

“Ken Eastman” by Glenn Adamson

“The Border Country is where I live, and the border is something I’m aware of and often cross.” So says Ken Eastman, and the proof is in his work. His ceramics seem built from pure contradiction. Small enough to be set on plinths, they have the commanding presence of whole mountains. Their undulating volumes are formed of thin, flexible planes, yet one could not imagine anything more solid, or definite. And while that concreteness lends them an air of serenity, they also produce a completely contrary impression of vertiginous movement, of turning and tumbling, of sloping and sliding.

I think of Alison Britton, another master of muscular, wonderfully unpredictable, hand-built ceramics. Back in 1989, she wrote of an Eastman pot: “Its pleasures are abstract, it provides a place for the eye to wander in.” That reminds me in turn of another British artist, William Hogarth, writing in his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) of compositions that “lead the eye a wanton kind of chase.” Other connections come to mind, too: the sculpture of Barbara Hepworth, the architecture of Frank Gehry, the choreography of Martha Graham, the tailoring of Cristobal Balenciaga. All these figures share Eastman’s particular form of genius, to pitch a curve in space just so, and meet it with another, and another, and another, each shape compounding the intelligence of the whole.

Yet Eastman has something going for him that none of these others do (Britton excepted, of course): the affordances of pottery. Uniquely among art forms, it allows for a dialogue between inside and out. The relationship between a vessel’s interior and its exterior topologies has no exact parallel: it is not simply a repetition, nor a mirroring, nor a molding, but its own special kind of counterpoint. In Eastman’s work, that primary dialectic is echoed in a perpetual series of unfurlings, the pot in constant dialogue with itself.

Over the past few years, in the UK and the USA alike, debates over the meanings of borders have raged. Are they necessary protective barriers, delineations of identity? Or should we see them as acts of violence, cutting across the human fabric? Eastman’s work exists beyond such stark opposition; every one of his edges is also a threshold. At a time like now, it’s helpful to have his objects to think with.