacular Revival and an interest in early Chinese pottery which warrant individual chapters. Herbert Read formulated his ideas of abstraction when writing on early English pottery made popular by the English Vernacular Revival, while appreciation of Oriental ceramics continued to grow with the interest in early Chinese pottery. Figurative modelling underwent a revival during the 1920s and merits a separate chapter. As studio pottery progressively attracted critical interest, questions were asked about its relationship to industry. This along with the rural pottery movement will also be discussed in an individual chapter. The following chapter sets the general context for the decade by discussing the first responses in the press, early public lectures, studio pottery's relationship to the Arts and Crafts movement and general publications on pottery.

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[7] Marriot, C., 'Stoneware Pottery', *The Times*, November 3, 1928.

9.1 Early Lectures and the Press

As discussed in Part 1, *The Studio Year-Book* is a useful indicator of the popularity of individuals and studio pottery as a whole. No studio pots were illustrated in 1920 and only one work, by an unknown Gabriel C. Bunney, featured in 1921. In 1922 thirteen pots were featured, eight by Staite Murray. In 1925, a year of unprecedented critical coverage in the art journals and broadsheet press, twenty-five in total were illustrated. It is unwise to draw substantial conclusions from the number or frequency of the illustrations, as many of the studio potters whose work was reproduced did not receive any other press coverage. *The Studio Year-Book,* like all publications, had a distinct editorial preference, and certain individual potters benefited while others did not. *The Studio Year-Book* included Bernard Leach for eight consecutive years and Staite Murray intermittently over four years. This did not accurately reflect their critical reputations, for by the end of the decade Staite Murray was exhibiting in prestigious galleries with rising young artists, while Leach was struggling and exhibiting at lesser venues. Irrespective of editorial bias, the increasing amount of studio pottery featured over the decade in *The Studio Year-Book* demonstrates a significant public and press interest.

Until studio pottery became established in the broadsheets and major art journals, coverage was limited to trade and minor publications. It tended to be generated by specific exhibitions or events organised by groups such as the Red Rose Guild. In 1921 *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*

covered a talk on historical pottery for the Ceramic Society at Hanley Town Hall given by Bernard Rackham, Keeper of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The lecture and a related article Rackham published in *The Studio Year Book* of 1922 were important. Although not dealing overtly with contemporary pottery, Rackham's work reflected a growing preoccupation with national identity, or the 'Englishness' of pottery. He presented a bleak picture of English pottery over the previous four centuries, arguing that English industrial ware eventually overwhelmed superior artistic pottery and porcelain from the Continent by its efficiency of production methods and price. English industrial ceramics, although regarded as globally dominant in 1922, did not, in his opinion, deserve this position on aesthetic grounds, for 'our early national wares compared very unfavourably with those of other countries.'[8] Alluding to the Arts and Crafts dictum of 'truth to materials', he condemned the 19th century for 'the artistic degradation of our domestic pottery'.[9]

In his discussion of vernacular English pottery Rackham took the orthodox position shared by specialist collectors and writers such as M. L. Solon. He described Medieval work as having 'a rough kind of beauty, it made no pretensions to beauty'[10] and considered early English slipware as a crude precursor to later, more technically sophisticated work.

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[8] Report of Bernard Rackham's, 'English Pottery: Its Place in Ceramic History', *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, December 1, 1921, p. 1797.
[9] Rackham, December 1921, p. 10.
[10] Bernard Rackham's lecture, 'Domestic Pottery of the Past', *The Studio Year-Book of Decorative Art*, 1922, London, The Studio Ltd, 1922, p. 7.

Rackham concluded his survey of English pottery with a direct reference to studio pottery. Although a figurehead of the ceramic establishment, Rackham was at first unsympathetic to developments in studio pottery. In an indirect comment on Leach and Hamada's slipware he warned against using 'actual materials of the 18th century' to make pottery because of its inappropriateness to 'social customs and hygiene'. Reginald Wells had attempted to revive vernacular Kentish slipware at his Couldrum Pottery a decade earlier and similarly Leach and Hamada were employing local materials to 'determine the character'[11] of their earthenware and stoneware. Rackham's conservatism prevented him from seeing the first signs of the studio pottery movement as motivated by artistic rather than commercial concerns.

The exhibition '*Fifty Years of London Pottery*' held at the South London Art Gallery in 1922 inspired *The Times* to comment on the fact that 'considerable progress [had been made] in modern ceramics and [how] inadequate attention has rarely been paid to the part played by London'.[12] Although *The Times* mainly referred to De Morgan and the Martin Brothers who were operating before studio pottery came of age, this exhibition was nevertheless an important marker of the contribution urban potters made to English ceramics.

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[11] 'An Art Pottery in Cornwall', 1920, p. 1661.
[12] 'Fifty Years of London Pottery', *The Times*, May 4, 1922.

The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review covered a lecture on 'Modern Pottery' given by the potter Alfred Hopkins at Camberwell College in 1923[13]. Despite its title, Hopkins steadfastly refused to acknowledge the new developments in studio pottery. Instead, he described figurative work by Phoebe Stabler, Charles Vyse, Royal Doulton, the Martin Brothers and his own and Henry Hopkins' work which he described as featuring 'a greater expression of texture and true glaze effects of depth colour'[14].

Just as Leach's return to Britain marked the beginning of a new era, so the death in 1923 of the specialist modeller and surviving Martin brother, Robert Wallace Martin, closed an era. In his obituary in an industrial trade magazine of 1923, *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*[15] the anonymous contributor described Martin as 'the first pioneer in the remarkable development of studio pottery which is now taking place in this country.'[16]. However, the figurative animals and grotesques typical of Martinware were out of sympathy with Modernist aesthetics. Charles Holme's 1908 tribute to the Martin Brothers in which he described them as 'Among the honoured names'[17] now seemed to belong to the mood of the previous century.

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[13] Report of Alfred Hopkin's lecture, 'Modern Pottery', *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, May 1, 1923, p. 824. The report mentions an Eastern gentleman in the audience. Since he was in London in May 1923 it is tempting to speculate that this gentleman was Hamada.
[14] *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, May 1, 1923, p. 824
[15] 'The Late Robert Wallace Martin', *The Pottery and Glass Trade Review*, September 1, 1923, p. 1475. Interesting also for featuring the earliest record so far found of the term 'studio pottery'.
[16] Specially contributed, 'The Late Robert Wallace Martin', *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, Sept. 1, 1923, p. 1472.
[17] Anon (Charles Holme), 'Some Recent Developments in the Pottery Ware of the Martin Brothers', *The Studio*, Vol. 42, 1908, p. 110.

During the early 1920's the pottery industry was slow to appreciate the aesthetic and social changes taking place in studio pottery. One trade editorial advised against training women as potters

> 'Few of the middle-class women ... would have the capital necessary to start a pottery making or decorating business of their own, and fewer still ... possess the genius that leads to success. ... We deprecate, therefore, the indiscriminate recommendation of potting as a career for women'. [18]

Although studio pottery was a marginal economic activity this was not a deterrent to the new group of admittedly often privileged individuals. At the time of the Gazette's publication Dora Lunn was successfully running Ravenscourt Pottery in London. Gwendolene Parnell was an established modeller and Dora Billington was running the ceramics department at the Royal College of Art. Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie and Nora Braden became assistants at the Leach pottery before eventually working together at Coleshill Pottery in 1928.

As the identity of studio pottery gradually began to be defined, critical essays appeared in the press offering new theories on the general nature of pottery and schemes of classification. The first such essay was Herbert Read's 'English Pottery: An Aesthetic Survey' published in 1925 and discussed in Chapter 15. In 1926 one of the most interesting writers on inter-war studio pottery, W. A. Thorpe, published his first article on pottery in the new journal *Artwork*. Thorpe was a regular writer in the English art press,

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[18] Editorial, 'Women as Potters', *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, Dec. 1, 1923, p. 1933.

writing four of the most perceptive, if idiosyncratic, essays on pottery during this period. He later became a vociferous Orientalist. His first essay 'Form in Pottery'[19] attempted to construct a new classification of pottery as either 'dynamic' or 'statuesque form.'[20] Frustratingly verbose but always inventive, 'Form in Pottery' was, at over eight and a half columns long, Thorpe's most convoluted article. One of the most perceptive analyses of pottery so far, his approach may have been too theoretical for studio pottery at this stage in its development. Thorpe boldly rejected Read's claim that pottery was a pure form of abstract art because abstract form was 'form which neither says anything nor does anything; and form which does something is not abstract.'[21] Thorpe was catholic in his writing comparing, for example, highly unfashionable classical Greek pottery 'functional forms'[22] and 'plastic forms' with classical Chinese pottery, as well as Persian ceramics and Minoan pottery in his analysis of decorative practice. His conclusion was prophetic of future problems

> 'The pottery of modern English artists has rediscovered form and is out of love with decoration but it has no precise idea which of two appeals—to reason [statuesque form] or to taste [dynamic form]—that form is attempting to convey : and it may perhaps be suggested that for the future, as in the more remote past, there is a real inspiration to the potter in the pantry, in the cellar and in the ordinary practices of housewifery.'[23]

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[19] Thorpe, W. A., 'Form in Pottery', *Artwork*, Vol. 2, No 7, Summer, 1926, pp. 162-170.
[20] Thorpe, 1926, p. 165.
[21] Thorpe, 1926, p. 162.
[22] Thorpe, 1926, p. 166.
[23] Thorpe, 1926, p. 170.

9.2 Early studio pottery and the Arts and Crafts

At the beginning of the 1920's studio potters had to rely on minor galleries and organisations such as The Red Rose Guild to show their work. Critical coverage at the beginning of the decade was shaped by 19th century Arts and Crafts values. Although The *Manchester Guardian* commented on 'the advance that has been made in certain directions since the early days of the arts and crafts movement'[24] the reviewer was still concerned with the 'moral value' of handicraft and the poor quality of machine products. *The Manchester City News* reinforced this, emphasising the hand-made qualities of Staite Murray and Leach's work in 1923 and stressing its modernity noting 'a spirit of revolt against the extravagant adornment and ugly shapes that have held the field for many years.'[25] The art press gradually made fewer references to the Arts and Craft Society and it declined as a viable force within British art and critical debate during the 1920s. Although Leach, Staite Murray, Hopkins and W. B. Dalton exhibited with the Society in 1926 and Herbert Furst praised their work in *Apollo* he criticised the exhibition overall. 'There is something wrong about the Arts and Crafts Exhibition at Burlington House ... It must be doubted whether the aims of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society are very clear.'[26] Furst cited affected workmanship, excessive prices, a hobbyist mentality and a

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[24] B. D. T., 'Manchester Arts and Crafts Exhibition', *The Manchester Guardian*, October 1920.
[25] 'The Red Rose Guild', *Manchester City News*, Nov. 3, 1923.
[26] Furst, H., 'The Arts and Crafts Exhibition at Burlington House', *Apollo*, Vol. 3, Mar, 1926, pp. 185-186. It is interesting to note that the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society was at last showing at Burlington House. The Society was formed in 1888 because the applied arts were excluded from the annual Royal Academy exhibition.

'fundamental lack of logic'. By the end of the decade T. W. Earp in *The Studio* wrote

> 'The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society ... will do little towards persuading an opponent of the movement as to its utility. There is little that the machine could not do as well, and a regrettable disregard of present-day housing conditions.'[27]

Few significant studio potters were associated with the Society during the 1920s with the exception of Leach who immediately affiliated himself with it on returning to England, setting up the Leach pottery as a branch of the St. Ives' Handicraft Guild 'to promote hand work rather than machine-craft.'[28] Alfred Hopkins of Camberwell College, one of a group of potters who struggled to establish a reputation on a par with Staite Murray, Leach and Wells was another exception. Hopkins occasionally wrote,[29] but his articles lacked subtlety. 'Pottery'[30] , for example, published in the parochial *Arts and Crafts Quarterly* revealed the underbelly of studio pottery. Hopkins discussed 'Hotels and restaurants' as locations for work rather than galleries and couched the change in modern taste as 'A lucrative opening ... for good handcraft pottery to meet this new demand.'[31]

Other significant figures were critical of the Arts and Crafts Society, notably Eric Gill. In his essay 'The Revival of Handicraft' published in 1924 in the first issue of *Artwork* Gill wrote 'What we cannot thank Heaven for is the

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[27] Earp, T. W., 'Arts and Crafts', *The Studio*, Vol. 97, Jan, 1929, p. 57.
[28] 'An Art Pottery in Cornwall', 1920, p. 1661.
[29] See correspondence in reply to Konody, P. G., 'Modern English Pottery'. 'The New Orientalism' , p.16
[30] Hopkins, A., 'Pottery', *The Arts and Crafts Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 10, Mar., 1927, pp. 8-10.
[31] Hopkins, 1927, p. 9.

mass of good intentions ... enrolled under the general banner of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Here is fiddling while Rome Burns!'[32] With an evangelical zeal about the importance of handicraft Gill poured scorn on official craft organisations 'All they succeed in doing is the whitewashing of the sepulchre.'[33] Many artists and critics had lost respect for the moral agenda of 19th century craftwork groups. Issues of craftsmanship were still of concern in critical debate, but the impact of Modernism and studio pottery's relationship with industry were growing preoccupations of the 1920s. Few writers chose to discuss the crafts as an independent concern. In a reprinted version of *'The Idea Behind Craftsmanship'*, an essay first published by the New Handworker's Gallery in London, Philip Mairet, the second husband of the weaver Ethel Mairet, saw Morris as 'too much in love'[34] with tradition and Ruskin as excessively concerned with 'discipline'. Mairet argued that contemporary craftworkers had two choices - 'a spiritual dependence on the past or into excessive reliance upon his own intuition.' Remarkably, Gill concurred with this view in 'The Criterion in Art' also published in *The Studio* in October 1928. Gill's disillusionment with contemporary art and craft reinforced his religious faith. He believed that the physical aspects of craft were 'quite subordinate' [35] to the demands of fine art which 'does nothing. It serves no one. It *is*; and it is *beautiful*. It ministers to the mind alone.'[36]

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[32] Gill, E., 'The Revival of Handicraft', *Artwork*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1924, p. 36.
[33] Gill, 1924, p. 35.
[34] Mairet, P., 'The Idea Behind Craftsmanship', The Studio, Vol. 96, Oct. 1928, p. 233. First published by the New Handworker's Gallery, London.
[35] Gill, E., 'The Criterion in Art', *The Studio*, Vol. 96, Oct., 1928, p.237.
[36] Gill, 1928, p. 239.

9.3 General Publications

There was a marked decline in press coverage of early or culturally diverse ceramics during the 1920s in contrast to of the 1910s. This was partially due to the establishment of early Chinese and English pottery and the increase in coverage of contemporary work. *The Burlington*, which was committed to a broad editorial policy, published two reviews of Peruvian ceramics in 1924 .[37] A 1926 review in *Artwork*, *Pueblo Pottery Making*, was notable for an early mention of the potter Maria Martinez and the revival of indigenous pottery in New Mexico.[38] In keeping with this broad policy *The Burlington* published an article on the value of ornamentation in archaic Greek pottery[39] that was markedly out of step with current sympathies.

Writing by museum curators which also featured prominently during the 1910s seemed to decline during the 1920s. An exception was the encyclopaedic *Pottery and Porcelain* written by the Danish curator Dr. Emil Hannover, partly translated by Rackham. This tome was reviewed by R. L. Hobson as a 'Great Work on Ceramics'[40], and it was universally approved despite Hannover's poor opinion of vernacular English pottery.[41]

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[37] Reviews, 'La Céramique du Péron' & 'The Art of Old Peru', *The Burlington*, Vol. XLV, No. CCLVI, July 1924, p. 42.
[38] Forsyth, G, review of 'Pueblo Pottery Making', *Artwork*, Vol. 2, No. 6, Jan.-Mar. 1926, p. 136.
[39] Jacobsthal, P., 'The Ornamentation of Greek Vases', *The Burlington*, Vol. XLVII, No. CCLXIX, Aug., 1925, pp. 64-75.
[40] Hobson, R. L., 'A Great Work on Ceramics', *The Burlington*, Vol. XLVI, No. CCLXVI, May 1925, p. 246.
[41] Hannover's book will be discussed in a later section.

Despite the decline in general ceramic press coverage, there was an increase in the publication of 'how to do it' books in the 1920s which generated a new general interest market. Familiar names continued their specialist historical writing. Hobson's *A Guide to English Pottery and Porcelain,*[42] and *A Guide to the Pottery and Porcelain of the Far East*[43] were a continuation of his curatorial writing published in *The Burlington* over the previous fifteen years. The most significant difference in publications on Eastern ceramics was the introduction of sections devoted to early Chinese work. Important commentators also published for the first time, such as W. B. Honey with *Old English Porcelain'*[44].

An indication of the growing importance of studio pottery was the publication of *Handcraft Pottery for Workshop and School* written by the potters Henry and Denise Wren, who were known as exhibiting potters at the time. An increase in ceramic education in County Council colleges and the growth of an amateur market created a demand for practical instruction books, as Frank Brangwyn indicated in his introduction to the Wren's publication. 'The recent revival of interest in pottery is a healthy development in English craftsmanship. ... This book is for those ... who wish to become "potters". May all success be with them.'[45] Practical manuals had been published before but 'Handcraft Pottery' was arguably the first modern

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[42] Hobson, R. L., 'A Guide to English Pottery & Porcelain in the British Museum', *British Museum*, London, 1923.
[43] Hobson, R. L., 'A Guide to the Pottery & Porcelain of the Far East, In the Department of Ceramics and Ethnography', *British Museum*, London, 1924.
[44] Honey, W. B., 'Old English Porcelain, A Handbook for Collectors', *Bell and Sons*, London, 1928.
[45] Wren, H. & D., 'Handcraft Pottery for Workshop and School', Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, London, 1928, p. v.

English 'how to do it' pottery book. Illustrated with a lavish number of photographs of various techniques and processes the book encouraged budding studio potters. As the Wrens wrote, 'The modern spirits amongst artists and craftsmen has delivered handcraft pottery from the thraldom of mere china-painting.'[46] Although historical and critical themes were absent, a small legacy of Fry's theoretical writing of the 1910s and Read's continuation during the 1920s was evident 'For the expression of form and colour in connection with things of use the craft is now beginning to be recognised as perhaps the most fascinating and most free of all.'[47] The book's novelty drew a brief review in the prestigious art journal *Artwork* which generously stated 'The book is not only the essence of practicability - not a word of it is superfluous - it contains here and there wise advice of psychological importance as well as artistic.'[48] Other miscellaneous books in the decade included *Pottery,* [49] a simple history of pottery and industrial manufacture published by Pitman under their Common Commodities and Industries Series and *Pots and Pans,* [50] a poorly written history book which must have seemed antiquated even in 1928.

By far the most important publication of the decade was *English Pottery* [51] by Bernard Rackham, the highly respected Keeper of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Herbert Read, a young curator in his department.

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[46] Wren, H. & D, 1928, p. vii.
[47] Wren, H. & D., 1928, p. vii.
[48] Review of H. & D. Wren's 'Handcraft Pottery for Workshop and School', *Artwork*, Vol. 4, No 16, Winter, 1928, p. XXIV.
[49] Noake, C. J. & Plant, H. J., 'Pottery', *Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons*, London 1924.
[50] Harrison, H. S., 'Pots and Pans', *Gerald Howe*, London, 1928.
[51] Rackham and Read, 1924.

Ostensibly a historical survey, the introduction to the book contained a theoretical argument that was to revolutionise appreciation of contemporary ceramics. Read's radical premise was that pottery represented the purest form of abstract art, a conclusion that was to bring studio pottery to the forefront of Modernist debate in English art during the late 1920s and early 1930s. The significance of *English Pottery* lay in its relationship to contemporary critical debate rather than to historical writing and it will be discussed at length in the chapter 'Staite Murray, Wells and Abstraction.'

Chapter 10

Leach, Hamada & Pupils

In December 1920, a minor article entitled 'An Art Pottery in Cornwall'[1] was published in *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*. Announcing Bernard Leach's return to England the article was likely to have been written by Leach himself and it reflects the potter's early sense of his own importance, opening with the remark that the establishment of The Leach Pottery 'created no little amount of interest in the west'. The 'specially contributed' article established the critical agenda that would typify Leach's writing and career throughout the inter-war years - a mythologising of the Orient, a neo-Arts and Crafts ideology, nationalist undertones and concern with English identity. As 'an artist who took up the pottery profession in Japan, where he served an apprenticeship in Eastern handicraft' Leach's time in Japan would accompany every press reference to Leach over the next decade, associating him personally with the Orient and mediating his pottery through the unassailable reputation of Oriental ceramics. With his polarisation of Eastern and Western culture - 'the natural love of beauty' of the Orient 'and the scientific bent' of the Occident - Leach positioned himself as a willing bridge between two disparate cultures. 'The object of Mr. Leach both in technique and in ideas is to find a common meeting ground between East and West'. Aware of the dangers of overplaying his hand however the

[1] Specially Contributed, 'An Art Pottery in Cornwall', The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review, December 1, 1920, p. 1661.

article stated 'Mr Leach does not intend to make pseudo-Oriental pottery', carefully grounding Leach's work within English ceramic practice.

Throughout his career Leach mimimalised any direct association with the failing Arts and Crafts movement but this early article reveals how he capitalised upon the rhetoric and tenets of its ideology. The pottery itself was described as 'a branch of the St Ives' Handicraft Guild, the object of which is to promote hand work rather than machine-craft.' 'An Art Pottery in Cornwall' also revealed a clear blueprint for the practical aspects of the Leach pottery 'We expect to have a few pupils and ... to turn out more than a couple of thousand pieces per annum for the first year or so.' Illustrated with two images, one of Leach in Japan, the other an example of his work, this early article discloses the remarkable coherence of Leach's strategy for setting up in England, and the precise nature of his plans before the pottery at St Ives was even built. As the article predicted 'The progress of this Cornish innovation will be watched with more than ordinary interest'.

The first mention of Leach's actual pottery was in another trade magazine, *The Pottery and Glass Record*, in a review of a Home Arts and Industries' Association exhibition in 1921. After discussing the pottery of Dora Lunn and Frances Richards it concluded 'Possibly the most outstanding exhibit is

that of Mr. Bernard Leach.'[2] This first response to Leach's pottery identified the Oriental and English vernacular themes which were to be characteristic over the next two decades, the 'forms of the Extreme Orient ... well potted jugs ...inspired by the work of English potters.' The next reference to Leach was a brief review of his first exhibition at the Cotswold Gallery in London in 1922 in which the anonymous critic voiced concern at Leach's impressionability to Orientalist influences. This concern would continue to be raised throughout his career.

