



Portico Gallery

The Portico Gallery is sponsored by Kim Spencer McPhee Barristers

Speaker: Sequoia Miller, Chief Curator and Deputy Director

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Hello and welcome to the Gardiner! I'm Sequoia Miller, Chief Curator and Deputy Director, and I'm here to talk about the artworks in the Portico Gallery. The objects on view here focus on the idea of Civic Engagement, one of the nine Pillars of Sustainability offered by our partners at No.9, an arts advocacy group.

Let's start with the tall figure with a flower for a head. Made by American artist Jack Earl, this figure represents one of the many characters in Earl's hometown in Ohio. Earl has long centred his work on this community, painstakingly recreating many of the town's eccentrics, while adding a surreal or otherworldly element. Earl both satirizes and honours the people of his town, as he explores his own place within this one particular community.

The provocative teapot was made in 1981 by artist Jeannot Blackburn, a very out gay man from Montreal. Blackburn was among the first to include explicit gay male imagery in ceramics, a medium perceived by many as traditional and backward-looking at the time. In this and other works, Blackburn brought the aesthetics and style of an urban subculture into the mainstream, redefining civic space for queerness.

The works on the next plinth are from England and China in the 17th century, and have ornamented surfaces that express civic affiliation. In the portrait cup, we see Charles II of England, the first monarch restored to the throne following the English civil war. His image sought to reestablish a stable national civic identity, embodied in his person—a project of limited success.

The cup with text carries the insignia of the Company of Watermen, a guild of London boatmen who oversaw traffic on the River Thames. Before the advent of widespread voting, guilds were a principal form of civic identity throughout Europe, and in some ways, were precursors to labour unions, political parties, and lobbying groups today. Guilds were often commemorate professional milestones with ceramic and other objects.

In a different way, the blue-and-white porcelain brush pot marks a form of civic identity as well. Objects such as these became popular implements among the scholar literati in China in the Ming and Ching dynasties, from the 14th to the 19th centuries. Scholar literati were elite civil servants who expressed their sophistication and identity through painting, calligraphy, poetry, and other practices. An object like this brush pot would assert one's role in this particular class.

Ceramics has a long history of folk and popular expression of civic engagement as well, from bar-room bawdiness to war protest. Taken as a group, these objects can help us think about ways that ceramics can bring us together to participate in many shared communities.

Thanks for visiting the Gardiner!

Artwork credits:

Jack Earl (American, b. 1934)
We Deliver Anywhere, 1979-80
White clay with china paint and glaze
Gift of Barbara and Philip Silverberg

Jeannot Blackburn (Canadian, 1959-1996)
Teapot, 1981
Glazed white earthenware
Gift of Barbara and Philip Silverberg

Mug with Charles II, 1664
Lambeth, Greater London, England
Earthenware, tin glaze, lead glaze, oxides
Gift of George and Helen Gardiner

Tankard with the Arms of the Waterman's Company, 1663
Lambeth, Greater London, England
Earthenware, tin glaze, lead glaze, oxides
Gift of George and Helen Gardiner

Brush Pot with mythical *qilin*, 1635-1644
Jingdezhen, China
Porcelain with cobalt
Gift of Robert Murray Bell and Ann Walker Bell

Axis of Evil Soap Dish, 2004
Walter Ostrom (American, b. 1944, active in Canada)
Earthenware with maiolica glaze
The Raphael Yu Collection

The Ale Bench, c. 1830-1835
Staffordshire, England
Glazed earthenware
Gift of S. J. Parks in memory of Faye Settler

RAPHAEL YU CENTRE
OF CANADIAN CERAMICS