

Celebrating its first anniversary, Studio Manifold is a collective of nine RCA graduates who have discovered that there is strength in numbers. By Teleri Lloyd-Jones. Portrait by Elisabeth Scheder-Bieschin

NINE LIVES

'Can you tell we haven't discussed this before?' Ian McIntyre interjects as he and some of his fellow Manifold artists get into a debate. Studio Manifold, a collective of nine, celebrated its first birthday last December, and I'm hearing all about the year that followed their graduation. The question is a simple one: are they going to have a group show of their work? The answers include a hopeful yes, a perhaps, and definitely a no. Turns out it's not so simple. In fact, for some questions there may be nine different responses.

Manifold is made up of graduates from the Ceramics & Glass MA of 2010 at the Royal College of Art: Zachary Eastwood-Bloom, Hanne Enemark, Amy Hughes, Sun Ae Kim, Bethan Lloyd Worthington, Ellie Doney, Hanne Mannheimer, Ian McIntyre and Matthew Raw. Although they may be connected most (but by no means all) of the time by the materials they use, the work is broad and sprawling. From McIntyre's poetic investigations into ceramics industrialisation to Hughes's lopsided urns; from Mannheimer's eerie sculptures incorporating found objects to Eastwood-Bloom's polished digital-fetish furniture.

As their title suggests, Manifold finds much of its strength in its moments of difference and many layers of knowledge. 'That's what's good about us. We're quite significantly different and you get to see the vastly diverse ways that people think. We're all on separate paths,' says Eastwood-Bloom. And McIntyre continues: 'My work is well out of the realm of art but I particularly use Sun Ae and Amy's investigations into glazes, while Zach is quite key in terms of model-making and mould making. Matt, the more conceptual stuff.' And on it goes. Underneath the East London arches, in this one studio space, many different approaches and styles converge. Individually they compete for the same opportunities and funding, so it's a surprise to hear that the only real moments of tension they'll confess to stem from the kiln queue – an artistic version of the clichéd bathroom queue. Raw is rightly practical ('That's the nature of the game that we're

From left to right: Ian McIntyre, Bethan Lloyd Worthington, Hanne Mannheimer, Ellie Doney, Matthew Raw, Zachary Eastwood-Bloom, Sun Ae Kim, Amy Hughes, Hanne Enemark, in front of their studio



Left: *Phototaxis*, Hanne Enemark, blown and cast glass, MDF, 140 x 150 cm
Right: *Teatotalism*, Sun Ae Kim, bone china, 2011



Left: *Co-operative Log Pile*, pieces waiting to be stacked, Matthew Raw, glazed Danish brickclay, 2011
Right: *Sketch Vase*, Nouveau Bleu Series, Amy Hughes, porcelain body, transparent and cobalt glaze, digital decals and gold leaf to finish, 48 x 26 cm, 2011
Far Right: *Japanning, Nurimono (Mountain and Blossom)*, Ellie Doney, installation on covered archeological site of temple in Nara, Japan, mixed media, 1.5 x 1.3 m, 2010



involved in. If you're going to get annoyed now then you'll be screwed in five years time'), while Eastwood-Bloom is a little more sentimental ('Anyone's success is everyone's success really').

They forged this bond in the intensity of their final terms at the RCA: the year group 'seemed more of a level playing field, there wasn't an established star,' explains Raw. After graduation, they set out together to look for a space in which they could all work – no mean feat. Hughes happened on a series of studios under the tracks of the new East London Line in Dalston, but the waiting list was a year, so they didn't hold their collective breath. Then some printmakers who'd already moved in discovered the damp curled their paper, and made a quick exit – and lucky Manifold were waiting in the wings. And here we find them today, with Ryan Gander working next door and friend-of-the-studio James Rigler further down the row.

The next fortuitous turn came during the hunt for equipment and furniture. Hughes discovered a school being torn down in Northampton and found herself running around with a batch of post-it notes, claiming anything she could think up a use for: 'We even took the whiteboard and the markers! Anything that wasn't nailed down.' Liberating this haul of kilns, tables and stools kept up the momentum of the studio's set up. And it turns out the advantages of salvage aren't just economic but aesthetic, as Lloyd Worthington muses: 'It was quite funny that it came from a school – it still had the soft institutional feel to it.' 'So that we didn't get withdrawal symptoms,' Doney adds with a chuckle.

