CELEBRATING PRACTICE: past, present, future
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Pete Moss: past, present, future

Catalogue to support a retrospective, first seen at the National Centre for Craft & Design in 2010
INTRODUCTION: CELEBRATING PETE MOSS AT THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR CRAFT & DESIGN

MELANIE KIDD
HEAD OF EXHIBITIONS

Pete Moss has a long and respected career as an artist, educator and arts activist. He has brought passion, intelligence and commitment to all facets of his practice. His ceramics are internationally acclaimed and widely collected, and he has spent thirty years living and working in our region.

Throughout his career Moss has maintained the philosophy that his work holds equal bearing as a pedagogue to his artistic output. It is therefore only appropriate that his retrospective not only illuminated the technical and aesthetic brilliance of his ceramics, but also celebrated Moss’s legacy as an educator. Five large-scale public art commissions created by young people and adults from various schools, colleges and community groups, sit alongside Moss’s personal collection in the show; reflecting the artist’s on-going desire to foster a sense of collective cohesion and egalitarianism amongst the citizens of the future.

A third strand to Moss’s practice, and perhaps most poignant to this gallery, is his ongoing support and promotion of the arts in Lincolnshire. Moss demonstrates this unrelenting commitment by generously giving his time to museums, galleries, societies and committees, with the sole goal of enriching our communities through arts and culture. The National Centre for Craft & Design became aware of this advocacy work ten years ago, three years prior to our opening, when Moss sat on our own advisory board and championed the development of a venue promoting craft and design practice of the highest artistic integrity.

Moss’s influence at this venue has since remained in both our exhibition and learning programmes, and we in turn have followed his career with interest — seeking the appropriate moment to revere such an influential and energetic practitioner that has sat at the heart of our community. At the time of Moss’s seventieth birthday, the National Centre for Craft & Design is pleased to stage his retrospective, celebrating the artist’s life and work — past, present and future.

Right: Moulded Dish, dark blue glaze with enamel decoration, 24” dia, 2010
September 1959 found me in the Red House Gallery Christchurch, looking for the drawing tutor from Bournemouth College of Art and Design. I wandered around chatting with other newly enrolled Intermediate in Art and Design students and waited for our tutor — time passed and I walked up to one of the group and asked where our bloody teacher was — he replied I am your tutor and thus began a deep and lasting friendship, only ended by his tragic death four years ago.

His name was Peter Williams, fresh from the Slade School of Art who for the next few years taught me drawing, art history and philosophy. An excellent teacher and hard task master who, towards the end of my NDD course, commissioned several ceramic works and encouraged me to immerse myself in the Summer and Winter Schools run by Harry Thubron and his colleagues as they put together a unique set of Foundation Course principles.

As a result of these incredible experiences, I was offered part-time teaching hours by Peter, who by then was the Director of Studies at Bournemouth.

I was encouraged to maintain my ceramic and sculpture interests by him and was able to develop my lecturing skills overseen by him.

The support from Peter Williams, David Ballantyne and other sculpture staff allowed me to apply to the Royal College with some confidence.

Throughout my time at the RCA and during my lecturing post at Nottingham, I kept in close contact with Peter. Suddenly in 1970 he invited me to join him at Lincoln School of Art, I accepted and a flourishing career followed.

After he left Lincoln to move to Kent, our friendship was maintained until four years ago at the end of our very successful two man exhibition in Whitstable when he was tragically killed in a road accident.

I really miss his influence upon my life, his encouragement and criticism. I count myself immensely fortunate and proud to have really known him.
Peter Moss was born on 13th October 1940 in Northampton. His mother had moved out of London to escape the Blitz but the young Pete would eventually spend his earliest years in Barnet on the northern outskirts of the capital. His father was an industrial chemist working for British Drug Houses Ltd (BDH) and the Moss family moved to Dorset in 1947 when BDH opened a new chemical facility in Poole. The family — both parents and three children, Joyce, Peter and Victor — lived in a house built by the company in nearby Upton. Moss was a pupil at Queen Elizabeth’s Grammar School in Wimborne from 1952. The school has a reputation for excellence in sports and it was here that he first developed his passion for rugby, a game that he played for many years to a high standard. Indeed, one of the interesting paradoxes of Moss’s life and career may be said to reside in the contrast that seems to exist, on the surface at least, between the elegance of his art and the strapping masculinity of the man himself.

Moss enrolled at Bournemouth College of Art in 1959. While patently a provincial art school, Bournemouth was also a very interesting and progressive one. The comic Peter Cook was a recent graduate and the renowned sculptor Ralph Brown had taught there from 1956 to 1958. More importantly, David Ballantyne headed the ceramics department, where he was vigorously assisted by Peter Stoodley. Moss quickly became fascinated by pottery and he was encouraged, cajoled, disciplined and supported by both men as he sought to develop his skills. Other notable mentors included Phillip Hartas and Clive Sheppard in the sculpture department. Hartas — who arrived in Bournemouth after a spell teaching at Liverpool College of Art, where his students included Michael Kenny (not to mention John Lennon and Stuart Sutcliffe) — was an influential figure behind the early ‘60s trend, led by Kenny, for employing drawing as an important and indivisible facet of sculpture, and he encouraged Moss to think creatively about surface mark-making in his own pieces. Sheppard, meanwhile, was friendly with
many of the day’s most prominent sculptors, from young and vogue-ish operators such as Roland Piché through to older and more established figures like Hubert Dalwood. He was also working as a studio assistant for Henry Moore; indeed he invited Moss to meet Moore and witness the industrial levels of production then ongoing at Much Hadham, which at that time was bathing in the glory of the famous Reclining Figure for the UNESCO building in Paris and many other grand public works besides. The young Moss could hardly help but be impressed.

