



Cube

Tony Hepburn

Not on display

Title/Description: Cube

Artist/Maker: Tony Hepburn (Artist)

Born: 1968

Object Type: Sculpture

Materials: Ceramic

Technique: Handbuilding

Measurements: h. 270mm

Accession Number: 50747

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England

Tony Hepburn is 'a sculptor in clay whose work lies outside all ceramic traditions'. [1] He initially studied painting but pursued working in clay because it freed him from representation. Here, a cube – an object strongly associated with minimalism is the vehicle for Hepburn's abstraction.

Minimalism gained momentum as an art movement during the 1960s and 1970s, pushing the idea of abstraction to the extreme. It stripped away all representation and leaving only form and material for contemplation. Hepburn's cube, made in 1968, is not as pristine and formally minimal as the sculptures of artists such as Donald Judd and Richard Serra. The worn textured appearance of the white glaze and subtle distortions in shape give the form a softness. However, the violet X markings on the sides of the cube boldly demarcate and emphasise the mass and physicality of the three-dimensional form.

In the early 1960s, Hepburn studied at Camberwell College of Art, where he was taught by Lucie Rie and Hans Coper. Hepburn's work has always challenged the expectations of ceramics practice. It has constantly shifted visually and stylistically, encompassing sculpture, installation, performance and the fields of conceptual art and architecture.

There is a rapport between Hepburn's early works in the Sainsbury Centre Collection (see also 50749 and 50747) and those of American sculptural ceramicists working in the 1960s, including Ron Nagle and Ken Price. This affinity was recognised when he was invited to teach in the USA in the late 1960s. By the mid-1970s Hepburn had moved to the USA permanently. Here he continued to make radical ceramic work and became an important and influential ceramics teacher at Alfred University, New York, and the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan.

Sim Panaser, June 2020

[1] Tony Birks, *Art of the Modern Potter*, (London: Country Life Books, 1976), p. 9.

Further Reading

Birks, Tony, 'Anthony Hepburn: Young British Potter', *Craft Horizons*, 29 (July 1969), 34-36

Birks, Tony, *Art of the Modern Potter* (London: Country Life Books, 1976)

Selection of essays on the work of Tony Hepburn, *Detroit Research*, Volume 2 (2015), <https://www.detroitresearch.org/volume2/> [accessed 20 June 2020]

