

CERAMIC REVIEW

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Altering perceptions

Ceramist Jin Eui Kim makes simple vessels that he decorates with carefully placed bands that play tricks with your eyes. *Andy Christian* meets him to discover more about the artist and his unique approach

In a busy back street near Cardiff Central Station there is a discreet blue door marked simply 24 Tudor Lane. Beyond the door you will find an oasis of creativity consisting of 18 ceramic workshops known as Fireworks Clay Studios. Established in 1996, Fireworks quickly expanded from smaller workshops housing six ceramists to its present arrangement. The busy collection of studios branch off first-floor corridors and at the end of one of these you will find the ceramic artist Jin Eui Kim.

Jin Eui grew up in the countryside in South Korea where he discovered a fascination and aptitude for making. 'I loved to play in the mountains and streams that surrounded my home,' he explains. 'Growing up I didn't have the usual Western toys you would expect, so I made toys for myself, including slingshots, kites, sledges and wooden rifles. I often went hunting after school with a friend who would always ask me to make slingshots for him, as mine were better. Today, I think I'm quite good at finding practical solutions and ideas during the making process. The creative problem-solving skills I learnt during my childhood spent outdoors have definitely helped me as a ceramist.'

BRAVE MOVES

However, Jin Eui didn't start out in ceramics but went to university in Korea to major in textile design, fashion and engineering. 'I enjoyed the textile design and art-related elements of the course,' he says. 'I began to focus on these areas, as I knew I was good at them and it would make me happy.'

In the second year of his BA in Contemporary Arts, Jin Eui was given the opportunity to transfer to the School of Art at the University of Tasmania. It was here that he experienced clay for the first time. 'We studied various mediums including drawing, painting, textiles, printing and ceramics,' he explains. 'I really



liked ceramics and fell in love with throwing. I used to sit at the wheel for hours at a time to practise. This was when I decided I wanted to concentrate on this medium, and obtained my BA in Contemporary Arts (Ceramics).'

Wishing to develop his ceramic skills even further, Jin Eui then made another brave decision: moving countries once again, he enrolled at Cardiff School of Art and Design to study for a Masters, then stayed on to complete a Doctorate. It is rather unusual for a potter to have a Doctorate, but when you listen to Jin Eui's careful explanations of his experiments and discoveries it is evident that his work relies on an acute understanding of the effects of light, chemistry, tone, colour and form.

ARTISTIC INSPIRATION

Artists who have come to influence him include optical art painters Patrick Hughes and Bridget Riley, the sculptor Anish Kapoor and the ceramist Liz Fritsch. From Hughes and Riley, he has taken two-dimensional visual challenges, which he has extended into three-dimensional optical illusions. He has considered volume through Kapoor, who inspired him to create the illusory black holes in

PREVIOUS PAGE: *OPject – Lower Form*, 2017

ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *OPject – Trapezoid Forms*, 2017; *OPject – Trapezoid Form*, 2017; *OPject – Lower Form*, 2017

OPPOSITE: *OPject – Lidded Boxes*, 2017

OVERLEAF: *OPject – Inversion IV*, 2016

his vessels, while Fritsch led him to explore the ways pattern can trick the eye into believing forms are shaped other than they are.

Drawing from these influences, Jin Eui developed a strong sense of creative purpose. He is committed both to throwing and to exploring the way surface patterns can deceive through graduating tonal effects and spatial illusions. 'I was focusing on making repetitive marks using a reductive process on the clay body when I found an illusory effect appeared on the surface – it looked different when it was upside down,' he explains. 'I really wanted to know why and how it appeared, so I started researching optical illusions, visual perception, and OP Art. I then used these principles to create my own effects.'

Through his research and experiments, Jin Eui discovered an interest in linear elements and in the

relationship between an object and its background, observing that the perception of three-dimensional forms can be influenced by different arrangements of lines or bands. Using white earthenware, he throws apparently simple forms that are decorated with bands. These are painted using engobes that Jin Eui creates by ball-milling clays, stains and flux in water to obtain a finely-textured finish. These are applied to bisque-fired work; once painted, the vessels are fired to 1120°. Most of the bands are tones ranging between black and white, but there are sometimes tonal variations of a single colour. Using altered calligraphy brushes, these are painted on the vessels while they spin on the wheel. 'I experimented with several mediums to create the illusory effects, such as computer-generated patterns, paper and clay, and techniques such as using masking tape, decals and painting by brush with lustre and slips. I found painting with a brush on the wheel was the best way to create repetitive gradient bands with clean joins between them,' he explains. Videos on Jin Eui's social media showing the hypnotic, rhythmic process of painting these bands gain thousands of views online.

