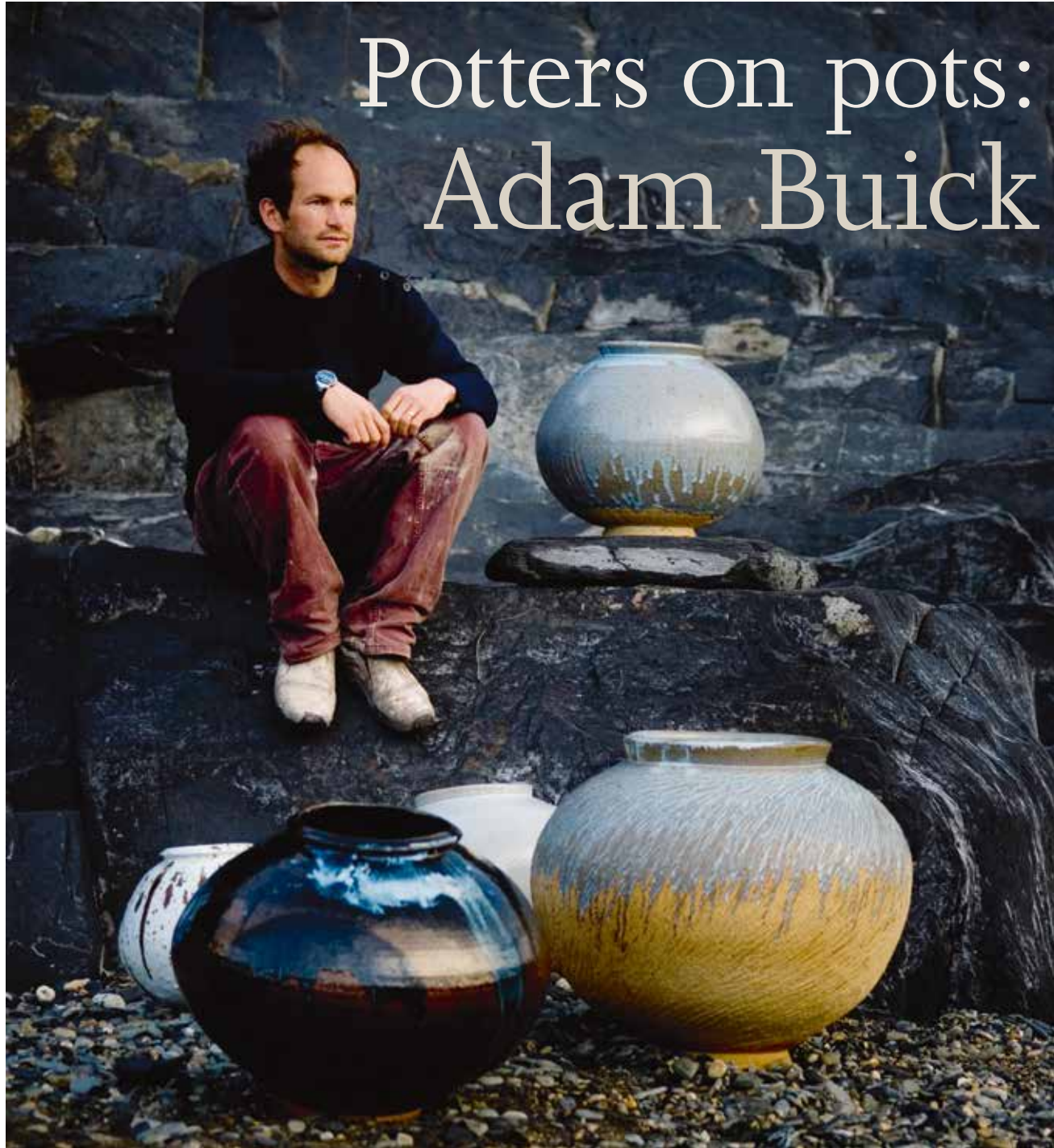


Potters on pots: Adam Buick



Interview: Isabella Smith. Images: Greg Rodland Buick, © Trustees of the British Museum

For over a decade, ceramic artist *Adam Buick* has been inspired by a historic Korean Moon Jar. Here, Adam tells us more about this important piece and its deep influence on his own work

The shapes I throw are based on Korean Moon Jars (*dal hang-ari*). These are a form from the Choson dynasty (1392-1910), which was originally made from plain white porcelain. The jars were used for storing rice, soy sauce, alcohol and occasionally for displaying flowers. They represented the epitome of the austere Confucian virtues of purity, honesty and modesty, and were also thought to represent the gentle qualities of womanhood and fertility.

Park Youngsook, the only modern exponent of Korean Moon Jars, points out the technical skills required to make them: the top and bottom are thrown separately, then they are joined in the centre. A careful firing schedule is needed at high temperatures to fuse both halves together successfully. The halves can sometimes shrink unevenly during firing, leading to subtly asymmetric forms.

Housed in the British Museum in London is a Moon Jar that Bernard Leach brought back from Seoul – one of only 20 original Moon Jars in existence. He bought it in Korea in 1935, and in 1943 gave it to Lucie Rie, who kept it in her studio until her death. Leach and his contemporaries in Japan admired it for its lack of self-consciousness and the beauty of its slight imperfections; I too was struck by these qualities, and by its serenity and simplicity. I was so inspired by this pure form that for the past eleven years I have made little else – not trying to replicate it exactly, but to capture its ephemeral qualities. Keeping Confucian virtues in mind, I now use the Moon Jar as the basis of my work.

