

## Fragile?

## Learning Resource



## The Exhibition

Fragile? is an exhibition about ceramics. Ceramics are objects that are made out of clay and then fired. We often think of those objects as being fragile, but this exhibition challenges that idea as well as giving us an insight into the different kinds of ceramics being made today.

The exhibition contains pieces from the museum's collection as well as objects on loan and specially commissioned work from contemporary artists.

This learning resource is designed to support teachers and educators. It includes support in planning a visit, exploring the exhibition and suggestions for things to do back in the classroom. It is primarily aimed at Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils but can be easily adapted for older or younger students.

## Before you visit the exhibition

## Discuss

What does fragile mean to you? Do you have anything fragile at home?

Have you ever made anything out of clay? Can you remember what it felt like? What did you make? Was it fragile? Did it break? Did you throw it on a wheel or make it by hand?

Do you have a favourite ceramic thing at home? Perhaps it's your favourite cup or a little clay ornament. Does your favourite ceramic object make you think of something or someone special? Or is there a story behind it?

## At the Exhibition

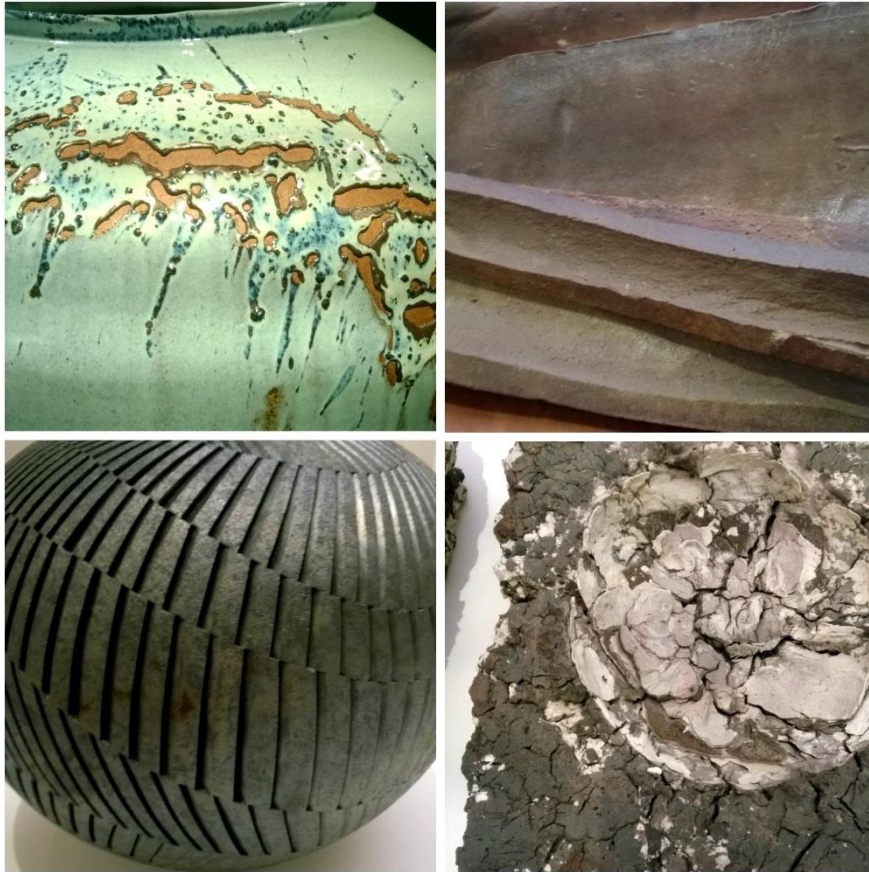
There are so many wonderful pieces in this exhibition and so much to talk about. There are questions on display in gallery 21 and 22 that you can use to start discussions, or you could talk about colour, pattern, shape, texture and materials.



See how many different shapes you can find.



What kinds of patterns and colours can you discover?



Look out for all the different textures.

Choose work to discuss with your group that you enjoy or resonates with you. We have chosen a few of our favourites to discuss in more detail.

### Keith Harrison - *Mute* 2015

Did you expect to see a piece like this in a ceramics exhibition? It's so big! And so shiny! You can even play records on it!

Keith works with ceramics but also crosses over into performance and sound. He is interested in how clay can be liquid or solid, raw or fired and a lot of his work is about experimentation. And the work doesn't end when it arrives at the gallery, the visitor is invited to take part and the art work may change as a result of this, it may even crack and fall apart. Why don't you play a record? Or if you have records at home, bring them in to play another day.





What does Keith Harrison's work remind you of? Perhaps it makes you think of buildings and tower blocks? Or the speakers might make you think of music concerts.