But it was David Ballantyne who was the seminal figure and it was by pottery that Moss’s imagination was most fully captured at this early stage. Ballantyne had arrived at Bournemouth in 1950 and he would stay until his retirement in 1978. The high regard in which he was held by so many of his peers made it possible for him to offer valuable stints for all his students in the workshops of some very good and well-established potters, almost as a matter of course. His brother was the collector James Rollo Ballantyne, whose fine collection of ceramics is now held by Nottingham Castle Museum, and he is also remembered for his development of the Saviac kick-wheel, as well as his collaborations with the poet, sculptor and gardener Ian Hamilton Finlay. His influence on Moss was profound and the assistance he offered was practical too, securing for him valuable studio time with such renowned ceramicists as Alan Caiger-Smith at Aldermaston Pottery in Berkshire and, closer by, Bernard Charles at the famous Poole Pottery. In the studio at Bournemouth, meanwhile, Ballantyne insisted his students
become proficient in basic hand-techniques, using historical and contemporary models as their guides. Moss learned how to throw a full range of standard domestic ware — dishes, bowls, mugs and the like — and how to fire these using earthenware and stoneware methods. His main touchstones while cultivating these skills were the Leach Pottery and the work of Michael Cardew, initially at the Leach Pottery and later at Winchcombe. Bernard Leach and Cardew had placed an Arts and Crafts emphasis on the need for basic utility in all that they produced, but the young Moss was just as keen to learn about the many decorative techniques that might be used to adorn the surfaces of these standard forms. Encouraged by Ballantyne and Stoodley, he familiarised himself with a range of historical models: Hispano-Moresque ware, French faience ware, salt-glazed German bellarmine bottles and jugs and a wide range of Art Nouveau and Art Deco tiles. These studies led him to the techniques of double-glazing, sprigging, under-glazing, on-glaze painting and tin-glazing with oxides. Moss also produced large coiled garden pots at Bournemouth, these stemming from his interest in early Indian and African wares as well as 12th-century ceramics from Japan.

It was also at Bournemouth that Moss first met Peter Williams, who would be a mentor and unstinting friend throughout his career. Fresh from the Slade School of Art, Williams taught drawing, art history and philosophy at Bournemouth, and he took a particular interest in Moss’s development from an early stage, commissioning several ceramic works while the latter was still a student. It was Williams who set Moss on his way as an art teacher, putting him to work organising the early foundation studies programme at Bournemouth. In so doing, he gave Moss a front row seat for the late ‘50s/early ‘60s drive in England to reinvent the art school, sending him to lively symposia and summer schools on the future of art education, where he was able to discuss the Bauhaus-inspired ideologies of what came to be known as ‘the New Creativity’ with progressives such as Dalwood and Harry Thubron from Leeds College of Art, Peter Green from Hornsey College of Arts and
Crafts and the influential painter-critic Patrick Heron. But Moss still had ambitions as an artist in his own right and in 1964 he won a travelling scholarship in a competition judged by Peter O’Malley, a ceramics tutor from the Royal College of Art (RCA). O’Malley urged him to continue his studies in London and Moss duly enrolled in the ceramics department at the RCA the following year. Headed by Professor David Queensberry, the department was undergoing a sea-change in attitudes at this time, with the vocational emphasis of recent decades – where students were predominantly trained to become designers in the ceramics industry – giving way to ‘fine art’ approaches to the subject: what Queensberry would later call, a trifle disparagingly, “a movement towards doing your own thing”. Moss had come to the RCA with a broadly skills-based National Diploma in Design (NDD) from Bournemouth, but increasingly in the coming years new students would arrive holding a Diploma in Art and Design (DipAD), the more liberal, some would say esoteric, qualification that came to replace the NDD. These students were hungry for innovative approaches and they were abetted in many ways by the methods of individual teachers within the department. Hans Coper taught one day a week from 1966 and his great mentor Lucie Rie had been visiting regularly since 1960 to give lectures and individual critiques on the work of the students. Rie and Coper are often noted for their reticence when it came to explaining their own work, and this
unwillingness to dictate on the question of what a pot could or should be was one of the things that drove the department’s growing spirit of individualism. Often Coper’s work was non-functional and sculptural in appearance but he still considered himself a potter, and he encouraged his students to think intently, with an adaptable sort of particularity, about every single piece they produced. This approach provided a basis for Pete Moss’s output at the RCA and, indeed, can be seen as characterising his work even to this day.

