



Designing the Future-Past: Ceramics and the forgetfulness of modernity

Mc Hugh, C. (in press). *Designing the Future-Past: Ceramics and the forgetfulness of modernity*. Paper presented at Memory full? Reimagining the relations between design and history, Design History Society Conference, 2021, Basel, Switzerland.

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Publication Status:

Accepted/In press: 07/05/2021

Document Version

Author Accepted version

General rights

The copyright and moral rights to the output are retained by the output author(s), unless otherwise stated by the document licence.

Unless otherwise stated, users are permitted to download a copy of the output for personal study or non-commercial research and are permitted to freely distribute the URL of the output. They are not permitted to alter, reproduce, distribute or make any commercial use of the output without obtaining the permission of the author(s).

If the document is licenced under Creative Commons, the rights of users of the documents can be found at <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/licenses/>.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Ulster University's institutional repository that provides access to Ulster's research outputs. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact pure-support@ulster.ac.uk

Designing the Future-Past: Ceramics and the forgetfulness of modernity

Christopher McHugh Memory Full Design History Society

The Anthropocene is characterised by an unprecedented increase in mass-produced material culture. While the shorter currency of objects contributes to cultural amnesia, the vast scale and synthetic nature of the contemporary built environment leads to a disengagement from place and production. This material forgetfulness is matched by our increasingly digital existence, where relationships, education, and even travel are becoming mediated in the virtual arena. Current archaeological approaches to the recent past often aim to counter this communal forgetting and disorientation. Here, archaeology is construed as a socially-engaged and inherently creative enterprise, where the past is constituted, or designed, in the present, both conceptually and materially. If archaeologists make the past in the present, ceramicists can be described as designers of the future-past, in that fired clay, perhaps more than any other creative medium, has the potential to endure and become archaeological evidence.

This paper explores these synergies between archaeological and creative research methodologies, arguing that ceramic practice may play a role in countering the widely problematised forgetfulness of modernity. It will focus on recent research undertaken in Seto City, Japan, regarding its pivotal involvement in the post-war ceramic figurine industry. This project employs art-archaeological methods to raise awareness of the endangered material practices of making associated with this industry, addressing issues of heritage, placemaking and sustainability. The whole fabric of this city, including former and current sites of production, is construed as a distributed design archive, providing an insight into a significant chapter in Japan's post-war recovery. As part of this, obsolete plaster moulds have been reused to make a new series of ceramic artefacts. The moulds act as stores of memory, their very materiality instructing their reanimation. Digital photogrammetry scans demonstrate the difficulty of reverse engineering these fragile objects once the tacit knowledge required to make them is lost.