

JASON WASON: SILENT WITNESS

LEMON STREET GALLERY, TRURO, CORNWALL

6 SEPTEMBER – 4 OCTOBER 2014

The Lemon Street Gallery, suffused with late summer sunlight, recently dedicated all three of its floors to a solo exhibition of new work by the ceramic artist, Jason Wason. Less than two years had elapsed since his previous successful show there. But the impressive quantity and variety of work produced in a relatively short time would count for nothing were it not for the fact that this is work of sublime quality. Here we have an artist operating at the height of his powers. He creates objects of originality, integrity and beauty in an astonishing range of shapes, sizes, colours and textures, each of which nevertheless carries his own recognisable imprint and could have been fashioned by no other hand.

In this exhibition he allows himself - presumably the Silent Witness of the title - to include several pieces that are anything but silent. Indeed they are screams of anguish against the obscenity of war. There is a dark *Tower* (a minaret?) grown taller since the last show, which bears a gaping wound that presumably alludes to damage by shellfire. There is the darkly menacing black-and-gold coloured *Broken Promises*, a nuclear warhead, squatting ready-primed on its launchpad. Louder still are two bowls inscribed with graffiti carrying accusatory messages in unambiguous language addressed to purveyors of war. Nails deface one of those bowls in a way that is reminiscent of similarly treated wooden figurines used in African witchcraft.

There are other references in this show to the cultures of Africa, such as in the traditional shapes of some of the containers, particularly the lidded ones, and in the zig-zag patterns on some dishes and wall-pieces (the *Shields*). There are also references to the Iron Age. And just how are we to interpret those enigmatic *Axe-head Vessels* where heavy, functional tools have been 'hollowed out' to form containers? Wason also harks back to ancient Chinese bronzes, such as those used for the propitiation of ancestors or as reliquaries. And a new theme, introduced in the previous exhibition but taken to new heights here, is the incorporation of the Buddhist *stupa* form in a series of *Temple-top Vessels*. Wason is open to wide cultural influences as he traverses the world seeking out what best suits his purposes and then adapting it. In so doing he creates a remarkably coherent body of artwork that is timeless and speaks to humanity at large, resonating as much with the ancient past as with us today.

In his hands, clay has come a long way since it was first shaped by our distant ancestors into vessels for food and drink. His work is still predominantly container based although it has left narrow functionalism far behind. The latest development - taking art into areas where it doesn't traditionally go or 'the art of protest' - may disturb some. But there's nothing new in that. Think 1937, think Picasso, think *La Guernica*.

Anthony Fagin

Anthony Fagin is a retired United Nations official who lives in Cornwall where he does ceramics. He has previously written for Ceramic Review.