

EXHIBITION GUIDE

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BREAK THE MOULD

25 MARCH – 6 SEPTEMBER 2026
FIRST FLOOR GALLERIES

Ikon presents *Break the Mould*, the final in a trilogy of exhibitions exploring craft, art school pedagogies and contemporary art practice. Focusing on ceramics, the exhibition positions clay as a site of experimentation, transforming the gallery into a laboratory for artist residencies, collaborative making and community engagement. Throughout the exhibition, visitors will encounter artists at work with the opportunity to take part in activities that bring ceramic processes to life.

Co-curated by Daphne Chu, Ikon Curator, and Will Kew, Education Coordinator, *Break the Mould* brings together leading ceramicists and contemporary artists whose practices challenge traditional boundaries of craft. Resident artists **Jack Ky Tan**, **Halima Cassell** and **Roo Dhissou** will work in the gallery during the exhibition alongside their own work and artworks by **Kara Chin**, **Mark Essen** and **Laurie Ramsell**. The exhibition hosts two Birmingham-based ceramic studios: **Sundragon Community Pottery**, a not-for-profit organisation in Balsall Heath, and *Modern Clay*, an artist-led cooperative clay studio in Digbeth.

At the entrance, Jack Ky Tan's *A Ceremony for the Unborn Future (2025)* [1] presents three ceramic urns inspired by

Shang Dynasty ceremonial bronzes, developed in dialogue with Artificial Intelligence. Collaged and adapted images from the Royal Geographical Society Picture Library appear behind the urns, drawing on Daoist cosmology and ritual symbolism. Tan's installation proposes a speculative ceremony that asks whether AI systems might be understood not as rupture, but as part of a longer continuum of cosmic and ethical thought.

On loan from Jerwood Collection, Halima Cassell's ***Shiraz (2004) [2]***, ***Concentric Flower (2003) [3]*** and ***Kirigami (2004) [4]*** showcase the geometric forms, intricate carving and architectural patterning that define her sculptural practice.

Responding to Birmingham's material history, in ***Deritend Revival (2026) [5]***, Mark Essen revisits the pottery produced in Birmingham from the 12th to 14th centuries. Reimagining the historic Deritend jug within the aesthetic of street art in Digbeth, the work connects Birmingham's medieval past with the vibrant creative culture of the area today. Nearby, Kara Chin showcases a series of 'future fossils': everyday objects rethought as artefacts in a distant future. ***Seagull Lure (2024) [6]*** considers the symbolic associations of birds as omens and messengers, sprung from a bento box, while a flaming bird spirit decorates a disintegrated ***Coffee Cup (2025) [7]***.

In the next gallery, Laurie Ramsell's ***Auras, Auguries, Augments (2025) [8]*** alludes to genetic modifications and disruptive technologies through embroidery on an apron, suggesting divination and possible futures. Embracing uncertainty and focusing on the creative potential of process, Ramsell's ***Chance (2024) [9]*** explores the precariousness of ceramic making, allowing the conditions of the kiln and firing to shape the final form.

Community, material and collective care are central to the practices of Roo Dhissou and Halima Cassell. Roo Dhissou's ***Heal, Home, Hmmm (2025) [10]*** is a walk-in pavilion exploring

sustainable architecture, cultural memory and community care. Built with reclaimed clay from HS2 construction sites supplied by Rescued Clay and using traditional Punjabi mud-building techniques, the structure incorporates a sound installation created in collaboration with sound artist Oliver Romoff. The work highlights how access, care and environmental responsibility shape the spaces we build and inhabit.

