



Square cinerary jar with lid

Julian Stair

Not on display

Title/Description: Square cinerary jar with lid

Artist/Maker: Julian Stair

Born: 2000

Measurements: h 8.4 x w 22.2 x d 22.4 cm

Accession Number: LSC 7

Historic Period: 21st century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Copyright: © Julian Stair

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Lady Sainsbury, 2014

Julian Stair's small funerary pots mark the very beginning of his exploration of the theme of death (a theme that evolves in his later monumental works). They also demonstrate the artist's changing focus from surface decoration to an emphasis on form.

In the late 1990s Stair began developing these thrown and constructed works, using unglazed red clay and white porcelain. He made a series of funerary pots in square, round, oval and triangular forms. The top, base, wall and lid of each pot are thrown as separate components, then collaged together. The artist cuts a circular hole in the lid, which becomes the stopper. The square begins as a circular form which is then teased, opened up and stretched to be almost flat, whilst still keeping the character of the thrown work. [1]

Lady Sainsbury visited the Contemporary Applied Arts gallery, London, in 1998 and contacted Stair to commend him on this series, expressing how much she loved the technique involved. She commissioned a group of seven works in red stoneware and white porcelain (see also LSC6, LSC 90, LSC 91, LSC 92, LSC 93, LSC 94). [2]

In contrast to Stair's early vessels, where the separate surface decoration plays against the form of the open pot, the decoration of these pots is integral to its form, with a raised swirling spiral design that echoes or contrasts the geometric shape. We are taken on a visual narrative of the processes the clay undergoes at the hands of the potter. The dynamic spiral design highlights the movement of the throwing technique, making us aware of the process of the clay being manipulated into shape by the potter.

The spiral ridge also creates shadows as light progresses around an object, producing three-dimensional qualities. It draws our eye around the different facets of the pot, moving upwards and inwards, until it disappears at the lid. This gentle visual communication brings our awareness to the passing of time and the functional aspect of the object, serving to remind us that these pots have been made to contain human remains.

Katharine Malcolm, October 2020

[1] Interview with the artist, phone call 19/06/20

[2] Ibid.

Further Reading

Frankel, Cyril, and James Austin, *Modern Pots* (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 2000)

Jones, Jeffrey, Studio Pottery In Britain 1900-2005 (London: A & C Black, 2007)

Watson, Oliver, Studio Pottery (London: Phaidon, in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1993)

www.julianstair.com

John M. Anderson Endowed Lecture Series: 'A Sense of Place', The Pennsylvania State University, 18 February 2014: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTyzNba2KL4>
