



# TRANSPORTED

ROGER LAW & STEPHEN BIRD





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ROGER LAW



STEPHEN BIRD

30 November – 23 December 2016

**THE SCOTTISH GALLERY**

CONTEMPORARY ART SINCE 1842

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Left: *Fogg Dam Tapestry* (detail), from an original watercolour, *Early Morning - Fogg Dam*, Roger Law (cat. 2)

Front cover: Roger Law working at the Big Pot Factory, Jingdezhen, China. Photo: Derek Au





*Roger Law Toby*, 2012

Stephen Bird

clay, pigment, glaze, H35 x W18 x D24 cms



*Self Portrait*, 2012

Stephen Bird

clay, pigment, glaze, H36 x W16 x D20 cms

# FOREWORD

Roger Law approached The Gallery in early 2014 with an idea for an exhibition which centred around cultural transportation, stemming from his own experience of living and working in Australia and his various journeys to China, where he frequently works and from where his ceramics return to Europe to be exhibited and sold.

The exhibition quickly evolved as a two-hander with his friend Stephen Bird. The two had met in Sydney and Law wrote the introduction to Bird's 2013 Edinburgh International Festival show with The Gallery *My Dad was Born on the Moon*. Bird was born in The Potteries, trained at Duncan of Jordanstone in Dundee and making his home and a huge international reputation from Sydney he remains aloof from any artist pigeon-hole. Law's subject is far from the historical-political world from which Bird extracts his concepts; he looks rather to nature (his subjects are delightful caricatures of the evolutionary process) while his design emphasis is on the decorative. In common, both artists are essentially subversive with little interest in convention; both are master craftsmen and both have completed residencies in China this year, acutely aware of the complex, vital history of their chosen medium between China and the West. *Transported* is an exhibition which spans three continents and brings together two very different visions of the world, all the work shipped from both China and Australia to be showcased in Edinburgh together for the first time. The Gallery is very grateful to Roger Law and Stephen Bird for this mammoth effort. The Gallery is also grateful to Merran Esson for her fascinating, insightful introductory essay.

Christina Jansen  
The Scottish Gallery

# TRANSPORTED

For over two centuries the traffic between UK and Australia has seen a good many folk transported, our first arrivals were as prisoners deported from mother England to the Australian penal colony. When Roger Law and Stephen Bird made the journey it was by choice. Transporting oneself to the other side of the world is often more than just shifting one's body, it is about a change in so many other things, a change in culture, lifestyle, influences, seasons, and the way one goes about one's work. Both Roger Law and Stephen Bird were up for a change.

