

**PRESS RELEASE: 16 May 2017**

## **International ceramics festival returns to Stoke-on-Trent for fifth edition: 2017 British Ceramics Biennial programme announced**

This autumn, the British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) will return to Stoke-on-Trent, the home of British ceramics, for its fifth edition. Running from 23 September to 5 November, this six week international ceramics festival will animate the city with exhibitions, installations, new commissions and hands-on activities that will showcase the creative potential of clay, reflecting and stimulating the resurgence of contemporary ceramics.

The former Spode Factory site in the heart of Stoke Town will form the main hub of the festival, with the cultural quarter of Hanley forming a second hub across venues including the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, AirSpace Gallery, Bethesda Chapel and Stoke-on-Trent Central Library. The festival programme will also link with some of the city's key industry players: Emma Bridgewater, Burleigh at Middleport Pottery, World of Wedgwood and Johnson Tiles. The BCB programme is launched to coincide with Stoke-on-Trent's bid for UK City of Culture 2021.

Artistic Director Barney Hare Duke comments: *'Launching the fifth iteration of BCB is something of a milestone. This year's festival is as ambitious as ever with over 100 artists involved in exhibitions and events taking place across the city. It's a particularly exciting and important time for the city and we are proud to present our 2017 programme to stoke the flames of the bid for Stoke-on-Trent to become UK City of Culture 2021.'*

BCB's flagship exhibition AWARD will take centre stage in Spode's China Hall with a presentation of new work by the ten artists competing for the £5,000 prize, which for the first time is sponsored by Johnson Tiles. From large-scale installations to intimate displays, the work will exemplify the abiding interest in clay as a medium for making and exploring ideas. BCB's other signature exhibition, FRESH, will bring together work by 25 of the most talented recent ceramics graduates as they embark on their careers as creative artists. Alongside these exhibitions will be a series of commissions including new work by 2015 AWARD winner Sam Bakewell and 2015 FRESH winner Hannah Tounsend.

A re-imagining of the archetypal teapot – the Brown Betty - by Ian McIntyre will be launched with an exhibition of an exclusive limited edition, available for sale through BCB. This iconic object was designed and refined through a process of making which spans 300 years. Once made in its millions, it is still produced in Stoke from the original Etruria Marl red clay - the bed rock of the city - and glazed with the instantly recognisable Rockingham dark treacle glaze. Although part of the remarkable story of The Potteries, the Brown Betty tea pot languishes in obscurity and struggles to be valued in a design-conscious marketplace. Pioneering a model of artist into industry Ian McIntyre has collaborated with Cauldon Ceramics, producers of the Brown Betty, to re-engineer the design to embody and progress the best of the DNA from the original and lift this overlooked icon into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Leading UK ceramic artist Keith Harrison has been commissioned by Stoke-on-Trent Libraries and Archives in association with BCB to create a major new work, *Knowledge is Power*. Inspired by the special Six Towns Collection of local history books, Harrison will work with over 200 local school children and community groups to make 467 replica clay books which will be fired in front of an



audience using a huge interactive kiln. The project celebrates the changing role of Stoke-on-Trent Libraries as cultural agents, repositories of local knowledge and sources of inspiration, invention and pleasure. The fired works will become part of a public art piece in the refurbished Stoke-on-Trent Central Library.

Highlighting the strong international focus of this year's festival, *HeartBeat*, set across the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery and Bethesda Chapel, is part of an exchange project between the UK and India and is part of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India's Independence. Warli painters, artists, craft workers, a musician, a filmmaker and ceramic artists from India and the UK came together in a remote village in rural Maharashtra to create an installation in the landscape of the village. For BCB, a re-configured installation complete with new commissions will bring together over 40 Warli paintings alongside film, sculpture, clay, objects, sound and live performance. The project presents a cross-cultural response to themes of material, place and tradition.

These themes are further explored through an ongoing UK and Korea exchange project led by Stoke-on-Trent artist Neil Brownsword. Throughout history, ceramics have played an important role in the phenomenon of cultural transfer that has led to the forging of new ceramic traditions. Korean artist Juree Kim will work alongside Brownsword in the former Spode Factory's China Hall over the summer and together they will present the outcomes of their exploration as a major installation within the festival.

