

Title: Holding yellow

Dear Lotte¹,

Have you made your yellow bowl yet?

I have been invited as one of a group of curators, to select and write about objects from the Burrell Collection, and consider how a contemporary work could resonate alongside.

There is a proliferation of pattern, colour, time and stories throughout this collection of 8000 items. Motifs of birds, animals, monsters and plants teem through tapestries and rugs; red can be traced through the '*Red Ballet Skirt*' of Degas' dancers to the red choir in the tapestry '*The Adoration of the Magi and St Erasmus and St Dorothy*' (German, 1471-80) and the red bedspread and drapes shown in its painted counterpart, '*The adoration of the Magi*' (c. 1460). The march of time passes from a small Roman statue of Aphrodite's idealised torso to the collapsed, spent figure of Auguste Rodin's old woman: '*She who was once the Helmet-Maker's Beautiful Wife*'.² In the Chinese Art Collection, plates and vases are the holders of stories; a maid accepts a love letter for her mistress; a solitary sage dreams of hills and sky.

And then, I saw a display of four porcelain dishes and one bowl³, from the Ming Dynasty, that sing with a simple yellow glaze. In contrast to the animation of the other objects, these delicate ceramics offer a pause for the viewer in terms of their simplicity, blankness and perfect form. What stories do these light, everyday plates hold? Made in the central government kilns of Jingdezhen, by potters who were governed by civil servants, yellow porcelain was created exclusively for the Ming Dynasty royal family. The rank of the user is denoted by the lack of pattern. The Emperor used the plainest dish, with his wives and concubines received different patterns incised on their dishes. The yellow colour symbolises Earth.

As I looked at this imperial yellow, I thought of you telling me that at times in the past, you have wished you could bury all the blue bowls you have made and are surrounded by, in the stony ground of your croft. A lifetime of blue is associated with you, and perhaps with this ritually cleared space, you could enter a new phase of making. You talked of preparing your kilns and your studio to accept this new dynasty of making only yellow ceramics.

On leaving the Burrell collection and walking through Pollok Park, I continued to hold onto the sensation of yellow, seeing a procession of it. Unopened daffodils on the riverbank; then as I neared the entrance to the park, above the gateway, I could see yellow stripes surrounding the tops of four, outlying tower blocks. Out on the main road, the fluorescent yellow plastic wrapping of a bouquet for a lost one flickers in the wind, tied to the tree at the bridge. The high-vis jacket of a cyclist weaves past. The yellow lichen on the railway station wall is followed by the yellow lighting of the underground tunnel carrying people over to the platform on the other side.

When (or if) you make your first yellow bowl, Lotte, I propose it becomes the sixth yellow ceramic in the case at the Burrell Collection for a while. Made from stoneware rather than porcelain, and incorporating fused rock and sediment from the landscape around you, your bowl will appear more roughly hewn next to the Chinese porcelain. Yet the connection is a passage of time. The Ming Dynasty dishes have passed through the hands of generations and collectors. Yours contain elements of the land that are millennia old.

¹ Lotte Glob (born 1944) is a Danish ceramic artist living in the north of Scotland in Sutherland.

² Model about 1885/87. Cast about 1887/89

³ Chinese, Ming Dynasty, Hongzai mark and period (AD, 1485-1505); bowl, Chinese, Ming Dynasty, Wanli mark, and period (1573-1621 AD); Dish, Chinese, Ming Dynasty, Hongzai mark, and period (AD 1488-1505); Dish, Chinese, Ming Dynasty, Jiajing mark and period (AD 1522-1566); Dish, Chinese, Ming Dynasty, Thengde Mark and period AD1506-1521).

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Having travelled so far to arrive at yellow, this colour can signify a new phase of time and renewal.

Jenny

Acknowledgements

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