COLOUR ENHANCEMENT

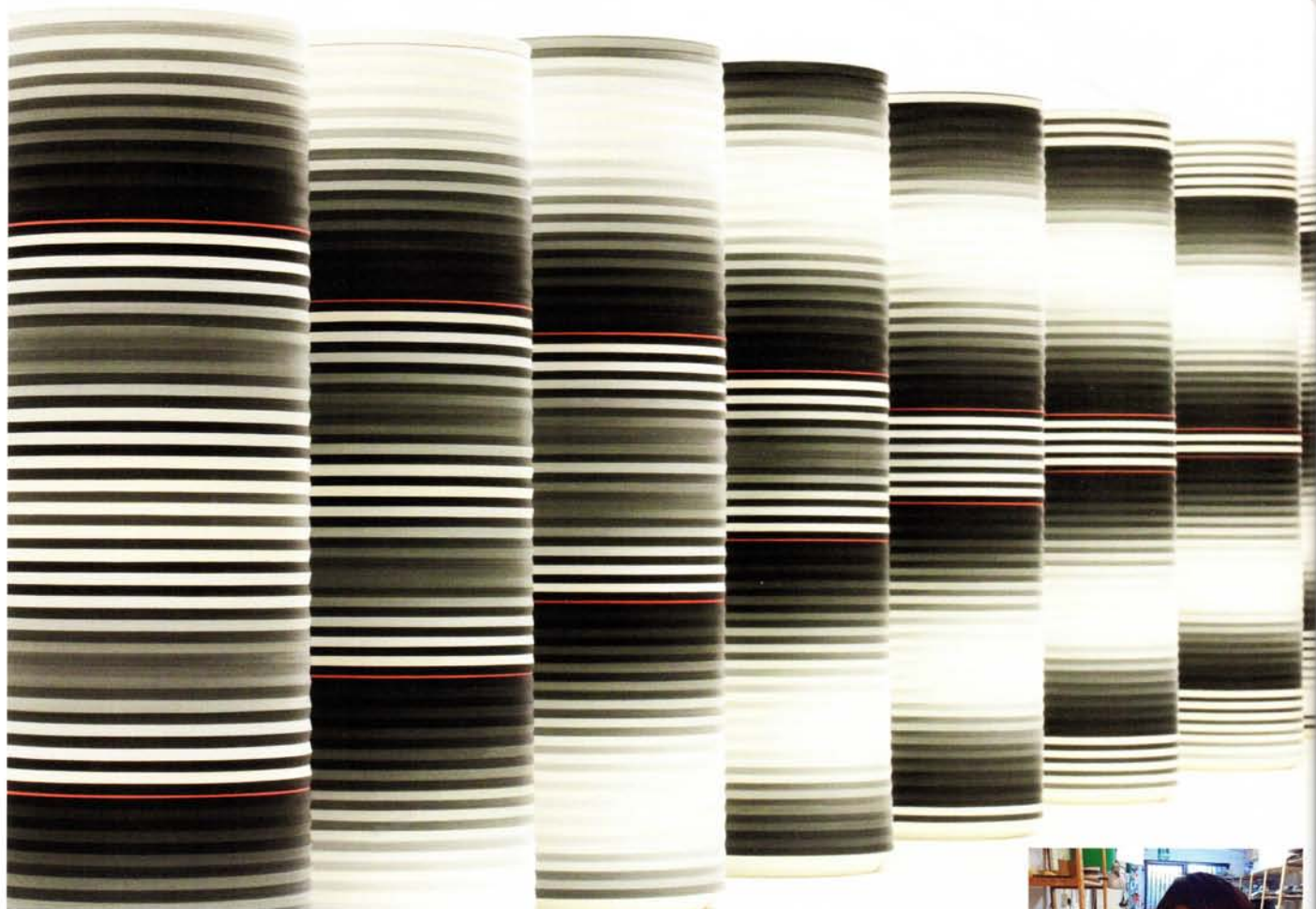
Jin Eui sets himself to make the bands of equal width as well as maintaining the correct range from tint through to tone. 'Focusing on the arrangement of the bands in terms of colour gradient, width and interval from the base to the rim, I can generate the illusion of spatial curvature,' he explains. 'Concentrating on the light and dark tones that meet at the ambiguous area at the rim I can also highlight the illusory qualities that make the top of the piece appear