Other festival highlights include:

- *Ceramic City Wall*, curated in collaboration with Emma Bridgewater, Johnson Tiles and other industry partners to reveal little known facts about ceramics in Stoke-On-Trent.
- *Refugee Tales*, a continuation of Stephen Dixon's WW1 project looking at the idea of commemoration through clay working with community and education groups in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.
- An exhibition exploring approaches to public realm work with artists including Phoebe Cummings at AirSpace Gallery.
- *Ceramics and its Dimensions European Conference* on 5, 6 and 7 October 2017, will explore the theme of Ceramic Values and how they make a difference.
- Hands-on, interactive events including: a mobile cooking and eating event led by artist Jo Ayre with Jubilee Club groups, which will take place at various times and locations throughout the festival; and The Clay Pit, an interactive workshop space within the China Hall where visitors can experience clay for themselves.

Darren Clanford, Creative Director at Johnson Tiles, Sponsors of the British Ceramics Biennial, comments: *'The British Ceramics Biennial is a true celebration of the creativity, craft and innovation found within the ceramics industry. With Johnson Tiles at the forefront of British tile design and manufacture, and with over 115 years of experience in producing ceramic tiles in Stoke-on-Trent, at the heart of The Potteries, we're extremely proud to be headline sponsors for an event that is so integral to the future of ceramics.'*

The British Ceramics Biennial will take place in Stoke on Trent from 23 September to 5 November 2017. For more information visit [www.britishceramicsbiennial.com](http://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com)

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Notes to editors

**AWARD 2017**

The ten artists shortlisted for AWARD are:

Alex Simpson  
Eva Masterman  
Katie Spragg  
Malene Hartmann Rasmussen  
Matthew Raw  
Matt Smith  
Nicholas Rena  
Pauliina Pöllänen  
Tana West  
Zoe Lloyd

**About the British Ceramics Biennial:**

This year's festival runs from 23 September to 5 November 2017.

In addition to the core 2017 festival programme of exhibitions and events, BArts will manage an on-site festival café and regular performance space at Spode.

The British Ceramics Biennial is a prestigious cultural event taking place in Stoke-on-Trent every two years. The six-week long festival presents work from the UK's leading contemporary ceramic artists in a series of new exhibitions and special events in the city, embracing the heritage of Stoke-on-Trent as the home of British ceramics, and celebrating the city's creative edge as an international centre for excellence in contemporary ceramics.

The British Ceramics Biennial launched in 2009 as a new initiative of residencies, fellowships, commissions, education and enterprise projects running year round with a major festival every two years. There have been four festivals to date. The BCB initiative is intended to be a catalyst for regeneration in the region and to create a platform for innovation and excellence celebrating the best in current ceramic practice, both nationally and internationally.

The Biennial draws on the historical strengths of the past in championing new future directions for the city.

The Biennial works in partnership with organisations and individuals in the museums, cultural, industry, business, education, community and voluntary sectors across the city in the development and delivery of projects year round with a particular focus on public engagement.



The festival and supporting community and education programme highlights and raises the profile of the many ceramics industries still working in Stoke-on-Trent, but also creates commissioning and exhibition opportunities for local ceramic artists as well as national and international artists.

**British Ceramics Biennial funders:**

The British Ceramics Biennial Ltd is funded by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Arts Council England, Creative Europe and Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

**BCB Sponsors:**

Johnson Tiles, Staffordshire University, Emma Bridgewater.

**Media partner:**

Ceramic Review

**Materials sponsor:**

Potclays

**UK City of Culture 2021:**

Stoke-on-Trent is currently bidding for the title of UK City of Culture 2021. The city is renowned worldwide for its history, heritage and culture. Culture is central to Stoke-on-Trent's current and future ambitions, and bidding to become UK City of Culture 2021 will significantly strengthen the city's profile and affirm its position as a successful visitor destination. Find out more information at: [www.sot2021.com](http://www.sot2021.com) or follow @sot2021 for all the latest news.

**European Festivals Association:**

The British Ceramics Biennial is part of the EFFE festival community, facilitated by the European Festivals Association, which consists of festivals that stand for artistic quality and have a significant impact on a local, national and international level.

**About Johnson Tiles:**

Johnson Tiles is the UK's leading manufacturer and importer of ceramic wall and floor tiles. A trading division of Norcros Group (Holdings) Limited, the company has over 100 years' experience and produces wall & floor tiles at its Stoke-on-Trent headquarters to the highest standards. It operates in both residential and commercial markets and its product ranges are recognised by the industry not only for their eco-friendly properties but excellence in quality and design. To find out more about Johnson Tiles visit [www.johnson-tiles.com](http://www.johnson-tiles.com).