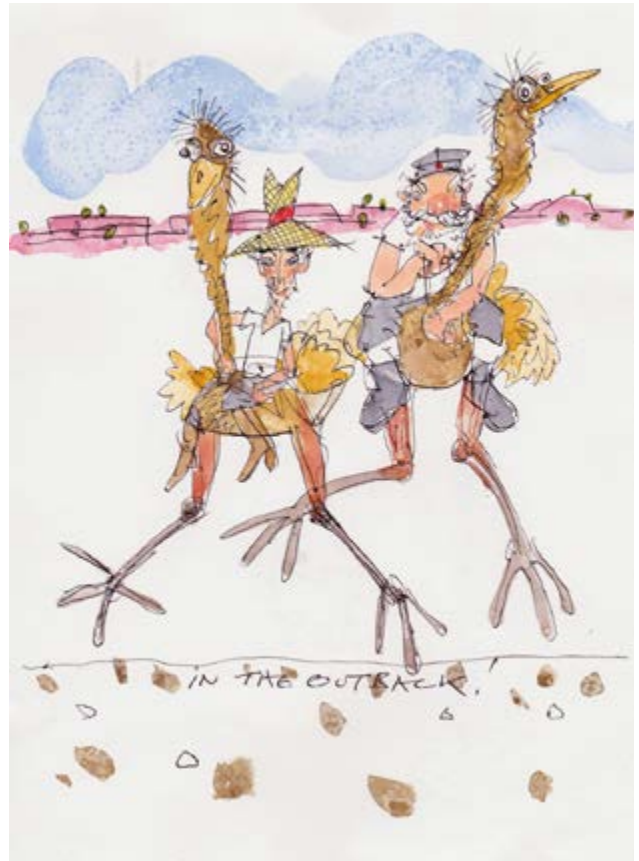
Roger Law arrived in 1998, a big man with a large presence; he had been part of the successful duo of Fluck and Law, the creators of the very successful satirical TV programme *Spitting Image*. Roger had virtually worked himself into the ground, meeting the deadlines of TV and the fame and pressures of the program. He arrived in Sydney, without a plan, but knowing that he needed to get away and to get back to drawing and to find time to make things. Through an introduction from Bill Leak, a cartoonist here in Sydney, I met Roger and found him some studio space within the walls of the National Art School. Roger had unwittingly landed into one of Sydney's leading art schools, which is housed in what was Sydney's earliest gaol. Roger writes that he needed this type of confinement. He was invited as an artist in residence, and given a cell in the Ceramics Department in block 24. His three-month sentence ended up being lengthened to almost a year. I'd like to think that the crop of students at that time learnt quite a lot from watching Roger as he settled into art school life for the second time in his life. Older and wiser, he covered the walls of his studio with drawings and set about understanding the flora and fauna of Australia. He laughs about his first attempts at firing pots in the college kilns, expecting glaze tests to just turn out perfectly. However, that year turned out to have an ever-lasting effect on him and the decisions he has made since. He joined a group of National Art School students and visited China in 1998. He was introduced to the porcelain city of Jingdezhen and he has been transporting himself there ever since. He works in collaboration and has developed a network of throwers, carvers, glazers and firers. Roger Law now makes pots.

Stephen first arrived in Australia in 1999 and I met him in 2005 when he started making work in my Sydney studio for his first solo exhibition at the Ray Hughes Gallery in Sydney. He is a quizzical man with a curious mind and a very quick eye and wit. His transportation was much easier, as

his father is Australian, so his entry into the country was assured. Born in Stoke-on-Trent and raised in Scotland, Stephen had a keen interest in UK politics through the tough years of Thatcherism, and the lean years of working as an artist after art school.

Both these artists were exploring a different way of living, Roger who had basically retired himself from the rigours of *Spitting Image* and Stephen who is 20 years younger, were both searching for a place where the sun shines and where the art world is different. Transportation is a two-way journey, in 1960's most of the traffic went the other way with Australian artists heading to the UK to live and work. Perhaps we Aussies see UK and Europe with all its history as exotic. Both Law and Bird looked at Australia in a way that Australians don't. Stephen Bird is definitely part of a change in Australian ceramics. Australia has no ceramics history, ceramic influences came to Australia through trading routes, and after WWII Australian potters turned their eyes to the East. Fine porcelains from China and wood-fired tea bowls and blossom jars from Japan. Roger Law saw a photo of a feldspathic glazed tea bowl and yearned to master this glaze, he says that his first attempt resulted in a pile of ceramic crisps in the college kiln and caused him to leave until the laughter died down. Of course this is not quite true, but this hugely successful man had learnt that he needed to start all over again to learn a new language of clay.

Stephen Bird on the other hand had brought with him a refreshed view of earthenware. He creates plates, figures, pots and sculptures, painted with layers of coloured slip and under-glazes, and topped with enamels, decals and lustres. His colour palette has been developed through many firings and a solid technical understanding of how things work in the kiln. He shows us that humour and 'violence is best served up on a plate'<sup>1</sup>. I think he offers Australia a very different tradition. It is the tradition of Staffordshire



Above: Illustration, *Racing Emus in the Outback*, Roger Law



1.  
*Korean Vase and Poppies*  
 brush drawing, 68 x 64.5 cms

ceramics and the story telling of human life though the sometimes mundane daily tasks that each of us has, to the brutal activities of war and aggression, and of sex, love and the whole damn thing.

