

ARCHITECTURE AND CRAFT AS CONTEMPORARY CRAFT MOVES BEYOND THE PLINTH, THE ARCHITECTURE THAT HOUSES IT BEGINS TO REFLECT THE DYNAMIC AND EXPANSIVE NATURE OF THE CURRENT SCENE. VERONICA SIMPSON TAKES A TOUR OF NEW SPACES

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

OPENING ITS SLIDING glass doors last October, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima) offers big, flowing, flexible spaces that don't differentiate between craft and art in scale or scope. Since then, other exciting buildings are delivering new possibilities for makers.

Clare Twomey, Felicity Aylieff, Julian Stair and Edmund de Waal are among those seeking bigger canvases for their work. Nor is scale the only issue being addressed. The relationship with the landscape around these new buildings, the quality of light, the flexibility they offer large- and small-scale displays: all are factors being reassessed.

And there's a boldness to the initiatives that reflects how the sector now sees itself – and how the wider audience will perceive it. James Beighton, mima curator of craft, says: 'Tate Modern was key for our building, for the way people interact with the space; the confidence it brought into the art scene generally. The fact that it's the most visited

attraction in the country makes you think you don't have to [design it for] an art cognoscenti audience.'

So it has proven with mima's architectural statement (see panel, p.39), as the building draws crowds from across the North East and beyond. And where mima has led, others follow: many compelling projects are under way, including the strong and site-specific new designs at the Ruthin Craft Centre (see *Material Culture*, p.40). The V&A will be creating a dramatically different ceramics space later this year, with flexibility and dynamic new display opportunities a given, and has just opened a translucent jewellery gallery by Eva Jiricna Architects (see *Crafts* No.212, May-June 2008). Even Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, one of the best loved of small spaces, is apparently planning a new scheme next year. Meanwhile the Ulster Museum is part-way through a massive £17.4 million redevelopment, to include a new, permanent applied-arts gallery when it opens in 2009. A roof is being con-

structed over the open-air sculpture court, adding a dramatic height of 10 metres to the 300 square metre space, and a flow of natural daylight through vertical 'celestial' windows just below roof level. Curator of applied art Kim Mawhinney says: 'Not only will we have a permanent display space for our extensive collection of glass, ceramics, fashion and textiles, we'll also have the room to be more creative, thematically. And we'll have a lot more flexibility both in terms of the size of exhibit we can display and how we display it.'

Potter Edmund de Waal believes that ceramics has been very poorly served by museums and galleries historically. He is celebrating the creation of these new craft platforms: 'There's a much more dynamic conversation going on between museums and galleries now. And Ruthin and mima have been designed completely around new possibilities for crafts. You shouldn't be curtailed by the dimensions of the typical craft gallery.'

THE BESPOKE STUDIO AND GALLERY SPACE

THIS PAGE Edmund de Waal's studio is a conversion of an existing warehouse OPPOSITE ABOVE and BELOW The studio includes an office-cum-library-cum-meeting space (above), and also acts as an exhibition area (below)



Given his work's obvious architectural sympathies, Edmund de Waal relished the opportunity to create a bespoke studio and exhibition space, together with architects DSDHA. In a small corner of South East London, he now has 140 square metres on two floors. Designed to a tight budget, this combines supreme flexibility with a wonderfully functional aesthetic: white walls, concrete sinks, slate floor.

The main potting space is large and open-plan. The potting equipment is all on wheels for easy removal. Kilns, kitchen, storage space and washroom with shower are tucked away behind this room. Up narrow stairs, an attic-style first floor serves as an office, library and meeting area. 'My studio had to be a very mobile space,' says de Waal. 'The only unmovable elements are two big cast concrete sinks – they act as incredibly solid, graphic symbols. Everything else can be moved around. It can be used as a space for looking at new pieces; a meeting room for 30 people; an exhibition.' And there's

room to create the increasingly large-scale works that inspire him – for example, a 37-metre cast aluminium shelf, which will hold 490 pieces of his porcelain commissioned for the opening of the new V&A ceramics gallery.

Full-height metal shutters secure the ground-floor exterior wall, with a door in them. During the summer, these shutters can roll back to allow light, air and sunshine in and double up the ground-floor area with the patio. There's no question his work has been freed up by this new space. Says de Waal: 'I'm now using a lot more other materials, not just porcelain, and creating tectonic objects. I'm working with architects on making buildings. Creating complex spaces within simple spaces is increasingly interesting to me.' Does he now have enough room? 'No, of course it's not big enough,' he says. 'But it works very well as a very simple, durable space that can be hosed down at the end of the day.'