Another important influence was Eduardo Paolozzi, who lectured in ceramics after arriving back in London in 1968 following a short spell teaching at the University of Berkeley in California. Paolozzi taught Moss during his final year at the RCA. In the same year he held one-man shows at Berkeley, at the Stedelijk in Amsterdam, the Galerie Neuendorf in Hamburg and the Städtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf, not to mention receiving a CBE from the Queen. In short, the man was at the top of his game. His appointment to teach ceramics at the RCA was a major coup and it had been actively sought by Queensberry but it did, nevertheless, represent a culmination of the shifting values that the Head of Department would later come to question. Paolozzi was renowned as a sculptor, print-maker and collagist but as far as can be told at this remove, he had never made a pot. By hiring him, the department confirmed its commitment to the new ethos of pluralism that was sweeping through English art schools at this time, which held that art is most productively taught with a fluid, non-prescriptive attitude towards the traditional boundaries between disciplines. Even now, some forty years later, Pete Moss is loath to say whether he is a potter or a sculptor; for him, the distinction is largely meaningless.

Paolozzi was a long-time proponent of new approaches to art education. As early as 1949 he had been invited by the painter William Johnstone, a fellow Scot, to teach at the Central School of Art and Design in London, ostensibly as a lecturer in textile design, though in actual fact he was “given free rein to impart creative attitudes in previously moribund departments”. The techniques he developed
were personalised and often somewhat idiosyncratic. Glenys Barton, a contemporary of Moss’s at the RCA, recalls how he told his students to assemble a mental ‘kit of images’ from which to create their own ‘synthetic worlds’. In cahoots with the likes of Coper and Rie, and ultimately sanctioned by Queensberry, Paolozzi encouraged the development of highly personal and individualised approaches to the business of art-making. His influence can be seen now as something that binds together the work of a diverse host of apparently quite unrelated makers, and the development of Moss’s career has parallels with those of Barton, Gordon Baldwin, Ewen Henderson, Elizabeth Fritsch, Graham Clarke, Carol McNicoll, Geoffrey Swindell, Jill Crowley, Jacqui Poncelet and Alison Britton. These artists and many others besides helped propel a quietly stunning renaissance in British ceramics in the late 1960s and ‘70s, their readiness to experiment with materials, form and surface meeting with widespread critical acclaim and commercial success. The number of studio potters working throughout the country increased steadily, with more and more galleries and auction houses eager to exhibit and sell their wares. The Craft Potters Association, originally formed in 1958, saw its membership swell dramatically and the Ceramic Review, today the field’s most respected journal, was first published in 1970 to respond to a general explosion in interest.

As well as soaking up the atmosphere at the RCA and becoming increasingly energised by it, Moss benefited enormously from being sent by Queensbury and O’Malley to work as an assistant in the studio of the designer Michael Caddy. Caddy had studied at the RCA in the 1950s and, like Moss, had grown up in the West Country. He too had enrolled at Bournemouth College of Art before moving to London. After finishing his studies, he made his name as a tile-maker and was running a successful studio in Chelsea by the time Moss came to work for him in 1966. These were heady times in London. The Greater London Council had been established the year before and one of its key objectives was to produce and implement a ‘Greater London Development Plan’, which
included a special focus on the re-development of central areas of the city. As a result of this and the economic boom that was helping to transform the capital generally, Caddy’s practice often found itself with more work than it could easily handle. Moss was frequently entrusted with the delivery of projects that, certainly for an artist still in his mid-twenties, must be regarded as very prestigious indeed. The firm was particularly successful in the field of interior design for new buildings, with Caddy specialising in corporate wall mosaics, making frequent use of fibreglass and tile work. One such project that Moss worked on was a fibreglass and resin decorative relief for a new Rocco Forte hotel by the architects Michael Lyell Associates near the recently-completed Terminal 1 of London Airport (today known as Heathrow). The relief was based on a plan view of the airport’s buildings and runways. For smaller projects Moss was often given a free hand to try out techniques such as ‘Decal-mania’ transfer work and to experiment with water-based inks and oil-based resists, as can be seen with the tile mural he made for the London showroom of the dental supply firm Claudius Ash & Co. Caddy also put Moss to work with designers such as George Mitchell and the stained glass artist Tony Hollaway, both of whom were prospering similarly from the building boom in London at this time. Moss’s skill-set broadened considerably as a result of these collaborations and to this
The friendship that Moss developed with Caddy and the success of their working relationship was such that, after completing his studies at the RCA in 1968, he went to work for the designer full-time. However it was in this year that Caddy decided to move his practice wholesale from London to converted farm buildings near Wimborne in Dorset, disconcertingly near to where Moss had gone to school. The young artist, perhaps mindful of the need to move forward rather than back, was soon looking for opportunities to strike out on his own. Caddy had given Moss plenty of experience of working on architectural projects and this helped enormously when it came to applying for a post lecturing in architectural ceramics at Trent Polytechnic (now Nottingham Trent University). His senior colleague at Trent was John Adams, a friend of Caddy’s since studying with him at Bournemouth in the early 1950s and a relative of the John Adams who part-owned the Poole Pottery where Moss had worked briefly while studying at Bournemouth himself in the early 1960s. Moss stayed at Trent until 1970 and during his time there came to the attention of staff from the Schools Museum Service in Nottingham, most especially Derek Bilton. Impressed by his skills as a teacher and his expertise with a wide range of materials,
Bilton set him to work running workshops for local schoolchildren. An important adjunct of this work, if not always its main objective, was that Moss was often required to facilitate and oversee the completion of public artworks by the children whose schools had sent them to his workshop. It was at this time, then, that he first began specialising in the collaborative works that form such an important part of his practice today. As we have seen, Moss had been immersed for some time in the new ideas and practices then taking hold of art education in England and his work with children can be seen as belonging very much to this wider revolution. He was certainly aware, at least indirectly, of the important research into children’s art that had been carried out by Tom Hudson, former Painting Master at Lowestoft School of Art. In the mid to late 1950s, in collaboration with Victor Pasmore and the aforementioned Harry Thubron, Hudson used his findings as the basis for a series of influential summer schools in Scarborough for educators interested in finding out about progressive new methods for the teaching of art. His studies had concluded that young children were especially open to teaching methods that encouraged a creative and exploratory approach to problems of design, but that this receptiveness and lack of fear was gradually inhibited as the child matured and accepted norms and mannerisms increasingly took hold. Devotees of the new methods were convinced that they could extend this window of opportunity beyond infancy and into adolescence and young adulthood. This belief underscores Moss’s work with children even today. Especially relevant are the theories that Hudson developed in relation to what Herbert Read’s Education Through Art had identified as the art student’s ‘Activity of Observation’ (as opposed to the related but separate activities of Self-Expression and Appreciation). Defined as “the individual’s desire to record his sense impressions, to clarify his conceptual knowledge, to build up his memory [and] to construct things which aid his practical activities”, Hudson felt that this crucial activity was being overlooked, even by disciples of the new educational theories, and he was eager to disseminate teaching
methods that allowed it a proper focus. The upshot of this was the
Basic Design course at Leeds College of Art that Hudson developed in
collaboration with Thubron and assisted by the likes of Dalwood and
Alan Davie, another inspirational figure in Pete Moss’s development.
The course aimed to take the process of design back to its most basic
and instinctual elements — “the intangible properties of simple graphic
marks” — and to build a process of truly creative discovery from these.
It is probably no coincidence that, even now, the initial drawings
produced by Pete Moss’s school pupils in response to exercises set in the
planning stages of his workshops are not dissimilar to work made by
first-year students at Leeds College of Art in the 1960s.

