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Ceramic City

This collaborative theme is also found in ceramics for natural sites and sculpture parks, which have become a major focus for public ceramic art. At Clitheroe Nature Reserve in Blackburn, Halima Cassell, known for work influenced by Islamic and African Art and her use of geometric forms, is currently completing a series of six sculptures. Based on local plants, made of compressed bricks in varied colours into which Cassell carves the geometric rendering of plant shapes, the blooms were chosen for their local associations, but also the robustness of their form. *"They had to be constructively sound and not fragile as even the wooden sculptures here have been vandalised,"* explains Cassell. She has consulted local residents, with 97% in support of the project and keen to protect the completed sculptures.

Solving such practical problems is a key element of public ceramic art. *"I love public art it is a great challenge,"* says Fernando Casasempere. *"I relish the challenge of new ways to build and use material and find many new things that inform my next works."* His clay projects, as for many artists, raise a raft of political, philosophical, and in his case, environmental arguments. For the New Art Centre at Roche Court, *Back to the Earth* uses waste from local industries with the technically challenging combination of white clay and porcelain, creating a cross between a dry stone wall and a pile of dinosaur bones crumbling into the earth. *"The porcelain symbolises the precious things that come from the earth,"* he says. For the Jerwood Sculpture Park at Ragley Hall, Casasempere created *Under the Forest*, a magical grove of silvery tree trunks that in summer take on the leaves of the forest. The scale and need to use industrial materials, necessitated that he work in a brick factory, where his trunks were fired for a week. He eventually won over the local workforce, another form of collaborative education. But the site-specific nature of the work is particularly important for most ceramicists. *"For me understanding the site is fundamental and what I feel about it and what I want to make others feel about it,"* Casasempere explains.

That is equally true of Kate Malone who has a long track record of public art. Her wild, exuberant, colourful forms first found their way into public life in Homerton Hospital in early 1990 and took off with her *Rise and Shine Magic Fish* fountain at Lea Valley in Hackney Marshes. Her work finds a resonance in hospitals, shopping centres and museums. She relishes the interaction that her pieces can evoke. Her most successful is the Royal Jubilee Children's Library in Brighton in 2005-6, for architects Bennett and Associates. The architects see ceramics as integral to the building, covering its surface with thousands of dark blue and green hand glazed tiles, to evoke the 'mathematical' tiles on many traditional Brighton buildings. In the Children's Library Malone created a *Wall of a Thousand Stories*, made up of ceramic objects based on thirty key themes. Carers encourage children to select three elements from which to make up a story. Even the seats in the library are Malone's trademark giant pumpkins, blood platelets, flowers and starfish. Yet before giving her imagination free reign she faces a variety of technical problems such as; interior/exterior, difficulties with the weather affecting vitrification levels, vandalism concerns, fire regulations, hanging or pumping mechanisms, water/power supply, installation requirements restrictions, public safety and public liability, and longevity.

One of her interior projects was a room installation at the Geffrye Museum, counterpoised against a room by Edmund de Waal. De Waal's newest work is his dome of multiples at the V&A, a commission to connect the new Ceramic Galleries with the rest of the museum. Above the entrance hall is a coffered ceiling at the centre of which is a square aperture through which can be seen 40-metres up into the dome and oculus of Gallery 141, which houses his *Signs & Wonders*. From the entrance hall visitors see an arc of floating red holding an arc of porcelain, from within the gallery, the whole installation of 450 vessels is visible. Arranged in seven rhythmical groupings, they take as their starting-point different great collections of ceramics - 18th century French