Australia has made a difference to Roger Law; Stephen Bird has made a difference to Australia. Bird arrived in Australia at a time of political upheaval and the war in the Middle East. He cast his net wide, reading newspapers, playing with headlines and challenging all sorts of traditions. I watched influences from Afghan war rugs in my home appear ever so beautifully in his work. Bird created images of war machinery such as tanks, helicopters and guns, on the sides of the work that he was making at that time, using cut outs of beautiful flower decals; such a clever subversion.

What brings these two artists together other than clay is their use of drawing as a means of discovery. In the case of Roger Law it was by looking at the Australian landscape, both saltwater and freshwater, particularly up around Fogg Dam in the Northern Territory. He spent a number of years living at Bondi Beach and swimming every day. His beautiful sketches and watercolour drawings have been translated onto ceramic plates using brushstrokes of cobalt oxide and most recently into a large colourful tapestry. The man is unstoppable.

Stephen Bird's sketchbooks are a constant store of ideas and images. Sometimes developed as paintings but still with a strong ceramics practice. He is fascinated by what goes on around him in politics and the news, and by observing his children, often using their toys as starting points in the clay moulding and building processes.

Stephen Bird and Roger Law have just recently returned from a trip to China. They were on separate residencies and missed each other by a few weeks. China is not a place





to stay for too long, the air in Jingdezhen is polluted from the amount of silica dust in the atmosphere. Roger speaks about his trips becoming shorter as his body tries to cope with the pollution and Stephen found the experience quite overwhelming. However, this experience and an earlier residency in Korea introduced Bird to modelling small sculptures in porcelain. In understanding why China is called China is to recognise that China sits on a great big slab of porcelain clay, of course it is under the topsoil of agriculture, but there are tonnes of it there. These small and very intimate sculptures of Stephen Bird's are exquisite.

The main connection between these two artists is friendship. Roger wrote the introduction to Stephen's exhibition catalogue *My Dad was Born on the Moon*, The Scottish

Gallery, 2013. It spells out their respect for each other. It's a friendship that has developed over the last 10 years. Both of these artists have found their own language with clay and the influence of travel between three quite different countries and cultures. Roger has transported himself back to the UK, settling near the marshes of Norfolk. He swims every evening in summer as the tide turns, and continues to explore the coastline for new drawings and ideas. Stephen and I still share a common studio in Sydney. His plates are multiplying as the world continues to throw more and more subject matter to him. He has just won the 2016 Gold Coast International Ceramic Art Award, and he is a lecturer in Ceramics at The National Art School in Sydney. He is destined to travel between both countries for a few more decades.

"It is very rare to create an object which is both beautiful and makes you smile. But it is not the critical humour of the caricaturist. It is the affectionate humour of the close observer. And it is in the long tradition of the grotesque in art."<sup>2</sup> Although written about Roger Law's work, I think this quote is perfect as a reference to view this exhibition of ceramics and drawing from both these artists.

Merran Esson,  
Sydney 2016

- 1 Roger Law, 'Stephen Bird, My Dad was Born on the Moon', *Craft Arts International* 88, 2013, p.105
- 2 Lesley Garner, 'Roger Law. The Long March to Jingdezhen', Catalogue essay, Sladmore Gallery, 2014, p.8

Above: Illustration, *Birdie in the Red Centre*, Roger Law







Roger Law working at the Big Pot Factory, Jingdezhen, China. Photo: Derek Au



2.

*Fogg Dam Tapestry*, from an original watercolour,  
*Early Morning - Fogg Dam*, Roger Law

acrylic, wool, cotton and other assorted yarns, sourced from  
Italy, Spain and Japan, H197 x W143 cms

Production: Factum Arte: Adam Lowe, Blanca Nieto and  
Isabel Fernández.

Weavers: Flanders Tapestries: Roland Dekeukelaere, Joke  
Dekeukelaere and Christian Dekeukelaere. Textile designer:  
Marcos Ludueña-Segre. Textile Finishing: Factum Arte

Photo: Oak Taylor-Smith, Factum Arte





3.  
*Fogg Dam Panorama*  
brush drawing, H41.5 x W81.5 cms





4.

