

# ***Vessels and Monuments***

**Andrew Burton**



## STATEMENT

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*Vessels* and *Monuments* is a body of ceramic work (2014-19) comprising installations and sculptures made, and remade, from a single stock of miniature hand-made bricks. These have been repeatedly salvaged by the artist from his earlier demolished works, exhibited in diverse historical and cultural contexts. The research presented here builds on this earlier work through its explorations with 'monumental' scale, its introduction of new forms, and the performative dimension of the project.

The research explores themes of construction and destruction, transposition, ruin, regeneration, utility, fragmentation and futility using the brick as a denominator. Burton uses the basic forms of a vessel and a monument to explore artistic process and the context of sited artworks. Two interweaving strands of the research embody and explore clay as a material that 'contains', and that 'builds'. The research also emphasises the quality and significance of the hand-made object, and the process of making by hand.

*Vessels* was first commissioned for the exhibition 'Unravelling Uppark' (2014), where selected artists responded to the history of the National Trust property Uppark in Sussex. Unmaking and remaking *Vessels* for subsequent exhibitions, Burton explored how small changes in the nature of the sculpture could adapt it to speak to a new context.

*Monuments*, a parallel and at times interweaving strand to the research made use of the same miniature bricks, constructed into an 'opposing' form. Where *Vessels* emphasised a horizontal axis, and were containers (for ideas, for goods or for voids), *Monuments* were vertical, closed, 'un-architectural', solid forms.

Exhibited first in 'Monument: Aftermath of War and Conflict' (Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, 2014), Burton's monumental work *Things Fall Apart* explored the artwork as a signifier for what remains and sustains beyond failure and collapse – in this context, the devastation brought about by war. *Things Fall Apart* was later re-made for the Gyeonggi International Ceramics Biennale (CICB) in South Korea in 2015. Here, the project was expanded to involve the audience and gallery staff as witnesses and participants within the performative nature of building.

This work was awarded Gold Prize by a jury of international curators who noted how the prizewinning works had, by dismantling boundaries between craft, sculpture, installation and performance, helped to establish a new direction in ceramic practice.

# OUTPUT



Andrew Burton, *Vessels and Monuments*.  
Detail from *Things Fall Apart*, 2015 showing re-used and new hand-made bricks (each 4 x 2 x 1 cm), paint, glaze, cement.

## OUTPUTS: summary of exhibitions

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### ***Vessels and Monuments* were exhibited in the following exhibitions:**

***Monument: Aftermath of War and Conflict***

Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art  
29<sup>th</sup> March – 27<sup>th</sup> July 2014

***Unravelling Uppark***

National Trust Uppark, Sussex  
4<sup>th</sup> May – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2014

***Andrew Burton, RBS Spotlight Exhibition: Vessel* (solo exhibition)**

Andipa Gallery, London  
18<sup>th</sup> November – 29<sup>th</sup> November 2014

***Leaving Home, A New Setting for Site-Specific Contemporary Craft***

Contemporary Applied Arts Gallery, London  
17<sup>th</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2015

***8th Gyeonggi International Ceramics Biennale***

Korea Ceramic Foundation (KOCEF)  
Icheon, Seoul, South Korea  
24<sup>th</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2015

***World Association of Brick Artists: Nau Gaudi***

Nau Gaudi Museum, Bassat Collection of Contemporary Art,  
Mataro, Catalonia  
16<sup>th</sup> September 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2017

***Ceramics in Architecture and Public Spaces***

International Academy of Ceramics Exhibition  
Design Museum, Barcelona  
12<sup>th</sup> September – 9<sup>th</sup> October 2016

***Sculpture by the Sea***

Bondi, New South Wales, Australia  
20<sup>th</sup> October – 12<sup>th</sup> November 2016

***British Ceramic Biennale***

Spode Works, Stoke-on-Trent  
7<sup>th</sup> September – 13<sup>th</sup> October 2019

***Andrew Burton: Resident Artist***

Korea Ceramic Foundation  
Icheon, Seoul, South Korea  
October 2019

## OUTPUTS: Process

Burton produced a large stock of miniature handmade clay bricks made from various clay bodies. He used these to create a series of sculptures originating in two simple forms: a vessel and a monument. *Vessels* were made in the studio, *Monuments* on-site in each exhibition venue. After being exhibited, *Monuments* were broken up and their component parts reused to make new works, which were in turn destroyed after being exhibited. Layers of paint and glaze, or cement used as a temporary bond, gradually built up on the individual bricks, to form a palimpsest-like patina, serving as fragmented 'memories' of earlier works.