Another important contextual aspect of Moss’s early work with
schoolchildren is the relationship that it can be seen as having with
the public art boom of the 1970s and ’80s. In the 1960s in Britain
this branch of the visual arts was still localised and largely piecemeal,
focused around outstanding but intermittent examples such as the
aforementioned Victor Pasmore’s arts consultancy work for the
designers of the new town of Peterlee in County Durham. Gradually,
though, central government began to become more closely involved,
using examples of successful artworks and schemes funded by local
authorities as the basis for policies that could be applied wholesale
across Britain. In 1977 the ruling Labour Party commissioned The
Arts and the People, an executive report that in turn informed the
Inner Urban Areas Act sanctioned by Parliament the following year.
Designated funding was now made available for local authorities to
encourage and directly sponsor community-based arts programmes.
This coincided with the culmination of a gradual shift in England and
Wales from a tripartite to a comprehensive system of education, with
its inherent ideological objectives of social equality and a belief in the
primacy of the community. It meant that an artist like Pete Moss was
now ideally placed to pick up commissions for new artworks in schools.
These artworks were to be aimed not so much at the adornment of
school-buildings as at fostering a sense of collective cohesion and
egalitarianism amongst the citizens of the future. And it is at this point that another interesting paradox makes itself apparent in relation to Moss’s work: he is a maker who was trained in such a way as to encourage individualism and a singularity of artistic vision, and yet he works successfully in a field where the sense of collective endeavour is seen as a key end in itself, often regardless of the qualities of the artworks that result. One of Moss’s outstanding geniuses is that, mentoring others in this way, he has consistently been able to produce finished works of great interest and artistic panache.

Though it augured well for his future work with schools, Moss’s time in Nottingham was actually rather short. In 1970 Peter Williams, by then Principal of Lincoln College of Art, invited him to head the ceramics department at that institution, as well as developing its foundation course. Thus began an association with Lincoln that, apart from a brief spell at Sheffield Polytechnic in the early 1980s, continues even to this day. Williams was looking to expand the art school when Moss arrived, with local government boundary changes and more general changes to the education system meaning that it would soon be able to take students from all over the county; in 1974 it became Lincolnshire College of Art and Design. A small, provincial art school on the up, it offered an environment that was hungry for Moss’s talents as an administrator, artist, craftsman, educator and mentor. Students responded especially to his ability – drawing on the twin philosophies of his own practice, already noted – to instil a sense of self-reliance at the same time as encouraging receptive attitudes to new ideas and methods, together with the sort of can-do approach that can help grease the wheels of any collaborative venture. Alan Vinters, who enrolled at Lincoln in 1973, recalls one episode where Moss lectured him and his fellow students on the vital importance, as a professional artist, of disciplining oneself and respecting deadlines. The next day Vinters went to Moss’s studio to help him pack the exhibits for a show in which he was taking part and was surprised to find “the boxes and packing all there, but no pots! I asked where the exhibition work was.
In here’, Pete replied, peering into a very hot kiln. I asked what time the transport would be arriving to take his work to exhibition. ‘One hour’, came the reply. He took the pieces out one by one and examined them. They were all perfect. ‘This is no way to work’, I said. ‘Anything could have happened in the kiln’. ‘Know your profession’, Pete replied. ‘Working to high standards eliminates any dilemma before it can occur and the deadlines will not be missed’. The exhibition was a complete success.