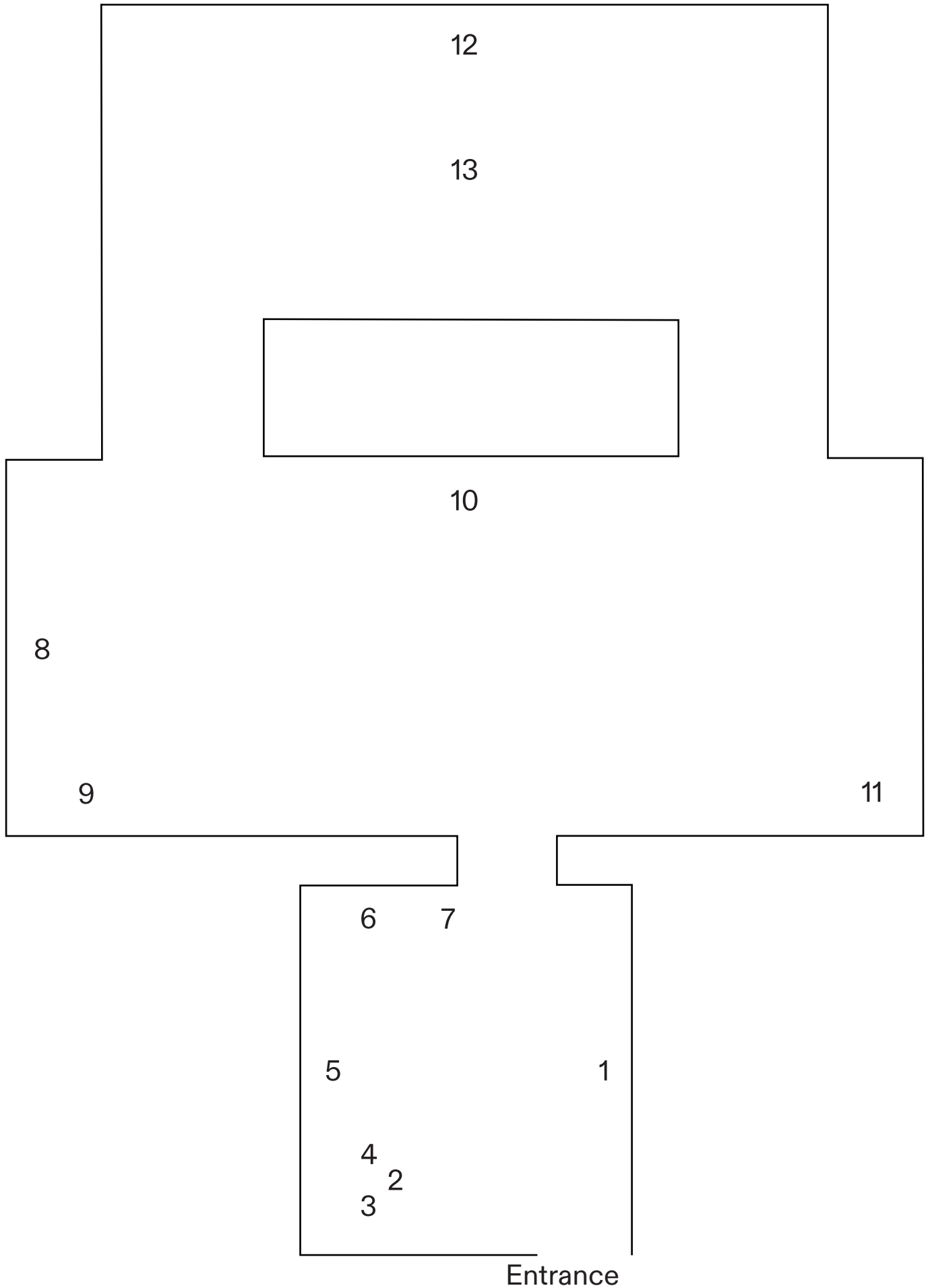
Halima Cassell's ongoing project *Virtues of Unity* (2009–) [11] contemplates shared humanity through hand-carved ceramic vessels. Each form features a soft, curvilinear structure pierced with openings that allow light to pass through. Made using clay gifted by friends and strangers from around the world, the project foregrounds a gift economy of materials, reminding us that nothing is created in isolation.