Burton's interest in bricks was informed through a series of research visits to brick makers in Asia, Africa and Europe. In Asia and Africa, bricks are often hand-made, whereas their counterparts in Europe are mostly made by machine. He sees the distinction as important: 1) because the way an individual brick is made fundamentally informs the nature of the structure of which it forms a part; and 2) because of the different ways the maker is valorised or marginalised within society. An exploration of hand-making is central to Burton's work, both in the manufacturing process of each brick and in the building of structures, where time, labour and individual determination are emphasised.

The shape and form of the work are partly defined before making begins, through drawings made on different scales. Drawings are made from observation, from imagination and with technical purpose, defining the way the object is to be made. The drawings are starting points, as the making process is iterative, responsive and serendipitous. The works are purposely 'un-architectural' in that they have no navigable internal spaces and defy being 'read' as miniature buildings, focussing instead on brick as a material for art-making.

Andrew Burton, *Vessels and Monuments*

From top: Andrew Burton *Things Fall Apart*, 2014, detail; brick kiln in Uganda; brick kiln in India. All photos Andrew Burton



Andrew Burton. *Things Fall Apart*. Fired clay, paint, glaze, stain. 400 x 300 x 250 cm, 2014, 'Monument, Aftermath of War', Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art, University of East Anglia, 2014



***Things Fall Apart* (2014). Exhibited at 'Monument: Aftermath of War and Conflict' Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art, 29<sup>th</sup> March – 27<sup>th</sup> July 2014. Curated by Amanda Geitner, Head of Exhibitions, SCVA**

*Monuments* is a series of monolithic works, exhibited individually, but also acting within the overall scope of the project as formal and conceptual counterpoints to *Vessels*. While *Monuments* can be seen as phallogentric 'closed' forms with an emphatic vertical axis – but also in a state of imminent collapse – *Vessels* suggest 'completeness', operate on a horizontal axis, and are containers, with all that this implies.

*Things Fall Apart* was commissioned for the exhibition 'Monument: Aftermath of War and Conflict' (Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, 2014) which, marking the centenary of the outbreak of WW1, reflected on the legacy of war and considered the monument as a statement of commemoration. Burton's sculpture adopted the trope of the monumental form, but in its evidently fragile, semi-collapsed state, and set amidst a brick-strewn landscape evocative of images of war-torn Europe, explored how sculpture could suggest some of the paradoxes latent in the idea of a monument to war

Andrew Burton. *Things Fall Apart*, 2014. Fired clay, paint, glaze, stain. 400 x 300 x 250 cm





*Things Fall Apart*,  
2014. (detail) Fired  
clay, paint, glaze,  
stain. 400 x 300 x  
250 cm



***Vessels* (2014). Exhibited at ‘Unravelling Uppark’  
National Trust Uppark, Sussex,  
4<sup>th</sup> May – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2014.  
Curated by Matt Smith, Polly Harknett and Caitlin  
Heffernan <http://www.unravelled.org.uk/uppark.html>**

The first version of *Vessels* was made for the exhibition ‘Unravelling Uppark’ (2014).

‘Unravelling Uppark’ was part of a three year (2012-15) project, ‘Unravelling the National Trust’, originated and curated by the artist/curator group Unravelled (Polly Harknett, Caitlin Heffernan and Matt Smith). This project invited proposals from artists for new artworks that responded to particular National Trust properties in South East England. It aimed to create innovation in the arts by working across fine art and craft, curating exhibitions in spaces where artists and makers explore how art evokes histories and a sense of place. The project was funded by Arts Council England.

*Vessels* was conceived and designed for the Beer Cellar at Uppark, a subterranean space with distinctive architectural vaulting and brickwork that contrasted with the rest of the country house. The sculpture occupied a space already filled with glass vessels and beer barrels.

<http://unravelled.org.uk/artists/>

Exhibition catalogue:

<https://sararobertsblog.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/uppark-catalogue.pdf>

*Vessels* responded to the context of Uppark. Architecturally, the house is a patchwork of different periods of building, with substantial reconstruction happening after a devastating fire in 1989, the rebuilding replicating the old. The ambiguous form of *Vessels*, both bomb-like and vessel-like, and the process by which it was made from many parts, each with its own history, spoke to this narrative. An underlying theme in Burton’s work, the relationship between sculpture and time, gained an additional dimension here through an association between Uppark and HG Wells, author of *The Time Machine*. Wells lived at Uppark during his childhood, where his mother was housekeeper.

## OUTPUTS

Exhibitions in detail

Andrew Burton. *Vessels* (2014)  
(detail) fired clay, paint, glaze, stain,  
cement.  
Installed work, dimensions variable.  
Commissioned for 'Unravelling  
Uppark', National Trust Uppark,  
Sussex, 2014





Burton re-made a larger version of *Vessels* for siting on the rocks at Bondi, Australia, as part of the exhibition ‘Sculpture by the Sea’. Bondi is one of the most significant protected heritage sites for Indigenous Australians. Here, the work was installed direct on a rocky outcrop, where its forms drew comparison both with the fish traps historically used there, and amphora, a form associated with heritages from the Northern Hemisphere. ‘Sculpture by the Sea’ is Australia’s largest public sculpture exhibition, drawing a reported audience of over 500,000 over a few weeks. The work was awarded the \$5,000 Andrea Stretton Memorial Prize by a jury including the exhibition curator and academics from ANU for the best work by an international artist.