I first saw the Moon Jar in 2005, in the exhibition *International Arts & Crafts at the V&A*. It featured in the exhibition because of its significant influence on the Mingei (Folk Crafts) movement in Japan. I have visited it in the British Museum many times since. In 2013 my work was part of the exhibition *Moon Jar: Contemporary Translations* at the Korean Cultural Centre in London, in which this original Jar was also shown. Last year I was fortunate enough to have had one of my Moon Jars gifted to the British Museum; it has been exhibited adjacent to the historic Moon Jar that first inspired me.

I strive for every Jar I make to have presence. I don't set out to make Jars that are pure, honest and modest, but I do hope that some of these qualities are reflected through my practice. My inspiration is also deeply connected to a study of my surroundings. My studio is situated in Llanferran on the north coast of the St. Davids peninsula in Wales. The way I observe, experience and understand the landscapes I experience is – I hope – reflected in the embellishment of the surfaces of my pieces. I endeavour to convey a sense that the Jars contain something greater than themselves, while showing an appreciation for the serenity of the landscape.

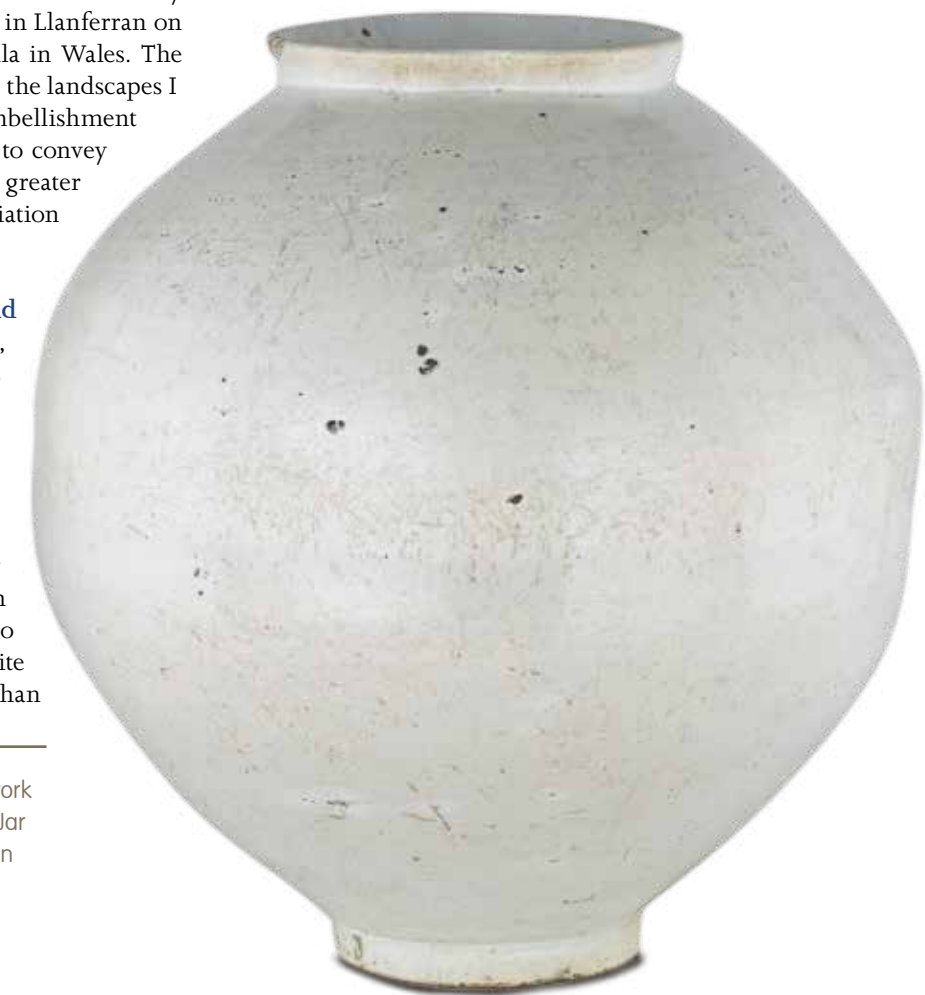
My Jars explore notions of beauty and perfection. As in the natural world, beauty is often found where there is tension between rugged and soft, pattern and chaos, perfection and imperfection. Between the balance of perfection and imperfection lies beauty. This balance or tension is often what gives a piece presence. In recent years I've moved away from the title of 'Moon Jar' as I feel that in some sense my pieces have developed into something different. Very few are white porcelain, their forms are often fuller than

the originals, and the surfaces are so diverse that they no longer resonate with that title (though the relationship between foot ring and rim is still there). But the original starting point is still strong – it very much remains the canvas onto which I work.

I even use this form for more conceptual artworks. For instance, in my most recent project *Place of Seven* I set seven ceramic vessels adrift from the coast of Ireland in the hope that they would travel the Irish Sea and reach the coast of Wales. The vessels are Moon Jar forms capped with Perspex and housing tracking devices. Most have actually ended up on the Isle of Man and two are off the coast of Scotland. (Editor's note: read more about this project on our News pages)

People often ask if I get bored with making the same form over and over. I actually find it quite freeing. I don't have to think about form and that gives me the freedom to play with the surface, concept and content of each piece. This simple form, revered by the Korean people for hundreds of years, still resonates today. ☞

Find out more about Adam's work at adambuick.com



LEFT: Adam Buick with examples of his own work
RIGHT: Glazed white porcelain Korean Moon Jar dating from the 18th century, from the collection of the British Museum