Moss had been showing regularly since leaving the RCA in 1968 and on arriving in Lincoln he threw himself into the local exhibiting scene with gusto. He soon became a prime mover. The textile artist Jeanette Killner recalls re-locating to the city in 1974 after successfully applying for a weaving fellowship from the Lincolnshire Arts Association. Moss had sat on the interview panel and he exhibited with Killner when the Regional Craft Centre opened at Jew’s Court in Lincoln soon after. The two have often shown in the same exhibitions since and Killner has witnessed first-hand the development of several of Pete Moss’s signature forms and decorations, including his kimono designs, his lustre-patterned dishes and his use of sgraffito. The use of sgraffito, as we have seen, probably goes back to Moss’s time with tutors such as the sculptor Phillip Hartas at Bournemouth, though the technique itself is as ancient as pottery. In the years after the Second World War it was seen as a trusted tool from the store of traditional methods available to potters working in the delicate Arts and Crafts afterglow of the Bernard Leach school of English ceramics. As David Whiting has said, “This was a world of the quietest ash and tenmoko glazes, of lyrical painting and incising on traditional orientally-inspired forms”. Moss mastered the technique under different circumstances, developing a far more adaptable attitude to its use. Inspired initially by Hartas and later by his teachers at the RCA, he paid no heed to the traditional demarcations between ceramics and other branches of the visual arts, including drawing. His aim instead was to develop an approach whereby he was able to call on any style of decoration at any given time and apply it as
he saw fit to whatever design problem he had in front of him. Sgraffito was just another technique from a well-stocked armoury, and Moss’s use of it rather confirms his adherence to the belief that decoration should not be seen as inextricable from the surface of the pot. Rather it should be applied in such a way as to make it integral to the finished artwork. Lucie Rie provided some pointers in this. Her chaste sgraffito emphasised and often helped to sustain the shapes of the vessels she made – a sort of decorative amendment to the modernist law that form should always follow function — and a continuation of this aesthetic can certainly be traced through the expressive early sgraffito work of Pete Moss, where the designs of individual pieces were often delineated using different types of mark, these employed to emphasise subdivisions within the overall form.

Moss has cultivated a similarly laissez-faire attitude in his use of imagery. It is an attitude that may stem from Paolozzi, whose Pop Art sensibilities and emphasis on the development of personalised and quasi-pictorial languages can certainly be seen to have encouraged Moss in his eclectic plundering of sources. These are often traditional and archaic, but they can just as often be modern or contemporary. It is a magpie aesthetic best illustrated, perhaps, by a series of non-functional artworks that Moss has made over the last twenty years, based on the form of the kimono: the traditional garment of the Japanese. Moss’s reasons for appropriating this form are varied. He first became fascinated by kimonos in the late 1980s after seeing one hung in the home of friends Roger and Lesli Day. His interest may have stemmed from the studies he had made of 12th-century ceramics from Japan, and he would certainly have pondered the fundamental influence of Japanese ceramics on the Leach Pottery, whose work he had also studied at Bournemouth. In addition to this he noticed that the kimono, when hung, takes on a shape that is remarkably redolent of the spade-pots he was making at the RCA in the late-1960s; his kimono-pieces are all based on the form of the garment when hung. By highlighting the similarity, Moss seems to be acknowledging concerns about the misuse
of surface decoration in ceramics, which throughout its history has run the risk, when inconsiderately applied, of masking the basic formal qualities of the pot as steadily and seductively as the kimono does the body. Perhaps to emphasise this concern, the kimono-pieces are often vibrantly coloured. The viewer is encouraged to consider whether he is looking at a shouldered pot that has been decorated to look like a kimono or a sculptural representation of a kimono that has many of the formal qualities of a shouldered pot. It is an ambiguity that has dogged Moss throughout his career – the tension between the craftsman and the fine artist, the sculptor and the pot-maker — and he seems to have decided to poke some fun at its expense. The exuberant colours that he applies to his kimonos have the effect of charging this everyday object of traditional Japanese culture with a sort of glitzy significance, one that seems to look back to Pop Art’s fascination with advertising, at the same time as casting a baleful sideways glance at the kitsch of Jeff Koons and others.