Andrew Burton, *Vessels Sculpture by the Sea*. (detail)  
 Bondi, New South Wales, Australia  
 20th October 2016 – 12th November 2016. Fired clay, glaze, paint, cement, corten steel. This element of the installed sculpture 300 x 70 x 70 cm.



Andrew Burton, *Vessels dimensions variable Sculpture by the Sea*.  
Bondi, New South Wales, Australia  
20th October 2016 – 12th November 2016.

Burton's work was selected by an international jury for the 8<sup>th</sup> Gyeonggi International Ceramics Biennale (GICB) in South Korea in 2015. It was awarded both the \$20,000 Gold Prize and the \$2000 People's prize. (The Grand Prize was awarded to Neil Brownsword, with bronze prize-winner Alexandra Engelfriet). This competition is regarded as:

*One of the most awaited events in the world among ceramic artists as a stage for developing recognition both internationally and in their home countries.*

**Hyeyoung Cho, Ceramics Monthly, Feb 2016**

Burton's sculpture, *Things Fall Apart*, was built up in the gallery space, the process on public view, during the early part of the exhibition, brick by brick in a precarious, labour intensive process. This performative aspect afforded both the makers and the audience a sense of the simultaneous experience of creation and destruction, arriving finally at a point of balance at which things might fall down to be rebuilt, becoming something else.

A jury member described Burton's work as *'a metaphor for the human condition, continually reassembling the past to construct the present.'*

*Things Fall Apart* (2015), 8<sup>th</sup> Gyeonggi International Ceramics Biennale Korea Ceramic Foundation (KOCEF), Icheon, Seoul, South Korea  
24<sup>th</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2015 . Fired clay bricks, paint, cement, 2.5m x2.5m x 2.25m (h)



The international jury for the 2015 biennial comprised 11 leading figures in the ceramics ecosystem:

- **Elisabeth Agro**, Associate Curator of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA
- **Janet DeBoos**, Australian National University School of Art, Australia
- **Alun Graves**, Senior Curator V&A, UK
- **Sook-Kyung Lee**, Research Curator of the Tate Research Centre: Asia-Pacific; Curator of the S. Korea pavilion, Venice Biennale
- **Walter McConnell**, Professor of Ceramic Art, Alfred University, USA
- **Lu Pinchang**, Dean of Sculpture, Central Academic of Fine Arts, Beijing, China
- **Tatehata Akira**, Director of the Museum of Modern Art, Satama, Japan
- **Frédéric Bodet**, Curator at the Cité de la Céramique, Paris, France
- **Kyoungsoon Park**, Professor of Ceramics, Kookmin University; Artistic Director of the GICB.
- **Anders Ruhwald**, Head of Ceramics, Cranbrook Academy of Art, USA
- **Namita Wiggers**, Co-founder of Critical Art Forum, USA

Jurors noted how the main prizewinners' work is '*...based in a deep understanding of practice, which advances the field of ceramics by dismantling boundaries between craft, architecture, artwork, construction, installation and performance*' (**Anders Ruhwald**)

*'I have never seen anything this novel and daring... the work of Andrew Burton, the Gold Prizewinner, was a philosophical installation work based on the premise of a performance that both constructs and destroys an artwork'* (**Tatehata Akira**)

*'...a metaphor for the human condition: [Burton's] work rediscovers the value of brick as an artistic material and a witness of human history and incorporates an act of social participation to explore the possibility of recycling... It is a poetic study about all materials, which are destined to degrade, the beauty of fragments and the vulnerability of all projects related with survival... a work of true spectacle'* (**Frédéric Bodet**)

*'[Burton] causes the viewer to think about the many meanings implied in this installation... and suggests a new concept for ceramic installation through this work that can be dismantled and created anew'* (**Kyoungsoon Park**)

*'Burton's work operates as a metaphor for cultural decay and rebirth. [He] uses the foundational form of the clay brick to build and rebuild, construct and deconstruct, revealing how materials can transcend cultures and structures... It is a structure on the edge of chaos'* (**Namita Wiggers**)

## The WABA exhibition, Mataro, Nau Gaudi, 2016 and other exhibitions

Burton is a member of the 'World Association of Brick Artists' (WABA), a small international group committed to exploring brick as a material for sculpture. A second version of *Vessels* was made For the WABA exhibition at the Contemporary Art Musuem of Mataro, Nau Gaudi, Mataro, Catalonia in 2016. The museum is housed in Gaudi's first industrial architecture project, which (in contrast to his later architecture) is an austere brick-walled building with bolted wooden arches. The design of colourful tiles used on outbuildings anticipates Gaudi's future architecture. Burton's work reflected its context, set next to this historic building, particularly in its specific use of colour. The work was acquired for the Public Collection of Mataro.