*Jesus Bird Plate*

blue and white porcelain, D37 cms

Photo: John Lawrence Jones

5.

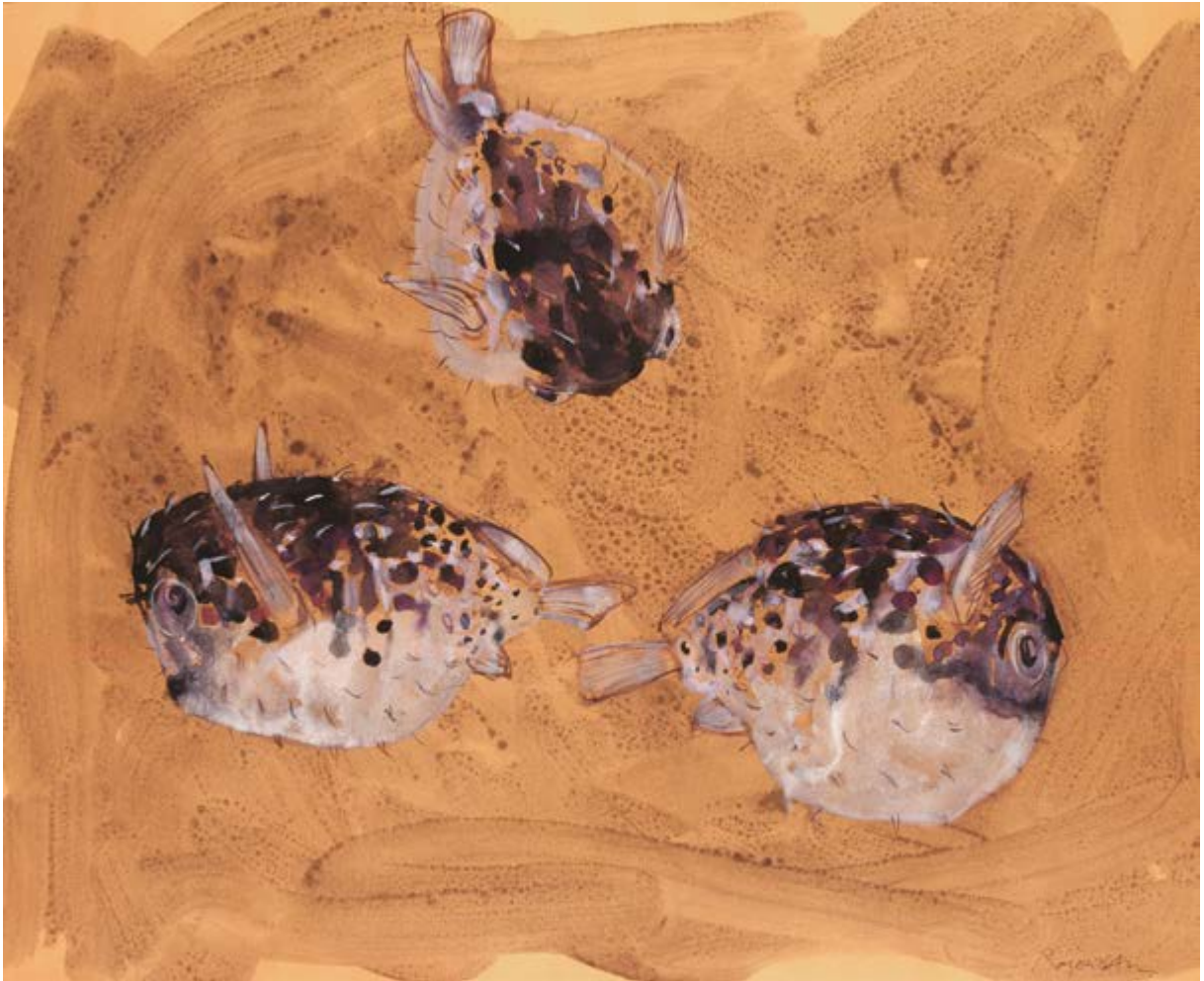
*Saltwater Vase*

hand-carved and modelled porcelain with olive green glaze,  
H52 x W54 cms

Photo: John Lawrence Jones







6.  
*Three Puffer Fish*  
brush drawing, H67 x W81 cms



7.  
*Mudskipper Plate*  
porcelain, D36 cms  
Photo: John Lawrence Jones



8.