> 'There is something ineffably sad in the passion of a man for a country which is not his own. Mr. Bernard Leach, who was born in Japan, and returned there after some years to study the art of the country, has an exhibition of pottery and etchings which show how much he prefers the foreign land of his birth. The pottery is very good, and his knowledge of the potter's technique quite extraordinary, but it is very sad.'[3]

The Arts Gazette was far more positive, describing it as 'one of the most original and stimulating one-man shows now on view.'[4] Leach's biographical history featured prominently and the reviewer credited him with 'contributing to that fusion of East and West'. He also claimed that Leach was 'the only foreigner since Hearn to whom it has been given to understand the inner life of Japan'[5]. The Oriental themes in his pottery were not regarded as contentious by this reviewer and Leach was described

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[2] 'Home Arts and Industries Exhibition, *The Pottery and Glass Record*, (month unknown)1921, p. 18.
[3] 'Cotswold Gallery. Mr. Bernard Leach. An Artist in Japan', *New Age*, 30 November, 1922.
[4] 'Bernard Leach', *Arts Gazette*, 2 December, 1922.
[5] Originally of Anglo-Irish descent Lacifidio Hearn worked as an American journalist for ten years before moving to Japan in 1889. After taking Japanese citizenship he married Setsu Koizumi, the daughter of a Samurai. He became an ardent Japanophile and wrote a variety of books interpreting Japanese life to the West and was revered in Japan for the subtlety of his awareness.

'as no slavish copyist' although paradoxically his '"Tzu chou"' style pottery was offered as evidence for this.

Leach effectively reviewed his own exhibition via another 'specially contributed' article in *The Pottery and Glass Trade Review*. Again he presented himself as an artist shaped by the Orient in a lengthy account of his history in the East. He was however careful to balance this with familiar Arts and Crafts references 'the machine is a good servant but a bad master in the mind of applied art.'[6] Intertwined with extensive biographical details and various references to his own importance were dubious critical claims about the work. Leach stated that his exhibition had 'awakened quite an animated interest in Eastern handicraft' despite the fact that critical interest in early Oriental ceramics had already been established in Britain through the critical writing of Roger Fry and scholarly work of R. L. Hobson. Leach also placed himself at the centre of contemporary ceramic practice and as 'one who has spent so many years in the East' claimed 'there seems to be little pottery in England which comes under the true heading of art.' This article positioned Leach as a commentator on studio pottery, a role he worked at as assiduously as he did his potting. He was unable however to maintain a distance between his own contribution as a potter and his views on contemporary studio pottery.

Leach's work and personal history impressed the art critic of *The Spectator*, W. McCance who wrote the first review of a studio pottery exhibition in a

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[6] 'A "Bernard Leach"

major national publication discovered so far. Writing on the same Cotswold Gallery show of 1922, McCance repeated Leach's familiar biographical travelogue but his account of Leach's views on the designer maker was more interesting. The idea that 'the potter should execute the whole of his craft, that the work should be his work from its beginning in the rough clay'[7] was still a relatively new concept at this early stage in studio pottery. McCance wrote of Leach's interest in the English vernacular pottery of 'early Staffordshire and Toft and Wrotham wares', his Arts and Crafts-inspired views on current industrial practice and 'Mr. Leach's ambition to re-establish true craft methods instead of the pernicious factory methods.'

10.1 Shoji Hamada

Leach was at the centre of developments in studio pottery in England for the first years of the 1920s and was the first potter who could claim direct experience of the East at this time of unprecedented interest in Oriental pottery. The gathering momentum of press coverage about Leach was diverted by Shoji Hamada's exhibition at Paterson's Gallery in Bond Street in early 1923. As has already been pointed out, Hamada was described initially by Leach as his 'Japanese assistant'[8] and was then referred to as Leach's 'thrower'[9]. After the exhibition he became 'a Japanese potter of considerable reputation in Japan, at presently working at Mr. Leach's

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[7] McCance, W., 'Pottery at the Cotswold Gallery', *The Spectator*, (month unknown) 1922.
[8] 'An Art Pottery in Cornwall', 1920.
[9] 'Home Arts and Industries Exhibition', 1921.

pottery.'[10] Hamada was the first of the studio potters to have a solo exhibition in Bond Street and the first to be reviewed in a broadsheet by the art critic of *The Times*, Charles Marriot.

Charles Marriot's first review of studio pottery in *The Times* placed Hamada's work firmly within the context of the Leach Pottery rather than presenting the potter as an artist in his own right. Marriot described 'A true mingling of East and West'[11] in the pots, whose character was attributed to 'the Chinese tradition' mediated by the use of Cornish materials. Marriot's early, rather measured view of studio pottery was coloured by his idea of pottery as an Arts and Craft trade. He also employed some of Leach's terms and ideas, describing the 'mingling of East and West' and promoting the pottery by concluding that 'The Leach Pottery shows every promise of creating a definitive range in ceramics.'

In 1923 there were few precedents for critical writing to focus on. W. McCance's review in The *Spectator* of Hamada's show at Paterson's Gallery was a significant improvement on his routine report on Leach a year earlier, since he contextualised the work as well as discussing its character. He described Hamada's pottery as 'an applied art', but acknowledged the individuality of each piece, 'as unique as a good piece of sculpture.' McCance discriminated between different types of decorative treatment, perceptively describing Hamada's decorations as 'an integral part of the form to which they have been applied'. Unlike many later critics he referred to the tactile

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[10] McCance, W., 'The Pottery of Mr. Shoji Hamada', *The Spectator*, May 26, 1923.

qualities of the work which he described as of 'a greater beauty than one cast in the mould.' McCance was astute enough to understand the work's historic references, suggesting Hamada's 'designs and shapes are derivative perhaps' but he acknowledged its individualism and directed his readers 'to encourage tradition in the making.' Hamada's arrival was dramatic, and he showed again at Paterson's later in the year. He played a pivotal role in linking historic and contemporary pottery and is discussed in depth in the chapter 'The New Orientalism'.

Marriot's second review of a studio pottery exhibition and his first on Bernard Leach followed a second exhibition at the Cotswold Gallery in 1923. Repeating the biographical and technical information given in the catalogue, Marriot's prose was descriptive but not particularly revealing. He complemented the work for its 'dignity of shape, depth of colour and quality of surface'[12] but his most interesting remarks were on the positioning of studio pottery as a link between the commercialism of industry and the 'gim-crack "craftsmanship"' of the Arts and Crafts. Leach contributed to the exhibition catalogue in what was the first official opportunity to use his own voice. His experiences in Japan were reiterated as were the quotes noting his similarity to Lacifidio Hearn. This mythologising offers a further insight into Leach's views of the damaging gulf between East and West and the missionary nature of his drive to heal this divide.

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[11] Marriot, C., 'Anglo-Japanese Pottery', *The Times*, November 1, 1923.
[12]Marriot, C., 'Leach Pottery', *The Times*, November 14, 1923.

> 'I have seen a vision of the marriage of East and West, and far off down the halls of time I heard the echo of a child-like voice : how long? how long?
>
> How I have longed for men of genius to come out of Europe instead of the average men of commerce, of statecraft, and of Churchcraft.
>
> The books which remain to write first and foremost and greatest, 'The Bible of East and West' greater than Blake's 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell,' a love-union of the two hemispheres, a mystic ring on the finger of the world.'[13]

As he had done with Hamada earlier in the year, it was McCance , the art critic of *The Spectator*, whose critical intervention supplied the most intelligent appraisal of studio pottery so far. Questioning its lowly status amongst the arts, McCance argued that it was time to fully acknowledge pottery given the 'exceptionally high merit'[14] of Hamada and Leach's work. He made the first of many attempts to classify studio pottery. Arguing that pottery could adapt either to a painterly or a sculptural approach, he expanded upon Roger Fry's criteria of 'rhythm of design' as an essential component of modern art, and applied it to pottery. He viewed Leach's work as expressive of expansive rhythm or 'centrifugal' tendencies, while he saw Hamada's as balanced or 'centripetal'. Perceptively analysing the differences between Leach and Hamada's handling of pottery, McCance described the way in which Leach worked 'delicately with his fingers, while Mr. Hamada uses his hand more as a whole'. McCance regarded 'the superaddition of pattern' as a distinguishing feature of pottery, something very different from either painting or sculpture, and noted how Hamada's design became 'an integral part of whatever shape it decorates.' He went

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[13] Leach, B., catalogue of 'An Exhibition of Pottery and Etchings by Bernard Leach,' The *Cotswold Gallery*, London, November 1923.

beyond the familiar mantra of the Leach Pottery's use of local materials and discussed the aesthetic value of impurities in artistic expression. As the last major critical contribution of 1923, the year before Read and Rackham's *English Pottery* was published, McCance proved to be the most perceptive of the first studio pottery critics. His profile diminished after 1923 but he played a crucial role in establishing a critical agenda that would last throughout the rest of the decade.

10.2 Leach's Eclipse

After a steady growth in press coverage up to 1923, Leach's critical profile was eclipsed by wider developments. Herbert Read's claim that pottery represented the purist form of abstract art created a new level of critical debate which was unsuited to Leach's agenda. Shortly after the publication of *English Pottery,* critics and scholars started to write about other new potters who, through their association with modern ideas of abstraction, concentrated on areas unrelated to Leach's pre-occupation with Orientalism mediated by Arts and Craft theory. Leach was not included in the exhibition 'Pictures, Sculpture and Pottery' at the Lefevre Gallery in 1925 which explored Post-Impressionist ideas through the work of Wells and Staite Murray along with Jacob Epstein and Paul Nash. Bernard Rackham wrote important features on Staite Murray and Wells in late 1924 and early 1925 , but ignored Leach. In 1925 Ernest Marsh also wrote a feature on Wells, while Staite Murray was busy establishing links between studio pottery and

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[14] McCance, W., 'The Art of Pottery', *The Spectator*, November 24, 1923. p. 791.

contemporary art through the publication of his important article 'Pottery From An Artist's Point of View'.

Leach's identification with Orientalist and Vernacular pottery may seem relevant to these new developments, but his philosophy was founded on a different critical basis. His highly romanticised portrayal of the East and prosaic adaptation of English pottery had little to do with the Modernist theory which drove the re-interpretation of mediaeval pottery and Oriental pottery. Leach's revival of English slipware was suddenly outmoded on two counts. Firstly, Fry and Read, the leading Modernist theoreticians of ceramics, had championed English vernacular pottery but identified early mediaeval work as significant rather than the slipware of Toft which Fry described in 1914 as a 'crude, barbaric and brutally clownish idea of deformation'.[15] Leach's use of slipware as an expression of functional 'handicraft' now appeared to be a product of 19th century Arts and Crafts ideology rather than part of the new Modernist vanguard sweeping British art. His reliance on ideas of utilitarian function and handwork were also at odds with the decorative slant of Wells's and Staite Murray's pottery.

Following a promising start to his career after his return to England at the beginning of the decade, there was no mention of Leach in the press in 1924. Apart from a passing reference in *The Studio* which described the work of the Leach Pottery as 'worthy'[16] there were only two references in 1925, one in a review by the steadfast Marriot in *The Times* and the other an article by

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[15] Fry, 1914.

Michael Cardew in *The Studio*. Following Hamada's shows in 1923 and Staite Murray's in 1924, Leach had a joint exhibition at Paterson's Gallery with Cardew and Hamada in 1925. Marriot's reference to Leach was contained within a longer review of two early Chinese pottery exhibitions. In contrast to his eulogies on Staite Murray, in which he discussed the pottery as works of art, Marriot's review of Leach was cursory, comparing his working methods to industrial production: 'The Leach Pottery does not touch directly the problem of an inexpensive artistic pottery for domestic use, but, indirectly, it is bound to have a good influence upon manufacture by setting a high standard of design and execution.'[17]

Leach had to fall back on his assistant Michael Cardew to write the only substantive article on his work of the mid 1920s. 'The Pottery of Mr. Bernard Leach'[18] published in *The Studio* in November 1925 discussed the large decorative slipware plates which Leach openly acknowledged as being of secondary interest to his stoneware pottery. While Staite Murray was contextualising studio pottery with fine art - the 'tendency of modern art exhibitions is to show paintings, sculpture and pottery together'[19] - Cardew was writing that the place for Leach's slipware was in the interior decoration of 'a small country house' with the work of furniture maker Romney Green and Ethel Mairet's textiles. Slipware plates offered Leach the opportunity to display his considerable graphic skills. More significantly, Cardew's

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[16] *The Studio*, Vol. 89, May, 1925, p. 285.
[17] Marriot, C., 'Chinese Art and English Pottery', *The Times*, June 9, 1925.
[18] Cardew, M., 'The Pottery of Mr. Bernard Leach', *The Studio*, Vol. 90, November 1925, pp. 298-301.

argument was that they provided a link with specific potters of the past which raised interesting issues of ceramic lineage. In reviving the idea of large slipware plates like those made by Ralph and Thomas Toft in the 17th century, Leach was capitalising on their popularity amongst collectors. Also, by referring to pre-industrial pottery and one of the best known 'signatures' of English pottery, Leach was associating himself with an individual potter, rather than one of the anonymous artisans of history. This could be regarded as an attempt to construct a ceramic lineage similar to that of Japan for he was making routine references to his teacher the 'sixth Kenzan'.

Leach's critical esteem seemed to fall in comparison with that of other potters over the next two years. While Marriot wrote in 1926 that Staite Murray was 'seeking to combine and fulfil the more abstract possibilities of both painting and sculpture'[20] he reviewed Leach's exhibition of stoneware and slipware at Paterson's Gallery in purely technical terms, arguing that Leach was 'a good potter'[21] because he was able to control his materials and firings. *The Studio* was more positive, describing 'the virtues of balance and sobriety ... original and tasteful in form.'[22] In 1927 Leach brought this inertia to a head, forcing a critical discussion of function, materials and price, by simultaneously exhibiting his stoneware pottery at Paterson's Gallery and his slipware at The Three Shields Gallery in Kensington. This was a bold challenge to prevailing attitudes whereby stoneware pottery had come to

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[19] Staite Murray, W., 'Pottery form the Artist's Point of View', Artwork, May-Aug., 1925, p. 202.
[20] Marriot, C., 'Stoneware Pottery', *The Times*, November 15, 1926.
[21] Marriot, C., 'Stoneware Pottery', *The Times*, April 21, 1926.
[22] *The Studio*, Vol. 91, June, 1926, p. 430.

typify high Modernist ideals and slipware represented the Arts and Crafts concern with domestic function. A statement by Leach declared his intent.

> 'In holding two simultaneous Exhibitions of work, it is my wish to draw attention to the fact that besides the inevitably expensive Stoneware selected from my year's personal output, I am attempting with my pupils, to provide some sound hand-made Pottery in the English Slipware Tradition, which is sufficiently inexpensive for people of moderate means to take into daily use.
>
> There is a need to escape from the atmosphere of the over-precious; and not only have the new craftsmen to prove that they can be creative, but as 'artist-craftsmen' they must if only for the sale of their art, contribute to national life. A growing public wants to enjoy the use of its crockery, and that can only be if it is inseparably practical and beautiful. Behind the scenes, the worker in the factory wants to enjoy his work again.
>
> There is a profound and urgent need for attempting to bridge that gulf soon.[23]

The Studio gave advance notice of this 'very interesting experiment'[24] which offered 'collector's pieces' and 'ordinary household utensils possessing all the merits of hand-made ware without the attendant disadvantage of high cost.' Unsurprisingly, given the tone of Leach's rhetoric, *The Arts and Crafts* re-printed the conclusion to Leach's statement under the title 'Bernard Leach on Crockery'.[25]

The 'experiment' was not a success. The exhibitions did not sell as well as hoped and were only reviewed in *The Times* by Marriot who continued his previous tack, discussing Leach in relationship to industry. Despite describing him as 'one of our two most artistic potters'[26] he did not support

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[23] Leach, B., St Ives, Spring 1927.
[24] *The Studio*, Vol. 93, March, 1927.
[25] 'Bernard Leach on Crockery', *The Arts and Crafts*, Vol. 2, No 2, June, 1927, p. 14.
[26] Marriot, C., 'Leach Pottery', *The Times*, March 23, 1927.

Leach's arguments against 'the over-precious'[27] in contemporary studio pottery, responding with a defence of the importance of 'cloistered virtue" in art. He argued that Leach's stoneware pottery stood in its own right as a form of artistic research and wrote

> 'The answer is that the utility is that which "cloister virtue" always has—that of a counsel of perfection, not so much to be imitated in workaday conditions as to radiate an influence.'

Nevertheless the two simultaneous exhibitions constituted a turning point in Leach's career. His broad approach in making two types of pottery representing different cultures, framed through 19th and 20th critical agendas, established a precedent in the formative period of studio pottery in the early 1920s which has continued to the present day. However, this had consequences for his work. As critical discussion became more sophisticated, his artistic standing declined in relation to the rise of Staite Murray and Reginald Wells. Leach's language became progressively more extreme and his adoption of 19th century rhetoric only increased his critical isolation. Beset by considerable financial problems, Leach turned on critics and other potters.

10.3 *A Potter's Outlook*

Leach repeated the concept of simultaneous exhibitions with 'Stoneware Pottery' at the Beaux Arts Gallery in Bond Street in 1928 and substituted 'Stoneware for Daily Use' instead of slipware at The New Handworker's

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[27] Leach, Spring 1927.

Gallery, off Tottenham Court Road. The latter exhibition was accompanied by the publication of his essay *A Potter's Outlook*. If his statement accompanying the Three Shields exhibition was mildly controversial, *A Potter's Outlook* pushed Leach's ideas for studio pottery to the point of conflict with his peers and critics. It oscillated between an evangelical vision of studio pottery as a craft, to an embittered attack on industry and his fellow potters who regarded their work as fine art . From his latent adoption of Arts and Craft themes regarding handicraft in 1920, Leach now openly referred to William Morris for the first time in a vociferous attack on industry, a sentiment still shared by many critics.

> 'Factories have driven folk-art practically out of England ... the artist craftsman, since the day of William Morris, has been the chief means of reaction against the materialism of industry.
>
> After one hundred years, the trade offers us crockery which is cheap, standardised, thin, white, hard and waterproof - good qualities all but the shapes are wretched, the colours sharp and harsh, the decoration banal, the quality absent.'[28]

Leach's anti-industrial views were relatively straightforward, a continuum of wider criticism voiced since the beginning of the century by Fry among others but also questioned the very role of his own work as a studio potter:

> 'What kind of person is the craftsman of our time? he is called individual ,or artist... and what is his relationship to the peasant or to the industrial worker? ...

It is interesting to note that Leach wrote this in the same year that Staite Murray exhibited with Winifred and Ben Nicolson at the prestigious

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[28] Leach, B., *A Potter's Outlook*, Handworkers' Pamphlets No 3, London, 1928.

Lefevre Gallery; at the time Marriot referred to Staite Murray as 'one of the most distinguished artists in Europe'[29] noting that 'There is not an artist at the moment moving more happily in his chosen medium than Mr. Murray'.[30] Leach's disenchantment with the world of art galleries was inconsistent with the fact that he was exhibiting in one at the time, for while his exhibition at the New Handworkers Gallery was selling reasonably priced domestic work, his show at the Beaux Arts Gallery in Bond Street featured 'museum pieces' such as 'Bottle with three small handles'[31] at thirty guineas.

Leach's struggle with ideals also distorted his perception of recent ceramic history.

> 'On my return to England, I have been surprised by the lack of any acknowledged classic standard of pottery.'

Barely a year later, he contradicted himself.

> 'Upon my return to England I found that the basis of criticism of pottery had shifted. America and Europe had become familiar with earlier work ...[Chinese]... the twelfth century or earlier. The fact is that our standards of beauty have undergone a thorough overhaul'.[32]

A Potter's Outlook is a stream of consciousness from a potter at odds with his critical peers and struggling for artistic direction. While he expressed his anger with the present he also projected forward, proposing ideas for

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[29] Marriot, C., 'Stoneware Pottery, *The Times*, November 3, 1928.
[30] Marriot, C., 'Pots and Paintings', *The Times*, July 6, 1928.
[31] Catalogue of 'Exhibition of Stoneware Pottery by Bernard Leach, Beaux Arts Gallery, London, December 1928.
[32] Leach, B., 'From the Hand of the Potter', *Homes & Gardens*, Nov. 1929, p.225.

production pottery which materialised a decade later in the form of his 'Standard Ware'. The real casualty of this approach was not the reputation of his fellow potters but the studio pottery movement itself. Leach's criticism was to undermine the fragile critical identity that studio pottery had slowly built over the previous eight years. In 1928 studio pottery was riding high through the combined efforts of Wells, Cardew, Parnell, the Vyses, Leach himself and the success of Staite Murray's integration with artists of other disciplines. The critical press had opened up to studio pottery with a genuine interest and enthusiasm for the potential of this new movement that was so well adapted to the Modernist theories and new aesthetics of the immediate post-war years. The publication of *A Potter's Outlook* [33] had a progressively devastating effect on Staite Murray, as charted in Chapters 13 and 17. Although Leach initiated the attack, it also rebounded on him as well. Marriot's opinion of Leach began to contain a germ of doubt that grew over the next few years. He reviewed Leach's exhibition 'Stoneware for Daily Use' in 1928 writing 'Mr Leach abandoned what may be called the museum attitude and comes down into the living room with jugs, tea set, porridge bowls'. Marriot commented on the economic viability of the tableware: 'Mr Leach cannot produce for less than 5s. the cup and saucer that the factory can produce at 3s'[34] going on to say ' in certain trades...a fruitful relationship has been established between the studio and the workshop.' Although Marriot's use of the word 'trade' is understandable given the

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[33] The publication of *A Potter's Outlook* undermined the notion of studio pottery as fine art, particularly with *The Times* critic Charles Marriot, who was a great supporter until the early 1930s. Marriot's reviews became progressively more subdued following the publication See Chapter 17.

[34] Marriot, C., 'Mr. Bernard Leach', *The Times*, December 6, 1928.

context of Leach's work in this exhibition, the linking of studio pottery and commerce reveal a downturn in Marriot's opinion of the discipline.

