

Call for Papers

Permanence / Impermanence:

Collecting and archiving contemporary clay practices

Conference: In-person, London, 24-26 June 2026

Deadline for proposals: 16 March 2026

Conference organisers: Ceramics Research Centre-UK, CREAM, University of Westminster, in partnership with the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The conference addresses how artworks in the 'expanded field of clay' can be made accessible and visible to current and future audiences.

Artists' practices in the expanded field of clay can result in raw clay artworks, large-scale site-specific installations, performance-based events and involve audience participation (Brown, Stair and Twomey, 2016). Due to their ephemeral or mutable nature, such works pose significant challenges to museums, which have more often acquired permanent ceramic objects due to the complexities of capturing live or transient clay artworks.

The conference takes place in the context of important recent work on collecting performance, installation and live art (Tate, 2018-22; Hölling, Feldman & Magnin, 2023-4), and on the politics and practices of museum collecting (Jones, 2021; Krmpotich & Stevenson, 2024).

Proposals are invited from artists, academics and museum professionals, including archivists, conservators, curators, collection managers, learning officers and others. Proposals may take any of the following formats: 10-minute provocations that ignite debate, 25-minute papers and 60-minute panel discussions. We particularly welcome case studies of artworks, acquisitions, exhibitions, interventions or other museum projects. Presenters may address issues relating to, although by no means limited to, the following themes and questions:

Artists / Artworks / Projects:

- How can artists be active in the process of their artworks being represented in collections?
- Object, concept, experience, process? What is it that museums are collecting?
- Can the re-performance of a work or its translation to a different medium be a productive, rather than reductive, process?
- Outside of documentation through photography and videography, how might the physical sensations of interacting with a work, beyond sight, be preserved when it no longer exists in the same form?

Museums:

- How are museums engaging with the expanded field of clay practice through collections, learning programmes and other activities?

- What are the implications if these artworks are not collected in a sufficiently meaningful way?
- What is the impact on visitors and institutions when working with ephemeral, performance-based, participatory and site-specific ceramic or clay artworks?
- What are the challenges of stewarding and/or documenting contemporary clay artworks, including issues of care, ethics and long-term availability, and how can museums meet them?
- How can museums welcome, accommodate or document intentional decay in ephemeral artworks?

Collections / Archives:

- What can be learned from the strategies of collecting other kinds of ephemeral art practices, such as performance, digital and hybrid objects?
- Do the nuances of materiality inherent in experimental clay and ceramic practices pose particular challenges?
- Collections or archives? Where can transient artworks be best represented for the future?

Timeline

16 March 2026: Deadline for proposals (max. 300 words + 100-word biography per presenter/panel member).

Submit proposals to: Ceramics@westminster.ac.uk

Early April 2026: Notification of acceptance.

Mid-April 2026: Registration opens.

The conference is staged in the first year of the AHRC-funded *Future Ecologies of Clay* research project (August 2025-July 2028) with the objective of gathering information on the experiences and needs of artists, museums and researchers. It is the first event of a 'long conference', which reconceptualises the notion of the conference-as-catalyst and functions as a means to develop ideas and approaches within a follow-on seminar series and summit day. Conference presenters will initially be invited to contribute to the project website, and selected conference papers and research findings will be published in an edited book of essays in 2028.

The *Future Ecologies of Clay* research involves creating four new artworks with four UK museums, including the V&A. These practice-based case studies of ephemeral, site-specific, participatory and live art will provide new content for each museum's collection. An Open Call for museums interested in participating will be publicised in Spring 2026.

The *Future Ecologies of Clay* research is being undertaken by the Ceramics Research Centre-UK in partnership with the V&A. This work is supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number UKR1748].

References:

Brown, C., Stair, J., & Twomey, C. (eds.) (2016), *Contemporary Clay and Museum Culture*, Routledge.

Hölling, H. B., Feldman, J. P., & Magnin, E. (eds.) (2023-4), *Performance: The Ethics and the Politics of Conservation and Care*, Vols. 1 & 2, Routledge.

Jones, M. (2021), *Artefacts, Archives and Documentation in the Relational Museum*, Routledge.

Krmpotich, C., & Stevenson, A. (eds.) (2024), *Collections Management as Critical Museum Practice*, UCL Press.

Tate (2018-22), *Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum*:
<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/reshaping-the-collectible>

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