

Views from the Pews - Pottery

We don't often use the Pew Sheet to review TV programmes but the reading from Jeremiah 18 on the 4th September reminded me of a plan to mention 'Grayson's Art Club' to you.

Grayson Perry is an established British artist, with a considerable media profile, and is an accomplished if somewhat off-beat potter. During the 2020 Covid pandemic, when the Brits were (finally) told to stay home, Perry decided to use his skills in a remarkable outreach project, employing television and other media platforms to promote art as a therapeutic and unifying force. Everyone and anyone was welcome to send in images of artwork they had completed while isolated. Perry and his wife Phillipa used empathy very skillfully to meet the often complex needs of their audience. Everyone was greeted with affirmation and encouragement, celebrities were invited to try their hand at art, and selections were made not necessarily on any objective merit but - crucially - on the basis of the submitter's individual needs. Part of the show features both Grayson and Phillipa throwing, moulding, and firing pottery. It was fascinating to watch a professional at work, often recreating what Jeremiah's potter had done, namely to crush and then re-shape a piece on the wheel. It brought the metaphor to life in an incredibly creative way, but could be confronting as well - anything not up to standard is liable to be re-shaped before being put into the kiln.

The reading is also an affirmation of the potter's status in Old Testament times when basic ceramics had to provide all the containers society then used. No glass bottles in those days, let alone tins, or plastic. God as potter will have resonated with those readers, someone who was at once creative, but also pragmatic to the point of ruthlessness. All creation must be fit for purpose. And ceramics generally continue to be God's gift to archeologists - shards of pottery speak from the distant past, especially when found under water in Greek merchant vessels - what did they contain, where were they going, and who was buying and selling? Ceramics do not dissolve or decay once fired but - on the potter's wheel - they

remain malleable until thoroughly dry. Ceramics must have represented real value in Biblical times, and so any threat to discard or destroy will have had immense impact.

'Grayson's Art Club' is available on Sky Arts and doubtlessly on other platforms as well.

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