But irony of this sort is rare in Moss’s work. His key concerns have always been beauty and good craftsmanship, with an overriding ambition to develop these concerns, idea upon idea, into the kaleidoscope of wonderfully-coloured forms we have before us today. His interest in lustre ware probably stems from this apparently innate fascination for the gorgeous, sumptuous object. It is an interest that has grown over the years, having been stimulated in the first place while still at art school in Bournemouth. The internship with Alan Caiger-Smith, who was interested in this type of decoration’s Islamic roots, was probably instrumental. Clive Fox, former director of Lincolnshire & Humberside Arts, recalls how, in the late 1980s, Moss’s research into lustre revealed a rich seam of new forms to complement his decorative advances, which rather tallies with the artist’s insistence, noted before.
that both form and decoration be treated as integral to the finished object. One of these new forms was a tall flattened ‘vase’ with a decoration of blue hues (left bottom). Gradually the colours became more vibrant, as can be seen with a large dish from the mid-1990s, on which the overlays of many firings have been juxtaposed. And by the early 2000s Moss had mastered a range of glowing lustres, his wares imbued with the jewel-like qualities of precious metals.

Moss had become Director of Studies at Lincoln in 1981. He was also College Governor for a year before a spell as Acting Principal in 1983. He became Vice Principal soon after and stayed in this position until retiring from full-time teaching in 1994. Although continuing to run workshops and lecture part time, predominantly at what was then known as the School of Applied Arts and Design at De Montfort University in Lincoln (now the University of Lincoln), Moss has been a full-time artist and arts consultant since 1995, producing private work for exhibition, accepting commissions and sitting on a number of
committees in relation to a broad range of creative industries and other arts interests. The professional contacts that he developed during his long teaching career have proved very useful and his importance today as a mentor for the contemporary arts scene in Lincoln and beyond is enormous. His long associations with national bodies such as the Society of Designer Craftsmen, the Crafts Council and the Royal Society of Arts have been used to inform a tremendous range of activities locally. He was a visual arts and crafts consultant for Lincolnshire and Humberside Arts throughout the 1970s and ‘80s and in 1988 he became a founder member of Lincolnshire & Humberside Contemporary Crafts. Through this he helped to manage exchange exhibitions for local artists in Estonia in 1993 and Russia in 1999. During the 1990s he sat on various arts committees for North Kesteven District Council and he was a specialist Crafts Consultant for the Eastern Arts Board from 1992 to 1997. Since then he has been President of the Lincolnshire Artists Society, which holds regular exhibitions at Lincoln’s Usher Gallery, where Moss is a Trustee. He has also worked as an arts consultant and exhibitions curator for the Sam Scorer Gallery, Art on the Map, the Heslam Trust, Lincolnshire Educational Arts Forum and the Creative Solutions Initiative Lincolnshire.

Moss’s private practice falls into three broad and often interchangeable categories: decorative surfaces, sculpture and architectural works. As we have seen, his work on decorative surfaces, after the expressionistic mark-making of earlier years, has gradually become more restrained and understated as the artist strives for harmony and balance from ever-changing combinations of colour, pattern and form. Certain forms – the flat-faced vase, for instance – reappear often, essentially because they offer the largest surface area on which to work, but Moss continues to work on an assortment of shapes, from the standard dishes and bowls of domestic pottery ware through to vases whose forms he has devised in response to specific design problems. For the most part his sculptural works share the same concerns and Moss is wary, as we have noted before, of drawing too
many distinctions between these two branches of his oeuvre. Even those pieces that can, for the purposes of this essay, be deemed purely sculptural often make liberal use of methods and materials that Moss first picked up while training as a ceramicist. His Large Ceramic and Wood Sculpture (1979) (right) is an assemblage, its bottom section constructed in re-used off-cuts from old floorboards and packing cases, but with a top section consisting of nine ceramic tiles pinned together in a square. A sculpture in two distinct sections, it seems to comment wryly on the perceptions of duality that are often at play in Moss’s explorations of free-standing form. A more recent piece, The Alchemist’s Table (2004), makes similar use of diverse techniques and materials – high-fired ceramics and welded metal – and comments even more pointedly on the tension that exists between the practical and quasi-magical elements of what the artist does. Moss’s architectural works, for the most part carried out as collaborations with schoolchildren and other interested parties, offer a salve to the artistic introspection of his decorative and sculptural works and seem to revel in the idea of architecture as a communal activity.

Now 70, Peter Moss remains a vital source of energy, experience, expertise and enthusiasm for the artistic community in Lincoln and the wider county, at the same time as continuing to explore the endless possibilities of the materials and methods he uses in his own practice. The man himself insists he is still learning — still growing in competence and still extending his ceramic vocabulary as he continues to develop his own personal artistic language. But as one long-term friend recently said: “The thing about Pete is that he’s a jack of all trades, but I’ll be damned if he’s not a master of them all too!”.  