*Crab Dance*

brush drawing, H77 x W55 cms



9.

*Crab Dance Vase*

blue and white porcelain, H33 x W16 cms

Photo: John Lawrence Jones



10.

*Eels Plate*

blue and white porcelain, D37 cms

Photo: John Lawrence Jones



11.

*Cheerleader Crabs Charger III*

celadon glazed hand-carved porcelain, D64 cms

Photo: John Lawrence Jones







12.

*Song Salad Bowl*

celadon glazed porcelain, H11 x D23.7 cms

Photo: John Lawrence Jones



13.

*Mudskipper Bowls*

celadon glazed porcelain, H7 x D22 cms

Photo: John Lawrence Jones



14.  
*Crayfish*  
watercolour, H46 x W33 cms



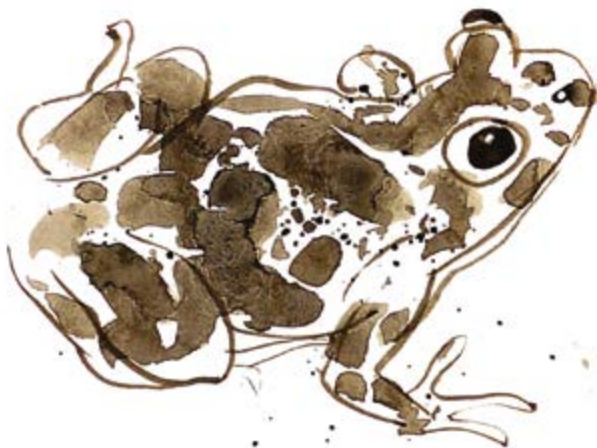


15.

*Copper Red Pot With Crayfish Handles*

porcelain, copper red glaze, H44 x W60 cms

Photo: Derek Au



16.

*Frog*

brush drawing, H43 x W46 cms



17.  
*Pair of Painted Bowls*  
porcelain, H8 x D21 cms  
Photo: John Lawrence Jones



18.

*Platypus Round Platter*

black oxide on matt white glazed stoneware,  
Dartington Pottery, D46 cms

Photo: John Lawrence Jones





19.

*Korean Vase Square Platter*

black oxide on matt white glazed stoneware,  
Dartington Pottery, H36 x W36 cms

Photo: John Lawrence Jones

20.

*Korean Vase Charger*

celadon glazed, hand-carved porcelain, D64 cms

Photo: John Lawrence Jones





*Roger Law Toby, 2012*

Stephen Bird

clay, pigment, glaze, H35 x W18 x D24 cms



# ROGER LAW b.1941

From the early 1960s Roger Law made caricatures for publications such as *The New York Times*, the *London Sunday Times*, and *Der Spiegel*, which in 1984 culminated in the topical satirical television show *Spitting Image*. For around thirteen years he was kept busy trying to meet impossible deadlines.

When the show closed in 1997 Law did what some people thought was the only decent thing he could do; possibly ever had done. He transported himself to Australia. Having lost all appetite for modelling caricatures (his quickest record for roughing out a life-size caricature head in clay was three minutes) fortunately he retained a fascination with the surreal and grotesque. Australia has an abundance of both. He bought himself paint and brushes and began chasing rainbows.

Law travelled extensively in Australia from Arnhem Land in the north to the Coorong in the south, drawing and painting Australia's strange flora and fauna. After years of satirising the insanity of western politics and contemporary life he began reconnecting with the natural world again. Law's formative years were spent in the Norfolk Fens during the 1940s and 50s. Much of the flora and fauna of that era has vanished from the Fens. And in Australia he celebrated and recorded Australian wildlife and wetlands, which are also gradually disappearing.