Burton exhibited three smaller *Vessels* in an exhibition organised by the International Academy of Ceramics in the Design Museum in Barcelona (2016), focused on ceramics and architecture.

Burton was invited to show *Vessel* in 'Masterpieces in Schools', Funded by Arts Council England. This project aims to engage schoolchildren directly with original artworks. Plans to install *Vessels* at Royal Grammar School Newcastle, and to hold a series of talks and events with visits from other local schools, were disrupted at the last minute due to Covid19.



Top: *Vessels* in the Contemporary Art Museum, Mataro, 2016.  
Bottom: Burton working on *Vessel* with Nau Gaudi in the background

## OUTPUTS

Exhibitions in detail

In 2019, the Gyeonggi Ceramics Biennale, British Ceramics Biennale and Indian Ceramics Triennial formed a partnership to nominate an artist to represent each country at the others biennial.

Burton was chosen to represent the UK in S. Korea. His new work for GICB responded to the biennial curator's suggestion to use his concept of making and unmaking to create a work that spoke to the need for reconciliation between North and South Korea

Burton's installation, *Wall with Vessels (Onngi)* (2019), brought together the themes of vessels and monuments. The work made use of 100 very large antique 'onngi' (kimchi jars). All Koreans share a veneration for onngi, and the kimchi they contain. The installation 'divided' two sets of *Onngi*, by building up a wall, brick by brick, from the bricks reclaimed from *Things Fall Apart*. The wall was unsupported and, when it reached a certain height it collapsed, momentarily reuniting the two sets of *Onngi*, only for the building process to begin again.



Top: *Wall with Vessels (Onngi)*, hand made brick and onngi, 7 x 7 x 1m, Korea Ceramic Biennale 2019  
Bottom: drawing for sculpture, 2019



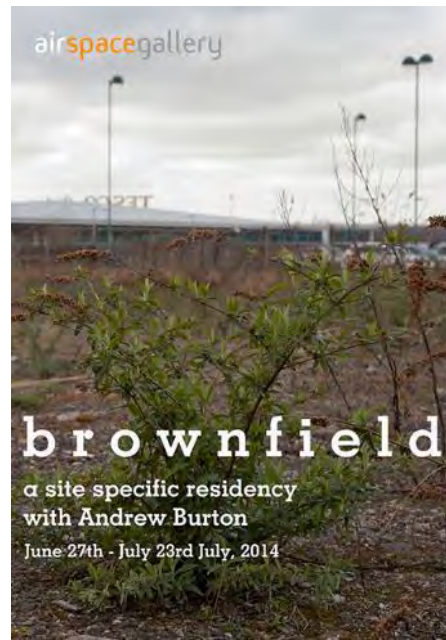


Commissioned for the *British Ceramics Biennale 2019*, Burton's work *Untitled* (2019) used over ten thousand of the bricks to create a form suggesting the foundation of a forgotten monument, or base for a future structure.

Andrew Burton. *Untitled*. Fired clay, paint, glaze, stain. 480 x 220 x 30cm, 2019. British Ceramic Biennial 2019, Stoke-on-Trent.

Since 2014, the research has had global reach through international public exhibitions and, in its awards and prizes, invited residencies (Burton worked on the Sydney sculpture while artist in residence at Bundanon, NSW, exhibiting brick sculptures at Bathurst Regional Art Gallery). The artworks and associated activities have facilitated public discourse on the intersection between sculpture, ceramics, architecture and craft, the perceived division between artistic and artisanal practice, and the cultural and social uses of materials.

The projects have received extensive critical and media attention. In 2019, the curator Glen Adamson was invited by the European Ceramics Work Centre (NL) to create an exhibition, *Ghosts of Sunday Morning*, of his choice of the 30 most significant works created in the centre in terms of the way the works disrupted conventions of ceramic production, over its 50 year life. Each of the original works was to be 're-made' in white stoneware to test the process behind the original creation. Adamson selected one of Burton's vessels, discussing the selected works in terms of '*their thematic tensions between transience and eternity*'. The exhibition, held at the Design Museum in den Bosch (NL) 18<sup>th</sup> April – 19<sup>th</sup> May 2019, included 're-made' works by 30 artists taking an experimental approach to clay, including Anish Kapoor, Tony Cragg, Jun Kaneko, Andrew Lord, Norbert Prangenberg, and was accompanied by a book with an essay and interviews by Adamson.



Left: Burton created new brick installations during a residency at the Airspace Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent (2014); and, right, at a one-person show at the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, NSW (2016).

