

From the art collection

When potter John Parker began making a name for himself in the 1970s, the clean, manufactured look of mass-produced Crown Lynn ceramics was losing its fashionable status and was certainly not to be taken seriously by potters.

In contrast, John found inspiration in Crown Lynn's distinctively grooved hand-potted range, produced by British import, Ernest Shufflebotham. Shufflebotham had been recruited from British company Wedgwood, where he worked under Kiwi ex-pat designer Keith Murray, and brought with him a refined sensibility of clean modernist forms and soft matt white glazes. Shufflebotham only stayed in New Zealand from 1948-55 but his tenure coincided with Crown Lynn sourcing its best white clay in Matauri and perfecting its glazing and firing processes, and his works have become some of Crown Lynn's most sought after items.

This passing of influence, from New Zealand to England and back again, is a point of fascination for John, who is an avid collector of both Murray and Shufflebotham pots. Highlights from Parker's own research collection, including several of his own works, were included in the exhibition "Crown Lynn: Pottery for the People" held at the Gus Fisher Gallery in 2011, demonstrating the circularity of influence and inspiration.

Although their work is hand-thrown, Shufflebotham, Murray and John produce it with

industrial lathe techniques. It is this fine tension between formalism and experimentation that has been a constant of John's ongoing practice. Looking to industrial processes, some of his ridged forms also nod toward the mass-produced ceramic insulators used on power pylons. For a period from 1996, he announced that he would only produce work in white, although he now also works in black and red. But by establishing self-imposed rules and a limited range of minimalist forms or finishes for each range he produces, John is able to push these boundaries to expand his vocabulary and keep collectors coming back to add his latest variations to the growing range.

John first trained at Elam School of Fine Arts before completing a diploma in teaching at Auckland Teachers College in Epsom, where there was a thriving ceramic scene, and then a Master of Fine Arts at the Royal College of London in 1975. He returned to New Zealand in 1977 and became Director of Auckland Studio Potters Centre, going on to win many awards and also finding renown as a theatre designer. City Gallery Wellington held a major retrospective of his work in 2002 and he was given a Laureate Award by the Arts Foundation in 2010.

A selection of John's orbs, bottles and vases were purchased for Tāmaki Campus in 2002 and are on permanent display in Café Europa as part of a collection that was started in 1992 to

fit-out the then new campus but is now managed as part of the wider University Art Collection.

In 2009, John also paid homage to West Auckland's Crown Lynn legacy by producing a ceramic tile mural for New Lynn's train station that depicts the most ubiquitous but (now) keenly collected item from Crown Lynn's whiteware range, the swan.



Andrew Clifford

*John Parker (b.1947), white ceramic cylinder, bottles, vase and orb vase, c.2001
Six pieces of white-glazed ceramics (#60, 80, 85, 92, 96, 103), various dimensions
The University of Auckland Art Collection*