Press Release
Felicity Aylieff: Expressions in Blue

5 April – 14 September 2025
The Weston Gallery and Outdoors

Felicity Aylieff, *Expressions in Blue* at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Photo © Jeff Eden, 2024. Courtesy of RBG Kew.

Expressions in Blue is a solo exhibition of monumental sculptural works in porcelain, painted in tones of rich cobalt blue oxide using expressive brushstrokes full of movement. These hand-thrown ceramic vessels and stacked monoliths stand up to an impressive five-metres high and have a powerful sculptural presence. Shown together in The Weston Gallery and outdoors, the organic energy of their surfaces and their forest-like presentation will resonate with the forms and rhythms of the 18th-century landscape beyond.

Felicity Aylieff says: *"Exhibiting my monumental porcelain vessels at Yorkshire Sculpture Park is an incredible opportunity. I am excited to see them come alive against the rich backdrop of rolling countryside in one of the best places to show sculpture in Britain."*

Alongside seven vast porcelain works and a range of smaller pieces in the gallery, and two towering obelisks outdoors, visitors will see photographs and a film that reveal the remarkable

making process and its physicality. Also on display will be a selection from Aylieff's extensive range of fascinating mark-making tools, including giant horsehair brushes used to whip around the vessels and create energetic flicks and splashes.

Sarah Coulson, YSP Senior Curator, says: *"Being surrounded by Aylieff's imposing ceramic vessels is an invigorating and moving experience. Their scale and technical ingenuity are breathtaking, and you get lost in the richness and vitality of their surfaces. The artist's mark-making echoes the energy of the natural world, and her practice expands our understanding of the sculptural potential of ceramics, making the work feel perfectly placed at YSP."*

Felicity Aylieff. Image © the artist. © UCN Documentary Studio.

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Painting the vessels is a spontaneous, performative act that engages the artist's whole body and brings energy to their surfaces, which she sees as canvasses for her artistic expression. In monochromatic shades of grey when applied, the cobalt oxides transform in the kiln into deep and vibrant blues. Aylieff was drawn to cobalt not only for its luminosity but for its significance in the history of Chinese ceramics. Using the classic blue and white of Chinese porcelain, she synthesises old and new, a reinterpretation that she describes as 'new Ming'.

Works such as *Blue: Triple Form* (2023) are painted with large brushes in bold and fluid swathes, built up layer on layer to give depth, with bold gestural marks bringing movement across the form. Others, including *Blue: Earth, Fire, Water, Undulating Form I* (2024), have smaller, more frenetic surface marks created using improvised brushes made from bunches of bale twine. Brought together across different forms and vessels, these contrasting strokes evoke changing tempos through the exhibition.

Aylieff's journey towards working at this unprecedented scale began with a visit to China in 2005 when she became captivated by the city of Jingdezhen, known for centuries for its high-quality porcelain production. Over the subsequent two decades, she has spent long periods living and

working there each year, developing close working relationships with specialist craftspeople who have accumulated knowledge over generations. Through an enduring process of creative collaboration with them, Aylieff has forged an ambitious and experimental path combining tradition with innovation across cultures. This has enabled her to push the limits of her work in a notoriously challenging material.

Before their physical making, the monumental pieces on display in *Expressions in Blue* started life as detailed digital drawings. This is a necessarily precise process and a way to counteract some of the risk and uncertainty involved in the production of large-scale ceramics. Then, using a giant potter's wheel, a highly skilled team of three or more throwers work together to centre and open up the clay. They brace each other's arms and bodies, using combined physical strength and harmony of movement to raise the wall of the clay upwards to create Aylieff's characteristic forms. These range from more conventional vase or jar-like shapes to contemporary organic and undulating stacks.

Aylieff has produced a ceramic beaker featuring her distinctive cobalt surface decoration in a limited edition of 100 especially for YSP. Each cup is individually hand thrown in porcelain, glazed and painted by the artist in tones of cobalt blue oxide. Created in Jingdezhen, China, 2025.

Priced at £75 it represents a wonderful opportunity to own the artist's work. YSP is a registered charity and accredited museum, all proceeds from sales help to share incredible art and continue to create meaningful experiences for everyone in a unique environment.

