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**Review of The Ceramics Reader, Andrew Livingstone and Kevin
Petrie (eds). London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2017
Peters, T.**

This is an accepted manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Journal of Modern Craft, 12 (2), pp. 197-199.

The final definitive version is available online:

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17496772.2019.1620444>

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The Ceramics Reader, Andrew Livingstone and Kevin Petrie (eds).

London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2017. 592pp., 16 b/w illus. etc

Reviewed by Tessa Peters

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The editors of *The Ceramics Reader*, Andrew Livingstone and Kevin Petrie, are practising artists and academics based at the University of Sunderland, UK; between them they have authored numerous books and articles in the fields of ceramics and glass. In their editorial introduction to this new anthology, they explain that their selection of texts has been guided by the concerns of their students. They identify its focus as “art ceramics,” as opposed to ceramics of industrial design or application, and in particular the creative practices of Europe, the USA and Australia. The primary concern is ceramics discourse rather than technical matters.

In his introductory overview, Garth Clark recalls that, back in 1978 when compiling the anthology *Ceramic Art: Comment and Review 1882-1977*, he had found little serious writing on key US movements of the previous two decades. The fact, therefore, that most of texts included in *The Ceramics Reader* come from the last twenty years, may be taken to demonstrate that there has been a significant development in critical writing in the field. It is certainly a substantial volume, comprising 67 texts organised within 3 sections, each divided into subsections preceded by an editors’ introduction. It encompasses different kinds of texts and voices: extracts from books, articles from specialist magazines and academic journals, conference papers and the occasional newly commissioned chapter; these are variously historically-orientated, interpretative, scholarly and polemical, with some more provisional and informal.

Section One, covering issues of “Ceramics – Materiality and Metaphor” aims to establish the significance of clay and ceramic artefacts in human life, offering examinations of their inherent values and meanings. Selected texts include philosophical, historical and ethnographic perspectives on ceramics in everyday existence and ritual ceremony by scholars such as Philip Rawson and Silvia Forni. In

examining how ceramics practice is seen through the lens of popular culture, Sarah Archer's 2012 article "Heart Like a Wheel: What is Hollywood Telling us about Working with Clay?" provides a less than flattering reflection.

The more expansive Section Two, "Ceramics in Context," starts by raising some precedents that have had an impact on art-orientated ceramics. Emmanuel Cooper's comprehensive study of the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement on pottery enterprises across Europe and the United States helps account for an emerging interest in craft practice in response to a period of increasing mechanisation and mass-production. Brent Johnson's "A Matter of Tradition: A debate between Marguerite Wildenhain and Bernard Leach," presents the opposing stances of two key figures – American cultural diversity versus Orientalism - on the standards that should be adopted by American pottery, and an essay by Lesley Jackson contextualises the work of Lucie Rie and Hans Coper within the wider context of 1950s 'Contemporary' design trends.

Other subsections explore matters pertaining to main areas of practice identified as "Studio Ceramics", "Sculptural Ceramics", and "Ceramics and Installation." Tanya Harrod's "Studio Pottery" and Julian Stair's "Inventing the Wheel" both add to our understanding of the evolving concerns of studio ceramics and their critical reception in the early part of the twentieth century. The pairing of a series of excerpts from Leach's "Towards a Standard" (from *A Potter's Book*, first published in 1940) with Edmund de Waal's critique "Towards a Double Standard?" offers insights into some divergences between the former's practice and what he preached. The section ends with Jeffrey Jones positing that, by the turn of the millennium, studio ceramics appeared to have taken on the role of the narrator of the ceramics story as a whole.

Among the texts assigned to sculptural ceramics are Rose Slivka's controversial 1961 *Craft Horizons* article, "The New Ceramics Presence", in which she aligns the concerns of painting, sculpture and ceramics. Its juxtaposition with an essay by Martina Margetts, from the catalogue of *The Raw and the Cooked* (1993) indicates how, by then, the terms of such an argument had shifted. Despite the thematic structure, texts resonate across sections of the book. While Mitchell Merback's discussion of the exhibition *Cooled Matter*, is assigned under sculpture it can be productively read in association with texts by Emma Shaw, Ruth Chambers and Glen

R. Brown, which deal more specifically with the dominant themes of installation. Situated at the boundary between art and craft, installation works are seen to represent one of the prime sites of 'the expanded field' of clay practice.

The subsection titled "Theoretical Perspectives", with incisive contributions from Glenn Adamson, Paul Greenhalgh and Garth Clark amongst others, engages with features of the art/craft debate pertaining mainly to the earlier discussion of studio ceramics, where notions of skill, authenticity and concerns relating to formal qualities of the vessel were important issues at stake. The critical thinking and key debates surrounding "Ceramics and Installation" and "Conceptual and Post Studio Practice" are mostly embedded within those thematic sections, where the range of perspectives comes from artists, critical writers and curators such as Clare Twomey, Jo Dahn and Ingrid Schaffer.

Many of the "Key Themes" included in Section Three relate to previous lines of discussion but also incorporate more detailed points of focus identified by the editors as 'relevant to ceramics today.' The section contains many compelling ideas, although the texts are less amenable to editorial juxtaposition, with its subsections operating more as straightforward taxonomies than frameworks of discursive context. Here just a few of the texts worthy of special mention are Moira Vincentelli's "Gender, Identity and Studio Ceramics," Matt Smith's account of "Queering the Museum", Ingrid Murphy's advocacy of digital technology in "Meta-Making and Me", and Laura Breen's "Re-defining Ceramics through Exhibitionary Practice (1970-2009)."

Despite its size *The Ceramics Reader* does not capture the entire field. Its lack of illustrations can be irritating, especially where the editors' advice to have the internet close to hand is frustrated by scant information. The texts contain numerous typographical errors that sometimes hamper meaning and dates for a few essays are missing. Yet overall, this long-awaited book is a significant extension and update to what is already available, with an ability to inspire and inform students, to foster wider debate, and to raise the bar of critical writing on ceramics still further.

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