

## BREAK THE MOULD 25 MARCH – 6 SEPTEMBER 2026



Jack Ky Tan, *A Ceremony for the Unborn Future* (2025)  
© Courtesy the artist. Photo by Zula Rabikowska

Ikon presents *Break the Mould*, the final exhibition in a trilogy exploring craft, art school pedagogies and contemporary art practice. This show focuses on ceramics, positioning clay as a site of experimentation. Running from 25 March to 6 September 2026, *Break the Mould* transforms the gallery into a laboratory for residencies, collaborative making and public engagement. Throughout the exhibition visitors will see artists at work and take part in activities that bring the process of making to life.

*Break the Mould* brings together leading ceramicists and contemporary artists who challenge traditional boundaries of craft. Resident artists [Jack Ky Tan](#), [Halima Cassell](#) and [Roo Dhissou](#) will work in the gallery during the exhibition, alongside artworks by [Kara Chin](#), [Mark Essen](#) and [Laurie Ramsell](#). The exhibition also hosts two Birmingham ceramics workshops; [Sundragon Community Pottery](#), a not-for-profit organisation in Balsall Heath; and [Modern Clay](#), an artist-led cooperative clay studio in Digbeth.

**Jack Ky Tan's** *A Ceremony for the Unborn Future* (2025) features three ceramic urns drawn from Shang Dynasty ceremonial bronzes, developed in dialogue with AI systems. Collaged and adapted images from the Royal Geographical Society sit behind the urns, inspired by Daoist cosmology. Tan's work proposes a speculative ritual that asks whether AI could be understood as a contemporary cosmic force.

Responding to Birmingham's history, **Mark Essen** revisits the medieval Deritend ware jug—pottery produced in Birmingham during the 12th and 13th century. The work blends the image of the jug with the aesthetic of contemporary Digbeth street art, connecting Birmingham's often-overlooked medieval history with its vibrant modern creative scene in the Digbeth area.

**Laurie Ramsell's** work focuses on the creative process, exploring chance and precarity through ceramic works shaped by the kiln and firing process. Whilst **Kara Chin** presents works envisioned as 'future fossils': objects imagined as artefacts for a distant future.

Community and material are central to the practices of **Roo Dhissou** and **Halima Cassell**. Roo Dhissou's *Heal, Home, Hmmm* (2025) is a walk-in pavilion that explores sustainable architecture, community care, and cultural memory. Built with reclaimed HS2 clay supplied by Rescued Clay and using traditional Punjabi mud-building techniques, the structure features a sound installation created in collaboration with sound artist Oliver Romoff. The work reflects on how access, care, and environmental responsibility shape the spaces we build.

On loan from Jerwood Foundation, Halima Cassell's *Kirigami* (2004), *Shiraz* (2004) and *Concentric Flower* (2003) showcase geometric forms, recurring patterns and architectural principles that define her work. Cassell's ongoing project, *Virtues of Unity* (2009-present), reflects on shared humanity through hand-carved ceramic vessels. Each form shares a soft, curvilinear form, pierced to let light through. Made using clay gifted by friends and strangers from around the world, the work reminds us that nothing is made in isolation.

In collaboration with Birmingham ceramic studios **Sundragon Community Pottery** and **Modern Clay**, audiences are invited to witness making in action and get hands on experience with clay. Through educational partnerships, local students will investigate a range of ceramic techniques, from processing wild clay to making architectural plaster moulds. Schools and colleges are invited to book onto **BCU Explore Days** at Ikon that introduce post-16 learners to a range of innovative 3D modelling techniques with academic leads from Art, Product Design and Architecture courses. **Ikon Youth Programme**, funded by Freelands Foundation,

will stage a 'take over' of the gallery space with Modern Clay during the summer holidays.

The exhibition is co-curated by Daphne Chu, Ikon Curator, and Will Kew, Ikon's Education Coordinator. Daphne Chu said "*Break the Mould shows clay as a material that transforms. It links past traditions with future possibilities.*" Will Kew adds "*This is a space for making and learning together. It's about care, creativity and sharing ideas.*"

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



## About the resident artists

[Jack Ky Tan](#) is a UK-based interdisciplinary artist working across performance, sculpture, installation and institutional critique. His practice is an ongoing exploration of social justice that blurs the boundaries between, art, law, governance, and consultancy. Looking toward alternative knowledge systems, Tan interrogates the legacies of empire with a particular interest in Southeast Asian and Tropical epistemologies of resistance. His work attempts to rethink our entanglement with the human and more-than-human worlds, and looks towards alternative ways of living and working. Tan will present outcomes from his studio and curatorial research into the 'Colonial Asian Middle' at Camden Art Centre in 2026, and an exhibition about artistic thinking in organisational behaviour at John Hansard Gallery in 2027.

