

STUDIO VISIT

Billy Lloyd

London, England



Just the Facts

Clay

porcelain

Primary forming method

throwing

Primary firing temperature

bisque to 1832°F (1000°C), glaze to 2300°F (1260°C) in an electric kiln

Favorite surface treatment

a smooth, glazed surface

Favorite tools

potter's wheel

Studio

My studio is based at Cockpit Arts on Creekside in Deptford, south east London. The building, a former home to Lewisham Borough Council, was purchased in 2002 and consequently converted into studios for up to 65 designer-makers. The founding site of Cockpit Arts has been based in Holborn, central London, since 1986. Originally established to facilitate craft-based 'starter' units for young unemployed people, the organization grew into a hub of 100 designers by 2000. A business incubator model was introduced in 2005 in recognition of the need to nurture business as well as craft and in 2010 the organization became a qualified Social Enterprise (similar to a 501(c)3 in the US).

One of my favorite aspects of the studio is its location. Situated at the rear of the building's third floor, I have a fantastic panoramic view of Deptford's urban sprawl and glimpses of the river Thames. Deptford was home of the first Royal Dockyard and thus Creekside was once an area of thriving industry, a precedent of its shipbuilding heritage. The industry has since passed but left behind is a heady cosmopolitan regeneration area home to numerous art studios, galleries and other like-minded organizations including RIBA Sterling Prize winner, The Laban Dance School, designed by the Tate Modern's architects Herzog de Meuron.

I first came into contact with Cockpit Arts during the summer of 2005. Allison Wiffen, a Camberwell ceramics graduate, had recently moved in and asked me to assist her for six weeks. I was 21 at the time and keen to gain as much experience as possible. What struck me most about my time with Allison was the diversity of makers and sense of community she shared with them. One of Cockpit's great fortitudes is its cross-pollination of craft disciplines,



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opinions, and imaginations ensuing in a dynamic hive of creativity that is very much alive today.

Paying Dues (and Bills):

I was fortunate enough to go to a school in Oxford with a competent ceramics department, somewhat of a rarity in the UK these days. I remember being fascinated by the process of transforming a lump of soft clay into a considered three-dimensional ceramic form that could be functional and hand held. My interest in the variety of processes and the control one needs to utilize them has stuck with me from then, at the age of thirteen, to the present day via my GCSE's, A Levels, Art Foundation and the Ceramics BA I undertook at Camberwell College of Art and Design from 2003-2006.

I had a very positive response to my degree show and subsequently exhibited the collection at Hatfield House before it traveled to a gallery in Amsterdam. Soon after, I heard that Lisa Hammond, a well known soda-firing potter, was looking for a new apprentice. We met and decided that I would assist her for one year at her pottery in Greenwich. Our aesthetics are quite divergent: Lisa's work is more gestural than mine, but working with her gave me the chance

to learn about the work of another maker, to develop my throwing skills and also get an insight into running a business.

In 2007, following an interview and brief trial period, I was offered an apprenticeship by leading potter and writer Julian Stair. Julian was introduced to my work by Carina Piscato (his first apprentice), who briefly taught me at Camberwell. From the outset it was clear that we shared similar aesthetic and methodical sensibilities and so formed a close working relationship in his newly established 1800 square foot studio in East Dulwich, London. Working as part of a team of four, I undertook and assisted an array of studio duties that broadened my skills as a maker and communicator. We had a flexible working arrangement and ultimately everything I did with Julian contributed to my own progression. Julian is a generous mentor whose skill, ambition and scholarly approach to craft, art, and design I greatly admire and I feel privileged to have worked so closely with him for four years.

In the spring of 2011 I applied for and won the Cockpit Arts Award. CEO Vanessa Swann, head of Business Development Ellen O'Hara, and guest judge Priscilla Carluccio (sister of Sir Terence Conran) selected me to be the recipient of a free studio and business



mentoring for one year. Winning the award has provided me the time and space to grow my business and develop my profile. Cockpit offers a wide range of workshops tailored to the needs of makers at different stages of their careers and businesses. Seminars focused on costing, marketing and public relations, methods of manufacture, financial forecasting, and business planning have all helped to shape a strategic approach to my ceramics and the design-oriented direction I am heading in.