Flat Faced Vase, white stoneware with drawn surface, 22" tall, 1996
Flat Faced Vase, stoneware clay with black vitreous slip and incised drawing, 19” tall, 2005
Flat Faced Vase, earthenware with on-glaze decoration, 22” tall, 1988
Dish, earthenware, black glaze with lustre decoration, 18” dia, 2010
Dish (detail of rim), bronze glaze with enamel and lustre decoration, 23” dia, 2010
Dish, earthenware red glaze with multi-layered lustrre decoration, 19" dia, 2009
Dish, bronze glaze with enamel and lustre decoration, 23” dia, 2010
Dish, earthenware, blue glaze with multi-fired lustres, 16.5” dia, 2010
Left: Red Riding Hood’s Red Riding Boot, earthenware sculpture with red glaze, 22” tall, 2005. Right: Mad King George’s Impossible Boot, stoneware body with white glaze, 9.5” tall, 2005
Stoneware Vase with coloured glazes and enamel decoration, 22” tall, 2008
PUBLIC ART COMMISSIONS

Over the year before the retrospective, Pete Moss worked with schools and other settings to make four works that are a major feature of the exhibition and will then be sited in the grounds and buildings of the participants’ venues. There will soon be a fifth.

Pete’s creative life has been marked by collaboration with young people. This mix of pedagogy and personal studio practice has been central. These commissions are evidence of this.

At Ash Villa School, students and staff produced a large number of drawings that formed the basis of two substantial roundels. Ash Villa is a school for students separated from main stream education. The works will provide a long lasting testament to students who often spend very limited periods at the school.

At Branston Community College, Year Eleven students created a number of maquettes that led to several large scale works to be sited in public areas around the school (see model, right).

At St Francis Community School, almost every student, whatever their ability, produced a tile that was part of a very large ceramic wall.

In Boston, Pete worked with parents and their very young children to make a plaque that sits at the entrance of their Sure Start Centre, evidence of their presence that will be there for many years to come.

A recently started project with Bishop Grosseteste University College will lead to a portico at the front of a new building.

In each and every workshop Pete applies a simple repertoire — for the participants to draw and draw — often to overcome resistance to the process of being creative. This considerable body of mark making leads in turn to experiment, maquettes and final works. It’s a process that deliberately values everyone, students, teachers and supporters alike. The evidence of successful outcomes can be seen in dozens of Lincolnshire schools and many beyond.

The commissions represented in the retrospective were funded by Arts Council England’s Grants for the Arts. The Lindum Group also, kindly, supported the project with finance and in-kind help.
Over the year before the Hub retrospective, Pete used Lottery funding to work alongside four schools and an early years group. The results were works that have taken or will take very public places in the host institutions. Work in progress is seen in the exhibition.
Egypto Figure, earthenware bronze glaze and lustre decoration, 24” tall, 1994.
Commissioned as a set of twelve by MI6, now in the Vauxhall Cross Building, London
I’m delighted to have been asked to write these few words about my dear friend and colleague, Pete Moss. Mathew’s excellent essay does Pete’s professional life due justice – I shall take the liberty of following another route; after all I’ve known the man for years.

Chambers defines afterword as an epilogue and according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary its third meaning is a speech or short poem addressed to the spectators by one of the actors after a play is over.

Again, according to the OED there is no such word as afterword – the nearest being afterwort defined as the second run of beer. Now, that in some way seems entirely right: the key word is beer – it provides a clue to meaning.

Defining the meaning of ‘To Moss’

- To play flat out whatever the game
- To drink, and pay for, more than one’s fair share of the beer
- To take the train to Twickenham to watch England lose to Wales – again
- To use his bus pass whenever possible (what happened to that motorcycle and sidecar and what about that Hell’s Angel’s helmet?)
- To take up lawn green bowls
- To love those he loves
- To really try, but fail, to think the best of those only worthy of disdain
- To laugh at himself as well as the rest of us
- To be gentle and soft-hearted when others are in pain
- To know who directed the Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie
- To like science fiction literature
- To have a stuffed fox in his downstairs toilet that still makes me jump after all these years
- To talk until there’s no claret left
- To give a gift of insight to those who follow on
- To fight for the arts
- To know that without craft there is no art
- To understand that Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance is also about pots (possibly more about pots than motorcycles)
- To make the most beautiful work
- To arrive bearing gifts
- Oh – and
- To like my books!

Thank you, Pete.

No epilogue required – the play goes on!
CURRICULUM VITAE: PETER MOSS, CERAMIC ARTIST AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES CONSULTANT

For detailed curriculum vitae, please visit www.petermoss.me.uk

ACADEMIC/PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Master of Art (Hons) - Royal College of Art
Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts
Professional Member of the Craft Potters Association
Fellow of the Society of Designer-Craftsmen

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

From 1968-94, full-time teaching at Trent Polytechnic, Sheffield Polytechnic, and Lincolnshire College of Art and Design. During this full-time period of teaching progressed from Lecturer 1 through to Vice Principal of Lincolnshire College of Art and Design.

Part-time teaching in further and higher education began in 1961 and continues to the present day. This has included: Bournemouth and Poole College of Art; De Montfort University; Grantham College; and, most recently, specialist lecturing posts at the University of Lincoln: School of Art, Design & Architecture, and Bishop Grosseteste University College: Department of Education with Art and Design.

Educational consultant and visiting lecturer at various colleges and universities nationally and internationally.

External Examiner and Moderator at numerous colleges.

Mentor for local and national mentorship schemes.

COMMITTEE WORK

Member or adviser/consultant on many committees including: regional arts funding organisations, regional and national arts/crafts groups, local galleries/arts centres, and education/arts development bodies.