Hardly had Law settled in Australia before he clocked the influence of Asia on Australian art. His growing interest in ceramics inevitably took him to China. He took his Australian drawings and sketch books to Jingdezhen, China's Porcelain City, where the Chinese have made porcelain for over two thousand years. Most years, since 2000, Law has worked for several months at a stretch in the porcelain workshops of Jingdezhen making finely crafted ceramics full of light and energy, that surprise and delight – dancing crabs, leaping mudfish and of course the platypus – as witty and beautiful as the *Spitting Image* caricatures were rude and ugly.

*Roger Law is represented by Sladmore Contemporary, London.*



Stephen Bird in his studio in Alexandria, Sydney, 2016







21.  
*Roger At The Big Pot Factory*, 2012  
glazed porcelain, H7 x W23 cms





22.  
*The Artist With His Children*, 2015  
clay, pigment and glaze, H43 x W23 x D23 cms



23.  
*Head Plate, 2015*  
 clay pigment and glaze, H29.5 x W24 cms



24.  
*Do You Like My Earrings, 2016*  
 tin glazed earthenware, H29 x W24 cmsb



25.  
*Andy Murray Gold Spoon, 2016*  
tin glazed earthenware, D22 cms



26.  
*Vincent Eating Chrome Paint*, 2016  
glazed earthenware, H53.5 x W44 cms





27.

*Korean Man With Jug, 2015*

Korean buncheong clay with pigment and glaze,  
H35 x W15.5 x D15 cms



28.

*Toby Eating A Biscuit*, 2016

enameled porcelain, H13 x W11 x D9 cms



29.  
*Big Bong Theory*, 2015  
 clay pigment glaze, H32 x W39 cms



30.  
*Come Back With My Balloons*, 2016  
 glazed earthenware, H32 x W39 cms



31.

*Sydney Dandy*, 2014

clay, pigment and glaze, H36 x W22 x D16 cms





32.  
*Bernard Leach In Japan, 2015*  
clay, pigment and glaze, H33 x W40 cms

34



33.

*Death, 2015*

clay, pigment and glaze, H22 x W31 cms

34.

*Be Normal, 2016*

glazed earthenware, D27 cms

35.

*Now Look At Me, 2014*

clay, pigment and glaze, H24 x W31 cms

33



35





36.  
*15 Years Later*, 2015  
clay, pigment and glaze, D28 cms





37.

*Worst Haircut Ever*, 2016

glazed earthenware, H40 x W33 cms





38.  
*Floral Head With Bee Stings, 2016*  
tin glazed earthenware, H44 x W36 cms



39.  
*Walking Man Purple And Yellow*, 2016  
 glazed earthenware, D28 cms



40.  
*Girl With A Flower*, 2016  
 glazed porcelain, D13.5 cms



41.  
*Man Hanging A Wall Of Plates*, 2015  
clay, pigment and glaze, H52 x W43 cms





42.  
*Wedding Party*, 2016  
glazed earthenware, H36 x W42 cms





43.  
*Goddess With SpongeBob SquarePants*, 2016  
Jingdezhen porcelain with blue celadon glaze,  
H16 x W10 x D9 cms



44.

*Monkey*, 2014

clay, pigment and glaze, H34 x W19 x D22 cms



45.  
*For Your Convenience*, 2016  
glazed earthenware, H40 x W50 cms

# STEPHEN BIRD b.1964

- 1964 Born Stoke on Trent, UK  
1987 B.A. (Hons) Fine Art, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee  
1988 Post Graduate, Cyprus College of Art, Lemba, Paphos  
1998 Higher National Certificate, Ceramics, Angus College of Further Education  
Lives and works Sydney (AUS) and Dundee (UK)  
Nationality: British and Australian