### Claire Twomey - *Consciousness/Conscience* 2015

Claire Twomey creates ceramic installations; this means that her work is made especially to fit in to different spaces and changes wherever it is shown. For *Fragile?* Claire is showing *Consciousness/Conscience* which she initially exhibited in 2001. The work is made from bone china which is a precious material and usually something you would take great care of. But here the artist is inviting the visitor to actually walk on her work, to be a part of the piece and to be responsible for its destruction.

Did you think you would be able to break something in the exhibition today? To walk across it and hear a satisfying cracking and creaking under your feet? How do you feel when you walk over the art work? What do you think about being part of its destruction?

What does the title mean? What do those words make you think of? If you had to think of an alternative title for it what would you call it?

### Phoebe Cummings - *Scenes for a Future History of Ornament* 2015

Like Claire Twomey, Phoebe Cummings mainly creates installations, working with raw clay which will disintegrate over time and her work also has an element of destruction and decay. Phoebe has made this work especially for the *Fragile?* exhibition and has created lots of little scenes and alternative landscapes which look at the relationships between scale and time and also how clay can tell a story. Phoebe has investigated the collections in National Museum Cardiff and has been inspired by many of our interesting objects, such as a ceramic candelabrum, botanical specimens and models and fossils.



### Things to do back in the classroom

Invent a magical landscape like **Phoebe Cummings** has done! You could even put it in a cardboard box. What kind of species would there be in your alternative landscape? Will it

look a bit like a science-fiction scene? Will it have fossils and botanical specimens in it?

As well as creating a landscape out of clay and other materials, you could also write a short story about it. What kind of scene is it? Is it from the past, the present or the future?

### Betty Woodman - *Diptych: The Balcony* 2007

Betty Woodman's work is quite different to the other pieces in the exhibition – it looks a lot like a painting and the brushstrokes are free and loose. Betty is an American artist who has been working with clay since the 1950s, and she plays with and interweaves the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional.

This piece is called *Diptych: The Balcony*. Can you see the balcony? What else can you see? Different patterns and colours, maybe flowers? The front of the work looks flat like a painting, but if you look at it from the back it is more three dimensional.

Near to Betty Woodman's work is a painting by Gillian Ayres. What do you think the connection is between them?



### Things to do back in the classroom

Make some beautiful paintings inspired by **Betty Woodman's** work – play with 2d shapes and 3d forms, use large brushes and bright colours.

### Edmund de Waal – *Porcelain Wall* 2005 and 2007

Edmund de Waal is interested in collecting and collections, how they are put together and how they are displayed. Because of this interest, his work fits in really well with museums and how they work, and this piece **Porcelain Wall** is in the museums' permanent collection. He is also fascinated in how objects can remind you of different things, how they can be passed down through generations and almost contain memories.

Think about your favourite objects you may have at home. What is it that makes them important, is it the object itself that you love, or is it because of the story behind it? Perhaps someone who you care about gave you the object, perhaps it just reminds you of someone or some place.

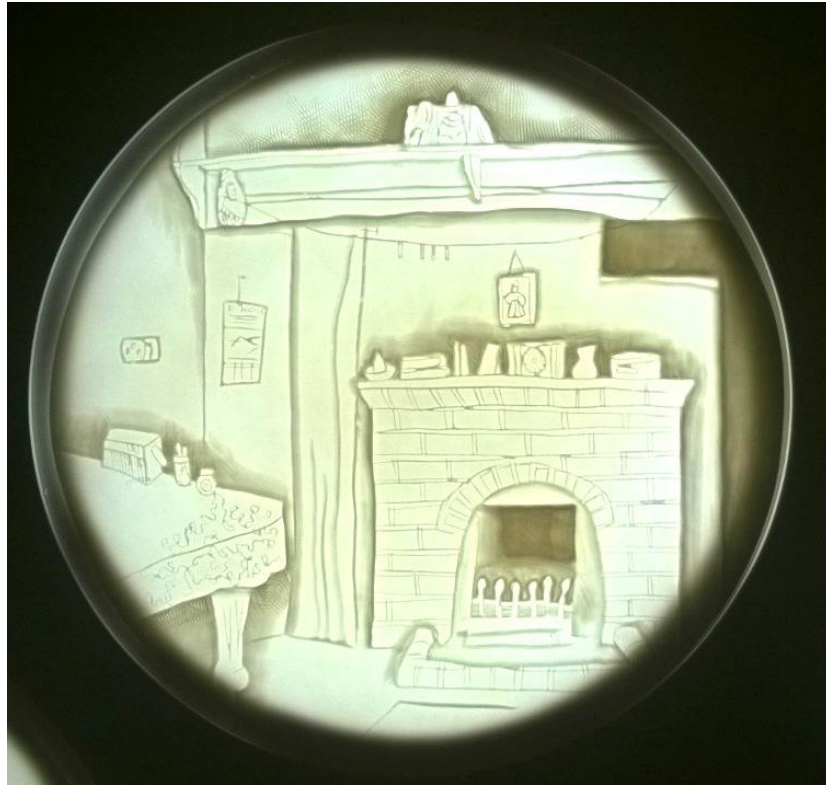


#### Things to do back in the classroom

Create your own display back in the classroom. This could be an exhibition of things that you have made, or it could be a display of different types of objects that are all the same colour. Is an object interesting on its own or does it just become interesting when it's displayed with lots of other things?