If Leach was distancing himself from the artistic vanguard of London, at the end of the decade his apprentices Michael Cardew, Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie and Nora Braden were providing an alternative circle of support for him through their independent exhibitions. Marriot reviewed Cardew for the first time in his 1928 Staite Murray article. His response was influenced by *A Potter's Outlook* for he described the work in terms of it supplying 'domestic ware of good, artistic quality as made by an individual potter.'[35] This work was seen as 'entirely different in aim and object' to Staite Murray's, although Marriot described Cardew's achievements as 'astonishing'. *The Studio* described Cardew in a brief review as one of 'the most notable workers in the craftsman-potter's art in England'.[36] Also acknowledging Leach's recent writing, the reviewer discussed the 'tactile quality' of Cardew's work adding 'It is too frequently forgotten that pottery, and especially household pottery, should be pleasing to the touch as to the eye.' Braden and Pleydell-Bouverie held the first of their joint exhibitions at the new Little Gallery in 1929 which Marriot reviewed as 'modesty in form and sobriety in colour combined with technical soundness'[37] before commenting on the 'moderate' prices. Leach himself kept to a broad exhibition programme and received an equally wide response of critical reviews. A group exhibition featuring the modeller Gwendolen Parnell

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[35] Marriot, C., 'Stoneware Pottery, *The Times*, November 1928.
[36] 'Craftsmanship', *The Studio*, Vol. 96, December, 1928, p, 442.
[37] Marriot, C., 'Stoneware Pottery', *The Times*, June 21, 1929.

among others at Colnaghi's Gallery was reviewed by a minor magazine which described Leach as 'pre-eminent among English potters'. After his caustic remarks on industry, *Arts & Crafts* magazine discussed a Design Industries Association[38] meeting at which Leach spoke with opinions 'almost identical with our own'.[39]

10.4 Leach's Revival

Leach's beleaguered position was aided by the visits of Yanagi and Hamada in 1929 for their work and views were sympathetic to his own. Hamada had returned to London for another exhibition at Paterson's Gallery while the potter Kanjiro Kawai had an exhibition at Leach's gallery, Beaux Arts, although he did not visit. The three old friends and colleagues from Japan provided support for Leach at this turbulent time. In Japan they had all contributed, along with the potter Tomimoto, to the early stages of *Mingei*[40] theory which Yanagi had since consolidated with the publication of *Kõgei no michi* (The way of crafts) and the 'Intention to Establish a Museum of Japanese Folk Art'[41] in 1926. Yanagi's presence helped to consolidate and reinforce Leach's views on the philosophy of craft and legitimise his respect for Japanese culture; as Watanabe and Kikuchi state 'The *Mingei* movement

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[38] The Design Industries Association was a breakaway group from the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. Formed in 1915, their remit was to foster closer relationships between the crafts and industry and improve the standard of British design.
[39] Editorial, *Arts & Crafts*, Vol. 1., No 5, August 1928.
[40] Mingei theory has been described as a "criterion of beauty", based on a concept of the supreme beauty of handmade folkcrafts for ordinary use, made by unknown craftsmen working in groups, free of ego and free of the desire to be famous or rich, merely working to earn their daily bread.' Watanabe, T., & Kikuchi, Y., catalogue for 'Ruskin in Japan 1890-1940: Nature for Art, Art for Life', Sheffield, *Ruskin Gallery*, 1997, p. 320.

developed a nation-wide campaign [in Japan] for the revival of folkcrafts from the 1930s onwards, its members united and nourished by a cultural ethnic nationalism.'[42]

Hamada and Kawai's exhibitions generated a flurry of critical activity which reflected well on Leach. He wrote the catalogue essay for Hamada's exhibition, portraying Hamada's life in a romanticised narrative. Leach idealised Japanese culture, presenting it as a pre-industrial idyll, glossing over the rigidity of the Japanese social structure when describing Hamada as 'living and working as one'[43] with the semi-peasants at his Mashiko pottery. Leach ignored the financial security that enabled Hamada to travel to England to exhibit in Bond Street, preferring to stress his work as 'kitchen wares' and 'an antidote to the artificiality of the art for art's sake, pot for pot's sake'. As with *A Potter's Outlook,* Leach's views of artistic identity were complex, and clashed with his espousal of the need for pottery to be free of ego. While praising the new found ability of the public 'to look critically for a personality behind a pot as it does for the author behind a book' he decried the excessive individualism of art, stressing the 'urge to serve needs rather than luxury'.

The two reviews that Hamada's exhibitions prompted were prefaced by biographical details and accounts of Leach's importance to Hamada's development as a potter. *Apollo's* reviewer relied heavily on Leach's essay,

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[41] For a detailed account of this see Nagata Keniichi's essay the catalogue for the exhibition "The English Arts & Crafts Movement and Hamada Shoji", Artist Inc, Japan, 1997.
[42] Watanabe & Kikuchi, 1997, p. 320.

quoting directly from it and stressing the value of handwork in 'fighting the same battle in the Far East that our artist potters are waging against the machine'.[44] In a routine review, Marriot detected an English influence on Hamada's work which he attributed to Leach; he also discussed the superiority of Japanese calligraphy when compared to English studio pottery. He viewed Hamada's work as 'a kind of aristocracy of the native domestic pottery'[45] concluding that it represented 'an easy relationship between the sensitive artist and the everyday craftsman.'

Kanjiro Kawai, described in *Apollo* as 'another "star" from the East'[46] , further reinforced Leach's status with his exhibition at Beaux Arts Gallery and two reviews. Both *Apollo* magazine and Marriot commented on the energetic character of his work and calligraphy but were perplexed by his use of bright enamels, describing them as '[47]Italian majolica'. Kawai's attempts at making slipware were questioned as 'Most curious'[48] but both reviews approved of the utility of his work. Marriot wrote 'A welcome general impression is that of pieces made for general use'[49] while *Apollo* said 'they are a worthy attempt to bring pottery back to use.'[50]

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[43] Leach, B., *Shoji Hamada*, catalogue, Paterson's Gallery, London, May, 1929.
[44] 'Mr. Shoji Hamada's Exhibition of Stoneware Pottery at Mr. W. M. Paterson's Gallery', *Apollo*, Vol. IX, No. 54, June 1929, p. 396.
[45] Marriot, C., 'A Japanese Potter, *The Times*, May 24, 1929.
[46] 'Exhibition of Stoneware Pottery by Kanjiro Kawai, of Kyoto, Japan, at the Beaux-Arts Gallery', *Apollo*, Vol. X, No. 56, August 1929, p. 120.
[47] Marriot, C., 'Japanese Stoneware, *The Times*, July 12, 1929.
[48] 'Exhibition of Stoneware Pottery by Kanjiro Kawai, of Kyoto, Japan, at the Beaux-Arts Gallery'., *Apollo*, Aug. 1929.
[49] Marriot, July 12, 1929.
[50] 'Exhibition of Stoneware Pottery by Kanjiro Kawai, of Kyoto, Japan, at the Beaux-Arts Gallery', *Apollo*, Aug. 1929

After the nadir of 1927, Leach had revived his career. He reduced the making of slipware pottery in favour of a new line of stoneware, re-positioned himself as a producer of 'domestic' pottery and reinforced his Oriental credentials through his association with Hamada and Kawai. Press coverage on Leach in 1929 reflected these changes. P. G. Konody in the Observer was by now including Japan as well as China as the dominant influences on studio pottery noting 'how completely our leading ceramic artists are under the spell of China and Japan.'[51] Leach strengthened his profile by writing a long article on stoneware in *Homes and Gardens* for his new audience of people with 'modest means'. As this was a popular sector of the press, the article was generously illustrated with photographs of his pottery as well as that of Staite Murray, Nora Braden and Pleydell-Bouverie. Leach juxtaposed technical information, ancient and modern history and self-promotion and even included an extensive section of *A Potter's Outlook*. The article revealed his pre-occupation of the moment 'we hand-workers must produce in greater quantity if we are to bring the prices of our pots down to the level at which our friends can purchase them for use.'[52] This new interest in a commercial functionalism was reflected in the responses to his work. Marriot described Leach's tiles in a group exhibition in Colnaghi's Gallery in New Bond Street as having '"bread-and-butter" rather than "cake" qualities.'[53] while The Studio Year Book of 1929 devoted its pottery section to Leach's new commercial lines. After discussing the success of his individual work it reported

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[51] Konody, P. G., 'Modern English Pottery', *The Observer*, December 1, 1929.
[52] Leach., B., 'From the Hand of the Potter', *Homes & Gardens*, Nov. 1929, pp. 224-226.
[53] Marriot, C., 'Present-Day Potters', *The Times*, November 30, 1929.

> 'Bernard Leach presents to us domestic wares suitable to their environment, made in Cornwall from Cornish clay, which are an entirely commercial proposition. ... and now we have from him those things that fulfil all his ideals, but that are within reasonable reach of the person of taste. The artist-craftsman has set himself to supply cultural needs'.[54]

An indication of how effectively Leach had resurrected his critical status after the lows of the mid 1920s is evident in an article in *Artwork* 'Some Modern Potters'. This summary of eight studio potters active in 1929 included, apart from Leach, three Japanese: Hamada, Kawai and Tomimoto, and three of Leach's ex-apprentices: Cardew, Pleydell-Bouverie and Braden. The only ones who were not linked directly to Leach were Staite Murray and Charles Vyse. Another sector of the art market might have come to different conclusions about the state of the ceramic world, and acknowledged Staite Murray's presence in the Seven and Five Society[55] as an important development for studio pottery. By 1929 however, the critical press were again aware of Leach through a combination of his writing, the phase of Japonisme he had initiated in studio pottery and his new commercialism. Leach's 'domestic' direction had become part of studio pottery's identity by the end of the 1920s, but the consequences of this would only become evident in the following decade.

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[54] 'Pottery and Glassware', *The Studio Yearbook*, London, 1929.
[55] The 'Seven and Five Society' was an exhibiting society for younger artists. It became the '7 & 5 Society' and finally '7 & 5' in 1935. Harrison, 1994, p. 345.

Chapter 11

Early Oriental Pottery

For Oriental pottery the critical transition from the 1910s to the 1920s was seamless, partly as a result of R. L. Hobson's series of 10 articles on the Eumorfopoulos Collection of Oriental art[1] published by *The Burlington* between 1919 and 1921. Hobson's writing was typically scholarly and thorough, but, in contrast to the usual sobriety of his writing these articles were littered with adjectives and terms such as 'exquisitely formed ... wonderful vase ... this masterpiece ... rules supreme.' Describing a Tang jar, Hobson even allowed himself to stray into the realms of aesthetic debate: '[the] jar ... not only lifts T'ang pottery into the highest place in Chinese ceramics, but raises pottery itself for one moment above the level of a minor art.'[2]

Hobson's articles emphasised the increasingly important role that the collector was playing in the appreciation of early Chinese ceramics by making work available for exhibitions and influencing scholarly research. With two other collectors, Benson and Alexander[3], Eumorfopoulos lent much of the work for the important 1910 Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition of early Chinese work. A decade later, Eumorfopoulos' collection

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[1] Hobson, R. L., 'The Eumorfopoulos Collection X', *The Burlington'*, Vol. XXXVI, No CCVII , June 1920.
[2] Hobson, June 1920, p. 300.

had grown so that it was the equal of a museum collection. As E. Dillon who reviewed the Burlington Fine Art show for *The Burlington* had written in 1910, the private collecting of this work created 'the psychological moment ... [that made] it possible to investigate critically both the claims to high antiquity and the intrinsic artistic merits of these various wares.'[4] Eumorfopoulos promulgated an ever growing interest in Oriental art at the beginning of the 1920s, consolidating the curatorial/collector relationship. His influence would continue to increase throughout the inter-war period through his acquisition of contemporary sculpture and pottery, work that was seen as a natural extension of his collection of early Chinese art.

11.1 'Modern Paintings in a Collection of Ancient Art'

Roger Fry's review of a catalogue of contemporary paintings owned by the French dealer and collector Kelekian reflected the developing relationship between curator, collector and critic.[5] Like many aspects of French art at this time, the article anticipated developments in Britain. In 'Modern Paintings in a Collection of Ancient Art'[6] Fry described Kelekian as 'the greatest collector and dealer in Oriental textiles and pottery'.[7] Kelekian had learnt to appreciate modern art through a knowledge of ancient art and his example reinforced Fry's Formalist view of the shared principles in all art. Fry's

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[3] Basil Gray describes W. C. Benson as the former patron of Whistler and an early collector of Japanese and Ch'ing porcelain before moving on to collect Sung Dynasty pottery.
[4] Dillon, E, 'Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain at the Burlington Fine Arts Club', *The Burlington*, No LXXXVIII, Vol. XVII, July 1910, p.211.
[5] This article was briefly discussed in Part 1.
[6] Fry, R., 'Modern Paintings in a Collection of Ancient Art', *The Burlington*, Vol. XXXVII, No CCXIII, Dec. 1920, pp. 303-309.
[7] Fry, Dec. 1920, p. 303.

article provided a concise example of his thoughts on the relationship between modern and ancient art. He discussed the 'coherence of attitude' needed to appreciate both modern and ancient art adding discreetly that, in part, the art historian had laid 'the way for the modernist movement'. Fry summarised this state of aesthetics as a struggle between the 'Graeco-Roman and the High Renaissance'[8] search for absolute beauty and the modernist or 'expressionist' view of beauty as a 'by-product ... of detached emotion'. Just as Fry had used historical art for arguing his case for Formalism, so this article extended a challenge to art historians about the way that they read the past. Fry stated that the dilemma of modern times was how to perceive beauty, an issue that affected the art historian almost as much as the creative artist.

Fry argued that 'the citadel of 'Beauty' had been subtly 'undermined' first by the art historian and then by the collector's actions. By placing unfashionable and diverse forms of art in public collections the collector provided material that had broadened the archaeological and scientific attitude of art historians, and appealed to 'purely aesthetic' forms of appreciation. By an 'omnivorous acquisitiveness' the collector led the art historian, providing material for a re-evaluation of the canons of art. Fry argued that Kelekian had the foresight to appreciate undervalued historic art; this ability then enabled him to appreciate contemporary developments and become a patron of modern art.

> 'The case of Mr. Kelekian, therefore, is one of great interest. Here is a man whose whole life has been spent in the study of early art, who at

[8] Fry, Dec. 1920, p. 304.

> a given moment had the grace to see its implications, to see that principles precisely similar to those employed by early Persian potters and Fatimite craftsmen were being actually put into practice by men of the present generation. He had the sense to put modern French artists beside Romanesque sculpture and Byzantine miniatures and to feel how illuminating to both the confrontation was.
>
> The collection of modern pictures which he has thus made is an admirable vindication of his method. His long familiarity with early Oriental art has trained his taste in the search for what is really significant in the work of art, has given him a courage which has not betrayed him in his choice of modern work.

Fry described how Kelekian initially collected Near Eastern art, then 'progressed' to Egyptian, Romanesque and finally to early Chinese art. He concluded his article by providing examples of the cross-fertilisation of taste that had enabled the collector to appreciate modern art. Fry suggested that Kelkekian's acquisition of Matisse was informed by his knowledge of Fayum portraits, while a Courbet reflected the 'poetical handling' of Chinese landscapes.

The significance of this article for studio pottery was that it strengthened the connection between the collector of classical Chinese ceramics, the critic and the artist (although it would be another three years before Shoji Hamada would exhibit at Paterson's Gallery, realising in person the link between ancient pottery and modern studio pottery). Fry had himself made connections between ancient and modern, Western and non-western art, and proto- studio potters such as George J. Cox had acknowledged the importance of historical precedents as early as 1914: 'It is here at the altar of perfection amidst the chaste richness of Tang and Sung and Ming that the

true disciple must worship'.[9] The collector of early Oriental work reflected changes in modern taste, the 'inevitable growth of taste that tends more and more to favour the simpler and ruder early wares'[10].

The Burlington in particular continued to cover Oriental, and specifically Chinese art, during the first half of the 1920s. The article following the pages of Fry's piece on Kelekian was the first of a series on Chinese Philosophy[11] by Arthur Waley. In the same year R. L. Hobson wrote a lengthy note on 'Early Chinese Art at Paterson's Gallery'[12](a show of bronzes and pottery) reinforcing the status of early Chinese pottery as art, and of pottery *per se*. As 'Friends of the Victoria and Albert Museum', collectors lent work for two exhibitions in 1922 which *The Burlington* covered in 'Early Ting Ware at South Kensington'[13]. The Keeper of Ceramics at the V & A, Bernard Rackham, the departmental expert on Italian Majolica, even wrote a lengthy letter to *The Burlington* on the origin of 'temmoku' as a term.[14] Fry published a routine review of another commercial exhibition 'Some Chinese Antiquities'[15] identifying various cultural influences in work that ranged from Roman to Indian. Whether intentionally or not, his disapproval of the mechanical character of a Han Dynasty mirror reinforced

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[9] Cox, G. J., *Pottery, for Artists Craftsmen & Teachers*, Macmillan, New York, 1914, p. 12.
[10] Dillon, E, 'Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain at the Burlington Fine Arts Club', *The Burlington*, No LXXXVIII, Vol. XVII, July 1910, p.211.
[11] Waley, A., 'Chinese Philosophy of Art- 1', *The Burlington*, Vol. XXXVII, No CCXIII, Dec. 1920, pp. 309-310.
[12] Hobson, R. L., 'Early Chinese Art at Paterson's Gallery', The Burlington, Vol. XXXVII, No CCXIV, Aug. 1920, pp. 110--111.
[13] E. E. B., 'Early Ting Ware at South Kensington', *The Burlington*, Vol. XLI, No CCXXXIV, Sept. 1912, pp. 148-149.
[14] Rackham, B., 'Temmoku Tea-Bowls : The Origin of the Name', *The Burlington*, Vol. XLIII, No CCXLVII, Oct. 1923, p. 201.

the link between classical Chinese and some manifestations of modern art: 'one would perhaps have supposed it made for the great Exhibition of 1851, so exactly does it correspond to the peculiar style which the endeavour to reproduce bad Graeco-Roman ornamentation by modern machinery created at that unhappy period.'[16] The Burlington published a notice of early 'Chinese Pottery and Porcelain'[17] exhibitions in 1924 that the anonymous reviewer urged his readers to visit: 'The enormously increased interest of art students in Chinese art, especially of the earlier types, can hardly be satisfied by [books] ... alone'. In June of the same year, *The Burlington's* full page review of 'Three Exhibitions of Chinese Art'[18] (one held at the British Museum and the other two at commercial galleries) revealed the extent to which interest in Oriental art had grown.

By 1925 this interest was great enough for Batsford to publish a handbook on '*Chinese Art*' intended for a general readership.[19] It included a chapter on ceramics by written by Bernard Rackham and a substantial introduction by Roger Fry that provided a succinct account of his views on Chinese art. Fry's approach was balanced, moderating his Formalist tendencies and included views on the Chinese attitude to nature and humour. The critical language was consistent with his previous writings, in his use of terms such as 'linear rhythm' to describe the chief characteristic of Chinese art, and 'cylinders,

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[15] Fry, R., 'Some Chinese Antiquities', *The Burlington*, Vol. XLIII, No CCXLIX, Dec. 1923, pp. 276-281.
[16] Fry, 1923, p. 281.
[17] 'Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain', *The Burlington*, Vol. XLIV, No CCLIV, May 1924, p. 260.
[18] 'Three Exhibitions of Chinese Art', *The Burlington*, Vol. XLIV, No CCLV, June 1924, p. 310.
[19] Fry, R., Rackham, B., 'et al', 'Chinese Art : An Introductory Handbook to Painting, Sculpture, Ceramics, Textiles, Bronzes & Minor Arts, *Batsford*, London, 1925.

spheres and ellipsoids'[20] to describe Chinese expression of plasticity in opposition to a European reliance on planes. Fry felt Chinese art was accessible to European sensibility 'if one approaches it in the same mood of attentive passivity that we cultivate before an Italian masterpiece of the Renaissance, or a Gothic or Romanesque sculpture.'[21] Although Fry believed Chinese art was accessible in formal terms he did acknowledge the remoteness of its religious content, but he countered this with an acknowledgement of the difficulty of entering into the 'psychology which lies behind much of our own mediaeval art.' The following year Fry published a collection of essays in his book 'Transformations' which included the essay 'Some Aspects of Chinese Art'. He wrote 'In its formal aspects, the Chinese art, though it has distinguishing characteristics, presents no serious difficulty to our European sensibilty' [22] and illustrated the essay with sculpture, paintings and bronzes but interestingly no ceramics.

Although he had co-authored *English Pottery* with Herbert Read the previous year, Rackham's chapter in the Batsford book was conventional in content and approach compared with *English Pottery's* claim for the abstract nature of English mediaeval pottery. Without the aid of Read, Rackham struggled to maintain the same degree of insightful critical appraisal

> '[Pottery] As a means of expressing the sense of beauty in shape, it is akin to sculpture, or rather to that part of sculpture that ought rather to be called "plastic" (it is characteristic of the English attitude towards art that whereas "logic," "rhetoric," "arithmetic," and a few others

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[20] Fry, 1925, p. 4.
[21] Fry, 1925, p. 1.
[22] Fry, R., 'Some Aspects of Chinese Art', *Transformations* , London, Chatto & Windus, 1926, p. 76.

have long been naturalised strangers, "plastic" as a noun still lingers without our gates).'[23]

Although Rackham was extremely knowledgeable and his writing informed, his prose belonged to an earlier era of critical writing; he described Tang figurines for example as 'children of the furnace'. His assessment of Chinese pottery from the early and rudimentary Han dynasty to the later and ornate K'ang Hsi pottery was descriptive, with bland and all-approving opinions 'It would be hard to point to a Sung pot that could be called ugly.'[24] The most controversial aspect of his contribution was countering the critically fashionable view of Chinese pottery (which favoured early work) by arguing for the appreciation of work from later Dynasties. Of the *sang-de-bœuf* glazes of the 18th century he wrote 'It is in the matter of shape that these wares generally fall short.'[25] On Ming underglaze painting he wrote 'Turn a deaf ear to academic pleas as to the wickedness of painting pictures on a pot, and you will come to agree that such a work as the blue-and-white bowl ... is its own justification.'[26] Despite the prominence of his position as Keeper at the V & A and the fact that he had written the first published appreciation of Staite Murray in *The Studio* the previous year, Rackham cautioned contemporary studio potters - those 'modern potters who too often doom themselves to failure in their anxious search for originality'[27]. However, the significance of Rackham's remarks is not in his warning but that he was able to refer to studio pottery at all; for the first time it had

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[23] Rackham, 1925, p. 29.
[24] Rackham, 1925, p. 39.
[25] Rackham, 1925,p. 36.
[26] Rackham, 1925, p. 34.
[27] Rackham, 1925, p. 33.

Henry Bergen was not published in one of the regular art journals but the magazine *The Old Furniture*. Bergen was an academic and collector who later edited Leach's *A Potter's Book* with what de Waal describes as 'supportive [and] fierce interventions.'[33] Bergen's eight page history of the tea ceremony was one of the most historically informed and perceptive articles written on any branch of ceramics over the previous two decades. He traced the rise of the tea ceremony from its hieratic origins and, balancing aesthetic appreciation with social history, gave a coherent appraisal of the pottery that was far superior to the majority of ceramic critical writing. He described the ideal tea-ceremony pottery

> 'It should also, like all good pottery, be strong and well-balanced in form, neither eccentric nor ingratiating, but austere, and close to nature, without artificiality of material or self consciousness of maker or ambitious display of technical cleverness'[34]

Instead of the bland approbation and romanticising of Oriental art that pervaded most writing, Bergen was not afraid to criticise developments in tea-ceremony pottery. He charted aesthetic developments within a social and political context with dry humour. Describing the Japanese military statesmen of the 17th century he wrote they were 'hardly the sort of men to give more than lip service to the ethics of Zen, and evidently believing with Napoleon that the function of art is to promote political stability, were enthusiastic collectors'[35]. It was unfortunate for ceramic critical writing that neither Bergen nor Kawai published again.

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[33] de Waal, E., 'Bernard Leach', *Tate Gallery*, London, 1997.
[34] Bergen, 1928, p. 46.
[35] Bergen, 1928, p. 51.

11.2 The Growth of the Collector

By the middle of the decade issues about collecting both contemporary and ancient pottery re-emerged in an article written by the art critic R. H. Wilenski in *Sphere*. *Sphere* was an illustrated weekly magazine and Wilenski wrote three popular articles on contemporary art and collecting. The inclusion of studio pottery revealed the progress made since Hamada's first exhibition in 1923. Of Eumorfopoulos, one of three featured collectors, Wilenski wrote

> 'Mr Eumorfopoulos specialises mainly in Oriental pottery. His collection of Chinese work in his house on Chelsea Embankment is one of the finest in the world. He began with a taste for Chinese porcelain of the later periods. Then his taste became more fastidious, and the majesty of the works of earlier periods made gradually an ever greater appeal. To-day he has the best judgement and the most discerning appreciation of any collector in England. He is a collector, moreover, who is not afraid to take certain risks. Side by side with masterpieces of pottery and sculpture produced a thousand years ago he has modern pottery by Staite Murray and sculpture by Epstein and Dobson, because in these contemporary artists he discerns the greatness that makes the artists of all lands and periods kin.'[36]

This was a direct endorsement of Fry's claims of Kelekien's connoisseurship in which he had argued that the collection of early Oriental art facilitated the appreciation of modern art. It 'trained his taste [Kelekien] in the search for what is really significant in the work of art, has given him a courage which has not betrayed him in his choice of modern work.'[37] Curatorial research, speculative collecting of early Chinese ceramics, and Fry's critical framing of Chinese ceramics with English vernacular pottery, underwritten by his

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[36] Wilenski, R. H., 'Art Collectors, Wise and Foolish', *The Sphere*, June 18, 1927, p. 304.