flat or convex depending on the viewpoint. I use mostly tonal gradients because I find it is the most effective way to create the visual phenomena I want to achieve.'

The monochromatic bands around his vessels are occasionally invaded by a fine line of electric colour. These sing out and surprise the viewer, appearing to hover above the surface of the stripes. The changing light of day, of artificial light combined with the particularity of their placement transforms what happens to how we perceive the surface decoration and the form. 'The first time I used a red line, my intention was to grab the viewer's attention,' Jin Eui explains. 'Using the principle that illusions are more effective in our peripheral field of vision rather than in the main area of focus, I wanted the viewer to see the red area first; this changes their perception.' A good example of this is *OPject – Inversion IV* (see page 26), in which the distance between red lines decreases from one cylinder to the next. This exaggerates the perspective and visually confuses the height and distance of the cylinders: they all appear to be the same size and with the same space between them, when in fact they are actually increasing.

'Focusing on the arrangement of the bands in terms of colour gradient, width and interval from the base to the rim, I can generate the illusion of spatial curvature'





It is usual for the sides, top and bottom of each piece to be decorated, but our perspective of the range of tones fluctuates according to ambient light, shade and our viewpoint. Such changes are surprisingly radical but might be overlooked without being given proper attention. 'The surfaces of my works are ridged or fluted. They are turned during the leatherhard stage using various profiled tools,' explains Jin Eui. 'The angle and width of the ridged area can vary: wide or narrow, deep or shallow, angular or round. These react with light differently depending on where the work is displayed and where the light source is coming from.'

Jin Eui's work has the power to dazzle and confuse our eyes: his clever use of monochromatic stripes changes the way we view his work, creating unique pieces that blur boundaries and stretch our awareness of shapes and forms. 'I sometimes try to look at my work with half-closed eyes to see more of the illusions,' he says. With optical tricks coming to the fore in this half-seen state, Jin Eui's work needs to be seen in the flesh to be believed. ■

For more information about Jin Eui's work, visit jineuikim.co.uk. He will be participating in the *Home from Home* exhibition (see page 60-61), at Contemporary Applied Arts, London, from 4 Oct to 4 Nov; caa.org.uk and The Oxford Ceramics Fair, 28 and 29 Oct; oxfordceramicsfair.co.uk

JIN EUI'S CAREER PATH

- 2003–2004: BA Contemporary Arts (Ceramics), University of Tasmania, Australia
- 2005–2012: MA and PhD Ceramics, Cardiff School of Art and Design
- 2012–2017: exhibited at *Ceramic Art London*
- 2013: exhibited in AWARD exhibition, *British Ceramics Biennial*
- 2014: *Voir et Percevoir*, Galerie Du Don, France
- 2014: selected for Westerwald Prizes, Keramikmuseum Westerwald, Germany
- 2015: *Collect*, with Ruthin Craft Centre, Saatchi Gallery
- 2015: *Eastern Exchange*, Manchester Art Gallery
- 2016: awarded Best Ceramics at *Contemporary Craft Festival*, Bovey Tracey
- 2016: winner in the China & Glass Category, *Homes & Gardens Design Awards*
- 2016: *PULS Contemporary Ceramics*, Brussels
- 2016: winner of the *Valentine Clays Peers Award*, at *Art in Clay*, Hatfield
- 2017: solo exhibition, New Craftsman Gallery, St Ives
- Public collections: Manchester Art Gallery and the National Museum, Wales
- Memberships: member of The Craft Potters Association and Contemporary Applied Arts

