

William Cobbing
SOCIAL SUBSTANCE

23 September –
05 November 2023

Opening Preview:
22 September, 4 – 9:30pm

Featuring William Cobbing’s
“So You” performance at 8:30pm

William Cobbing presents a series of new video, sculpture, and performance, exploring a playful and ambiguous interaction between people immersed in mounds of formless clay. The ceramic objects and tv screens that populate the gallery invite us to consider how we tell stories with clay, and how it feels to interact with this earthy material through senses of touch and sound, both physically and digitally. The experience of the works is akin to the messy interface of sticking a lump of mud on to the shiny screen of a mobile phone.

PERFORMANCE PROGRAMME

22 September 2023, 8:30pm
AirSpace Gallery
William Cobbing, So You

30 September 2023, 1–3pm
Spode Rose Garden
Naima Khan, Fragments and Remnants

07 October 2023, 2–4pm
AirSpace window
Luca Bosani, Clay’s investigation

14 October 2023, 2–4pm
AirSpace window
Morven Mulgrew, HIGH BROW INTERACTIVE
SELF REFLEXIVE WINDOW SHOPPING
PERFORMANCE CONCEPT

21 October 2023, 12–4pm
AirSpace window
Josh Woolford, Cascade

28 October 2023, 2–4pm
Airspace Window
Jake Wood, #ClayGains

04 November 2023, 1–9pm
Airspace Gallery
Mavis & Mabel, Potteraoke



Will.Lazahodia (2022)

In videos developing from ‘The Kiss Z’, the raw clay connects the performers, extending body boundaries and merging individual identities as they make and remake themselves. The figures are caught in an endless transitional moment, as if in limbo, repeating the same apparently aimless grasping and prodding of the material. What, if anything, are they trying to make? Or, is the act of making without a conclusion enough? These earth-clad people are caught in an ouroboros loop of transforming themselves. We are invited to move through the space, piecing together our own narrative from these brief performances.

The clay is a character in itself, being an equal player rather than a passive subject to the creative process. Conversely, the performers often adopt a languid or deadpan demeanour, allowing the material to assert its agency over them. The state of plasticity of the clay as a slimy material allows for this drama to unfold. It sticks to the performers head and hands, disrupting the sense of body boundaries. Simultaneously attractive and repulsive, it can engender a conflicting set of emotions. The sound of the performer’s breath can be heard through their clay enclosure, with the internalised and claustrophobic sensation of the material being transferred through the digital screen.

The ceramic sculptures draw much of their sensibility from the videos, with a reciprocation between the two forms. Ceramic head cavities evocative of caves have undulating eye and mouth holes burrowing into the back of their craggy interiors. These are reminiscent of the ‘Will je.suis’ videos where a wire cutter slices through

the clay face to reveal brightly coloured gooey substance that spews out. The rich use of colour in the videos and ceramics references the humour and excess of the vibrant polychromatic glazes of Minton Majolica, produced in Stoke-on-Trent in the Victorian era.

There is an elusive and incidental humour to the work, as if it is leaking out at the edges; the slapstick quality of clay falling to the ground with its accompanying ASMR splatting sound. The material used is lowly earthy clay, with the humour being low too. Emerging from the lumpy fallible nature of our bodies is a realisation that we’re brought down by gravity and end up in the mud.

In the videos individual identity is effaced, with the protagonists becoming hybrid forms somewhere between themselves and the material. This immersion in clay allows the performers to become mutable, with the videos showing two or more performers merged under the singular mass of clay. For example, in ‘Screensaver’ the idea of communality and connection between people and ground is forged through being part of the same undulating muddy terrain. Individual autonomy is subsumed into a larger mass of clay and limbs. Rather than seeing ourselves as separate from the mass of earthy material below our feet, the works invite us to consider our deep and enmeshed connection with it.

Social Substance is an exhibition, performance programme and workshop series, facilitated by AirSpace director Glen Stoker, in partnership with AirSpace, the British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) and The Portland Inn Project.

Below: Will.ni.naiz (2022)



AIRSPACE



William Cobbing
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AIRSPACE is a gallery, project space and studios, led by and run by artists. From our base in Stoke-on-Trent we champion the artist and their work, and advocate for a broader role for the arts in society.