### Lowri Davies – *Casglu* 2015

Lowri Davies is a Welsh artist who makes beautiful ceramics featuring delicate line drawings. Her work often features drawings that are inspired by her upbringing, family history and childhood memories. For *Fragile?* Lowri has made some lithophanes which are very thin porcelain objects that were popular in the mid-1800s. The image is either etched or moulded onto the porcelain, and in order to see them properly they need to be lit from behind.



### Things to do back in the classroom

Create some line drawings or mono prints (see below for mono printing tips) about your identity like **Lowri Davies** does. Can you tell your family story through these drawings? When people look at them, would they be able to tell where you and your family are from?

### Staffordshire figures - manufacturers unknown, about 1840-1900

Staffordshire figures, like the ones here in Fragile? were extremely popular during the Victorian era and would have decorated lots of people's houses. They have a 'flat-back' and were made by pressing clay into moulds and then painted. There were so many different Staffordshire figures produced as well as lots of different animal figurines (the most popular animal ones were lions and dogs!). If a special event happened, there would probably be a Staffordshire figure made to commemorate it, such as one of Queen Victoria made to celebrate her coronation in 1837. There were also figures made of the famous people from history, such as Shakespeare or Rob Roy and also people who were famous at the time, like Abraham Lincoln, Christmas Evans, and even Maria and Frederic Manning who were hanged for murder in 1849.





What figures can you see here? What do you think they were famous for? Perhaps you could make up a story about them and then see if you were right when you get back to school. Have you seen figures like these before?

### Things to do back in the classroom

The **Staffordshire Figures** were often based on famous people of the day, you could make your own contemporary versions of them of famous people you admire today. Make them out of clay or do some collages.

### A few other ideas of things to do back in the classroom

What did you think of the exhibition? Was it what you thought it would be like? What was your favourite piece? Were all the pieces fragile? Did you expect to hear music and be able to walk across some ceramic tiles?

Here are a few ideas of arty things to do back in the classroom.

Buy bags of air drying clay or fimo, or make your own playdough (recipe below). Perhaps you are lucky enough to have a kiln, in which case you can buy lots of different types of clay and fire your pieces.

**Make a pinch pot.** Take a ball of clay in your hands and put your thumb in the middle to create a dip and then flatten out the sides and turn around in your hands until you get a pot shape! If everyone in the class makes a small pinch pot you could display them all together like an art installation. Have a look at some of **Claire Twomey's** art installations for inspiration – she has made some out of tiny ceramic birds or little flowers.

To make **play dough** mix one cup of flour, ½ cup of salt, 1 tablespoon cream of tartar, 1 tablespoon vegetable oil, then add 1 cup of boiling water and stir until it is all mixed in and pliable. You could also add food colouring, flavouring or glitter.

### How to make a simple **mono print**

- what you will need – inks, a roller, paper, pencil, a glass or metal sheet or something similar – a glass dinner placemat works well.
- Put some ink on the glass and roll it out thinly
- Place a bit of paper on the top lightly and try not to touch any part of it other than the sides (as any part of the paper you touch will show up!)
- Draw an image on the back
- Lift off your paper and you should have a drawing in reverse



You can also trace images, or paint directly onto the glass and print off it that way. Once you've mastered the basics, have a look online for different ways to use monoprint, you can mix it with collage or print with feathers, you can also draw onto craft foam and print of that. It's a great way of using the patterns and designs found in the Fragile? exhibition.

### #fragilefaves

We would love it if you could join in with our Twitter and Instagram fun! Take a photo of yourself with your favourite fragile thing – it could be ceramic but it doesn't have to be! Write a couple of sentences about why it is your favourite fragile thing and share it on Twitter or Instagram using the hashtags #fragilefaves and #FragileCardiff

### Other Resources

For older students (or for background information for yourselves) you may want to watch some of these films on YouTube. You could also pick up a copy of *Smashed: an alternative guide to Fragile?* Which has been created by National Museum Cardiff's Youth Forum.

**Edmund de Waal** has written a book about his family and about collecting called **The Hare with the Amber Eyes** which would provide an interesting background to his work and life.

### Films

**Phoebe Cummings**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lydgiyyRVXg>

**Keith Harrison**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLcsxbuM0LQ>

**Lowri Davies**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrfP\\_tZGmGY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrfP_tZGmGY)

**David Cushway**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFa7GFwldqs>