A more specific institutional connection continues with the occasional more recent RCA graduate working in the studio. There have been various comings and goings of the Manifold family this year, as Raw did a residency at Denmark's International Ceramic Research Centre, Hughes visited Sweden and Doney went to Japan – in fact, before their portrait photo shoot, the last time they'd all been together physically in one space was in January. With some empty seats in the studio, Manifold allow friends to sub-let. So, as well as RCA alumni Makiko Nakamura they've recently welcomed Brighton graduate Katy Spragg and puppet-maker and fine-art fabricator Matt Jackson. This flow of makers and artists passing through the studio keeps everyone on their toes, adds new skills to the group as well as helping to pay the bills.

It is only their first year, but Manifold have been quick to put down local roots. Winning a coveted placement with Creative Learning in Artists' Studios (CLAS), the group went into the Urswick School in Hackney, and in pairs taught teenage pupils a cross section of processes, from mould-making to transfers. The experience was entirely positive, cementing the belief that their value lies in diversity and flexibility as well as the possibilities for ceramics beyond the cloistered realm of a gallery. Another group project saw Manifold relocate to Stoke-on-Trent for the British Ceramics Biennial. Seven of the group were paired randomly with artists from Airspace, and they then spent three days making collaborative work for the show *Stick-Up*. The final pieces included Lloyd Worthington's and Anna Francis's *Reliquary*, filled with shards they'd excavated from a local site – and also Andrew Branscombe's deviant tools and machines



Left: *Untitled (Birds and Teapot)*, Hanne Mannheimer, found objects and porcelain, 2011
 Right: *Transmutation*, Zachary Eastwood-Bloom, CNC-milled found table, 1 x 2m, 2011



Left: *Apology for untimely use of mobile phone internet whilst at ancient beauty spot*, Bethan Lloyd Worthington, pencil, watercolour and gouache on paper, 2011
 Right: Ian McIntyre model making with Sailesha Prajapati in Amedabad, India, 2011
 Far Right: *Reliquary*, part of *Stick-Up*, Bethan Lloyd Worthington and Anna Francis, Weinerberger engineering bricks, relics, chalk, paper, 2011



devised for Mannheimer to make 'a range of mass-produced failures'. Their Stoke partnerships were drawn out of a hat, but magically satisfied everyone, Lloyd Worthington explains: 'It was really fun – it worked out as something that tallied with our own practices but at the same time was really different. It made sense and I think a lot of us felt that.'

Apart from obligatory studio meetings – with members often appearing from across the globe via Skype – the whole group rarely get together, and only get a sense of what projects are happening when putting together the intimidatingly long newsletter. Many of Manifold subsidise their practices with teaching or technician positions, but here follows just a handful of what they've been up to individually. Raw has been guest artist at Cranbrook Academy of the Arts in Detroit and in the summer, as part of his work with the charity Manchester Aid to Kosovo, built a kiln there. Kim has just begun an MPhil at the RCA. Lloyd Worthington is creating a series of installations commissioned for the Bethnal Green Town Hall Hotel. Eastwood-Bloom will be working with choreographers at the English National Ballet Theatre at Sadlers Wells, to produce musically responsive digital backdrops as well as a science-art collaboration for this year's Cultural Olympiad. And that's not the half of it.

In addition to all this, the studio is about to expand by one. We meet just a few weeks before Mannheimer has her first child. She explains that her fellow artists have been creative with the prospective names, 'Manifold Mannheimer?' she smiles. 'My boyfriend really isn't convinced.'

In the new year the studio hope to start their first series of talks, with the working title *More Than Making*. Using the arch next door, the group want to host regular discussions with guest speakers on every aspect of practice – whether it be a guide to residencies, the complexities of production or theories of the hand-made. 'It's a different kind of platform, away from the dust,' says Raw, 'and inviting people into a clean space. Eventually, I'd really like each one of us to put on a talk, to start tailoring it. We can do that because we've got numbers, everyone's got different skills.'

If you step back and look at it all – the individual work, educational workshops, talks, collaborations – an ambitious picture builds up, much bigger than the sum of nine graduates' practice, more promising, more communal and more nurturing. There is safety in numbers of course, but beyond that Studio Manifold have that early sense of infallibility. One feels that failing wouldn't rock them too much. Not trying, now that would be far worse.

Looking back from their first anniversary, the group know that next year will be focused on new bodies of work, while continuing to build on the foundations of the studio. So, what about their long term future? Hughes points out they've signed a five-year contract underneath the arches. This comes as an obvious surprise to several around the table. 'As you can see, Amy's the one who deals with the practicalities,' Lloyd Worthington sheepishly covers for the group's slight embarrassment. That's a rather huge detail to have fallen between the cracks, but no one minds, because it's going to be a good five years.

For details of individual projects, see *Crafts Guide*.
www.studiomanifold.org