

Ceramics Blog

Fi Underhill

Tag: Julia Schuster

Spode //

A visit to Stoke-on-Trent in the first week presented a wealth of inspiration and generated an outpouring of response. Our first stop was the Old Spode Works at China Hall. The building alone was enough to set my mind alive... thinking of possible shapes, lines and marks with it's curved ceiling, abundance of natural light and signs of decay throughout. Much of the work housed within echoed this decay, responding aptly to it's stark and decomposing surroundings. The undulating roof space prompted thoughts of opposites: up and down, light and dark, high and low and as I traverse the space, I find myself fascinated by the idea of tension, particularly between opposing forces, ideas, entities.

Intuitive // Planned

Spontaneous // Forced

Fluid // Rigid

Momentary // Finite



Undulating roof, Spode entrance, September 2017.

This opposition is especially present in the shadows cast throughout the space, reinforcing the sense of the present reaching back to touch the past. Or perhaps the past hovering gently alongside the present, influencing and informing.



Shadow and soft light at Spode, September, 2017.

The piece which caught my attention most keenly was this video installation by Julia Schuster, a recent graduate from the RCA:



*Video Still
'Longing', 2016.*

I found the piece mesmerising and inspiring in its use of and exploration of touch. It successfully stimulated multiple senses. Initially, the piece is visually stimulating as you watch furrows and patterns emerge in the clay as the fingers and palms glide over its surface leaving beautiful and fascinating marks in their wake, yet the haptic nature of the work led me to imagine not only the feeling of touching the clay but also that of being the clay itself. I felt simultaneously empathetic to both the hands and the clay they were massaging. The tactile movements begin rhythmically and alternate in pattern and strength. The hands work in synchronicity, then asymmetrically, the marks left behind are softer, growing deeper and increasingly evident. The disembodied hands are playing with the material, coaxing it, almost goading it at times, eager for some response. I felt there was a definite transference happening within the piece, an exchange so understated yet powerful in its subtlety. The most powerful aspect of the piece for me was the way in which, by substituting skin for clay, Schuster is able to render the invisible, visible. Though she describes the work as pertaining to desire and longing, both of which I felt were successfully articulated via the use of touch, I also felt the marks left behind in the clay could be seen to emulate scars, both literal and metaphoric. Schuster has commented that, "touch is [...]the very core of being human," a statement which I wholeheartedly agree with and aim to investigate further through my own work.