Expressions in Blue has been made possible through support and collaboration with Adrian Sassoon, London, who represent the artist internationally.

The exhibition was first shown in expanded form at The Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

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Felicity Aylieff. Image © the artist. © UCN Documentary Studio.Image courtesy of Adrian Sassoon, London.

Felicity Aylieff, *Blue: Earth, Fire, Water*, 2024. Image © RedHouse Ceramics Studio. Image courtesy of Adrian Sassoon, London.

Notes for Editors

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Near Wakefield and Barnsley – M1 Junction 38
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Check online for opening hours.
Book tickets at ysp.org.uk

Social media
Instagram: @YSPsculpture
Facebook: @YorkshireSculpturePark
LinkedIn: Yorkshire Sculpture Park
#YSPSculpture

About Felicity Aylieff
Felicity Aylieff has an established reputation as a creator of large-scale, sculptural ceramics. Having worked from her studio in the UK for over three decades, 2005 saw her undertake an 'incredibly liberating' artist residency in Jingdezhen, China, the world famous capital of porcelain production. It was to be the beginning of a lasting collaborative relationship with factories in Jingdezhen, where she now has a studio and makes monumental porcelain pots, the largest standing at over five metres high.

Her work shows her passion for material and process through its use of colour, pattern, and historically informed decorative techniques. Represented in major public collections her work has astounded collectors and curators alike.

Felicity has a teaching career that spans over 40 years and is currently a Professor of Ceramics and Glass as well as Research at the Royal College of Art, London. Her work is held in numerous international private and public collections including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA.

Felicity Aylieff is represented by Adrian Sassoon, London.

About Yorkshire Sculpture Park
Awarded VisitEngland's gold accolade in 2023-24 for an outstanding visitor attraction, Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) is the leading international centre for modern and contemporary sculpture. Welcoming around 300,000 visitors each year, YSP is a registered charity and accredited museum situated in the 500-acre, 18th-century Bretton Hall estate in West and South Yorkshire.

YSP is led by Clare Lilley, and was founded in 1977 by Sir Peter Murray CBE, it is the largest sculpture park of its kind in Europe. It is the only place in Europe to see Barbara Hepworth's *The Family of Man* in its entirety, alongside a significant collection of sculpture, including bronzes by Henry Moore, important pieces by Hemali Bhuta, Roger Hiorns, Damien Hirst, Suhasini Kejriwal, Kimsooja, Marc Quinn, Hank Willis Thomas and Erwin Wurm, and site-specific works by Katrina Palmer, Andy Goldsworthy, Alfredo Jaar, David Nash, Sean Scully and James Turrell.

YSP mounts a year-round temporary exhibitions programme including some of the world's leading artists across six indoor galleries and the outdoors. Highlights include exhibitions by Fiona

Banner, Anthony Caro, Tony Cragg, Leonardo Drew, Robert Indiana, Amar Kanwar, KAWS, Joan Miró, Henry Moore, Lindsey Mendick, Annie Morris, Giuseppe Penone, Jaume Plensa, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Sean Scully, Yinka Shonibare CBE, Chiharu Shiota, David Smith, Joana Vasconcelos, Bill Viola and Erwin Wurm.

Across its 48-year history, YSP has worked with over 1,000 artists from more than 40 countries, on varied projects from short-term residencies to major surveys. YSP supports artists at vital stages in their careers and is rare in having the accommodation, workshops and expertise to enable open-ended and risk-taking practice, giving artists space, time and support to think and to develop new ideas.

Over this time, YSP has sought to ignite, nurture and sustain interest in and debate around contemporary art and sculpture, especially with those for whom art participation is not habitual or familiar. It enables open access to art, situations and ideas, and continues to re-evaluate and expand the approach to considering art's role and relevance in society. Supporting 40,000 people each year through YSP's learning programme, this innovative work develops ability, confidence and life aspiration in participants.

YSP's core work is made possible by investment from Arts Council England, Wakefield Council, the Liz and Terry Bramall Foundation and Dunard Fund. YSP was named Art Fund Museum of the Year in 2014 and awarded the 2023 Visitor Attraction of the Year and Cultural Award in the Yorkshire Post Tourism Awards.

ADRIAN SASSOON

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Supported using public funding by
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