At present committee work includes: President, Lincolnshire Artists Society; Trustee of Usher Gallery; Heslam Trust; and the Sam Scorer Gallery.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Professional practice began in the mid-60s with Michael Caddy Associates, followed by The Stone Organisation, and since 1970 as Peter Moss Designs with a wide range of clients.

WORKSHOPS/PUBLIC ARTS PROJECTS/PUBLIC ART COMMISSIONS

Since 1997 numerous workshops in Lincolnshire schools working with schoolchildren of all ages to produce ceramic, glass or mosaic work.

Workshops with all ages at the Usher Gallery as part of the Gallery’s education programme.

Public arts projects with youth groups, with teacher training students, and with specific groups of people of all ages to produce work for local communities and villages.

Recent workshops associated with the Retrospective Exhibition in The Hub National Centre for Craft and Design have been held in St Francis Special School, Ash Villa School, Branston Community College and Boston Children’s Services Sure Start Centre.

VISITING ARTIST-CRAFTSMAN

Since 1991 visiting artist-craftsman to Sweden, Estonia, Romania, Portugal, Russia, and Norway. Europe has proved to be an important link as cultural exchange in both technical and artistic language. The Arts Council and British Council have greatly assisted in the following developments:
1989  Lincoln Rheinland Pfalz Exchange; travelling exhibition
1991  Arts Council of Turku and Pori, Finland; one-man exhibition
1997  Applied Arts Museum, Tallinn, Estonia; one-man exhibition
1999  Museum of Applied Arts, Archangel, Russia; exchange exhibition

CERAMIC EXHIBITIONS
Many solo and group exhibitions from 1961 to the present day, regionally, nationally and internationally.
Group and solo shows have included:
1977  41 Glazes; Lincolnshire & Humberside Arts one-man exhibition: Jews Court Lincoln
1980  Lusteware; Lincolnshire & Humberside Arts major touring exhibition
1983  Pace Setters 4; Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery
1988  Ceramics Exhibition; Salisbury Arts Centre, Wiltshire
1988  New Ceramics Curated by Peter Lane; Craftsmen Potters Gallery, London
1998  One Man Exhibition; Handel Gallery, Devizes
2001  Invitation Exhibition; Walford Mill Gallery, Dorset
2001  Two Man Show; Pam Schomberg Gallery, Colchester
2002  Christmas Exhibition; Harley Gallery, Welbeck, Nottinghamshire
2003  Inaugural Exhibition; The Hub, Sleaford
2004  Selected Exhibition; Society of Designer Craftsmen: The Oxo Tower Gallery, London
2005  Face to Face Peter Moss and Peter Williams Contemporary Ceramics and Paintings; Horsebridge Art Gallery, Whitstable
2005  Allure; Design Factory Exhibition: Rufford Craft Centre, Nottinghamshire
2008  2 Artists Peter Moss and Gillian Kelsey; Ropewalk Gallery, Barton-on-Humber
2008  The Marlborough Open Exhibition – Wine Street Gallery, Devizes
2008  20 Years On; Contemporary Crafts Network: Sam Scorer Gallery, Lincoln
2010  Kimono O; Beetroot Tree Gallery, Draycott, Derbyshire

ARTICLES AND INCLUSION IN PUBLICATIONS
Articles have appeared in various publications including:
Arts in Modern Interiors; Crafts Magazine; Arts Review; Ceramic Review; Gifts International; Ceramic Form: Design and Decoration, P Lane; Designer Craftsmen Issue No. 73.
2006  Commissioner as President of Lincolnshire Artists Society Centenary Book Publication. Author: Edward Mayor.
2008  Co-curator and Contributor to Peter Peri Exhibition Catalogue; Sam Scorer Gallery, Lincoln

RESEARCH AWARDS
Awards have included: St Hugh’s Trust for research into terracotta and terra sigillata; Arts Council England for craft visit to Norway; Design Factory for market development; LCSI Flourish for website development; and Arts Council England towards retrospective exhibition at The Hub National Centre for Craft and Design, Sleaford.
CREDITS:
Exhibition curator: Melanie Kidd
Project assistants: Laura Mabbutt, Harriott Brand, Delphine Heymans and Iain Edwards
Biographical researcher: Matthew Withey
Photography and film: Electric Egg
Catalogue design: Barry Hepton

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Branston Community College
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Boston Children’s Services
Bishop Grosseteste University College.
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It is often onerous to select individuals for thanks, but the following deserve special mention:
Michelle Bowen, Former Craft and Design Officer, Arts Council England, East Midlands
Phil Cosker, Former Hub Director
Barry Hepton, Former Hub Head of Learning
Melanie Kidd, Hub Head of Exhibitions
Helen Fletcher, Commissions Facilitator
Matthew Withey, Researcher and writer
Special thanks to all those who have so generously loaned work for this exhibition.
And, of course, to my wife, family and friends who have had to take a back seat over the past year.

CATALOGUE IMAGERY*:
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* With the exception of images on p38 & 39

Opposite: Portrait of Pete Moss by Steve Hatton
www.stevenhattonphotography.co.uk

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