



## SPOTLIGHT ON

# HALIMA CASSELL

An exhibition of ceramicist and sculptor  
Halima Cassell's work is currently  
showing at Manchester Art Gallery

WORDS: Kate Houghton



Internationally celebrated ceramicist and sculptor, Halima Cassell, was born in Pakistan but moved with her family to Manchester at a young age, and it was this city that provided the early inspiration that fired her natural artistic talent.

'I always had a passion for architecture and geometry,' she says. 'As a child growing up in Manchester I always had to touch the architecture, the mouldings and carvings on the buildings. I was always intrigued to know it was handmade, replicating nature in the structures. I think that making objects that were a smaller size, echoing that kind of feeling I had as a child, set me off on the pursuit to work as I have to date. My work naturally evolved and changed through different materials and through different

residencies, scholarships or research grants. But you can still recognise those original elements are still very important, very close to everything I do.'

While Halima now resides in Shropshire, where she has her studio, she is constantly drawn back to Manchester, taking pleasure in the architecture that originally inspired her.

'I love the John Rylands building and a lot of the neo-gothic ones. To be honest, anything that has moulding or stone-carving, draws me. There are various terracotta buildings – actually pubs now – that would have been banks and such. Liverpool, as well, offers a richness of hand-detailing and moulding. I like modern buildings as well; the architect David Chipperfield for example, but mainly older, Victorian buildings and also mosques, churches and cathedrals, where

there is a wealth of intricacy, of handcarved, handmade or handpainted elements. It's that connection between being handmade and architecture and geometry and nature.'

The current exhibition presents a varied and fascinating insight into 25 years of Halima's work, and offers the most intense temptation to touch these visually and physically tactile pieces.

Her earlier pieces show her desire to reflect, in her own way, the curved geometry and beautiful symmetry of the work that first inspired her, then over time slides into a more sinuous, curvaceous, asymmetric style.

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'It's important to show where the work started and where it is now,' she says. 'But I'm only 44 and I have so many ideas in my head and you can't develop them all. I fell in love with concrete for example when I was doing the Hepworth Wakefield Gallery commission, in 2007.

'But it wasn't until 2013 that I did concrete, so you kind of have these ideas lingering for many years before you make them real. I have kept a visual diary since I was a teen. Just the way a hair curl falls can inspire a geometric construction. There's a lot more to come.' ♦

***Eclectica - global inspirations runs until January 5th 2020, manchesterartgallery.org***

**ABOVE:** Lumina, hard-carved stoneware

**BELOW:** Phoenix, hand-carved clay  
Photo: Tony West