Through a dynamic, critical and evolving programme of exhibitions, residencies, events, social and off-site projects, we provide opportunities and developmental support for artists across the career spectrum – delivering engaged and engaging contemporary visual arts. Working independently and with local and national partners, we mix frequent open calls with invites to ensure a vibrant and responsive programme.

While maintaining a thoughtful, ideas-based and critical approach to our activities, our programme seeks to open up the gallery and its processes for all. Public engagement is always central to what we do, as we strive to create a thriving, inclusive and democratic communal space for artists to mix with those maybe less used to the arts.

Cover image: ‘Screensaver’ (2023) video still
Poster image: ‘Meld’ (2021). Camera Thomas Mootton, for LNCC and Maison Margiela

Design: work-form

OPEN DURING EXHIBITIONS and EVENTS

TUESDAY to SUNDAY
12pm – 5pm
Other times by pre-arranged appointment

AirSpace Gallery
4 Broad Street
City Centre
Stoke-on-Trent
ST1 4HL

mail@airspacegallery.org
01782 244545

PERFORMANCES

William Cobbing
So You
@william.cobbing

A performance in which the two protagonists engage in a slapstick way of making, with absurdly extruded shapes, oversized noses and ear-like forms. Modelling blindly, the focus is on a kind of haptic symmetry, with the portrait forming as an equivalence of the size of the artist’s hand, and impressions of fingers. Over time, the portrait forms, as the sitter, and the audience watch the story unfold.



Naima Khan
Fragments and Remnants
@naima_nimsy

Fragments and Remnants is symbolic of Khan’s upbringing in apartheid South Africa. Terracotta tiles are meditatively formed from fragments before being assembled in a grid formation. Coloured slips are applied by hand and foot, layering heritage, history and a cultural aesthetic onto a series of representative objects.



Luca Bosani
Clay’s investigation
@luca_bosani

Bosani assumes the role of interrogator working for Private investigation company ‘TLSP’. Presenting ‘Clay’ as a subject rather than a material, Bosani digs deep into the character of Clay asking, “Can we really manipulate clay at our will?”, “What are the underlying

narratives between human touch and our psyche?” and “What if clay is not only an artistic material but an enemy or an obscure character to be surveilled and interrogated?”



Morven Mulgrew
HIGH BROW /INTERACTIVE SELF
REFLEXIVE WINDOW SHOPPING
PERFORMANCE CONCEPT
@morvenmulgrew

Mulgrew invites you to observe a real life artisan potter at work in her genuine studio recreation. Observe the artist’s creative process live in action, commission pottery works in real time through an interactive high tech digital communication system and leave with your very own piece of pottery. No money will change hands!!



Josh Woolford
Cascade
@jshwlfrd

Transdisciplinary artist Joshua Woolford builds upon their ‘Cascade’ body of work with a durational performance that explores the personal, familial, and cultural histories held within clay.

Their performance draws inspiration from the overlapping material cultures of the Arawak, Taino, Kalinago, West African, and European peoples across the Caribbean. By drawing on these artifacts and repositioning them in direct relation to each other, Woolford confronts the violent histories of settler colonialism and the trafficking

of enslaved people which is evidenced through the geographical proximity of these previously disparate forms.



Jake Wood
#ClayGains
@jake_wood_artist

Jake Wood invites you to experience his new performance work #ClayGains! The performance draws upon Wood’s wider practice, concerned with de-bunking ideas of fitness, work and exercise. Wood is a competitive bodybuilder and fitness model and will perform a typical leg day workout, using lumps of clay as the weight.



Mavis & Mabel
Potteraoke
@annafrancisart
@rebeccamariadavies

For our end-of-exhibition social, join hosts Mavis and Mabel, for the latest episode in the world renowned pottery/karaoke mash up. Choose a clay related song from the specially themed Potteraoke list and sing your heart out while throwing a pot on the wheel. The winner takes home a very special prize.





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 British
Ceramics
Biennial

 City of
Stoke-on-Trent

 ARTS COUNCIL
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