Formalist theories, had finally come together. The relationship between curator, collector and critic facilitated the emergence of studio pottery and provided a unified critical agenda to support it. Wilenski underlined this new congruence in a reference to an anonymous collection

> 'A type of collector who has my personal admiration is the man who buys works by contemporary artists and buys them while the artists are still young. I know a man who has early works by Muirhead Bone, Wilson Steer, ... Rothenstein, ...Sir William Orpen,...Augustus John, ...Gaudier Brzeska; and pots by Staite Murray and Reginald Wells. '[38]

The fact that Staite Murray and Wells were mentioned in the same context as Wilson Steer, John and Gaudier-Brzeska was a testament to the impact that studio pottery had made.

A full decade after *The Burlington's* monumental eleven part series on Eumorfopoulos, *The Studio* finally published a feature on this collection in 1929. Hobson doggedly kept to his laboured style. Although adding little of interest he did confirm Eumorfopoulos' reputation and contribution in establishing a new field of curatorial study. As Hobson remarked, Mr George Eumorfopoulos ... is perhaps the best-known collector of Oriental works of art in the world,'[39]

General notices and reviews on Chinese art continued to the end of the decade. In a review of early Chinese pottery at the Victoria and Albert

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[37] Fry, Dec. 1920, p. 304.
[38] Wilenski, 1927,p. 304.
[39] Hobson, R. L., 'Oriental Pottery in the Eumorfopoulos Collection', *The Studio*, Vol. XCVII, No 430, January 1929, p. 3.

Museum in 1928, the inter-changeable nature of ceramic criticism was evident. The writer T. W. Earp adopted the recently invented term 'artist potter' to describe the Chinese potters of the Han and Yuan dynasties, reinforcing the perception of a shared identity between ancient and modern pottery. He also applied the criteria of reductive form now clearly identifiable with both types of work, writing that 'a sense of utility always prevented the artist-potter from any decadence of form or structure'.[40] In 1929 a lengthy *Burlington* review summarised the advances made in the appreciation of Oriental art over the decade. W. Perceval Yetts, who later became a lecturer at the London School of Oriental Studies, gave an appraisal of developments in Orientalist studies, placing the credit with Western scholars

> 'Broadening of knowledge concerning the products of Chinese civilisation naturally results in a higher standard of criticism and a diversity of demands .... even native critics were content with the old traditional estimates till recent years, when we have seen the interesting phenomenon of stimulus from the West moving them to novel speculation.'[41]

Two contrasting articles closed the decade's obsession with Chinese pottery in December 1929. One, a homily to the "Sung standard" written by the critic W. A. Thorpe, the other a commentary written by Observer critic P. G. Konody who questioned the extent of Orientalist influence.

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[40] Earp, T. W., 'South Kensington', *The Studio*, Vol. 96, Oct. 1928, p. 289.
[41] Perceval Yetts, W., 'An Exhibition of Early Chinese Art', *The Burlington*, Vol. LV, No CCCXVII, Aug. 1929, p. 82.

11.3 W. A. Thorpe & Oriental Pottery

Thorpe was one of the most interesting, if idiosyncratic, writers of the inter-war period and characteristically deviated from his intended subject in an eight column article 'The Rutherston Collection at South Kensington'.[42] Despite the verbosity of his prose, Thorpe wrote one of the most intelligent analyses of pottery of the decade. Having rejected the application of abstract ideas to pottery three years earlier he now rescinded this view. He opened his article with the statement 'Early China had a bias towards abstraction. ... The art of the potter is itself so limited, for it is thrown on the wheel and allows no pictures. '[43] He was perhaps the most committed sinologist of the period but was never tempted into unqualified romanticising. In his discussion of Sung pottery he defined the formal criteria and constituent elements of thrown pottery that critics had alluded to but been unable to express. The first category in his analysis of pottery was Form.

> 'In Chinese pottery good form does not proceed from a putting together of parts to make a proportioned whole. It is brought off in a direct rhythm that carries the apperception from one node to another, but allows no pause in the transit.'[44]

He then went on to break form down into three elements: volume, profile and mass. Of these he wrote

> 'Volume is the spatial content of content, a declared hollowness ...

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[42] Thorpe, W. A., 'The Rutherston Collection at South Kensington II - Ceramics', *The Burlington*, Vol. LV, No CCCXXI, Dec. 1929, pp. 300-309.
[43] Thorpe, 1929, p. 300.
[44] Thorpe, 1929,p. 303.

> The chief ally of volume is profile, and profile is the form seen in two dimensions ...
>
> The third factor in form is mass, and by mass is meant the solid body of the pot, the thickness or thinness of its walls. Mass may be apparent ... or it may be implied.'

Thorpe's descriptive writing was as effective as his analytical writing. Discussing the clay or 'body' of pottery he made an analogy between stoneware and porcelain: it 'is like looking at a picture where you can *see* the paint, and then at another in which you only know that it must be there.' He analysed the nature and characteristics of glaze and decoration with similar insight. Although Fry and Bell had discussed art and pottery's formal qualities since the early 1910s as had Read in the early 1920s, none of these influential critics managed to do so as convincingly as Thorpe. Even Read in 'English Pottery: An Aesthetic Survey' when writing of the 'primacy of formal values'[45] was only able to apply the terms 'mass and outline' to his analysis of mediaeval pottery. The formal values of pottery were referred to as often as the superiority of early Chinese pottery was throughout the whole of the 1920s. However, until Thorpe started to write from 1926 onwards, no one had been able to deliver formal criticism so effectively.

> 'That is the subtlety of Sung Pottery. ... Its virtues, rather, are in order and movement and if it cheats your first observation it does so by a sweeping reticence that has always its reserve of possibility, like the T'ang poets whose works stop, but whose sense goes on. ... Like all great art it is both classical and romantic, classical in the defined clarity of actual form, and romantic because it is big with intimations.'

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[45] Read, 1925, p. 318.

Thorpe believed its good form was not the result of an assemblage of different components but came from its fluid character. In arguing that ceramic form was composed of three constituent parts, volume, profile and mass, and with close scrutiny, he concluded that the pre-eminence of Sung pottery was as a result of 'sensitive mastery of ceramic volume.' Although verbose at times, Thorpe's writing was like a Classical version of Fry's. With a deep knowledge of ceramics and glass, and an ability to make intelligent connections with historical precedents, his contribution to ceramic critical writing of the inter-war period was that he was the first writer capable of analysing a pot formally.

11.4 P. G. Konody & Oriental Pottery

P. G. Konody published a topical article in the same month, questioning the studio potter's appropriation of Oriental ceramics, a contrasting approach to Thorpe's. As the 1920s progressed Oriental pottery had become the unchallenged benchmark for studio pottery, unifying the radical aspirations of Staite Murray, the archaism of Wells and the sloganeering of Leach. English vernacular earthenware pottery was the only exception to the perceived supremacy of Oriental stonewares but it critical status was confused. Read may have offered Medieval English pottery as exemplifying abstract ideals but he was dismissive of historical slipware which Leach and Cardew chose to revive. In a review of one of the by now annual Christmas studio pottery exhibitions Konody wrote

> 'One has only to examine the beautiful examples of modern English pottery now on view at some half-dozen galleries in and near Bond-street, in order to realise how completely our leading ceramic artists are under the spell of China and Japan....For it is a strange fact that the vast majority of the pieces shown by Mr. and Mrs. Vyse ...Mr. Staite Murray ...Lily and Wilfred Norton, W. B. Dalton, and D. K. N. Braden and K. Pleydell-Bouverie ... follow with scrupulous anxiety the traditional shapes of Chinese Ceramics.' [46]

Konody was not simply levelling criticism at the studio potters, but questioned whether there were alternative courses open to English potters. He was unequivocal in his acceptance of the superior qualities of Chinese pottery, dividing it into two separate areas, form and technique. On the issue of form he felt that 'To improve upon the traditional forms of Old Chinese pottery would be as hopelessly difficult as to improve upon the form of a fine Chippendale chair or Sheraton sideboard.' He commented that when English potters 'depart, be it ever so slightly, from their Eastern models, the results cease to be completely satisfying'. On technical matters he regarded Chinese glazes with an alchemist's wonder about 'the secrets which enabled the Chinese potters of the Sung and Ming periods to produce their exquisite and infinitely varied glazes.' Just as many critics of this period had done, he perceived cultural differences as products of racial characteristics, regarding Chinese pottery as 'the natural expression of their racial rhythm in appropriate form and material.' Because of this 'racial' element Konody felt it would be inappropriate to apply Chinese glazes to 'European design', it would appear 'as incongruous as a Hottentot Venus in a Chanel gown'. After raising questions about the fundamental nature of English studio pottery Konody concluded

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[46] Konody, P. G., 'Modern English Pottery', *The Observer*, Dec. 1, 1929.

> 'Perhaps it is their subconscious recognition ... and their sense of inevitable fitness that induce our modern potters to adhere so largely to Eastern Forms when they resort to Eastern methods.' [47]

This was a long 'commentary' for The Observer for it generally featured short reviews. Despite an extensive preamble, Konody was unable to offer any solution to his questions about identity, suggesting that his views were undecided and he closed by remarking weakly on the distinctive nature of Leach's slipware which 'remains true to the English tradition' while modellers such as Phoebe Stabler 'are altogether outside the sphere of Eastern influence.' Although the article was free of polemic, the three letters it attracted from leading potters attest to the debate that would follow, marking the issue of Orientalism as the most contentious and divisive subject within English studio pottery.

The first reply to Konody's commentary was from the designer and Principal of Stoke-on-Trent College, Gordon Forsyth. He resurrected the art versus craft debate by categorising the work of English studio potters as 'mere craftsmanship'[48] instead of 'creative art', because of its lack of originality. Forsyth expanded on Konody's metaphor of clothing, writing 'it is rather a fancy dress ball where a normal Briton disguises himself as a Chinaman, and the whole business is a masquerade, amusing and unreal.' Referring to 'artists who can "think in material" he praised Europeans such as Jean-Paul Gauguin (Paul Gauguin's son) and Jain Nelson at Royal Copenhagen. Forsyth was supported by the Camberwell College teacher and potter Alfred

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[47] Konody, 1929.

Hopkins. In equally strong language Hopkins repeated the accusation that studio potters lacked 'the genuine hall-mark of the artist'[49] claiming 'present-day Anglo-Chinese pottery is purely that of replica'. [50] The only defence of the Anglo-Chinese potter came from the Poole Pottery designer John Adams in a letter to *The Observer* in 1929. Adams argued 'Original work, and English work at that, will come later'[51] because studio potters were still struggling with technical problems without the aid of industry. Adams had written a survey of three hundred years of English pottery in *The Architectural Review* in 1926 and worked at a small, innovative factory. He was critical of much industrial pottery and accused Forsyth of taking a high handed position; 'this point of view savours rather of the velvet jacket and the big black tie.'[52]

Konody was either curious or mildly dissatisfied with the identity of English studio pottery. His innocent enquiry may have been a footnote to the 1920s but it was a precursor of the bitter debates to come. Studio pottery came of age in the 1920s and it did so by latching on to the achievements of early Oriental ceramics for reasons that varied from true appreciation to commercial band-waggoning. The initial appreciation of early Chinese ceramics that emerged in the 1910s set the agenda for the emergence of studio pottery. The 1920s saw its consolidation and the interdependence between studio pottery and Oriental ware. By examining critical coverage of

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[48] Forsyth, G., 'Our Anglo-Chinese Potters', letter page, *The Observer*, Dec. 8, 1929.
[49] Hopkins, A. G., 'Our Anglo-Chinese Potters', letter page, *The Observer*, Dec. 15, 1929.
[50] Hopkins did not enjoy the status or press coverage of more established potters and his writing over the decade was limited to a single contribution in *The Arts and Craft Quarterly*.
[51] Adams, J., 'Our Anglo-Chinese Potters', letter page, *The Observer*, Dec. 15, 1929.

individuals such as Staite Murray, Wells and Leach, the importance of their identification with Chinese ceramics and its remarkable benefits will become evident.

[52] Adams, 1929.

Chapter 12

The English Vernacular Revival

There had been a rapid growth of interest in 13th - 17th century English vernacular pottery during the 1910s. This continued during the 1920s with a steady flow of articles and reviews, although coverage was less than that devoted to early Oriental ceramics. The culmination of this attention was the publication of *English Pottery* written by Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read and published in 1924. After *English Pottery* general coverage declined, partly because of a broadening of critical writing which embraced historical and contemporary work alike. From 1921 onwards the revivalist slipware pottery made by Leach, Hamada and Cardew provided a challenge for critics who wanted to write about contemporary pottery and its accompanying new concerns.

12.1 Press coverage of English vernacular pottery 1920-29

Just as it had done in the 1910s, *The Burlington* magazine continued to cover English vernacular pottery in the form of short reviews and notices of historical work sold through London galleries. In a review of 1920 *The Burlington* concurred with M. S. Solon's view of two decades earlier that the most interesting period of English pottery was that 'which preceded the

period of industrial development.'[1] This early work was again seen as virtuous in character and expressive of an innate 'Englishness', with its 'honest potting ... and homely skill of the old Staffordshire craftsmen', reassuring qualities which would be projected onto the modern revival. The staff writer of *The Burlington's* 'Monthly Chronicle' section, which reviewed current exhibitions, noted the expressive nature of this early work, with its 'good throwing and clever use of the graving tool'. It was regarded as superior to more technically accomplished industrial pottery, which relied on decorative treatments and 'enamel painting'. Although English vernacular pottery was by now widely accepted in the refined world of the connoisseur, it still came second to mediaeval tiles, with their ecclesiastical and architectural associations. *The Burlington* reaffirmed this in 1923 in a full length feature on eight medieval English tiles 'bought by the British Museum with liberal help from the National Art Collections Fund'[2] . R. L. Hobson commented on the 'superb drawing ...[and] the freedom and vivacity of the figures.'

Coverage of English vernacular pottery had been limited to the specialised art press, but in 1923 it broke out into the broadsheets. In his column in *The Observer* the art critic P. G. Konody reviewed an exhibition of figurative pottery by Ralph Wood (1716 -1772). This was written the month after Hamada's first exhibition at Paterson's Gallery and in it he discussed the growing acceptance of English vernacular ceramics. 'I had never paid much

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[1] 'Early English Pottery at the Dalmeny Galleries', *The Burlington*, Vol. XXXVI. No CVII, June 1920, p. 309.

attention to the isolated specimens of Ralph Wood Pottery ... and had come to regard this ware as a coarse and crude precursor to the golden age of English porcelain manufacture.'[3] As discussed in the two chapters 'The English Vernacular revival of the 1910s' and 'Critical Essays of the 1920s', and in a rare endorsement by a fellow critic, P. G. Konody acknowledged the impact of Roger Fry's writing. Konody cited Fry's book *Animals in Chinese Art,* which had shaped Konody's understanding of 'the essential difference' between Chinese and Western art. He described the homogeneity of Fry's Formalist theory and the way that his appreciation of Chinese figurative modelling helped form Konody's views on English vernacular modelling. He wrote 'I must confess that I was not a little surprised ... to find a formidable number of animals in glazed earthenware that have far more in common with the Chinese understanding of animal nature than with the "anthropocentric" outlook of the Occident.' In the spirit of Fry's Formalism, Konody discussed the 'simplified massive form' of Wood's work although he was unable to develop this any further. Many reviews of English vernacular work from this period relied on descriptive writing, and Konody's was no exception, falling back onto familiar descriptive techniques such as 'the great charm of this English peasant art—an art genuinely naive in its notions and very pleasing in colour.'[4].

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[2] James, M. R., 'Rare Mediaeval Tiles and their Story', *The Burlington*, Vol. XLII, No CCXXXVIII, Jan. 1923, p. 32.
[3] Konody, P. G., 'Ralph Wood Pottery', *The Observer*, June 24, 1923.
[4] 'English Pottery', The Burlington Vol. XLV, Vol. CCLIX, Oct. 1924, p. 199.

12.2 *English Pottery*, Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read

The important publication *English Pottery: Its Development From Early Times To The End Of The Eighteenth Century*[5] by Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read was published in 1924. Combining Read's theories of abstraction with the subject of English vernacular pottery, the book transformed an unassuming folk art into pottery of iconic status.

Rackham and Read proclaimed their intentions in the preface to *'English Pottery'* to treat the subject from a critical point of view, and to introduce 'standards which may be helpful, not only to collectors ... but also to designers and craftsmen whose aim it is to develop the English tradition in the future.'[6] With their varied backgrounds, Rackham and Read were ideally suited to address the different constituents in the ceramic sector. Read's interest in the avant-garde (discussed in *General Overview* of the 1920s) complemented Rackham's extensive knowledge and establishment position as Keeper of the Ceramics Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum and a leading scholar on Renaissance majolica. The inclusion of 'designers and craftsmen' in Rackham and Read's target audience was a significant one for critical writing on vernacular pottery. Such essays and publications were usually directed towards the specific concerns of the collector's market.[7] When *'English Pottery'* was published in 1924, Leach and Hamada had been

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[5] Rackham, Read, 1924.
[6] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. vii.
[7] Fry's *The Art Pottery of England* was an exception as it was written for a general art audience, but this seminal essay was published before studio pottery emerged as a distinct movement.

exhibiting their revivalist slipware for three years, including shows in major London Galleries. Rackham and Read were not working in an historical vacuum but were writing for an audience with contemporary interests.

'English Pottery' covered the period from 13th century mediaeval earthenware up to Wedgwood's neo-classical pottery. Chapter titles such as 'The English Tradition' and 'Foreign Strains: Maiolica and Delft' underlined Rackham's view that early English pottery had its own clear identity, an issue that preoccupied Rackham in the early 1920s[8] due to his awareness of the poor international standing of British commercial ceramics.[9] This national aesthetic built around monochrome treatments of clay, coloured slips and simple glazes existed before new techniques and influences spread from the continent during the 17th century. As he had made clear in his earlier writing, Rackham felt that slipware pottery during the Tudor and Stuart periods when 'English potters were to achieve their most characteristic triumphs'[10] expressed a true English character.

The introduction to *'English Pottery'* was the most significant section of the book for the studio pottery movement. Here Read attempted the first modern classification of ceramic aesthetic criteria: 'the general aesthetic principles on which the work of the potter should be judged.'[11] Along with

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[8] *English Pottery* was jointly written but where relevant I have specified individual authorial contributions thanks to the annotated copy in the Ceramics Department in the V&A.
[9] Discussed further in the 'Overview of 19th Century Pottery' and 'General Overview of the 1920s'.
[10] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 5.
[11] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 6.

Fry's *'The Art Pottery of England'* this book was a departure from earlier writing on vernacular pottery, which was primarily concerned with rarity value and attribution, research which had little relevance to contemporary work. Although intended to evaluate historical work, the contemporary nature of Read's ideas, the universal character of his classifications and the lack of comparable critical schemes meant that these principles could easily be applied to studio pottery and the 'designers and craftsmen'[12] mentioned in the Preface.

Before rules could be established, the topic of pottery as a valid art form had to be discussed and agreed. Here Read's critical voice was at its keenest. He argued that pottery 'was potentially, no less than painting or sculpture, a means of aesthetic self-expression'.[13] When he compared pottery and painting's capacity for self-expression Read concluded that pottery's potential was greater than sculpture's, because sculpture was limited by its figurative past.

> 'Sculpture, whether glyptic or plastic, had from the first an imitative intention, and is to that extent less free for the expression of the aesthetic sense than pottery, which may be regarded as plastic art in its most abstract form.'[14]

In devising the idea of pottery as a plastic art Read was indebted to Roger Fry, and to a lesser degree Clive Bell. From its characteristic use of self-expression to the discussion of abstract form, the framework of Read's proposition was defined by Fry's critical writing and theories at the time of the Post-

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[12] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. vii.
[13] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 4.

Impressionist exhibitions in 1910 and 1912. The precedents for Fry's Formalism are discussed in detail in 'Post-Impressionist Painting and Pottery'. However, one of the aims of his theory was an inclusiveness for art from different cultures, regardless of material which led to his interest in Sung and English mediaeval pottery and eventually the experiment of Omega.

Read's emphasis on 'self-expression' as a criterion to evaluate art was based on Fry's belief in the expressive power of design. Fry had discussed 'the lost expressiveness of life'[15] in his critical writing on new French painting and Primitive art during the 1910s. The association between pottery and abstraction can be directly traced to Fry's inclusion of Fauve ceramics in the first Post-Impressionist exhibition. Fry felt that pottery was an ideal instrument to demonstrate his principles of form because of its innate design properties which were free of the representational associations of painting and sculpture.

> And I would instance as a proof of the direction in which the post impressionists are working, the excellence of their pure design as shown in the pottery in the present exhibition. In these there is often scarcely any appeal made through representation,...'The artist plays upon us by the rhythm of line, by colour, by abstract form, and by the quality of the matter he employs.' [16]

Fourteen years had passed since Fry first aired these ideas and in this interval Cubism and abstract art had become established internationally. Fry

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[14] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 4.
[15] MacCarthy, 1910, p. 8.
[16] Fry, R., 'Post-Impressionism', *The Fortnightly Review*, Vol. LXXXIX, January 1911, p. 856-867.

was instrumental in aiding the development of abstract art in Britain, having acknowledged the theoretical possibility of 'a purely abstract language of form'[17] when he included early drawings by Picasso in the Second Post-Impressionist exhibition. Even Read's use of the term 'abstract form' played on the tone of early Post-Impressionist critical writing. It also evoked Bell's 'significant form' a term that he used to describe the aesthetic character and diversity of all art, including pottery. He illustrated this in *Art* with a picture of a Persian dish and a Peruvian pot.

Read's proposal in the book that pottery was 'plastic art in its most abstract form' preceded the classification of ceramic standards. Read and Rackham's declaration that 'aesthetic principles' were the basis for this marked a further distancing from schemes of traditional classification in ceramic writing which were typically based on nationality, technical factors and sophistication of technique. Again the debt to Fry is evident; his Formalist criticism broke down appreciation of art into discussion of specific categories such as colour, line, character, rhythm and composition, providing a precedent for Read and Rackham. Read's assertion that pottery was a 'plastic art' changed the appreciation of indigenous pottery and instantly spilt over into contemporary debate. The alliance between abstraction and pottery became the most important idea in ceramics since the previous decade when Fry and Bell had argued the significance of Sung and English mediaeval pottery to contemporary art.

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[17] Fry, R., 'The French Group', Catalogue *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, London, Ballantyne, 1912, p. 27.