In the final gallery, six window vinyls by Kara Chin depict silhouettes of ceramic vessels [12], incorporating the surrounding cityscape into the exhibition. In the **Ceramics Studio** [13], resident artists will activate the space throughout the exhibition, championing a 'learning by doing' approach that enables visitors to observe and engage with diverse ceramic practices.

Through educational partnerships, local students will explore a range of ceramic techniques—from processing wild clay to creating architectural plaster moulds. Schools and colleges are invited to book onto BCU Explore Days at Ikon, introducing post-16 learners to innovative 3D modelling techniques with academic leads from Art, Product Design and Architecture courses at Birmingham City University.

Ikon Youth Programme, funded by Freelands Foundation, enact a summer 'takeover' of the Ceramics Studio in collaboration with Modern Clay.

GALLERY MAP



LIST OF WORKS

1. Jack Ky Tan, *A Ceremony for the Unborn Future* (2025), glazed ceramic, print with imagery from Royal Geographical Society Picture Library, London

Wanwu: the ten thousand bits,
Courtesy Nimrod Vardi and
Caroline Harris

*Wuji: the infinite unexecuted
algorithm*

*Taiji: the endless movement of
information*, Courtesy Helen Starr

2. Halima Cassell, *Shiraz* (2004),
unglazed clay
Courtesy Jerwood Collection

3. Halima Cassell, *Concentric
Flower* (2003), unglazed clay
Courtesy Jerwood Collection

4. Halima Cassell, *Kirigami* (2004),
unglazed clay
Courtesy Jerwood Collection

5. Mark Essen, *Deritend revival*
(2026), wheat-pasted billboard
with photo by Birmingham
Museums Trust, licensed under
CC0

6. Kara Chin, *Seagull Lure* (2024),
glazed ceramic, grout, pigment
Courtesy Kate MacGarry Gallery
and the artist

7. Kara Chin, *Coffee Cup* (2025),
glazed stoneware ceramic, grout,
embedded in concrete paving
stone

8. Laurie Ramsell, *Auras, Auguries,
Augments* (2025), cotton, rayon

9. Laurie Ramsell, *Chance* (2024),
ceramic

10. Roo Dhissou, *Heal, Home,
Hmmm* (2025), sculptural pavilion

11. Halima Cassell, *Virtues of Unity*
(2009-), 57 hand-carved clay
bodies in a range of stoneware
and earthenware, unglazed

12. Kara Chin, *Double-glazed Pots*
(2026), window vinyl

13. Ceramics Studio

All works courtesy the artist
unless otherwise stated

CERAMICS STUDIO SCHEDULE

As part of *Break the Mould*, three artists and Ikon Youth Programme present a Ceramics Studio.

Halima Cassell

Thursday 16 – Sunday 19 April

Friday 24 – Sunday 26 April

Jack Ky Tan

Tuesday 19 – Thursday 21 May

Tuesday 23 – Thursday 25 June

Tuesday 14 – Wednesday 15 July

Roo Dhissou

Tuesday 28 April – Saturday 2 May

Friday 8 May

Sunday 10 May

Tuesday 12 – Thursday 14 May

Ikon Youth Programme x Modern Clay

Tuesday 2 – Sunday 14 June

Tuesday 4 – Sunday 16 August

The firing of Jack Ky Tan's work is generously supported by Emily John; Lily Savill, Senior Technician, Ceramics and Plaster; and Matthew Thomas, Technical Manager at Birmingham City University.

EXHIBITION SUPPORTERS

This exhibition is supported by Jerwood Foundation, Freelands Foundation and ai. gallery.

With thanks to Birmingham City University whose innovative new partnership enables Ikon Gallery to open on Tuesdays.

FREE DIGITAL GUIDE

Discover more about the exhibition with our free digital guide on Bloomberg Connects, the arts and culture app.



EVENTS

Clay, Yarn, and Ink: The Interplay between Heritage Crafts and Contemporary Art

Friday 15 May, 2-6pm

Free, booking essential, suggested donation £5.

Book your place on our website ikon-gallery.org.



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Open Tuesday–Sunday, 11am–5pm

Free entry, donations welcome

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