



# Monumental Jar VIII

Julian Stair

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## On display

**Title/Description:** Monumental Jar VIII

**Artist/Maker:** Julian Stair

**Born:** 2011

**Measurements:** h. 1520 x dia. 880 mm

**Accession Number:** 50586

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**Credit Line:** Purchased with support from Martin and Katharine Pinfold and the Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, 2020

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*Monumental Jar VIII* commands a significant physical presence. It is an outstanding example of a blue brick vessel from Julian Stair's celebrated exhibition, *Quietus: The Vessel, Death and the Human Body* (2012-14). The title refers to a final moment, a finishing point. Featuring cinerary jars and life size sarcophagi, the exhibition was the culmination of ten years' work exploring the containment of the human body after death. Commissioned by Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA), *Quietus* toured across the UK (National Museum of Wales Cardiff, Winchester Cathedral and Somerset House, London), and assumed very different forms in its various venues. [1]

Stair offers an artistic rather than a religious response to practices surrounding death: 'There is something about clay that is elemental. Many creation myths refer to the forming of man from clay; it's the stuff of the world that we live in, it's what we walk on. Taking that material which symbolises our origins, and then making vessels to house the body to take it back into the ground, creates a wonderful kind of circularity.' [2]

The scale of Stair's monumental works required them to be made at three different brick factories (whilst on a residency), using industrial kilns for the firing process. Stair states, 'There's an alchemy to making ceramics. We take an inert material, fashion it, dry it and expose it to heat and flame. The practice of cremation, of exposing the body to fire, going through an alchemical change, echoes and parallels the process of firing.' [3]

The formation of small spiral crusts of clay (that look like metal burr) along the horizontal ridges of

the jar serve to emphasize the technical process of the vessel's creation. They provide tactile focal points in contrast to the otherwise hard, raw, granular surface of the Etruria marl clay.

The scale and tactile nature of this work makes a dramatic intervention into the Sainsbury Centre's collection of modern studio ceramics. Complementing the existing 16 works by Stair dating from 1982-2003, this work represents a culmination of his monumental work from the more recent period. It also complements the Centre's historic collection of ceramic works, many of which are associated with how different societies across the world, at different periods, have dealt with the topic of housing the human body in death - a central theme of Stair's work:

'Pots almost universally have been made to hold the body in death, in both burial but also in cremation. They're vessels, and the body itself is also seen as a vessel, a physical container for the soul or the spirit...that's one of the reasons I'm interested in making funerary ware, because it's about art that engages with this incredible ritual that is so profoundly important.' [4]

Katharine Malcolm, August 2020

[1] <https://www.julianstair.com/quietus> [Accessed 05/08/20]

[2] James Beighton and others, *Julian Stair, Quietus: The Vessel, Death and the Human Body* (Middlesbrough: Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, 2012), p.8  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c9ca409c2ff61708747e27f/t/5e37cbab0bbd9407605cea5a/1580714953874/mima\\_quietus.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c9ca409c2ff61708747e27f/t/5e37cbab0bbd9407605cea5a/1580714953874/mima_quietus.pdf) (p.8) [Accessed 05/08/20]

[3] James Beighton and others, *Julian Stair, Quietus: The Vessel, Death and the Human Body* (Middlesbrough: Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, 2012), p.18  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c9ca409c2ff61708747e27f/t/5e37cbab0bbd9407605cea5a/1580714953874/mima\\_quietus.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c9ca409c2ff61708747e27f/t/5e37cbab0bbd9407605cea5a/1580714953874/mima_quietus.pdf) (p.18) [Accessed 05/08/20]

[4] Julian Stair: *Quietus - a documentary* (Somerset House, 2013) [Accessed 05/08/20]  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xts5qdXFh2A>

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## Further Reading

Beighton, James, Glenn Adamson, Nigel Llewellyn, and Garth Clark, *Julian Stair, Quietus: The Vessel, Death and the Human Body* (Middlesbrough: Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, 2012)

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c9ca409c2ff61708747e27f/t/5e37cbab0bbd9407605cea5a/1580714953874/mima\\_quietus.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c9ca409c2ff61708747e27f/t/5e37cbab0bbd9407605cea5a/1580714953874/mima_quietus.pdf)

Julian Stair: *Quietus - a documentary* (Somerset House, 2013)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xts5qdXFh2A>

<https://www.julianstair.com/>

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## **Provenance**

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from the artist in 2020 out of funds provided by Martin and Katharine Pinfold (Pinfold Trust) and the Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund.

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