The first set of 'principles' in *'English Pottery'* considered elements of form. The first criterion concerned utility: 'The form of an earthenware vessel should in the first place be strictly appropriate to its use.'[18] The Design and Industries Association slogan 'Fitness for Purpose' promoted functionalism in contemporary industrial design at this period. Decorative form was to have a separate but unspecified canon of its own. Symmetry was then proposed as an extension of form and considered an essential element of thrown work 'the balance of its symmetrically opposed parts'. 'Vitality' was considered fundamental in defining the aesthetic character of a pot, 'the contemplation of energetic lines and masses, a sense of movement, rhythm, or harmony'.[19] Echoing Fry's view of decoration and pattern, Rackham and Read stated that the principles of decoration were 'common to all decorative art'[20] but they extended the argument stating 'Pottery is, at its best, an abstract art, and its decoration should be in harmony with its abstract nature.' They felt decoration should be dictated by form and complement the continuous surface of pottery 'from one *and* any point of view' and that vessels should be treated 'as a blank panel' drawing the allusion of '"canvas" for the painter's brush'. Begrudgingly they acknowledged stylisation as a legitimate means of decoration, offering up Oriental designs as more effective than English. And finally, in 'Another departure from the strict canon of ceramic art'[21] humour was cautiously admitted.

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[18] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 6.
[19] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 7.
[20] Rackham, Read, 1924, p.7.
[21] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 8.

The conclusion of this analysis of ceramic form and decoration was a list of criteria that included form, utility, vitality, decoration, stylisation and humour. This was a three-dimensional equivalent of Fry's categories of colour, line, pattern, rhythm and design. While consistent with the purity of Read's Modernist views, the severity of this systematic approach strained Rackham's traditional curatorial approach. His moderating remarks can be heard countering the strictness of Read's proposals; when Read stated 'the less decoration ... the better' Rackham added - 'in case this should be regarded as impossibly austere, we hasten to admit certain forms ... whilst not pure, are justified by their results.'[22] Rackham's influence can also be detected in the inclusion of certain work such as the decorative plates of 'The Tofts' and the highly inappropriate inclusion of Renaissance majolica, his specialist subject. Here Rackham added a forlorn proviso 'it must be admitted that the aesthetic appreciation of such art is more allied to painting than to pottery.'[23] The increasing difference between the established school of ceramic appreciation and the emerging agenda of Modernism had never been more graphically illustrated.

The main body of *'English Pottery'* consisted of a detailed account of the history of pottery made in England, using conventional curatorial means to detail provenance, materials and technique. Rackham's views were again moderated by his collaboration with Read. Whereas two years earlier he had dismissed mediaeval pottery as having 'a rough kind of beauty, it made no

[22] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 7.
[23] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 7.

pretensions to beauty'[24] Read and Rackham now discussed 'the solid good workmanship and dignity of form seldom wanting in mediaeval pottery.'[25] Read's views were moderated in return by Rackham. In contrast to Read's later statement that slipware was 'fanciful'[26], their collective view of slipware in *'English Pottery'* was that it was of high aesthetic value and represented an English sensibility. Certain scholars had claimed that slipware had been influenced by continental pottery. A stout defence was mounted in response: 'All this speculation concerning a foreign origin seems to be rather wilfully blind to the facts. Slipware has existed in England in one shape or another ever since the Roman occupation.'[27]

Rackham and Read's closing remarks in *'English Pottery'* were pertinent to emerging debates on utility. They claimed that Wedgwood's revolution in ceramic production had created a distinction between 'ornamental wares' and 'useful wares' and concluded that this division was now inevitably established within contemporary life.

> 'The dualism between useful and ornamental wares ... must probably be accepted as inevitable. It is one of the results of modern civilisation.'[28]

In their final chapter Rackham and Read defended Wedgwood's reputation which had been widely criticised for being so bound to the neo-classical ideals of his day. In their discussion of the 18th century ceramic revolution

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[24] Bernard Rackham's lecture, 'Domestic Pottery of the Past', *The Studio Year-Book of Decorative Art*, 1922, London, The Studio Ltd, 1922, p. 7.
[25] Rackham, Read, 1924, p. 13.
[26] Read, H., 'English Pottery : An Aesthetic Survey', *Apollo*, Vol. 2, No 12, Dec., 1925, p. 320.
[27] Rackham, Read, 1924, 22.

they drew a parallel with the revolution taking place in British art in the inter-war period.

> 'Wedgwood must be excused ; the circumstances were too much for him. In the same way in these days of new revelation of the Far East and Negro Africa circumstances are apt to be too much for those with no strong traditional instincts.'[29]

Two lengthy reviews which followed the publication of *'English Pottery'* were a testament to its importance. Gordon Forsyth, the Principal of Stoke on Trent College, praised the book generously in *Artwork* although he did not acknowledge its critical ideas. He endorsed the modernisation of industrial design. Acknowledging the scholarship of established writers (mentioning Rackham but not Read) he wrote *'English Pottery* has emerged from this cloud of classicism, and a much more healthy outlook as to what constitutes fine pottery quality is now prevalent.'[30] Max Friendlander in *The Burlington* complemented both Read and Rackham, praising the contemporary relevance of *'English Pottery'*.

> 'The true canons of the potter's art, as conceived by our authors, are clearly explained in the introduction, and they are kept constantly in view in the admirable criticisms which run through the book. ... The correctness of these canons is beyond dispute'[31]

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[28] Rackham, Read, 1924, 130.
[29] Rackham, Read, 1924, 124.
[30] Forsyth, G., Review of English Pottery, *Artwork*, Vol. 2, No. 5, Oct.-Dec. 1925, p.68.
[31] Friedlander, M., Review of English Pottery *The Burlington*, Vol. XLV, No. CCLVII, August 1924, pp. 88-89.

12.3 *An Aesthetic Survey*

Read's ideas established a new standard for the critical appreciation of ceramics through the publication of *English Pottery*. Not since Fry had a critic managed to blend historical appreciation with Modernist values so effectively. Read developed his classification of the aesthetic characteristics of pottery in an article *'English Pottery: An Aesthetic Survey'* [32] in 1925 in the new publication *Apollo*, establishing the critical essay as a new genre in ceramic writing,.

The critical origins of Read's theories on the abstract qualities of pottery are discussed in the chapter 'The English Vernacular Revival' in Part I of this thesis. However, in *'English Pottery: An Aesthetic Survey'* it is clear that he continued to base his approach on Roger Fry's Formalist ideas. Read defined his intentions at the beginning of the essay. He hoped to construct a critical framework for the classification of all types of pottery, not to continue the aesthetic discussion of *English Pottery*. Nevertheless he restated the key theory that pottery should be regarded as an abstract plastic art, arguing it was 'the fundamental proposition on the basis of which all aesthetic classifications of pottery must be made.' His new framework was based on four value groups, with appropriate types of pottery.

I . Formal values : the Gothic period and the modern revival.
II . Peasant art.
III . Imitative art : almost confined to the eighteenth century

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[32] Read, *Apollo*, 1925, pp. 318-323.

IV . Utilitarian and commercial values : the nineteenth century.' [33]

Read promoted 'the 'primacy of formal values' in the critical appreciation of pottery. His use of 'formal' referred to pottery form as opposed to pottery decoration, while also suggesting a continuation of Fry's 'Formalist' theories. In the first and most important of his four value groups he related English mediaeval pottery with early Chinese pottery, writing that it 'can bear comparison with the best products of the T'ang and Sung dynasties.'[34]

This declaration recalled Fry's original pairing of the two groups in *'The Art Pottery of England'* published in 1914 where he had compared a medieval bottle with work from the Tang dynasty.

> 'to compare it at all with some of the greatest ceramics in existence is to show how exquisite a sense of structural design the English craftsman once possessed.'[35]

Read's belief in the 'formal' appreciation of pottery was built on Fry's ideas, as was his use of critical language. An example is the way in which he described the 'expressive' nature of medieval work using terms such as 'vigour' and 'vitality'. He ranked mediaeval pottery above slipware, echoing Fry's opinion of the two types of pottery. Read wrote of its superior nature 'in purity, vigour, and vitality of formal qualities'[36] while Fry had written that it demonstrated a 'great refinement of taste, that is shows a real

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[33] Read, *Apollo*, 1925, pp. 318
[34] Read, *Apollo*, 1925, pp. 318
[35] Fry, R., 'The Art Pottery of England', *The Burlington*, No. CXXXII, Vol. XXIV, March, 1914, p. 335.
[36] Read, *Apollo*, 1925, p. 318.

appreciation of form'.[37] Read was not as harsh as Fry in his conception of slipware but his description of its designs as 'fanciful'[38] echoed Fry's opinion of it as 'clownish'.[39]

Read's reliance on critical ideas set down during the 1910s reinforces the importance of Fry's contribution. Read's contribution to studio pottery between 1924 and 1930 was crucial to the formation of a Modernist critical identity and was responsible for attracting the interest of many critics and dealers. Fry did not have contemporary studio potters to link his historical ideas to during the 1910s, and, unlike Read, declined the opportunity of doing so during the 1920s.

In *'English Pottery: An Aesthetic Survey'* Read included Leach and Staite Murray in his first and most important group 'Formal values: the Gothic period and the modern revival.'[40] Making the all important connection he wrote

> 'Only in modern times, particularly in the hands of Mr. W. S. Murray and Mr. Bernard Leach, has there been a revival of that sense of formal values which we must persist in regarding as the essential quality of the potter's art.'[41]

Read's theories of abstraction provided a Modernist identity for studio pottery during the inter-war years. Staite Murray built his career on these ideas and many critics, including Rutter, Konody and Marriot, referred to

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[37] Fry, 1914, 'The Art Pottery of England', p. 335.
[38] Read, *Apollo*, 1925, p. 320.
[39] Fry, 1914, The Art Pottery of England', p. 335.
[40] Read, H., 'English Pottery : An Aesthetic Survey', *Apollo*, Vol. 2, No 12, Dec., 1925, p. 318.

them frequently in their writing. Unfortunately, studio pottery could not maintain the same degree of theoretical interest from critics after Read's last contribution to Staite Murray's Lefevre catalogue of 1930. The extent of Read's interest in studio pottery is debatable. Like Fry, he never reviewed a studio pottery exhibition or wrote a feature on an individual potter although he referred to Staite Murray who was teaching at the Royal College of Art in his article 'Art and Decoration' in *The Listener* in 1930. His interest in the abstract nature of pottery was not dependent on understanding the formal qualities of medieval pottery but was a precursor to his later interest in the nature of industrial art. The last paragraph of *'English Pottery : An Aesthetic Survey'* reveals the germ of Read's growing interest in industrial art and the ideals of Le Corbusier and the Bahaus. In the conclusion to his fourth category 'Utilitarian and commercial values: the nineteenth century'[42] Read speculated on factory production in relation to early Wedgwood.

> 'But there is not a real reason why factory-produced pottery made for daily use should not have, in common with the motor-car and steamship, quasi-aesthetic qualities of efficiency and appropriateness.'[43]

Studio pottery's loss was Read's gain, for it is arguable that his early writing on pottery played a significant part in forming his views on industrial art, which in turn led to his seminal book *Art and Industry: The Principles of Industrial Design* of 1934, a work that shaped a new era of criticism.

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[41] Read, *Apollo*, 1925, p. 320.
[42] Read, *Apollo*, 1925,. p. 318.
[43] Read, *Apollo*, 1925, p. 323.

The quantity of writing on English vernacular pottery fell away after the publication of *'English Pottery'*. The expansion of interest which had initially been fuelled by the acquisitiveness of collectors eager to exploit an unfamiliar area of ceramics had gradually been transformed into a field of scholarly research. This was then taken up by Fry as part of his challenge to conventional art criticism. It was appropriate that Read and Rackham's seminal work should close this period of intense activity, for *English Pottery* opened up a new understanding of indigenous pottery in the early stages of its revival.

Read's agenda never struck a critical chord with the early studio potters, Leach, Hamada and Cardew, in the 1920s and 30s. They preferred the romantic interpretation of vernacular pottery which had its roots in 19th century Arts and Crafts ideology. In many respects, Read's radical views of abstraction and pottery could have been written about any area of pottery. The universal nature of his criteria were equally applicable to early Chinese stonewares. In his essay *'An Aesthetic Survey'* published a year later Read connected Medieval English pottery, early Chinese pottery and the modern studio pottery revival in his first and most important category of 'Formal Values.' It is fitting however that a previously neglected English form of pottery, long regarded as crude and unsophisticated, should become the centre of a debate that would affect the small world of studio pottery, before sweeping out into the wider areas of British art. An exhibition in 1928 of

Old London Pottery in the Mansard Gallery at Heal & Sons[44] and its accompanying publication provide a fitting footnote. The placing of vernacular work in an art gallery situated in a London store renowned for design portrays the extent of *English Pottery's* critical legacy.

There is a contemporary footnote to Read and Rackham's *English Pottery.* Modern research has revealed that the authors' assertion that slipware production was unique to England is misguided. Darren Dean and Robin Hildyard both refer to archaeological evidence that points to Holland as the country of origin for slipware decorative methods. The critics and studio potters who capitalised on reviving slipware as an intact indigenous pre-industrial form of English pottery were unfortunately working on false assumptions.

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[44] 'Old London Potters: A Guide to the Wares in the Exhibition of Old London Pottery & Porcelain in Heal & Sons Mansard Gallery, London, *Heal & Sons,* April, 1928.

Chapter 13

Staite Murray, Wells & Abstraction.

A few references were made to William Staite Murray in the press during the early 1920s in reviews of group shows such as the 'Exhibition of Pottery Produced in London between the years 1872 - 1922.'[1] *The Times* did not acknowledge Staite Murray's contribution[2] in its review. However, in his book *William Staite Murray* Malcolm Haslam cites a small mention of the potter in the *Yorkshire Post.*

> 'the adjoining small room, where perhaps the most notable - apart from the interesting collection of contemporary French pottery - are the pieces by Mr Murray, fired at a very high temperature. ... This artist's work holds great promise for the future.'[3]

Following Staite Murray's first exhibition in 1923 with the Red Rose Guild of Artworkers (created by Margaret Pilkington in 1921), the art critic of the *Manchester City News* described the stoneware pots as '... of delightful colour and texture, the shapes and graceful contours reflecting the delicate touch of the hand.'[4]

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[1] Held at what is now the South London Gallery, Peckham.
[2] See 'Fifty Years of London Pottery', *The Times*, May 4, 1922., General Overview p. 7.
[3] Review of 'Exhibition of Pottery Produced in London between the years 1872 - 1922', Haslam, Malcolm, 'William Staite Murray', *Crafts Council*, London, pp. 17 - 18.
[4] 'The Red Rose Guild : Arts and Crafts Exhibition', *Manchester City News*, November 3, 1923.

Charles Marriot, the art critic of *The Times*, reviewed Hamada and Leach in 1924 before the idea of abstraction - the issue most associated with Staite Murray - had entered wider debate. He wrote the first substantial review of Staite Murray's work on his solo exhibition at Paterson's Gallery in late 1924 (where Hamada had shown twice in the previous year). Marriot was enthusiastic. He regarded the work as distinctive, describing Staite Murray as a potter who worked 'by his own methods and without a hint of eclecticism', producing 'simple' and 'sober' forms. He also wrote that the pots were characteristic of the 'Far East'.[5] This review marked the beginning of one of the most important relationships between a studio potter and a critic in the inter-war period. Between 1924 and the early 1930s Marriot championed Staite Murray above all others, helping to establish his reputation and confirm his position as the most important studio potter of the period.

Staite Murray's entry into the higher levels of the British press took place the following month with a feature in *The Studio*[6], 'Mr. W. S. Murray's Flambé Stoneware' by Bernard Rackham. Its significance was twofold: Rackham's endorsement of the work was important, but Staite Murray also benefited from the critical ideas expressed in Rackham and Read's publication *English Pottery* which Rackham proceeded without delay to apply to Staite Murray's pottery. Following the critical model laid down in *English Pottery* he declared that 'pottery can be an instrument of aesthetic

[5] Marriot, C., 'Stoneware Pottery', *The Times*, November 19, 1924.
[6] Rackham, B., 'Mr. W. S. Murray's Flambé Stoneware", *The Studio*, Vol. 88, December 1924.

self-expression'[7] and reiterated Read's idea that pottery was 'plastic art in its most abstract form.'[8] Without the support of Read, Rackham struggled to apply these new ideas effectively as is exposed in his discussion of Staite Murray's glazes: 'he feels that abstraction in colour is more easily realised in pottery than in any other form of art.'[9] By slightly changing the wording and introducing the concept of beauty he diluted the impact of Read's original concept.

> 'Pottery can indeed be plastic sculpture in a purely abstract form, and something more than sculpture ; for it is capable of adding to beauty of shape, beauty of colour beyond the reach of sculpture in the ordinary sense of the word.'[10]

After this opening Rackham retreated into familiar territory, comparing Staite Murray's glazes with Oriental precedents and discussing the technical difficulties of firing. Critics as well as potters emphasised the methods of studio pottery during this early period. Rackham's essay marked the reverence for stoneware glazes - 'the stern rigours of an intense firing'- that became a feature of debate during the 1920s. However, the benefits of this article to Staite Murray outweighed any minor difficulties over critical ideas. In contrast to the limited press coverage that he had previously received, this two month period following the Paterson's show was productive. Most significantly, it introduced Staite Murray as the first potter to be associated with the idea of abstraction.

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[7] Rackham, December 1924, p. 318.
[8]Rackham, B. & Read, H., 'English Pottery : Its Development From Early Times To The End Of The Eighteenth Century'', *Ernest Benn*, London, 1924, p. 4.
[9] Rackham, December 1924., p. 321.

Throughout the late 1910s and 1920s Staite Murray showed with artists working in other disciplines. 'Pictures, Sculptures, & Pottery By Some British Artists Of To-Day'[11] in 1925 was his first group show with painters since his association with Cuthbert Hamilton and the Arts League Service in the late 1910s (as discussed in Chapter 8). It was an exhibition with a determinedly modern aim and included Paul Nash, Winifred Nicholson, Jacob Epstein and the potter Reginald Wells as well as Staite Murray himself. The inclusion of both potters was unsurprising, as Staite Murray and Wells were frequently compared to each other during the mid 1920s. P. G. Konody, the art critic of the *Observer* and author of the exhibition catalogue considered the inclusion of their pottery as a demonstration of the exhibition's broad intent, and he drew on well established Post-Impressionist rhetoric in relating these developments of the modern movement.

> ' it asks nothing of its followers but a real interest in plastic forms and inventions, a real passion for experiment, and a real absence of conceits and prejudices.'[12]

Konody specifically referred to the pottery as stoneware, writing of Wells' 'sumptuous refinement of the Chinese ware'[13] and the 'special texture 'of Staite Murray's 'whole-heat stoneware glazes.' Staite Murray's aspiration to position studio pottery with contemporary painting and sculpture was

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[10] Rackham, December 1924, p. 318.
[11] Konody, P. G., catalogue essay of Pictures, Sculptures & Pottery By Some British Artists Of To-Day', London, *Lefevre Gallery*, February 1925.
[12] Konody, February 1925, p. 1.
[13] Konody, February 1925, p. 3.

reflected by Konody's closing words: 'the union of these several schools will enhance the reputations of these several artists and of the whole modern movement in English art.'[14]

13.1 Reginald Wells

Apart from minor references, the first significant mention of Reginald Wells's pottery in the British press was a short review of an exhibition at Beaux Arts in 1925 in *The Studio*. It described him as having 'developed the artistic possibilities of the potter's craft in a way of his own'.[15] Later in that year Ernest Marsh wrote a seven page article in *Apollo* which reviewed Wells's life and work. Having already established a career as a sculptor, Wells had moved into potting, motivated, in Marsh's words, by a desire 'for greater output' after poor sales of his sculpture. Marsh described the 'delicately coloured glaze effects'[16] of Wells's early 'Coldrum' pottery and said that it was a characteristic also typical of the later work Wells called 'Soon Pottery.' Marsh went to great lengths to explain the innocent origins of the word 'Soon', describing its similarity to the term 'Sung' as a 'misapprehension'. Co-incidence or not, the 'Soon' pottery with its simple, monumental forms, rich glazes and discarding of 'all definite design in ornamentation' was clearly influenced by early Chinese pottery and established Wells as one of the three most important potters of the 1920s.

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[14] Konody, February 1925, p. 4.
[15] 'Studio Talk', *The Studio*, Vol. 89, February 1925, p. 92.
[16] Marsh, E., 'R. F. Wells-Sculptor and Potter', *Apollo*, Vol. 1. No. 5., May 1925, p. 285.

Wells arguably capitalised more on the fashionable interest in Sung and Tang pottery than Staite Murray and Leach. By now Sung pottery occupied a revered place amongst critics and collectors. Wells's pottery, often placed on carved 'Chinese' wooden stands, aspired to this status. Unlike Leach who was producing both exhibition 'one-offs' and standard ware, Wells was emphatically working for the collector. When Marsh described his own close handling of the work, 'the subtle ribbings formed by the touch of the potter's fingers on the plastic clay as it revolved upon the wheel giving to the surface the desired effects of light and shade' he was evoking 'the delight of the collector' rather than the kitchen table.

In 'The Pottery of Mr. Reginald Wells'[17], his second and final feature on a studio potter, Bernard Rackham also described Wells's move from sculpture to pottery.

> 'The shifting of interest away from the "fine" arts towards the so-called "applied" arts is one of the significant features of the post-war period in England.'[18]

Like Marsh, Rackham was impressed by the subtlety of Wells' glazes and surfaces, the 'pressure of the shaping hand ... shows itself clearly in all his productions' with 'the light and shade of the form ... agreeable alike to sight and touch.'[19] In line with Wells' emphasis on form, Rackham described the shapes as 'masculine' and expressing 'strength and beauty'. Although he did

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[17] Rackham, B., 'The Pottery of Mr. Reginald Wells', *The Studio*, Vol. 90, December 1925.
[18] Marriot, December 1925, p. 359.

not describe the work as stoneware, Rackham discussed the bond of clay and glaze characteristic of high temperature firing. Like his article on Staite Murray, Rackham was at ease when discussing the close qualities of Wells' pottery, but he struggled to apply Read's new critical theories of abstraction. He was confident of the expressive potential of pottery when discussing Wells's background as a sculptor. However, he avoided the universal nature of Read's theory, suggesting that pottery had 'a tendency sometimes to stray into the fields of other crafts.' His application of abstract ideas to pottery was hesitant: 'pottery, which in certain of its forms—may rightly be classed as abstract sculpture'. He was unable to apply the idea to the work with conviction.

