

Tactile Change by Matthew Raw

Ceramic artist's second solo show explores progress and migration – through the story of Plymouth Zoo

Plymouth College of Art
20 September - 16 November 2019



Ceramic artist Matthew Raw working hard at the Plymouth College of Art. Photo: Sarah Packer.

This September, the Gallery at Plymouth College of Art plays host to Matthew Raw's second solo show. *Tactile Change* is a display of contemporary ceramics inspired by the themes of migration and progress, a meditation on borders in the post-Brexit landscape – and a response to the history of Plymouth Zoo.

Raw's work uses tile and clay to explore how human landscapes evolve with communities that inhabit them. His first solo exhibition in 2017, *Clad*, looked at the social evolution of East London. Now the artist turns his eyes – and his hands – to Plymouth, where he will be interpreting the story of the city and its short-lived zoo in clay.

"Plymouth is a hub for contemporary arts within the southwest. It has been a privilege to commission an artist as accomplished as Matthew to develop his personal response to the history of the city, as his second national solo show."

– Hannah Rose, Gallery Curator, Plymouth College of Art

Through ceramic tiles, block-printed clay and monumental works, Tactile Change uses the story of the zoo as the starting point to examine society's understanding of progress and the individual's response to change.



Tactile Change was a deeply collaborative project, from the children at Plymouth to architects at Warwick. Photo credit: Sarah Packer.

Although Tactile Change is a solo show, it is also a team effort – the result of a deliberate programme of collaboration and social making on Matthew's part. As the tactile disciplines of making disappear from mainstream education in the UK, Matthew Raw has made the relationship between learning and making an integral part of his practice. In recent months, he has been working with children from Plymouth School of Creative Arts (PSCA) to prepare for the Tactile Change project.

Matthew's involvement with PSCA stems from a mural project he is currently undertaking in collaboration with architects Feilden Clegg Bradley at the University of Warwick. Matthew learned that the firm also worked with Plymouth College of Art on the design for Plymouth School of Creative Arts, and that the school placed

making at the heart of its curriculum. He decided that the students would make ideal partners for the Tactile Change project.

Opened in 1962 and closed just 16 years later, Plymouth Zoo served as a quarantine centre for animals arriving in the UK from overseas. Matthew used the story of an elephant temporarily held at the zoo as a starting point for PSCA children to consider ideas of migration, transience, containment and the experience of quarantine. A number of the designs the students produced during this period have become motifs for a series of ceramic tiles to be installed as pieces of public art in the zoo's former home in Central Park, at PSCA and as part of Tactile Change.

In the exhibition, the elephant tiles form part of the installation Routemaster, an arrangement of large-scale doors and fences deployed around the Gallery that direct and restrict the movement of visitors through the space.



Workshops were led by artist Matthew Raw, who also commissioned students at Plymouth to help with the exhibition's fabrication. Photo: Sarah Packer.

Alongside the PSCA pupils, students of Plymouth College of Art have also been instrumental in bringing about Tactile Change. In collaboration with lecturers and technical demonstrators from Plymouth's BA (Hons) 3D Design Crafts programme, Matthew has commissioned a number of the college's current students to assist with the fabrication of a number of the exhibition's ceramic elements.



Examples of what the students at Plymouth College of Art made during the workshops.
Photo: Sarah Packer.



Lots of tools and techniques were used for the exhibition Tactile Change by Matthew Raw.
Photo: Sarah Packer.

In the interactive work Progress, Matthew has collaborated with metal specialist Noah Taylor to create an assembly of tile-clad walls and doors emblazoned with seemingly generic words that are instantly identifiable from the lexicon of politics and protest. Continuing this interrogation of language, in The Long Read, Matthew presents a series of five terracotta prints made with hand-carved wooden blocks and bearing fragments of text that invite us to question our response to the everyday rhetoric of progress.

Funded by Arts Council England, Plymouth College of Art and the city's forthcoming cultural and heritage centre the Box (opening in 2020), Tactile Change is part of Plymouth College of Art's biennial symposium Making Futures: People, Place, Meaning – Crafting Worlds & Social Making, which explores contemporary craft and maker movements as agents of change in 21st-century society. The exhibition expands on the themes of Matthew Raw's previous work with Clad at the Ragged School Museum in East London and his collaboration with Assemble on the Art on the Underground project at Seven Sisters station – the material interaction of people and place.

"I grew up in post-industrial Manchester, which felt like a place where old and new architecture was always meeting in harmony or clashing around me. Since then I've found myself drawn to investigate the architectural scars of every city that I visit, investigating what impact industry and progress have had on the communities that form there. Working in Plymouth has been a delight, learning about the history of the city and the forces that have shaped the southwest over the past century. I'm fascinated by the mixture of buildings new and old, and by people's relationships to the notion of progress in the city; the things they hope will change and the things they want to stay the same."
– Matthew Raw, ceramic artist

"Tactile Change is the product of Matthew Raw's deep immersion in our workspace and his creative interaction with the progressive continuum of our learning community - with Plymouth College of Art and the school we founded in Millbay, the Plymouth School of Creative Arts. It is powerfully oriented towards the horizon and, with the looming prospect of Brexit, invites us to dwell upon themes of migration, place-making and border controls that feel more than ever significant to the future of our city and the international dimension of our work. I'm delighted that Matthew Raw has chosen to respond to our past and present in this way, and that his work with children at PSCA has grown from our internationally-regarded collaboration with Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios."
– Professor Andrew Brewerton, Principal and Chief Executive of Plymouth College of Art

Notes to editors

For more information about Tactile Change, Matthew Raw and images of his work, please contact Jodi Moss at jodi@zetteler.co.uk or Chris Hayes at chris@zetteler.co.uk, or reach them on +44 (0)20 3735 5855.

Tactile Change is commissioned by the Gallery at Plymouth of Art in partnership with the Box. The project is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

Tactile Change opens at the Gallery, Plymouth College of Art, Tavistock Place, Plymouth PL4 8AT on Friday 20 September.

About Matthew Raw

Matthew Raw is a ceramics artist who seeks to push the possibilities of clay to communicate, and to challenge public perceptions of what it can do as a material. Based between Paris and East London, he is a founding member of the Manifold Studio in Hoxton, an artistic collective of nine Royal College of Art graduates, and has participated in group shows, collaborative projects and exhibitions in London, Milan, Munich, Copenhagen, Detroit and more. He collected the Jerwood Prize in 2014 for 'The Shifting Spirit', a full-size recreation of a tiled pub exterior now on permanent display at the Five Points Brewery in East London. In 2017, he worked with architecture collective Assemble for an Art on the Underground project at Seven Sisters Tube station, and hosted his first solo show, Clad, at the Ragged School Museum as part of London Craft Week. He teaches extensively (RCA, Central St Martins and his own Raw Ceramic Workshops) and is currently working on projects in Leeds, Paris and London.

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Instagram [@matrawworksincay](https://www.instagram.com/matrawworksincay)

About The Gallery at Plymouth College of Art

The Gallery at Plymouth College of Art features a high-quality contemporary programme of exhibitions and events, which seeks to enrich teaching and learning at the College, whilst also welcoming a wider public audience to enjoy and debate contemporary arts. The Gallery was established in 2006 and has presented over 50 exhibitions since then. The free public events programme has invited over 100 artists to give talks at evening sessions, adding to the richness of the Gallery programme. The Gallery often works in partnership, contributing actively to strengthening and enhancing the offer of arts and culture in Plymouth.

Website plymouthart.ac.uk