Stanley Picker Fellowships in Design & Fine Art application 2025

■ Outline Proposal / Project Brief (max 100 words)

Provide a clear concise statement of what your proposal focuses upon.

This proposal focuses on the existential connotations of designing through a reappraisal of English designer and educator Norman Potter (1923–1995) in writing, (re-)making, situated discourse, and publishing. Potter was a compelling character with the highest expectations of design's potential for making meaning. He insisted that designers should read and write widely, and his reluctance to document his work in images sustains a mysterious aura around him. He also had monstrous qualities, to use Claire Dederer's term, which cannot be ignored. I intend to make a critical and contradictory account of his contribution and its contemporary utility.

■ Proposed Activity & Area of Research (max 500 words)

Explain why you want to undertake this project, how you envisage developing it, and describe its wider context.

I am motivated to revisit Potter's ideas precisely because they are so resolutely incompatible with current values. My own experience as a design educator (I have held two professorships in graphic design in Germany, as well as many shorter appointments at schools across Europe) has confronted me with distinctions we routinely make between professional practice and self-initiated work and, especially in a UK-context, how the creation of a market for design education has tended to curtail discourse in ways which are of great consequence for design at large and its ability to engage with societal questions.

I have been researching Potter for over a decade and have considerable access to material. My work has enjoyed the support of Potter's daughter, the filmmaker Sally Potter. I have staged several presentations, including a recent reconstruction of his most notable surviving work, The Penton Kitchen. Having failed to convince any UK museum of the significance of this remarkable object, it was enthusiastically restored and installed at the contemporary art space 019 in Ghent, Belgium, where it has already stimulated considerable interest and public discourse.

I would approach the fellowship with two main objectives. The first would be to reanimate Potter's ideas about the existential nature of design and the staging of design education, particularly his two spatial metaphors: the 'family', a student-

defined space in which supportive cooperation is nurtured; and the ‘arena’, a space of “critical dispute”, in which ideas and objects are exposed to unforgiving scrutiny. This would involve new research, (re-)production of objects of Potter’s design which no longer exist as originals, and the convening of experimental discursive events, both for the Kingston University community and wider publics. I already have sympathetic connections in the School of Design at Kingston, where I was invited as a guest lecturer in 2025.

The second main objective would be the publication of a book on Potter. I have authored several essays in international design journals which I would revisit, complement with new writing — my own and by others with contrary perspectives — and visual production centred around the fellowship. I already have a publisher: Empire, a Paris-based studio who are among the most active non-institutional disseminators of design history and contemporary practice, and who would be open to co-publishing arrangements.

I see this work in the wider context of an elemental discourse about design’s social role. We think of design in ways which are so utterly inseparable from capitalism. Potter, as a figure, represents a provocative counter to that. He was idealistic but never superficial. To encounter his work is to encounter a force of frugality, rigour, impossibly demanding personal ethics, and an individual who, in everything he did, approached design in full relation to its social and political dimensions. He can be no hero figure, however, and the relation of his ideas to chauvinistic aspects of the culture in which he lived and worked must be given unflinching consideration. For me, the Stanley Picker fellowship would be an extremely fitting context in which to do this work.