After the publication of these two reviews, it was Staite Murray himself who finally claimed the idea of abstraction for studio pottery. In his manifesto 'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View'[20] Staite Murray summarised the critical discussions of the last two years, and asserted the right of the studio potter to take on the role of the modern artist. Staite Murray littered the article with references to recent ceramic critical writing. He adopted McCance's terms 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal'[21] of the previous year and echoed Read's introduction to *English Pottery* with its ideas of 'vitality'[22], 'balance', 'decorative value'[23] and 'abstract'[24]. He was emphatic about the

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[19] Marriot, December 1925, p. 360.
[20] Staite Murray, W., 'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View', *Artwork*, Vol. 1., No. 4., May.-Aug. 1924.
[21] McCance, W., 'The Pottery of Mr. Shoji Hamada', *The Spectator*, May 26, 1923.
[22] Staite Murray, W., 'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View', *Artwork*, Vol. 1., No. 4., May.-Aug. 1924, p. 201.
[23] Staite Murray 1924 p. 202.
[24] Staite Murray 1924p. 201.

relationship between pottery and abstraction. 'The forms are abstractions and as such readily contemplated as pure form.'[25]

Staite Murray's critical voice was assured and he discussed the evolving identity and aspirations of studio pottery confidently. He opened the article by stating 'Pottery as a means of expression in Art has within the last few years been re-established'.[26] Unusually, he linked English studio pottery with contemporary French ceramics, writing that 'in Paris at least two well - known painters are decorating and working in pottery'.[27] Staite Murray went on to construct an image of the studio potter as a modern artist engaged in an integrated art world, exaggerating that 'the tendency of modern art exhibitions is to show paintings, sculpture and pottery together'. Although he had recently exhibited with artists such as Nash, Nicholson and Epstein, he was also still showing with the Red Rose Guild, was a member of the Guild of Potters and would be included within the British industrial pottery section at the Paris Exhibition of 1925.

Staite Murray balanced his references to contemporary practice with an informed and reflective understanding of history. He concurred with Leach and many other critics that Wedgwood's 'commercialising [of] the craft' had broken the tradition of pottery in England epitomised by 17th century English potters such as John Dwight, Thomas Toft and Ralph Wood whose work

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[25] Staite Murray 1924p. 202.
[26] Staite Murray 1924p. 201.
[27] Staite Murray 1924p. 202.

was 'intensely vital'.[28] He perceived these potters as pre-industrial designer makers, 'the last of the individual potters'. Like Leach, Staite Murray saw his role as 're-creating tradition' although he differed in his emphasis on the need to also be 'an experimenter'.

Consistent with prevailing critical and antiquarian views, Staite Murray acknowledged the supremacy of Oriental ceramics. In contrast to the majority of writers, and following on from Charles Holme's work of twenty years earlier, Staite Murray's thoughts centred around Japan because of its continuity of ceramic practice. Unlike Leach, he did not mythologise Japanese culture but made it intelligible by discussing work within the financial and cultural terms of museum acquisition practice. He cited individual potters such as Koetsu and the first Kenzan and the Raku family as role models for English potters because they combined tradition with innovation.

> 'these artists, with no question of imitation, but by imposing their personality, gave individual and subtle new characteristics to traditional forms. The potter may be influenced by traditional forms, and yet his personality is so marked in his work as to re-interpret the form,'[29]

In 'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View' Staite Murray built on his association with avant-garde groups such as the Arts League of Service, when he had produced 'Vorticist' pots with the painter Cuthbert Hamilton

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[28] Staite Murray 1924p. 201.
[29] Staite Murray 1924,p. 202.

during the late 1910s. His ambition to position studio pottery with painting and sculpture was declared, and led to his future involvement with the Seven and Five Society and exhibitions with young painters such as Ben Nicholson and Christopher Wood.

> 'Painting and sculpture as well as pottery, suffer through being considered as independent units, instead of part of an organised decorative whole. ... the tendency of modern art exhibitions is to show paintings, sculpture and pottery together, and not separately, the artists more or less co-operating in exhibiting work complementary to each.'[30]

'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View' should be regarded as a declaration of intent rather than a summary of studio pottery's achievements in 1924, but it reinforced the difference in approach between himself, the neo-Arts and Crafts ideology of Bernard Leach, and Reginald Wells's neutrality.

As previously discussed, Leach increasingly retreated into the rhetoric of the Arts and Crafts during the 1920s. Wells was enjoying commercial success but his career would not survive the initial flush of interest in Oriental pottery, nor did he contribute to critical debate. Staite Murray alone represented the Modernist agenda within studio pottery; by taking possession of Read's ideas of pottery and abstraction he attempted to integrate studio pottery into avant-garde art practice, and place it at the core of the new movement in English art. While 'Pottery From the Artist's Point of View' encapsulated the spirit of the early twenties, encouraging interest from new art critics and shaping an alternative approach to Leach, it

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[30] Staite Murray 1924p. 202.

remained Staite Murray's only critical essay, and its influence was relatively short-lived. Staite Murray's decline will be discussed in the final chapter on the 1930s when Leach emerged as the sole voice of studio pottery, establishing the critical tone for the 1930s onwards.

After Wells and Staite Murray's success during 1925 it was appropriate that Marriot review them together at the end of the year. From his tone it is evident that the critic was now aware of the concept of abstraction. By inference, he discussed 'the distraction of subject [figurative] appeal'[31] in sculpture and concluded that the formal qualities of Staite Murray's work made 'pottery a work of art'. Alternatively Wells was presented as an experimenter of colour and glaze, while his figurative work (which did not easily fit into these new ideas) was seen to have benefited from 'the discipline of the wheel.' Staite Murray was the preferred artist and, in what could have only been a reference to Leach, was viewed as 'free from the taint of production.'

P. G. Konody, the art critic of *The Observer*, also capitalised on the new relationship between studio pottery and abstraction in his upbeat assessment of English studio pottery, 'Modern English Ceramics',[32] a review of four exhibitions held concurrently 'in or near Bond-street'. Konody quoted from a catalogue foreword written by Bernard Rackham for The Guild of Potters which discussed these new ideas of abstraction, agreeing that pottery 'is a

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[31] Marriot, C., 'The Work of the Potter', *The Times*, November 13, 1925.

phase of abstract sculpture' and arguing 'This definition holds the key to the fascination exercised by Mr. Wells's and Mr. Murray's pottery'. Surprisingly, Konody's interpretation was limited compared to the understanding and support he had given to Fry in his reviews of 'Manet and The Post-Impressionists' in the *Daily Mail* and *The Observer* in 1910. Like many critics, Konody seemed unable to transfer his knowledge of contemporary critical theories in art to writing about studio pottery.

> 'The precise nature of this appeal cannot very well be expressed in words. All one can say is that these pots and bowls and vases are completely satisfying to the eye and to the sense of touch'[33]

Konody was enthusiastic however in his general endorsement of studio pottery and described its growing popularity as demonstrating the 'healthier signs of the new spirit'. With a moderated Formalist approach he discussed Wells' and Staite Murray's rich glazes and textures and made frequent references to Chinese pottery. Just as Marriot did, he presented the potters as artists, a superior position to those who were 'ruled by commercial concerns'. He saw Staite Murray in particular as having 'a true sculptor's feeling for form' and the graphic treatment of his pots was compared to the work of Modigliani.

While reviewing the same group of exhibitions Frank Rutter also emphasised the link between abstraction and studio pottery, and demonstrated a fuller understanding of it than any critic other than Read.

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[32] Konody, P. G., 'Modern English Ceramics', *The Observer*, Nov. 22, 1925.
[33] Konody, November 1925.

As a leading sympathiser with Modernist ideas he was appreciative of studio pottery (he had been the only critic to refer to the pottery in *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, writing in 1910 that 'Derain and Vlaminck's pottery is better represented than their painting, and should help to convince people of the merit of their purely decorative principles.')[34] 'Modern English Pottery'[35] followed on from his article 'Modern English Pottery and Porcelain' published in *Apollo* the previous September. In this he had written exclusively on Leach amongst the throwers; he discussed Wells's modelling but he ignored Staite Murray. In 'Modern English Pottery' Rutter argued that pottery was particularly suited as an expressive medium because of 'the pure aesthetic qualities inherent in form and color[sic]'.[36] Applying general Formalist criteria and building on Read's new ideas, Rutter used familiar terms such as 'rhythm', 'emotional appeal' and 'significance of his forms' to discuss the pottery. Staite Murray's work embraced this modern agenda above the other potters.

> 'The pure aesthetic charms of pottery, independent of all association of ideas and representational forms, may be seen in the work of ... W. Staite Murray ... Each piece shows an exceedingly refined discernment in its adjustment of appropriate color and decoration to the right shape.''[37]

Rutter acknowledged the influence of Chinese ceramics in Staite Murray's work although he stated 'he was no mere imitator'. In contrast, he discussed Wells within the specifics of Sung Dynasty ware, passing quickly over the

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[34] Rutter, Frank, 'Success de Scandals', *Sunday Times*, November 13, 1910, p. 14.
[35] Rutter, F., 'Modern English Pottery', *The Christian Science Monitor*, Dec. 14, 1925.
[36] Rutter, December 1925.
[37] Rutter, December 1925.

'traditional forms and colour schemes' of Wells's pottery in favour of his modelled work which he compared with 'T'ang animal figures'. He wrote 'no English potter has done more than he to narrow the interval between contemporary practice in ceramics and the work of the old Chinese craftsmen'. Rutter's great interest in modelling will be further discussed in Chapter 14.

In late 1926 Marriot converted to the cause of abstraction in studio pottery with an evangelical zeal. In his review of Staite Murray's exhibition '50 Pieces of Stoneware and Porcelain Pottery'[38] at Paterson's Gallery he adopted a blend of Fry, Read and Staite Murray's critical ideas. Using Read's theory (from *English Pottery)* that sculpture was limited by its figurative nature, Marriot argued that pottery was able to exceed painting and sculpture in expressing abstract ideas because it was a plastic art and was able 'to stand alone ; ... form, colour, and texture can be used for a purely expressive purpose.'[39] He also applied Staite Murray's ideas on pottery expressed in his manifesto 'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View' as a link between painting and sculpture, writing '...it seeks to combine and fulfil the more abstract possibilities of both painting and sculpture.' Marriot saw Staite Murray's pottery as having transcended earlier Oriental influences: 'Mr Murray's work now bears little relation to the work of the old Chinese potters. ... they remain but as memories.' Equipped with the critical means to discuss studio pottery and drawing on Fry's ideas of the emotional

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[38] '50 Pieces of Stoneware and Porcelain Pottery', London, Paterson's Gallery, November 1926.
[39] Marriot, C., 'Stoneware Pottery', *The Times*, Nov. 15, 1926.

expressiveness of art ('Art appreciates emotion in and for itself'[40]) Marriot began to suggest that personal sensibility was a mediator of aesthetic experience. Just as Clive Bell had stressed the importance of the viewer's response, and internalised the process of aesthetic appreciation twelve years earlier in his book *Art*, so Marriot was able to discuss Staite Murray's pottery in terms of 'moods and feelings.' He wrote '... these pots are not to be described ; they are to be experienced'. Making an analogy between the abstract nature of this work and the abstract qualities of music, Marriot unleashed his full descriptive powers.

> 'This one makes you calm, that one excited ; one you would describe as a gay little thing, another very sad ; and you are aware that in these effects form, colour and tone quality play a unified part in the effects of music.'

Read's ideas of abstraction and pottery were now widely accepted in critical circles. One month after Marriot's review, Frank Lessore, the owner of the Beaux Arts Gallery, discussed pottery in the same terms in a preview of Wells's forthcoming exhibition. Lessore's views corresponded with the growing perception that studio pottery, whether modelled or thrown, was being considered in sculptural terms (discussed further in Chapter 15). This philosophy was in part due the idea of pottery as an abstract art but was also helped in this case by the fact that Wells was a well known sculptor. Lessore wrote:

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[40] Fry, R., 'An Essay in Aesthetics', *Vision and Design*, London, Oxford University Press, 1981, p 12, first published *New Quarterly*, April 1909, pp 171-90.

> 'The most characteristic movement in contemporary sculpture has unquestionably been the development from purely realistic or imitative art to an art that is essentially formal, abstract and interpretative'[41]

Summing up Modernist developments in English sculpture over the last decade he significantly included studio pottery within this trend.

> 'Of the movement as a whole it is perhaps to early speak, in all probability it has not yet reached its fullest expression, but there are examples of its influence that are too important to pass unnoticed. One notable instance is the rise of pottery, which was considered formerly only an applied art, and which to-day, in the hands of the best potters, ranks as high as any other branch of sculpture, of which it may justly be considered the most abstract form.' [42]

Lessore described Wells's modelled figurines and animals as 'distant from the representation of nature', a form of abstracted sculpture based on Wells's imaginative powers of interpretation, rather than faithful representation. This notion, combined with Read's ideas of plastic abstraction, presented a case for Wells's modelled work to be considered as a form of sculpture, since the boundaries between studio pottery, modelling and sculpture at this stage were still fluid. Lessore presented Wells as a pioneer of studio pottery, describing his early Coldrum slipware as relying solely 'on perfection of form and quality of colour and surface.' His methods of potting were described in sculptural terms: 'a sculptor's mind still dictates the ever-varying forms and proportions of his pots, as they grow on the wheel, and a sculptor's skilful fingers fashion the clay.' Decoration was seen as

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[41] Lessore, F., 'The Art of Reginald Wells Sculptor and Potter,' *Artwork*, Vol. 2, No. 8, Dec.-Feb. 1926-27, p. 234.
[42] Lessore, 1926, p. 234.

superfluous to Wells's pots as they did not need 'pattern or ornament for their enrichment'. And, in common with other critics, the making of stoneware was regarded with an alchemic reverence. Lessore even credited Wells with re-discovering the secrets of China 'which seemingly had been lost for all time.'

Lessore regarded Wells as 'an artist's artist', like the later familiar term 'a potter's potter', but despite this positive review, it was the last significant article to be published on Wells. Having received critical acclaim for his work only a year after he started potting, and despite the interest of high-calibre critics such as Marriot and Rackham, press coverage of Wells only covered a period of two years. In February 1927 he wrote a short article 'The Lure of Making Pottery' [43] which was published in *The Arts and Crafts*. This sole example of published writing by Wells does not further the cause of the potter-critic, since he avoided critical discussion, but it provides a rare insight into the potter's dilemma in the 1920s. With self-deprecating irony, Wells described the difficulties of financial survival. Opening with an account of his own 'vernacular' revival he wrote.

> 'Most things start with an idea. It occurred 25 years ago to the writer that if a flower pot maker could make a flower pot for a penny, why should not an artist produce a form of interest in pottery and apply the same glaze that is used on the common bread pan?'[44]

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[43] Wells, R., 'The Lure of Making Pottery', *The Arts and Crafts*, Vol. 2. No. 1., May, 1927, pp. 10-13.
[44] p. 10.

Wells continued along these lines with sketches on various technical difficulties: 'Most potters in the country make up the roads and fill the ruts with their broken pots and failures.' This droll approach masked a sober commentary on the economic problems of working in studio pottery.

> 'It takes about five minutes to glaze a pot for which you may get a few pence, many guineas and often nothing—divide the "nothings" into the guineas and you get the results in pence, if you are lucky. ... De Morgan gave up pottery and took to writing. Other potters take to teaching other would-be-potters and so the good work goes on. But do not imagine there is a living in so-called artistic pottery—*there is not.*
> ... The success of all pottery, *all* , depends on one little word : sales. If you do not sell your pots a time must and will come when you will cease to make pots. There is no flaw in that argument. It is definite, precise and has been proved by many unfortunate potters.'[45]

A brief mention in the 'Studio-Talk' section of *The Studio* magazine in December of the same year and the last reference detected to him in the press described Wells as 'one of the most original and skilful of modern potters'[46] Despite experiencing such a brief period of press attention, Wells helped to establish the critical identity of studio pottery during its first years through the topicality of his Sung inspired pottery and figurative modelling. Although he is less well known now, during the mid 1920s his critical reputation outstripped that of Bernard Leach and came a close second to Staite Murray's.

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[45] p. 13.
[46] 'Studio-Notes', *The Studio*, Vol. 94, December, 1927, p. 424.

13.2 Staite Murray 1927-29

In contrast to Wells, the critical reputation of Staite Murray continued to rise. In 1927 he took part in a mixed exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery with Ben Nicholson and Christopher Wood. The catalogue foreword written by Hubert Wellington[47] of the *Spectator* followed recent arguments and contrasted Staite Murray's art works of 'pure expression' with the 'merely decorative objects'[48] of his fellow potters. Wellington drew on the maxim of truth to materials 'the materials ... are left to speak for themselves' and, although he did not use abstract as a term, claimed that Staite Murray's pots had a 'unity of form, colour and texture.'

Despite his first billing in the exhibition title, Marriot reviewed Staite Murray last out of respect and attributed the exhibition's 'engaging air of youth'[49] to Staite Murray's ability to fuse 'subject, material, and personality.' Marriot's commentary was brief but he closed by remarking that Staite Murray's work had 'the music of sculpture without its representative burden.' Marriot's critical opinion of Staite Murray was approaching a high point after his annual solo exhibition at Paterson's Gallery in late 1927. His *Times* review of the three hundred pots exhibited in 'Stoneware Pottery and Drypoints by W. Staite Murray'[50] drew Marriot's most extravagant praise to

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[47] Wellington, H., 'Stoneware Pottery by W. Staite Murray and Paintings by Ben Nicholson, Christopher Wood', London, *Beaux Arts Gallery*, 1927.
[48] Wellington, 1927.
[49] Marriot, C., 'Beaux Arts Gallery', *The Times*, April 21, 1927.
[50] *Stoneware Pottery and Drypoints by W. Staite Murray*, catalogue, London, Paterson's Gallery, Nov. -Dec. 1927.

date: 'The difficulty ... is to avoid superlatives'[51]. Marriot's earlier hesitancy in ascribing the status of art to either Staite Murray or pottery had now disappeared and he stated 'it is questionable if anything so perfect of its kind is being done by any other artist in England.' Staite Murray's pottery even seemed to help Marriot accept the demands of abstract art, for he wrote 'the results goes a long way to show in what direction abstract aims are legitimate'. Staite Murray's work was now confidently acknowledged 'to represent a fusion of painting and sculpture' and Marriot accorded studio pottery the full status of an abstract art 'Abstract as is the art of pottery'[52].

The first mention of Staite Murray's work in the *Apollo* magazine (newly launched in 1925) was in a brief review of a mixed exhibition at the Redfern Gallery which took place in November 1927. The reviewer wrote 'The most considerable works of art ...[are] without a doubt, Mr. Staite Murray's pots'.[53] This was followed by a lengthier article in December's *Apollo* which quoted many of Staite Murray's own ideas. Written in a conversational style, the pottery was discussed in terms of the abstract nature of its forms and decoration. The author regarded it as contemplative rather than functional; it had 'an independent aesthetic reality'.[54] Although he did use decorative motifs, Staite Murray favoured 'an abstract emotional subject-matter' which illustrated his conceptual titles such as "Cadence". Leaving judgement on the validity of the artist's theories open, the *Apollo* reviewer concluded that

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[51] Marriot, C., 'Mr. W. Staite Murray', *The Times*, 11 November, 1927.
[52] Marriot, November 1927.
[53] 'The Celtic Artists at the Redfern Gallery', *Apollo*, Vol. VI, No. 35, November 1927.
[54] 'Mr. W. Staite Murray's Stoneware, Pottery, and Drypoints at Mr. William Paterson's Gallery', *Apollo*, Vol. VI, No. 36, December 1927, p. 283.

the pots had 'an austere beauty in many of them which one will find nowhere else amongst modern pottery ... which makes us less willing to scoff at the prices of 25, 30, even 100 guineas.'[55] Despite Staite Murray's rejection of function (which implies handling) Marriot had already discussed the tangible nature of his work. The *Apollo* review also acknowledged the importance of the work's tactile qualities in discussing the "feel" of the pottery, describing it as a '*sine qua non* of ceramic appreciation'.

By the late 1920s Staite Murray and Leach's pottery was extending beyond the review pages. In its regular coverage of educational events, *The Studio* reported the first appearance of stoneware at a Central School exhibition with work that 'showed the influence of Mr. W. S. Murray and Mr. Bernard Leach.'[56] As the decade progressed and philosophical differences of approach emerged between the two potters, a rivalry developed. Leach's early success became overshadowed by Staite Murray's. In 1927 Staite Murray received an official endorsement through Forsyth's report on the Paris Exhibition of 1925 for the Department of Overseas Trade. Forsyth described Staite Murray simply: 'He is a great artist potter.'[57] (He also singled out one other potter for praise, the modeller Gwendolene Parnell). Using his favoured term 'virility' to describe Staite Murray's pots, Forsyth referred to the abstract decoration before closing 'The high artistic qualities of his work have yet to be generally known, and recognised as a great asset to English pottery.' Leach was simply referred to as showing 'good work.'

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[55] *Apollo*, December 1927, p. 283.
[56] 'Studio-Notes', *The Studio*, Vol. 94, September, 1927, p. 198.
[57] Forsyth, Department of Overseas Trade, 1927, p. 134.

In 1928 Staite Murray's visibility increased further in another joint exhibition with contemporary painters at the prestigious Lefevre Galleries in London. The foreword to the catalogue for 'Paintings by Ben & Winifred Nicholson and Pottery by Staite Murray' was written by H. S. Ede. the Cambridge scholar, collector and critic. His words validated the aspiration to link studio pottery to the fine arts.

> 'The three artists who are showing in this Exhibition form a most interesting trinity; their work is curiously synthetic since together they make up one life, each containing something of the other, and yet each quite sharply working from an individual basis. In Staite Murray the outward aspect is material; objects of daily life, as usual to the eye as people, and yet each with its secret inner life.'[58]

Ede was the first critic to allude to Staite Murray's interest in Buddhism. He described his desire 'to make pots which couldn't be seen ... they become one with the beauty of created life.'[59] Recounting the now well-established motifs of expressiveness, abstraction and musical analogy, Ede concluded his preface with an endorsement of Staite Murray and appealed for a unity of the visual arts. This was later to be realised in Ede's extraordinary house at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, which he filled with fine art and pottery.

> 'it is indeed time that the potter's art took its place again with other branches of plastic art, for in his hands pottery becomes a thing expressive and intimate in which art and craft are miraculously balanced.'[60]

Marriot's response to 'Paintings by Ben & Winifred Nicholson and Pottery by Staite Murray' was characteristically positive but in his enthusiasm to

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[58] Ede, H. S., Foreword to 'Paintings by Ben & Winifred Nicholson and Pottery by Staite Murray', London, *The Lefevre Galleries*, July 1928, p. 1.
[59] Ede, July 1928, p. 2.

praise Staite Murray in 'Pots and Paintings'[61] in *The Times*, 6 July, 1928 he penned one of his more enigmatic reviews. Applying the circular logic of Clive Bell's theory of significant form (as expressed in his book *Art)*, i.e. that an object which elicits an emotional response is deemed to have significant form, irrespective of the nature of the response, Marriot attempted to construct a theory of 'articulation' for pottery. He argued that successful abstract art implied an 'inevitable next step' and described Staite Murray's decoration

> 'as an articulate comment, in terms of the material, on the tendency already existing in the shape, colour. surface, quality, and "movement" of the pot. But whether decoration is added or not, all the pots have a meaning which, so to speak, trembles on the brink of articulate expression. The name, even when it is not in the catalogue is "on the tip of your tongue".[62]

Marriot may have championed Staite Murray but his critical skills did not match the intellectual capabilities of Read who had already provided the most important theoretical idea of the 20s.

H. S. Ede expanded upon his foreword to the Lefevre exhibition in a later issue of *Artwork.* In 'Ben Nicholson, Winifred Nicholson and William Staite Murray'[63] he wrote mostly on Ben Nicholson, drawing an analogy with Braque's paintings. He added little to the concluding short section on Staite Murray. Although he was unable to contextualise the pottery within wider artistic practice, Ede eloquently described it as 'midway between

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[60] Ede, July 1928, p. 2.
[61] Marriot, C., 'Pots and Paintings', *The Times*, 6 July, 1928.
[62] Marriot, July 1928.

sculpture and painting—the alternating point of abstract and concrete plastic formal expression'.