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *A Melting Moment*, Olsen Irwin, Woollahra, New South Wales, Australia  
2014 *Once Upon A Time In New England*, Gould Galleries, South Yarra, Australia  
2013 *My Dad Was Born On The Moon*, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh  
2012 *Where the wild roses grow*, Rex Irwin Art Dealer, Sydney, Australia  
2011 *Staffordshire Psycho*, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane, Australia  
2010 *War on pottery*, Rex Irwin Art Dealer, Sydney, Australia  
*Irony makes a country strong*, Gould gallery, Melbourne, Australia  
*Industrial Sabotage Phase-3*, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland  
2009 *New work*, Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney, Australia  
*Windows show*, Bluecoat Display Centre, Liverpool, UK  
2008 *Industrial Sabotage*, Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney, Australia  
*The view from here, paintings from Australia*, Open Eye Gallery, Edinburgh  
2007 Compass Gallery, Glasgow  
*Figure this*, The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent

- 2006 The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh  
2005 Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney, Australia  
2004 England & Co, London  
One Five Two Gallery, Dundee Contemporary Arts  
2003 *A journey to Australia through India, S.E. Asia*, Open Eye Gallery  
England & Co, London (concurrent show with David Larwill)  
2001 Compass Gallery, Glasgow  
2000 England & Co, London  
1998 *Works on paper*, Wysing Arts, Cambridge  
1994 Open Eye Gallery, Edinburgh  
1994 Psychology Institute, Edinburgh  
1989 Tower Gallery, Dundee University

## AWARDS

- 2016 Winner of the 30th Gold Coast International Ceramic Art Award  
2012 New work grant, established artist, Australia Council for the Arts *Vitrify*, The Vitrify Alcorso Ceramic Award. (Shorlisted artist)  
2011 Deakin University Contemporary Small Sculpture Award  
2010 New work grant, established artist, Australia Council for the Arts  
Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize, Special Commendation  
2006 Dundee Visual Arts Award  
Aberdeen artists design award  
Shell Expo Award, Aberdeen  
2005 Engage Scotland Visual Arts Education Award  
2004 Professional Development Award, Scottish Arts Council Lottery Grant  
Creative Development Award, Scottish Arts Council  
2000 Dundee Visual Arts Award



- 1997 Mott McDonald Painting Prize, Aberdeen Artists Society, Travelled to N.Y
- 1987 Elizabeth Greenshields Memorial Award
- 1986 Duncan of Drunfaulk Travel Award, Italy
- 1985 Ian Eadie Memorial Award. Travelled to Holland and Belgium
- 1984 Mitchell Painting Prize. Travelled to Barcelona, Spain

#### SELECTED COLLECTIONS:

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia  
 National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh  
 National Museums Northern Ireland  
 Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
 Artbank Sydney, Australia  
 Deakin University Art Gallery and Museums,  
 Melbourne, Australia  
 Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, Scotland  
 Dundee Art Gallery and Museum, Scotland  
 Dundee District Council, Scotland  
 Hackney Borough Council, England  
 Mexican Consulate, Blairgowrie, Scotland  
 Manly Art Gallery and Museum, NSW, Australia  
 Arizona State University Art Museum, USA  
 The Grainer Collection, Washington, D.C, USA  
 The University of Queensland Art Museum,  
 Brisbane, Australia  
 Tweed Regional Gallery, Murwillumbah, NSW, Australia  
 Wollongong Art Gallery, NSW, Australia  
 Clayarch Gimhae Museum, South Korea  
 Australia-Korea Foundation, Canberra, ACT, Australia  
 Australian Embassy, Republic of Korea  
 Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Queensland, Australia



*Self Portrait*, 2012

Stephen Bird

clay, pigment, glaze, H36 x W16 x D20 cms

Published by The Scottish Gallery to coincide with the exhibition  
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[www.scottish-gallery.co.uk/transported](http://www.scottish-gallery.co.uk/transported)  
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## NATIONAL ART SCHOOL

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## THE SCOTTISH GALLERY

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[www.scottish-gallery.co.uk](http://www.scottish-gallery.co.uk)

Right: *Artists At Work*, Roger Law  
Back cover: Stephen Bird in his studio in Alexandria, Sydney, 2016

ARTISTS AT WORK







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