

HOUSE & GARDEN

THE
EDIT

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Lifestyle

OBJECT LESSONS

PETER TING and BRIAN KENNEDY are curators and artistic matchmakers, who believe the pieces we surround ourselves with should be chosen not for their value, but for the stories that they can tell us

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PHOTOGRAPHS DEAN HEARNE

Peter Ting is a very difficult person to label. He is a gallerist, a ceramicist, a curator and a designer, but really – more than anything else – he is a connector of people. ‘I love people,’ he says. ‘So why not make the introduction?’ He is skilled at drawing out a story and, in doing so, identifying a common interest that might unite two future friends or collaborators. Similarly, his husband Brian Kennedy, also a curator, has a keen eye for spotting new talent, whose work will often find its way into his exhibitions. Together they are an indomitable, generous force in the world of craft and applied arts.

Their flat in south-east London showcases their shared passion for people and objects. They bought it off-plan 10 years ago and were able to persuade the developers to change the entire layout. ‘Brian and I were in complete agreement as to how it should look,’ says Peter. ‘We often say we are one coin. Each side is different, but we always come to the same – or at least to a similar – conclusion.’

Of course, the magic really happened when they moved all their belongings into the flat. ‘We are both collectors,’ says Peter. ‘If we see an object we love and we can afford to buy it, like a friend, it has to come into our life.’ As such, the flat is filled with work by a wonderful array of makers. The sitting room wall is lined with a lino-printed paper by Marthe Armitage and nearby is a vivid green abstract by Jeremy Moon, which Peter sold his car to buy. Mounted on another wall is a sculpture made from chicken-feet bones, pigs’ teeth and copper wire by Emma Witter. And a forest of miniature trees, as fine as needles, by the artist Ross Neil hangs above the bed. ‘Once or twice a year, we move the objects around; we rehang pictures, we put things away and we bring other things out,’ explains Peter. ‘Changing a room is not something we fear.’

This constant shifting is to be expected from a pair of curators, but Peter also attributes it to Brian’s nomadic childhood. His father was a member of the Gardaí in Ireland, a job that meant his family moved a lot. ‘They always knew they’d have to take their curtains down and have their favourite toy with them and be ready to go,’ >



OPPOSITE Peter and Brian in their London flat. ANTICLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Objects are displayed on shelves in the study and hall. A Jeremy Moon painting in the sitting room. Model trees by Ross Neil in the bedroom. Hylton Nel, Morgan Hall and Felicity Ayleiff ceramics in the sitting room



PEOPLE *lifestyle*



I will NEVER BE RICH in money terms, but I AM RICH in terms of LIFE and the OBJECTS I choose to live with

says Peter. He attributes his own interest in curating to childhood visits to a relative in Hong Kong, who collected ceramics: 'He had a Chinese cabinet filled with beautiful things. In spring and summer, he displayed blue and white objects, and, in autumn and winter, he displayed oxblood-glazed porcelain. It was only later I understood that this was called curation.'

Peter's first experience of working directly with clay was while he was still at school and he was instantly hooked. This early interest propelled him to study for an MA in both studio and industrial ceramic design, before going on to roles at Thomas Goode, in Stoke-on-Trent, and Asprey. In 2016, he collaborated with the writer Ying Jian to launch Ting-Ying Gallery, of which Brian is the creative director. The gallery will be exhibiting at the inaugural Eye of the Collector fair in London this September.

Ultimately, everything Peter and Brian do goes back to the object and the person who made it. 'It's important to remember that even something you consider to be ugly was designed by someone,' says Peter. 'There is nothing in our life that is not designed. Someone somewhere has thought about it. Whether it is a good thought or a bad thought is up to you to decide, but everything has human contact within it.' And, of course, objects are receptacles >



FROM FAR LEFT At the Haggerston studio of ceramicist Cristina Vezzini and glassblower Stan Chen. Fulham-based sculptor Emma Witter. ANTICLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Peter at Cockpit Arts, WCL, with CEO Annie Warburton and weaver Jacob Monk. The studio space is also home to ceramicist Tessa Eastman, bag maker Justin Oh and textile artist Ekta Kaul



PEOPLE *lifestyle*

for our memories and our stories, 'I have a set of clothes hangers that remind me of my mother. They are cheap, metal, with plastic covers,' he says. 'She brought them with her to the UK. They are not beautiful, but they are well designed and the memory they hold is so specific to me. The sight of them may leave someone else cold but that, too, is a reaction. Every object exudes its presence.'

Peter is quick to point out that none of this is about accruing monetary value. 'You marry someone because you love them, not because they are worth a certain amount,' he says. 'It's the same with an object - buy it because you love it.' Similarly, he is not in pursuit of perfection: 'The mark of the maker is so important. It tells the story of how something was formed.' In fact, he collects things that have been repaired, whether it is an English bone-china breakfast cup that has been riveted, or a Japanese bowl mended using the *kintsugi* technique of applying powdered gold to the broken area. To Peter, both not only carry the weight of history, but also display the love of their owners, who could not bear to throw them away and carefully repaired them instead.

This spring, Peter and Brian worked alongside designer and curator Shiro Muchiri to put on an exhibition celebrating innovative craftsmanship at Shiro's gallery on Welbeck Street, W1. Brian sums up their intentions, 'To illustrate that now, more than ever, the process of creation is undeniably a deep-rooted, unifying force.' It is an idea that was shown in action by the diverse selection of work, with contributions from makers across the globe. ▷



ABOVE Peter at SoShiro, the Marylebone gallery founded by the designer and curator Shiro Muchiri. The digitally printed vase on the left is by Andrea Salvatori from Madeinbritaly.

BELOW FROM LEFT Peter, Shiro and Brian examining an object created by Helen O'Shea, who works with waste plastic. Also on display at SoShiro is a vase by Renzi e Reale





Supporting emerging artists and makers is a central part of what Peter and Brian do. Peter is a trustee of the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust (QUEST), a charity that supports British craftsmanship. As he explains, 'They hold technical and design assets in their hands. Whether it's how to cut leather or how to wedge clay, they have skills that need to be passed on to future generations. They have a specific vision and have chosen to dedicate their lives to it. That simple fact must be celebrated.'

'I will never be rich in money terms,' he continues. 'But I am rich in terms of life and the objects I choose to live with. Every morning, I wake up and see something that sparks a memory. I think about the day I bought it, the person who gave it to me or the hand that made it. Objects are my life and while they may only be stuff, the right combination of stuff can make you really happy' □

Ting-Ying Gallery: ting-ying.com

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Peter at Design Centre, Chelsea Harbour with associate director of exhibitions Simone du Bois; his Ting-Ying gallery was involved in the Artefact craft fair at DCCH in June. He is a trustee of the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust, a charity that supports British craft, and is seen here with QUEST ambassador Jay Blades and its CEO Deborah Pocock. Peter and Brian at Postcard Teas, a specialist tea shop that also sells fine ceramics, with its founder Timothy d'Offay