Staite Murray's reputation of exhibiting with painters and sculptors was further enhanced in 1928 through an Arts League of Service publication. 'Design and Art'[64] was a substantial book covering the League's activities in theatre and art and included interviews on contemporary issues with figures such as Eric Maclagan, the Director of the V & A and Sir William Rothenstein, Principal of the Royal College of Art. An account of its early days 'A Survey : Some Younger Artists and the A.L.S.' written by Ana Berry discussed the founding aim - how 'to bring the public into closer touch with the artists—particularly the younger ones.'[65] She discussed the role of prominent figures such as Wyndham Lewis but also referred to the first showing of Staite Murray's Yeoman pottery in 1919

> 'In the experimental exhibition of 1919 had been shown for the first time in London some Yeoman Pottery (it attracted little attention at the time, though to-day it is prized by collectors)'[66].

Berry also discussed the details of Staite Murray's first solo exhibition before he exhibited at Paterson's Gallery.

> 'He was anxious to hold his first one-man show in London. So in May, 1924, an exhibition of the works of W. Staite Murray and Cedric Morris

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[63] Ede, H. S., 'Ben Nicholson, Winifred Nicholson and William Staite Murray', *Artwork*, Vol. 4, No. 16, Winter 1928.
[64] 'Design and Art', London, *Arts League of Service*, 1928.
[65] Berry, A., 'A Survey some Younger Artists and the A.L.S.', 'Design and Art', London, *Arts League of Service*, 1928, p. 46.
[66] Berry, 1928, p. 48.

was opened at Gower Street. In spite of being outside of the radius of picture galleries the exhibition proved a very great success.'[67]

This account confirms the mixed nature of studio pottery exhibition venues in the early 1920s, from British Institute of Industrial Art Fairs to Arts League of Service Exhibitions. It also confirms that Staite Murray sought the association with mixed exhibitions with painters and sculptors throughout the whole of his career.

Marriot's review in *The Times* of Staite Murray's November 1928 solo exhibition at Paterson's Gallery was written in his typically relaxed prose style. In 'Stoneware Pottery' he described the work as the perfect synthesis between form, decoration, concept and material. He wrote of the forms that their 'quality depends on subtle modifications of curve and proportion under the plastic impulse' and described the semi-illustrative decorative treatments: 'His general aim at present appears to be to control the abstract under a naturalistic suggestion.' Marriot attributed the success of Staite Murray's work to its lack of concern with function; he was 'without prejudice to the possible utility of what he produces'[68] (an observation Marriot also made in his 1925 review of Staite Murray). Significantly, 1928, the year of Staite Murray's Paterson's show was the time when Leach published *A Potter's Outlook.* This pamphlet contained an attack on the 'collectors, purists, cranks, or "arty" people' who made up the 'collecting' culture that supported Staite Murray. Leach was on the point of financial collapse at this moment and his endeavour to make individual, expensive

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[67] Berry, 1928, p. 52.

pots gave way to a militant utilitarianism, work created for 'the normal man or woman'[69].

> 'What have the artist potters been doing all this while? Working by hand to please ourselves as artist first and therefore producing only limited and expensive pieces... consequently most of our pots have been still-born: they have not had the breath of reality in them: it has been a game.'[70]

The emergent world of studio pottery had up to this point been relatively free of critical conflict and Marriot, for example, had supported both Staite Murray and Leach. Leach's barely-veiled attack on Staite Murray was a challenge to Marriot's enthusiastic but fragile confidence in studio pottery and his remark about 'the non-utilitarian' nature of Staite Murray's pottery was his first response to this new disharmony. In the same review of the 1928 Paterson's exhibition Marriot mentioned an early Cardew exhibition at the New Handworker's Gallery (which published Leach's pamphlet). He regarded its objectives as quite removed from those of Staite Murray 'it is so entirely different in aim and object that it will not suffer by being noticed in the same article.'[71]

Marriot significantly chose not to devote a full review to Staite Murray's next solo show at Paterson's in 1929, but included it in coverage of the Vyses who were in a mixed show of modelling and an exhibition of Alfred Hopkin's work. This combination might have been unusual a year earlier;

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[68] Marriot, November, 1928.
[69] Leach, B., *A Potter's Outlook*, Handworkers' Pamphlets No 3, London, 1928.
[70] Leach, 1928.
[71] Marriot, November 1928.

even Marriot remarked 'If Mr. Murray stands for a cloistered virtue among our potters, Mr. Hopkins is the most racy of the soil.'[72] Marriot began by acknowledging Staite Murray and Leach as 'the two potters generally excused from the dust of the movement' but added 'Mr Leach has made intelligent advances in that direction', that is, towards functional pottery. Staite Murray was given less column space than usual, and although Marriot wrote of his pots 'There is a beneficial influence', he also added 'though it would not be easy to say exactly how it works.' Repeating his usual themes, Marriot complimented Staite Murray's work, but relied on more description than usual. He did not eulogise studio pottery or make claims for its wider recognition. Staite Murray may have been losing his greatest public supporter but he was as ever expanding his creative options. The first press reference to his membership of the fine art group, the Seven and Five Society was published in May 1929 in *The Studio*.[73]

The publication of Leach's *A Potter's Outlook* forced Charles Marriot to acknowledge the distinctions between Leach and Staite Murray's work which he had previously ignored, regarding both as artists rather than commercial potters. His subsequent disenchantment with studio pottery would mean the loss of its most visible and loyal critic in England, for he had lost confidence in the whole movement. Marriot's esteem for Staite Murray reached its apogee with his 1928 review of the Paterson's Gallery show. It was the culmination of a four year period of continual support for

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[72] Marriot, C., 'English Pottery', *The Times*, 23 November, 1929.
[73] Earp, T. W., 'Studio-Talk', *The Studio*, Vol. 97, May 1929, p. 371.

the potter whom he described as 'one of the most distinguished artists in Europe'.[74]

[74] Marriot, C., 'Stoneware Pottery', *The Times*, November 3, 1928.

Chapter 14

Figurative Modelling

The location of figurative modelling within the discipline of studio pottery in the 1920s has been reconsidered in recent writing on 20th century craft. Systems of classification, gender issues and the restrictive orthodoxy of Modernism are subjects which have accompanied discussion of this genre and its inclusion or omission from studio pottery. Rachel Gotlieb claims in her M.A. thesis that historiographies have concentrated on male potters such as Leach and Staite Murray and ignored figures such as Gwendolene Parnell. Moira Vincentelli's essay *Potters of the 1920s* states that a 'bias seems to have been at work in ceramic history, with particular consequences for women's role within it'[1]. Comprehensive histories of studio pottery are rare, with the exception of Tanya Harrod's seminal book *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century.* Harrod suggests that 'A period eye is needed here'[2] in order to appreciate figurative modelling, that it was marginalised by the historians George Wingfield Digby and Muriel Rose in the 50s and that inter-war 'studio ceramics encompassed a more varied practice than the later histories of the movement allow'[3].

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[1] Vincentelli, M., 'Potters of the 1920s' 'Women and Craft' 'eds.' Richardson, S. 'et al', London,*Virago Press,* 1987, p. 83.
[2] Harrod, 1999, p. 41.
[3] Harrod, 1999, p. 41.

In the 1920s, studio potters were a diverse collection of individuals with varying aspirations. The boundaries between industry, the traditional crafts, amateur practice and an aspiration towards fine art were still fluid. The work of Leach, Parnell, Staite Murray and the Vyses varied greatly yet all exhibited with The Guild of Potters.[4] As potters were themselves open to the inclusion of a variety of work at this time it is not surprising that critics also responded in the same way. The manufacturer and supporter of studio pottery John Adams was in a good position to appraise this situation and in his 1926 article *Modern British Pottery* he included all types of work.

> 'The studio potters, such as Bernard Leach, Charles Vyse, Harry Parr, W. S. Murray, Gwendolene Parnell, and Stella Crofts, make exquisite figurines and pots.'[5]

A typical figurine of the mid 1920s seems at odds with our understanding of early studio pottery today, and far removed from the arguments for abstraction put forward by Staite Murray or Leach's views on utility. Although figurative modelled work did not attract the same degree of critical attention as thrown pottery and even that rapidly declined after the 1920s, it was certainly included under the umbrella of studio pottery at the time and therefore warrants inclusion in this thesis.

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[4] The Guild of Potters was a group of throwers and modellers who exhibited together throughout the late 1920s.

[5] Adams, J., 'Modern British Pottery', *The Architectural Review*, Vol. LIX, Jan,-June 1926, p. 190.

14.1 Early Response to Figurative Modelling

At the beginning of the decade coverage of figurative ceramics was very limited but then increased as press interest in studio pottery grew. In 1920 *The Studio* published illustrations of six '"Cheyne" figures'[6] and introduced the early work of Gwendolene Parnell who would become the most prominent modeller of the inter-war period. Whereas the break with European pottery two hundred years previously, caused by English industrialisation, was an important factor in studio pottery's identity, there was still a surviving link between the types of figurines made in factories such as Sèvres in France and Chelsea in England.

The first major article on the subject was written the following year, again in *The Studio.* In *The Pottery Figures of Mr. Charles Vyse* [7] Bernard Rackham compared Vyse's work to Meissen's 18th century allegorical *Schauessen* figures, but also pointed to the Renaissance work of Bernard Palissy and Della Robbia. As Vyse was reviving the modelled figurine, Rackham referred to archaic ceramics in an attempt to demonstrate its longevity as a genre. He cited the cultures of ancient Egypt and Greece, and also included the fashionable and recently imported Tang tomb figures from China in his overview. Keen to stress the common origins of modelling and pottery,

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[6] 'Studio-Talk, "Cheyne" Figures', *The Studio*, Vol. 79, June 1920, p. 147

[7] Rackham, B., 'The Pottery Figures of Mr. Charles Vyse', *The Studio*, Vol. 81. May 1921, pp. 184-187.

Rackham wrote 'Sculpture in clay ... [began] ... with the birth of the potter's art itself ... the arts of the sculptor and the potter were early united'.[8]

The revival of the modelled figurine was simultaneous with the emergence of studio pottery. Despite the Modernist rhetoric of studio pottery and the Classical origins of the figurine, their grouping together was governed by a shared classification of material and this was accepted by the press, industry and museum world. Both types of work continued to be exhibited together throughout the 1920s despite differences which are especially notable to the modern eye.

Rackham claimed that deterioration in 19th century taste had affected modelling as well as pottery. Interestingly, he pre-dated Staite Murray's claim that pottery provided a decorative link between painting and sculpture; Rackham argued that the modern concern with 'schemes of interior decoration in which some kind of harmony is kept in view'[9] was responsible for the revival of the modelled figure. *The Pottery Figures of Mr. Charles Vyse,* a four page feature, was typical of Rackham's writing from this period. He was at ease with descriptive writing discussing Vyse's biography and the technical aspects of his work in relation to historic precedents. The use of colour became an important issue in discussion of modelled work, and although he did not focus on this, Rackham did comment on the 'kaleidoscopic mingling of strong colours' which 'seem to answer to the

[8] Rackham, 1921 p. 184.
[9] Rackham, 1921 p. 185.

mood of the hour.'[10] The modelled details of Vyse's idealised 'balloon women' and 'the lavender girl' were discussed in terms of their expressiveness while potentially darker social narrative in "The Madonna of World's End Passage" depicting a poor mother with a child was described as 'charming'. Irrespective of Rackham's claims that Vyse revealed the 'the drama of London life' such modelled figurines of the 1920s rarely dealt with subject matter more demanding than "dainty rogues in porcelain." [11]

In its regular coverage of Art School shows *The Studio* illustrated some early work made by Stella Crofts, another of the decade's important modellers, in 1922[12]. The following year *The Studio* described the growing trend for modelling amongst student work.

> 'These particular manifestations of the potter's art (animal and figure subjects) have perhaps received from students a degree of attention somewhat out of proportion to their value, but the results are undeniably attractive.'[13]

The press was by now starting to clarify the differences in character between modern and early work as *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review* revealed in 1923. Covering a lecture given by Alfred Hopkins at Camberwell, the staff reporter commented on a decline in 'the craze for elaborate decoration'.[14] He compared an 'elaborately modelled and decorated' figure made by Richard Lunn thirty years earlier with a contemporary figure made his daughter Dora which was 'simplicity itself'.

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[10] Rackham, 1921 p. 186.
[11] Rackham, 1921 p. 186.
[12] 'The Arts and Crafts Student', *The Studio*, Vol. 84, Sept. 1922, p. 133.
[13] quoted by Vincentelli, 1987, p. 80.

The trade press was still cautious in its response to modelled work at this period as some comments on Vyse, Stabler and Harry Parr's modelling at the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition of 1923 suggest.

> 'It cannot be said that there is anything new or startling in the way of pottery at the summer exhibition ... this year — there are a few glazed earthenware statuettes, but these offer nothing really new.'[15]

A mixed exhibition at Chelsea Town Hall in 1924 merited an advance notice in the *Times*. 'Gwendoline Parnell, Charles Vyse, Harry Parr and Reginald Wells'[16] featured work from leading modellers and potters, but the review was not sympathetic to the figurines: 'there does not seem much point in reviving a kind of pottery which is valued chiefly for its associations.'[17] It described the works of Staite Murray, Leach, Wells and Dunn however as 'serious pots.' In a general article *Some Recent London Exhibitions, The Pottery and Glass Trade Review* described the modellers as 'modern Chelsea potters.'[18] Frank Rutter was the only established critic who referred to the Chelsea Town Hall exhibition in his survey of English pottery the following year. He wrote

> 'the array of delightful figures by modern artists will be an imperishable memory .... all these modern works could, and did, hold their own against anything which the past of Chelsea could present.'[19]

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[14] 'Modern Pottery', *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, May 1, 1923, p. 824.
[15] 'Pottery at the Royal Academy', *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, June 1, 1923, p. 1000.
[16] 'Exhibition of Chelsea China', *The Times*, 8 January, 1924.
[17] quoted by Vincentelli, 1987, p. 78.
[18] 'Some Recent London Exhibitions', *The Pottery and Glass Trade Review*, July 1, 1924, p. 1208.
[19] Rutter, F., 'Modern English Pottery and Porcelain', *Apollo*, Vol. 2, No. 9, September, 1925, p. 137.

In common with its lack of coverage of studio pottery exhibitions *The Burlington* did not review exhibitions of modelled work, although in 1925 it responded to the increased interest by publishing the article 'Some Eighteenth Century Literary Allusions to Chelsea China'. In an apparent attempt to raise the level of critical debate the article commented on the contrast between 'the exclusive reliance on literary sources'[20] for 18th century sculpture and 'the opposite defect' for Chelsea China. This account of historical Chelsea china quoted liberally from sources including Horace and Sir Robert Walpole who were interested in Chelsea china. It pointedly ignored contemporary work. *The Burlington* followed this scholarly article with a feature on the sculptor Frank Dobson written by Roger Fry in June 1925. Although well known for modelling in clay as well as working in plaster and bronze, Dobson was, after Epstein. the most prominent sculptor of the early 1920s and Fry championed his work. Although not specifically referring to ceramic modelling, Fry attacked the 'poverty of sculpture of any kind in England'[21] because of sculpture's devotion to 'sentimental photography'. Applying his Formalist criteria, Fry discussed the 'organisation of form', 'three-dimensional relations' and the abstract nature of its 'plastic schemes'[22]. In an interesting development he praised the 'intimate and sensual contact' of Dobson's sculptures in contrast to what he described as the 'cold dogmatism' of Cubism. Having led the formal appreciation of art the previous decade, Fry was now critical of overly theoretical approaches which denied the artist his own sensibility.

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[20] Esdaile, A., 'Some Eighteenth Century Literary Allusions to Chelsea China', *The Burlington*, Vol. XLVI, No. CCLXII, Jan, 1925, p. 4.
[21] Fry, R., 'Mr Frank Dobson's Sculpture', *The Burlington*, April, 1925, p. 172.

More recently, Charles Harrison has described the immediate post-war period of 1919-1924 as one of 'Hiatus'[23]. Avant-garde sculpture had not recovered from the death of Gaudier-Breszka or the 'retrenchment'[24] of Epstein into his religious phase and Henry Moore was yet to emerge as a new force. Because of this it is perhaps arguable that a transitional phase of sculpture combined with the emergence of studio pottery, as well as wealthy new patrons, supported the revival of figurative pottery.

In 1925 Gwendolen Parnell was president of The Guild of Potters which held an exhibition at Colnaghi's Galleries. P. G. Konody covered this exhibition in *The Observer* as part of a larger review. Despite quoting liberally from Rackham's foreword to the exhibition with its view of pottery as an abstract art freed from imitative intentions, Konody reviewed the figurative work positively. The animal models of Stella Crofts were described as 'admirably modelled and coloured'[25] while the work of Gwendolen Parnell, Ethel Sleigh and Phyllis Simpson were complemented for their 'piquant touch of modernity and liveliness.' Konody felt it was important to acknowledge the relationship between the modern figurative work and the originals from Dresden, Sèvres and Royal Copenhagen. However, Konody saw all the studio potters included in his extensive review as part of a new movement which was motivated by the initiative of individual artists as opposed to the commercial concerns of industrial pottery.

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[22] Fry, 1925, p. 177.
[23] Harrison, 1994, p. 145.
[24] Harrison, 1994, p. 206.
[25] Konody, P. G., 'Modern English Ceramics', *The Observer*, November 22, 1925.

14.2 Rutter and Modelling

Frank Rutter and P. G. Konody were two of the major art critics of this period[26]. Rutter also covered the Colnaghi exhibition within a general review of four separate exhibitions and these reviews were significant in endorsing the place of modelling within the rising discipline of studio pottery. Like Konody, Rutter began by referring to Rackham's foreword on the abstract nature of pottery and discussed the modern revival of 'individual and artistic pottery'[27]. He identified two main directions to this revival, the decorative stonewares of Staite Murray, Wells and Leach and the modelled figures of Parnell and Vyse. Whereas Konody discussed the figurative work last, Rutter opened with Parnell, describing her as the 'first in her own line' of modellers. Looked at from a conventional Modernist perspective, this critical admiration for Parnell is difficult to reconcile with Rutter's avant-garde interests. His organisation of the Allied Artist's Association which showed Kandinsky for the first time in Britain and his defence of Post-Impressionist painters as 'pictorial anarchists'[28] seems incompatible with his appreciation of Parnell's modelling. However, Rutter's critical interests were broad and ranged from supporting the New English Art Club and the Design Industries Association. He used descriptive terms such as 'exquisite little statuettes' and 'dainty little eighteenth century maiden in a mob hat' without irony. Rutter expressed admiration for the expressive modelling and technical refinement of Parnell's work. He found

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[26] Greutzner Robins , 1997, p. 32.
[27] Rutter, F., 'Modern English Pottery', The Christian Science Monitor, December 14, 1925.
[28] Rutter, F., *Revolution in Art*, London, Art New Press, 1910, p. 53.

a vitality in her figurines which was 'expressive in gesture and countenance' and had a 'keen sense of character'. Acknowledging the 'fame of the original Chelsea Figure', Rutter appreciated Parnell's animated narratives. He analysed how

> 'the wealth of gay-coloured detail is organised into unity to enrich the presentment of a single figure which itself is perfectly expressive of life and movement.'

Rutter also complemented Crofts for displaying 'a real knowledge of animal form and a charming taste' and described Vyse's figures as attractive. Modelled work was popular and commanded high prices. In her unpublished thesis, Rachel Gotlieb discussed the range of prices for industrial and studio pottery at the British Institute of Industrial Art fair of 1923. The most expensive industrial pottery was Moorcroft priced at up to £18, while Leach's work ranged between £2 and £12, Staite Murray's was between £5.10s and £29. Parnell's work was by far the most expensive ranging between £15 and £52. Rutter was the first critic to acknowledge the market for Parnell's figures, revealing she had made 'porcelain-portraiture a vogue in London society.'[29] Discussion of individual collectors in reviews or features on studio pottery was rare, but it seemed to be a more common theme in writing about modelled work. Critics emphasised the popularity of modelled work within the higher levels of English society and this was perhaps the key to its success. In a later feature in *Apollo* Mrs Steuart Erskine confirmed the social status of Parnell's clients by disclosing that she

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[29] Rutter, 1925.

had produced a portrait of 'Mrs Theodore Roosevelt, junior'[30]. The popularity of Parnell's work in the highest sections of London society may explain its high prices, but it is unlikely that this accounts for its high critical standing with Rutter. In his 1925 survey *Modern English Pottery*[31] he wrote extensively about the modelled work of Parnell and Harry Parr in the context of the role of domestic sculpture.

> 'For years I have been concerned at our general neglect of one of the oldest, noblest and most enduring of the arts. There can be no health either in ourselves nor is the art that has not part in our ordinary everyday life. To me a home without one piece of sculpture is as incomplete as would be a home without pictures, without music, without books. ... I have repeatedly urged sculptors of my acquaintance to devote some of their time to the production of figurines and small pieces.'[32]

Although Rutter claimed that James Pryde was the forerunner of the modern revival, he described Parnell as 'the popularizer—of the "Porcelain Lady"'[33]. Rutter described how Parnell started modelling in response to visiting an '"Enemy Product Exhibition"' in 1914 [34]which encouraged 'the patriotic to capture the enemy's trade' and how her first work was bought by the Queen. He suggested that she was at her best when 'depicting dainty "rogues in porcelain"', writing that she displayed an 'amazing fertility of invention, but a shrewd and wittily penetrating power of characterization.'[35] After mentioning Crofts, Wells and Vyse in passing, Rutter devoted a substantial section to Harry Parr, a modeller virtually ignored by the press

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[30] Erskine, S., 'Gwendolen Parnell and Her Chelsea Cheyne Figures', *Apollo*, Vol. IX, No. 50, February 1929, p. 105.
[31] Rutter, F., 'Modern English Pottery and Porcelain', *Apollo*, Vol. 2, No. 9, September, 1925.
[32] Rutter, 'Modern English Pottery and Porcelain', 1925, p. 136.
[33] Rutter, 'Modern English Pottery and Porcelain', 1925, p. 137.

views on studio pottery but singled out Gwendolen Parnell and Staite Murray.[38]

It is not surprising that Parnell's work appealed to Forsyth, given that his was a manufacturing background and he was familiar with the production of figurines. He may have selected Parnell and Staite Murray to represent the opposite extremes of studio pottery, but it is without doubt that the elevation of Parnell above Leach and Wells challenges common beliefs about the 1920s. Forsyth's appreciation of Parnell's work was consistent with other writers and he commented on 'its lightness and frivolity'[39] and 'the grace and movement of her figures'. Her debt to original Chelsea figurines was acknowledged but Forsyth regarded Parnell's work as 'wholly devoid of their insipidity' and complemented her for the work's sense of humour.

Charles Marriot was slow to acknowledge the figurative revival but finally discussed the work when some was displayed at a British Institute of Industrial Art[40] exhibition at the V & A in 1927. Marriot regarded Parnell's work as inferior to the Chelsea originals but nevertheless described it as 'witty and imaginative'[41]. Crofts' work was described as 'admirable'. Marriot only mentioned the figurative work at the end of his review and concluded by discussing the relationship between studio pottery and industry.