Body

Spending time wedging clay and hunched over a wheel is physically strenuous so I try look after myself as best as I can given my busy schedule. I enjoy walking and cycling in London and try to do as much as possible; it's a great way to get to know your surroundings, stretch your legs and clear your mind. I also have a program of exercises designed by a physiotherapist to ensure that I keep a good posture, which is vital for any thrower. Food plays an important part in my life too and so preparing and cooking a meal is always a welcome distraction.

Mind

Keeping abreast of current happenings within your field is important if you are to involve yourself in movements and debate. Magazines such as *Crafts*, *Ceramic Review*, *Wallpaper**, and *Icon* provide informed overviews of contemporary opinion and are a good place to start for any busy enthusiast or practitioner. One of the great attractions and benefits of life in London is the culture it has to offer.

From the raw and eclectic street markets to the exquisitely refined collections on view at the Victoria and Albert Museum, (V&A) London is vibrant. The newly refurbished ceramics galleries at the V&A are particularly inspiring, I often frequent the Design Museum, and the British Museum brilliantly depicts the history of mankind through objects. Two independent design galleries worthy of note are the eponymous Aram Gallery and Gallery Libby Sellers, both promoting innovative designers and makers. I find a solitary journey to a favorite or unknown part of London helps me to unwind and think creatively—I particularly enjoy visiting the functional elegance of the Margaret Howell, David Mellor and Jasper Morrison stores, to name but a few.

Marketing

Having developed my core range of tableware while working with Julian Stair, I initially started exhibiting at open studios and occasional exhibitions while taking on some small commissions. As my work progressed, so too did people's interest and slowly but surely relationships were built with a network of collectors, curators, and retailers.

Since moving to Cockpit Arts my career has gathered pace and I am now not only selling in the UK but will soon be selling at Beams Department Store in Tokyo, Japan and Mill Goods, a design store established by Sophie Dahl's brother Luke Kelly in New Hampshire. I have exhibited at large fairs during the London Design Festival such as Origin (now defunct), co-organized by the



Craft Council and TENT London, and have recently been selected as a member of Contemporary Applied Arts, a long-established gallery and retail outlet in central London. Participating in fairs and exhibitions has exposed my work to a wider audience and helped to generate not only sales but press, too.

From the outset, however, I have been as select as possible, choosing only to work with companies that share a similar approach to craft and design as me. The way in which you present your work and the work you are associated with are extremely important factors in building a successful identity and attracting discerning collaborators. I regularly have my work professionally photographed so as to keep my portfolio looking fresh, and in order to create a permanent online base for people to find my work, I designed my own website, which launched in 2010.

While I have been fortunate to have organically received interesting press and retail opportunities, I also work hard to instigate new avenues of retail. I am sure to respond positively and promptly when enquiries come my way, having learned that succinct and regular communication is key to any successful relationship. I also, therefore, write a newsletter every four to six months and have an active profile on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (a photo sharing app), which have all generated sales and press. In order to progress in a competitive environment, one has to fulfill various roles; designing, making, marketing, and selling all need constant attention.

As Cockpit Arts has a strong reputation for craftsmanship and design, journalists, curators, and retailers often contact the staff

with press requests, exhibition or retail opportunities, which are then filtered through to the makers to respond in kind. In addition, I believe that your working environment should reflect and enhance your work: I have designed the furniture and layout of my studio to be flexible enough to function both as workshop and as a presentable space in which to display and sell work to clients.

Towards the end of last year I made *An Edition Of Fifty Mugs*. Each mug was of a unique design in five geometric shapes. The mugs were for sale individually, however, Lady Vicky Conran purchased the whole set for Sir Terence Conran's Christmas present. The story has generated lots of interest in my work and is a great endorsement of an idea that I had been developing over a long period of time and a real highlight of my career so far.

Most Important Lesson

As a maker, you must remember that ultimately your work should speak for itself. There will be many times when your skill will be judged without your presence. If you haven't spent enough time really getting to know your craft, you have compromised your ability and lost track of what you set out to do in the first place. Equally, design is not only about products but people too; never forget those who helped steer you to where you are today, as well as those whom you hope will use your work.

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