

Preface

The Crafts Study Centre is honoured to host the second iteration of Neil Brownsword's *Obsolescence and Renewal*, an examination of the marginalised histories associated with North Staffordshire's ceramic industry in its pre- or proto-industrial moment in the 17th and 18th centuries. This was a time when competing workshops in the region were trying to emulate highly fashionable Chinese porcelain and other valuable ceramics. In revisiting these histories, Brownsword seeks not only to celebrate the ingenuity of fledgling ceramic producers, but to draw attention to the details of technical innovation and the material slippages that occur when attempting to develop one material in imitation of another. Brownsword achieves this with digital renderings, prototypes gone askew, tapestries of digital glitches, the display of museum objects, and archival prints.

The timing for Brownsword's first exhibition at the Crafts Study Centre is both overdue, given his position as a leading ceramic researcher, educator and practitioner, and fortuitous. Just weeks before writing this preface, Stoke-on-Trent was named the UK's second craft city, following Farnham which achieved the same accolade from the World Crafts Council in 2020. The ceramic culture of both places is often presented in oppositional terms: Stoke-on-Trent, the industrial behemoth; Farnham, one of many English towns with a rich history in small-scale studio pottery. Brownsword's advocacy and preservation of the skill *within* industry complicates this division and provides a basis for thinking about what connects these different contexts of ceramic practice. In an original essay for this publication Tanya Harrod examines the complex relationship between studio and industrial ceramics with an especial focus on the early days of the Crafts Study Centre in the 1970s. Anti-industrialism was prevalent among the Centre's founders and is reflected in many of the founding collections, but Harrod questions these presumptions, providing examples of rapprochement and even active collaboration with industry among studio craftspeople, and draws an unexpected parallel between Brownsword and Michael Cardew.

The texts following Harrod's essay introduce Brownsword's artistic practice from a range of theoretical positions and offer a historic context to Newcastle-under-Lyme's importance contribution to early ceramic industrialisation.

Dr Stephen Knott
Director, Crafts Study Centre