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[38] Forsyth, 1925, p. 134.
[39] Forsyth, 1925, p. 134.
[40] The British Institute of Industrial Art was established by the Government in 1920 and ended in 1929, Harrod, 1999, p.112.
[41] Marriot, C., 'British Pottery', *The Times*, September 30, 1927.

Coverage of modelled work ranged across all levels of the press and in 1928 *The Arts and Crafts* published the article *Pottery Animals*[42]. This general homily to animal sculpture (exhibits included the 'Sphinx' and the 'Parthenon') featured Crofts' work but added little critical commentary. *Art Weekly* also reviewed a mixed exhibition of studio pottery and modelled work at Colnaghi's Galleries in 1928. Parnell was discussed before the other potters (including Leach) as, the author maintained, she 'merits special attention'[43]. The review focused entirely on the use of colour in Parnell's work, and seems to be based on her own account of her aims. While the importance of colour in modelled work was discussed by Rackham in 1921, the emphasis in this review can only reflect the emphasis Parnell placed upon it herself.

> 'It is important to remember that Miss Parnell is in no way a sculptor. Her preoccupation is with colour as much as form, and this emphasis on colour places her work and the work of other artists of her kind in a class apart. An eminent critic writes : "Colour in a large piece of work we detest, but in a small one it is very desirable." ...Though the figures in which she has not made use of colour are exquisite, those in which colours are used are more satisfying and seem more fully to realise the artist's own conception.'[44]

This emphasis on colour is difficult to explain; it suddenly became a feature of writing in 1929. Marriot also acknowledged this interest writing 'she is now concentrating upon a limited range of colours'[45] while the feature on Parnell in *Apollo* opened with a quote from Rutter which reinforced this interest.

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[42] Parkes, K., 'Pottery Animals', *The Arts and Crafts*, April, 1928, pp. 33-34.
[43] 'Modern Pottery', *Art Weekly*, December 6, 1928.
[44] *Art Weekly*, December 6, 1928.
[45] Marriot, C., 'Present-Day Potters, *The Times*, November 30, 1929.

> 'In them, in the best of them, we have concentrated, in a manner impossible to any other art object, all the beauties that exist in form and all the joys that can be given only by colour. In this respect china figures are unique, supreme, and unapproachable.'[46]

Apart from the Rutter quote, Mrs. Steuart Erskine's article added little apart from biographical information and descriptive accounts of individual works, although it did reinforce the social rank of collectors by adding Lady Astor to the list.

The Studio provided the decade's penultimate piece with a short article on Harry Parr which consolidated general interest in modelling skills, technique, colour and patronage by stating 'The Queen bought the delightful *Boy and Toad,* and presented it to the Victoria and Albert Museum.'[47] 1920s writing on figurative ceramics closed with the publication of Herbert Read's *Staffordshire Pottery Figures* in 1929. As in his writing on pottery, Read's sympathies were for early work and peasant modelled figures rather than of the 18th and 19th century porcelain figurines. Read indirectly commented on the era of the Chelsea figure by writing 'These rather lonely remnants of English peasant art have suffered from unjust neglect'[48] because 19th century writers 'whose only aesthetic criterion was "elegance" scorned to notice their lowly existence.'

The idea of thrown monochrome stonewares and colourful porcelain figurines being commonly exhibited together seems remarkable to current

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[46] Erskine, 1929, p. 100.
[47] 'Notes'-Harry Parr's Pottery Figures', *The Studio,* Vol. 98, November, 1929, p. 823,

understanding of contemporary ceramics. The social standing of some of the modellers and their collectors may partially account for the popularity of such work but it is doubtful whether this would account for the interest of critics such as Rutter. As the interest in modelled figurines did not continue into the 1930s it seems likely that the fluid identity of studio pottery during its first few years allowed a broad audience for different types of work. However, as the orthodoxy of Modernist theory and abstraction consolidated during the 1930s and studio pottery started to define its own identity more clearly, there was less of a place for innocent modelled figurines.

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[48] Read, H., 'Staffordshire Pottery Figures', London, *Duckworth*, 1929, p. 21.

Chapter 15

Studio Pottery and Industry

While the notion of studio pottery as a pure craft in simple opposition to the machine was losing critical currency during the 1920s, discussion of the nature of its relationship with industry grew. The ceramic industry was moving towards a more modern sensibility, with purer form and decoration replacing the 'riotous abuse'[1] which had come to be associated with 19th century ceramics. The formation of the Design and Industries Association in 1915 was integral to these new developments and it declared its aims as

> 'to found a DESIGN & INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION which shall aim at closer contact between the branches of production and distribution ... We ought to obtain far greater results from our own originality and initiative than we have done in the past. We must learn to see the value of our own ideas before they are reflected back on us from the Continent.'[2]

The D. I. A. was launched with a German industrial exhibition; its committee included Ambrose Heal and Harold Stabler from what is now known as Poole Pottery. *The Athenaeum* wrote 'We welcome the DIA because of its sanity and the sweep of its operations'.[3] The following year *The Athenaeum* published an article detailing its aims further.

> "to harmonise right design and manufacturing efficiency, accepting the machine in its proper place ... as a device to be guided and

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[1] Rackham, B., Domestic Pottery of the Past, p. 10.
[2] 'Proposal for the Foundation of the Design & Industries Association', quoted Plummer, R., 'Nothing Need be Ugly', London, *Design & Industries Association*, 1985, p. 1.
[3] Plummer, 1985, p. 1.

> controlled, not merely boycotted, by those interested in the production of worthier and more beautiful things."[4]

As the growth and critical approval of studio pottery increased, the press and journals asked how studio pottery could assist this revolution. The International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris in 1925 threw such issues into sharp focus. Gordon Forsyth wrote his report on the British Pavilion for The Department of Overseas Trade where both factory ware and the new studio pottery had been shown. The section in the report on 'British Studio Potters'[5] briefly described recent developments and raised the issue of cross fertilisation with industry.

> Studio Pottery is in its infancy in England. . It is yet lacking in virility and it is inclined to be affected or to err on the "pretty-pretty" side.....
>
> Pottery has always exercised a great fascination for many of our greatest English artists, both sculptors and painters, and it is a thousand pities, as far as English Pottery is concerned, that this peculiar fascination is not translated into practical application of their great talent. It is sincerely hoped that manufactures and artists will come together and thus produce for England pottery which will be unsurpassed in the whole history of ceramics. This is a possibility which might easily reach fruition in the near future.'[6]

One of the first English critics to respond to the Paris 1925 exhibition was Frank Rutter who published a seven page article in *Apollo*, 'Modern English Pottery and Porcelain'.[7] An associate of Fry and Bell from the early 1910s, Rutter was a early supporter of Post Impressionist theory. He singled out the

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[4] *The Athenaeum*, No 4611, Nov., 1916, p. 557.
[5] The choice of title 'British Studio Potters' for this section of the report was indicative of the growing and widespread use of 'studio pottery' as a generic term.
[6] 'Reports on the Present Position and Tendencies of the Industrial Arts as indicated at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts', Paris, 1925, *Dept. of Overseas Trade*, 1927.
[7] Modern English Pottery and Porcelain, Frank Rutter, Apollo, Vol. 2, No 9, Sept. 1925.

ceramic section at the Exhibition for praise, classifying it into three sections, the 'domestic wares'[8] of industry, 'decorative wares' or studio pottery and the 'remarkable revival of figure-work' or modelling. Rutter credited the D. I. A. for recent improvements in British ceramic industry, quoting their slogan '"Fitness for purpose"' and contrasting this with the 'factitious (sic) ornamentation which passed for beauty in Victorian times'.[9] In a lengthy section he discussed the new principles of design through which beauty was achieved 'as a by-product' of sound practice that emphasised form over decoration. Rutter ignored the thrown studio pottery with the exception of a generous passage on Leach and a passing reference to Cardew; he devoted the remaining half of the article to the modelled ceramics of Reginald Wells, Gwendolen Parnell and Harry Parr. Like Fry and Bell, Rutter regarded early Chinese pottery as the apex of ceramic achievement: 'The superiority of the best Oriental pottery to anything else that has ever been produced in other parts of the world is so incontestable'.[10] For a critic not well-disposed towards 'decorative' studio pottery, Leach's well publicised personal history in Japan and self-identification with Sung pottery was persuasive, particularly given the importance of early Chinese ceramics to the formulation of the Formalist theories of Fry and Bell (see Chapter on Post Impressionism) and the 'increasing good taste of the present generation.'[11]

An article published in the *Birmingham Post* later in the year took a markedly different view and attacked studio pottery for its inability to

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[8]Rutter, Modern English Pottery and Porcelain, 1925, p. 133.
[9]Rutter, Modern English Pottery and Porcelain, 1925, p. 134.
[10]Rutter, Modern English Pottery and Porcelain, 1925, p. 135.

produce functional work. It is tempting to attribute this article to Frank Rutter as it was credited to 'F. S. R.'. The author wrote a review of four studio pottery exhibitions in London entitled 'In Quest of a Teapot' which included a thinly veiled attack on Leach's work. In what was more of a satirical sketch on the inability of studio pottery to produce competent utilitarian work rather than a review, the author described his forlorn search for an efficient studio pottery teapot.

> 'We have been suffering from a teapot with a defective spout. It is most versatile and will shed its contents anywhere besides into a cup. It was bought at a small pottery in the west country. We were attracted by a pleasantly mottled colour and the fact that the maker incises his name on every piece, with the place of origin. This, we thought, should be a guarantee of general excellence, and we still think it should.'[12]

Unable to find a teapot made by Staite Murray or Wells, the author parodied the musical analogies recently made by Rutter when describing Staite Murray's work. 'Now, we are just ordinary quiet people, and do not want a teapot that booms in organ tones or pizzicatos, or flutes. We do not care for music at our meals.' Of Wells he wrote 'here again my teapot with the impeccable spout eludes me.' The author finally found a teapot in an exhibition of Alfred and Louise Powell's work. As Forsyth's report for the Department of Overseas Trade stated, their work was 'not, in the strictest sense of the term, "studio" pottery, as their productions are made by Messrs. Josiah Wedgwood & Sons'[13]. Nevertheless he praised the Powells and devoted a substantial part of the studio pottery section to their work. For the

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[11]Rutter, Modern English Pottery and Porcelain, 1925, p. 134.
[12]F.S.R., 'In Quest of a Teapot', *Birmingham Post*, December 9, 1925.
[13] *Dept of Overseas Trade*, p. 134.

first time in the two and a half years since Hamada's initial exhibition, studio pottery was being examined in relation to industrial pottery, and was found wanting both artistically and practically. The honeymoon period for studio pottery was over, and the door to future, very public, criticism by Functionalist critics of the 1930s such as Geoffrey Grigson was opened.

One of the most vocal defenders of studio pottery during the 1920s was John Adams, of Carter, Stabler and Adams, an unusually imaginative English company which had collaborated with Omega in the manufacture of dinner ware, cast from Fry's thrown models. Adams felt that 'An adequate account of English nineteenth and early twentieth-century pottery has still to be written.'[14] Concurring with the general view that the 19th century was responsible for 'some of the most atrocious ceramic design the world has ever seen' Adams saw the studio potter's independence as a strength. 'They react on the general situation from the outside' arguing 'there need be not antagonism between hand-work and machine work. They function for different ends.' Discussing the price differential between industrial and studio pottery, Adams stated the studio potter 'abhors mass production' and acknowledged that 'It is inevitable that the middle and lower-classes must continue to yearn in vain for the fine things of the studio potters.' Unlike Rutter, who could not see a productive exchange between the two disciplines, Adams saw the studio potter as crucial to industry and argued for the artist's involvement. He predicted that, if studio pottery declined, industry would develop a 'machine aesthetic'.

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[14] Adams, J., 'Modern British Pottery',*The Architectural Review*,. LIX, Jan-July 1926, p. 190.

> 'The artist has to realise that he must resume his leadership in industries such as this, or make way for a new type of worker who will create beauty for us all out of the work of the machine. It is a phase of evolution in which the artist stands on trial.'

Another source of encouragement for industry to work with studio pottery was found in *Arts and Crafts* in 1928, in Harry Trethowan's article 'Potters and Pottery of To-Day in England.'[15] Trethowan was a buyer at Heals and, like Adams, saw the divide between artist and industry as a barrier to raising standards. Impartially, he suggested that both meet half-way, following developments in Sweden and Denmark in ceramics, glass and textiles.

> 'there is a false pride of position on both sides. Until the industry is capable of appreciating the talent that is spent ineffectively too often by the studio potter (so-called) and until the studio potter realizes the worth of providing industry with such talent, so long will there be waste in both spheres.'[16]

At The European Arts and Crafts Show at Leipzig[17] in 1927 the English pottery ranged from Leach and Staite Murray's pots to industrial work. *The Studio* reported 'The Germans frankly think our pots dull, one critic said "we do similar semi-peasant designs, but do not show it as our first-class work."'[18] This forthright response to English studio pottery made Rutter's criticism of 1925 seem mild. An exhibition organised by the Industrial Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1927 widened the debate on the growing relationship between industrial and studio pottery. One of three reviews, *The Studio's* opinion was the most cursory. Criticising the scarcity

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[15] Trethowan, H., 'Potters and Pottery of To-Day in England', *Arts and Crafts*, Vol. 1., No. 2., May, 1928, pp. 83-85.
[16] p. 83.
[17] The D. I . A. contributed to the Leipzig exhibition. Harrod, 1999, p.111
[18] 'Leipzig', *The Studio*, Vol. 94, July, 1927, p. 55.

of work, either industrial or hand made 'to serve any practical purpose', the author went on to say 'This is to be regretted as, after all, well designed objects intended for use are of much greater value to the average citizen with a modest income than these decorative accessories, destined, for the most part, for collectors' cabinets.'[19] The 'collector's cabinet' would be pilloried over the next decade by pragmatic Modernists, while the 'parlour' was the symbol of everything that advocates of vernacular pottery were rebelling against. In his description of Hamada's pottery Yanagi stated that it had returned 'from the parlour to the living room and kitchen.'[20] *The Arts and Crafts* also condemned the lack of utilitarian pottery at the Victoria and Albert Museum in a rambling review: ' "...useful pottery" was in the minority.'[21] Surprisingly, Charles Marriot's was the most perceptive review : 'the most interesting development is the gradual response of the factory to the studio.'[22] Marriot developed a theory that drew on Adams' position of 1926, drawing an analogy between studio to industry as 'pure to applied science, or pure to applied scholarship.' At this stage Marriot was one of studio pottery's greatest supporters and he championed the right for individuals to pursue ideas without commercial or utilitarian constraint, writing

> 'It leaves us unmoved that the wares of such potters as Mr W. Staite Murray and Mr Bernard Leach—with Mr. R. F. Wells ... have to be produced at prices prohibitive to most of us; they serve their purpose as "museum pieces" and the pottery trade will ultimately benefit by their example—as the world benefits by 'cloistered virtues."'

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[19] 'Notes', The *Studio*, Vol. 95, Jan., 1928, p. 47.
[20] Yanagi, M., Catalogue essay 'The Pottery of Shoji Hamada', Paterson's Gallery, Oct. 1931,
[21] 'Recent Examples of British Pottery, *The Arts and Crafts*, Vol. 2, No 6, Nov., 1927, p. 18.
[22] Marriot, C., 'British Pottery', *The Times*, 30 Sept., 1927.

This absolute endorsement of the creative freedom of studio pottery was typical of Marriot's support at the time, some four years after his first review of Hamada's second exhibition at Paterson's Gallery in 1923. His approval and elevation of studio pottery to the level of pure science or scholarship was matched by his claim that Staite Murray was one of Europe's greatest individual artists. A year later, Marriot was expressing doubt over the 'museum attitude' of studio potters and complaining of 'an unsatisfactory situation' between potters and industry. The source of this doubt and its effect on what had appeared to be an unshakeable conviction was not criticism from industry itself, nor the growing band of advocates of the machine aesthetic or the next phase of Modernism. As far as Marriot was concerned, it was a self inflicted wound from within the field of studio pottery (see Chapter 10).

As has already been suggested, doubts about studio pottery were sown in Marriot's mind by Bernard Leach's essay *A Potter's Outlook*, written the year after Marriot's review of the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition of industrial art. Following Leach's bleak portrayal of studio pottery Marriot wrote of a Leach exhibition in the same year

> 'it must be evident that a stage has been reached for some better adjustment between private and factory production. On the one hand we have an increasing number of artist-craftsmen ... producing wares of high artistic quality at prohibitive prices and on the other hand factories turning out inexpensive wares of generally good technical quality'.

Other critics as well as Marriot began to question the artistic validity of studio pottery and started to regard it as a commercial concern. The growing

utilitarian nature of studio pottery itself, not the industrial might of Stoke on Trent, was to be a factor in sowing the seeds of its undoing within the same decade of its inception. As the divide between Leach and Staite Murray increased throughout the 1930s and industry modernised further, the relationship between the two potters would be thrown into sharper focus.

15.1 Rural Industries

Debates about the relationship between hand-made pottery and industry were not simply focused on the industrial heartland of Stoke-on-Trent but also extended to work made in the rural environment. As the 1920s progressed, pottery making in England diversified, and while studio pottery and industrial manufacture marked the extremes of its production, the middle ground expanded to further complicate the emerging identity of the new studio pottery. The establishment of the Ashtead Pottery in the early 1920s meant that 'hand made' pottery was no longer the exclusive domain of studio potters. Its foundation was part of a wider inter-war trend in social engineering and paralleled the establishment of the Rural Industries Bureau in 1921, described by Harrod as an attempt 'to alleviate unemployment and poverty in the countryside'.[23] Ashtead was a philanthropic enterprise established by Sir Lawrence and Lady Weaver to employ 40 disabled ex-servicemen in the production of hand-made pottery. *The Times* published an article on Ashtead's pottery in 1925 but the anonymous correspondent's

[23] Harrod, T., 'The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century', Yale, 1999, p. 173.

interest was with the altruistic intent of the enterprise as much as the aesthetic qualities of the work. In discussing the contribution of the ex-servicemen *The Times* stated 'More than pots are being made'.[24] and raised the rhetorical question 'what would they be to-day?... Certainly not the interested busy, self-supporting citizens and workers that they are.'

As discussed earlier, the role of the studio potter in relationship to ceramic industry was extensively debated during the 1920s and *The Times'* article widened the debate. The correspondent was technically informed and referred to the 'unpretentious sound work, with a dash of originality in it, yet without "artiness," cleanly designed, and finely finished[25]. In what appears to be a reference to criticism of Leach and other studio potter's inability to make functional teapots published earlier in the year[26], the correspondent concluded his discussion of the pottery with a triumphant claim 'And the tea-pot! Ashtead has a tea-pot'. At this early stage of studio pottery Hamada, Staite Murray, Wells and Leach were presented as artists but their place in the art world was not yet clearly defined, especially as their work drew on traditions of utilitarian pottery. Although there were small potteries producing utilitarian work such as Ravenscourt Pottery run by Dora Lunn, these received little press interest. The emergence and coverage of Ashtead Pottery challenged the unique position the early studio potters had created for themselves. Another 'specially contributed' article in *The Times* in 1928 further highlighted the ambiguity of studio pottery's

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[24] 'The Potter and the Pot', Work at Ashtead', The Times Aug., 19, 1925.
[25] The Times Aug., 19, 1925.
[26] 'Modern English Pottery', The Christian Science Monitor, December 14, 1925.

emerging position - with questions about whether it was an artistic or commercial discipline. This lengthy article 'Pottery Craft : Growing Industry in Rural Areas'[27], surveyed the production of hand-made pottery in England and Wales. It was notable for a strong attack on the romanticisation of the 'village or rural industries movement' and specifically art or exhibition based pottery. The anonymous writer criticised the 'amateur' potter who made '"Art" pottery ... of the "studio" and the indiscriminate clientele who purchased this work.

> 'They will place the highest value upon some utensil that has neither utilitarian merit nor artistic distinction, if only it happened to have been reproduced in sufficiently picturesque surroundings. ... Let the article be crude and useless, but let it have been fashioned in curious circumstances or in a ramshackle workshop ten miles from a railway station and they will treasure it'.

'Good pottery in various styles' was listed and unusually included traditional pottery along with studio pottery, Guilds and philanthropic enterprises. Given the attack on exhibition pottery it was surprising that Staite Murray and Bernard Leach were included, although they were referred to as 'artistic potters'. The article was notable for an early mention of Michael Cardew's Winchcombe Pottery, and it then went on to discuss the Potters Art Guild in Guildford, Duxhurst Village Pottery in Surrey, Dicker Pottery in Hailsham, Braunton Pottery in Devon, Silchester in Hampshire, Ewohny and Rumney in Wales along with Ashtead Pottery. Such listing of potteries was unusual for two reasons. Firstly, it bracketed the new studio potteries at Winchombe and St Ives with the remaining country potteries, an area pointedly ignored by the new studio potters who were happy to re-

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[27] 'Pottery Craft, Growing Industry in Rural Areas', *The Times*, Oct. 1, 1928.

invent vernacular traditions as long as they were safely located in the past. But, more importantly, it positioned studio pottery away from its desired location in Bond Street, placing it within the arena of rural industry. Published in the same year as Leach's *A Potter's Outlook* which attacked the direction studio pottery was taking, this article further questioned studio pottery's identity. By juxtaposing studio pottery with traditional country potters, guilds and enterprises such as Ashtead, it challenged the claim that studio pottery was a new art form rather than a commercial craft.

In the following year the profile of rural potteries was strengthened with the opening of Ashtead's London showroom Peter Potter Ltd. *The Times* previewed an Armistice exhibition in 1929 describing the shop's policy to

> 'specialise in the designs of the lesser known English potters, including individual artists who are providing distinguished work, but ordinary commercial prices will be the rule.'[28]

Studio pottery was unable to establish a single coherent identity. Although Staite Murray and Reginald Wells were decidedly metropolitan potters, Bernard Leach was reliant on London galleries but positioned himself as a rural potter. Alfred Hopkins' declaration that studio pottery 'began in London',[29] the comment in *The Times* that 'inadequate attention has rarely been paid to the part played by London'[30], and even Staite Murray's work shown with avant-garde groups such as The Seven and Five Society, were unable to resist the onset of a romantic rural nationalism. The

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[28] 'Ex-Service Potters', *The Times*, Nov. 8, 1929.
[29] Hopkins, A., 'Pottery', *The Arts and Crafts Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 10, Mar., 1927, pp. 10.
[30] 'Fifty Years of London Pottery', *The Times*, May 4, 1922.

pastoralisation of studio pottery typified by the Leach Pottery at St Ives was reinforced by the addition of Cardew's Winchombe pottery and to a lesser extent Braden and Pleydell-Bouverie's pottery at Coleshill in Wiltshire. Leach's rejection of industry and an avant-garde critical agenda supported by the 'collectors, purists, cranks, or "arty" people'[31] now divided studio pottery. It was no longer seen as an exclusively metropolitan movement with its origins in Fry's French-inspired Modernism. Leach's critical re-positioning and the rise of the Rural Industries Movement combined to establish a second strand that situated studio pottery within the 'rural' environment. The 'rural/metropolitan' divide was now established and would invariably present a dichotomy for practitioners in the future.

[31] Leach, B., *A Potter's Outlook*, Handwork's' Pamphlets No 3, London, 1928.