



**University of  
Sunderland**

Ewins, Neil (2019) Association For Art History. In: Annual Conference 2019, 4-6 April 2019, Brighton, UK. (Unpublished)

Downloaded from: <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/10403/>

**Usage guidelines**

Please refer to the usage guidelines at <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact [sure@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:sure@sunderland.ac.uk).

## **Association For Art History - 2019 Annual Conference**

**Brighton, 4-6 April 2019.**

### **Expanding the Ceramic Field in the Long 19th Century**

**Caroline McCaffrey-Howarth**, Visiting Lecturer, V&A/RCA

**Anne Anderson**, V&A Course Director and Tutor

**Rachel Gotlieb**, Gardiner Museum, Toronto

This session examines the current scholarly field of ceramics in the long 19th century. It seeks to explore alternative narratives within art, decorative art and design histories and material culture and thus move beyond the tradition of connoisseurship and the cycles of production and consumption. We maintain that ceramics in the 19th century had a profound and pervasive presence: a rare Kangxi vase or a Chelsea figurine, a popular blue transferware plate or a humble china cup spoke to multiple actants – collector, dealer, consumer, designer, for example – and thereby contributed to the 19th-century's tangled and often fraught social and intellectual networks. This period also bore witness to an increase in scholarly publications relating to the cultural history of ceramics, intensified by museum exhibitions and the rising art market for these objects, and culminating in a second Chinamania. Building upon Cavanaugh and Yonan's seminal publication on 18th-century porcelain (2010), we ask: How did pottery and porcelain operate as agents of culture, conveying social, psychological and symbolical meanings in the 19th century?

### **Speakers and Abstracts**

#### **Ceramics as a Vehicle of Protest and Spiritual Enlightenment**

*Neil Ewins (University of Sunderland)*

Over the years, there have been considerable changes in the ways in which ceramics have been discussed and analysed by scholars. The early emphasis on ceramic attribution has been broadened to examine the degree to which sophisticated marketing techniques impacted on ceramic consumption (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, 1982). Also, in recent times, it has been proposed that, guided by middlemen, ceramic production could be a response to national or international demand (Brewer and Porter, 1993). Either way, and not unreasonably, both interpretations are based on the assumption that they occurred as ways to maximise profits.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the interesting example of an early 19th-century American importer whose strategy of ordering printed ceramics from Staffordshire increasingly reflected his own views on religion, politics and anti-slavery. Such cases are worth recognising since they demonstrate how English manufactured goods were not always produced to appeal to popular ceramic demand, and how the motivation of importers was not entirely profit-seeking. Press reactions to what he commissioned and sold were mixed. Perceived in this way, some ceramics in American museums and collections must, in part, be interpreted as embodying the ceramic importers' own anxieties and sense of morality. Thus, it is concluded that some industrial ceramics were more marginal objects, rather than greatly mass-produced commodities, symbolising a desire to use design to influence American culture and society.