[Halima Cassell](#) was born in Kashmir, Pakistan, raised in the north-west of England, and now lives and works in Shropshire. Her multicultural background is a powerful influence that resonates throughout her work. A compelling fusion of cultural influences, her work is rooted in her Asian heritage, inspired by African patterning, and driven by a deep fascination with architectural geometry. Working across a variety of media, Cassell continues to explore and expand her creative practice. In recognition of her contribution to the arts, she was awarded a fellowship of the Royal Society of Sculptors in 2016 and an MBE in 2022 for Services to Art.

Artist and researcher [Roo Dhissou](#)'s practice spans sculpture, installation, moving image, craft, and community-engaged collaboration. Rooted in care, cultural context, and integrity, her

work challenges dominant narratives and reflects deeply on disability, lived experience, social, environmental and material justice. Through reflective processes and ethical research, Dhissou values relationship-building and intuition, prioritising process over product to create thoughtful, impactful work. Exhibiting widely across the UK, Dhissou received the Serpentine Galleries' Support Structures fellowship in 2024, recognising social justice-driven visual art.

**For more information**, press appointments, high-res images and to request interviews please contact [press@ikon-gallery.org](mailto:press@ikon-gallery.org) or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

**Social Media:** @ikongallery #IkonGallery @ace\_national @aceagrams @ace\_midlands

## Notes to editors

1. **Ikon Gallery**, 1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS. 0121 248 0708 / [ikon-gallery.org](http://ikon-gallery.org) Open Tuesday-Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm. Free entry, donations welcome. Ikon Gallery Limited trading as Ikon. Registered charity no. 528892.
2. **Ikon** is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art gallery, situated in Birmingham's city centre. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2024. It is an educational charity with free entry for all and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Ikon aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art.
3. **Ikon Shop** is Birmingham's only specialist art bookshop, stocking a range of books, cards, artists' limited editions, magazines and gifts. All profits from Ikon Shop support Ikon Gallery's charitable artistic and educational programme. [shop.ikon-gallery.org](http://shop.ikon-gallery.org)
4. **Ikon** is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, and Birmingham City Council.
5. **Arts Council England** is the national development agency for creativity and culture. ACE have set out their strategic vision in *Let's Create* that by 2030 they want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and

where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 ACE will invest over £467 million of public money from Government and an estimated £250 million from The National Lottery each year to help to deliver this vision. [artscouncil.org.uk](http://artscouncil.org.uk)

6. **Jerwood Foundation.** Established in 1977 for John Jerwood MC (1918-1991) by Alan Grieve CBE (1928-2025), Jerwood Foundation is a UK charity committed to supporting excellence and emerging talent in the arts in the UK. Alan Grieve served as Chairman for over 30 years and was appointed Chairman Emeritus in 2023, when Rupert Tyler was appointed Chairman. The organisation is led by Lara Wardle, Executive Director and Trustee and to date Jerwood Foundation has committed over £113 million to support the arts in the UK.

Jerwood Foundation owns the Jerwood Collection of modern and contemporary art, and an important part of Jerwood's philanthropic mission is delivered by the Collection through its loaning programme and promotion of a broader understanding, interpretation and enjoyment of art. Also included in the Jerwood group of organisations is Jerwood Space, which was Jerwood's first major capital project when established by Jerwood Foundation in Southwark in 1998. Jerwood Space is a dedicated rehearsal space providing theatre, musical theatre, opera and dance companies with an outstanding environment within which to create their work. [jerwood.org](http://jerwood.org)

7. **Freelands Foundation** believes in the intrinsic value of art and that making is fundamental. Its vision is to increase the status of art education, enable equality of access and promote material literacy.

The Foundation supports this important work in formal education settings, in galleries and art organisations, and by learning through artistic practice. Its charitable programme provides vital funding through grants, awards, fellowships and residencies.

It also commissions innovative action research to inform the Foundation's future support and to help make progress across the sector.

At the Foundation's home in London, as well as online, there is a programme of lively discussions, workshops and events for teachers, artists, gallery and art professionals, alongside a growing a library of inspiring art education resources.

[freelandsfoundation.co.uk](http://freelandsfoundation.co.uk)

8. **ai. Gallery** Based in London, ai. is a gallery platform committed to encouraging dialogue and challenging the notions of the East and West. It has a permanent space at 1a Tenter Ground, London, E1 7NH.