



An Idea Needing to Be Made: Contemporary Ceramics

27 July to 20 October 2019

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Nicolette Johnson studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

This education resource is designed to support students of VCE Studio Arts:

Unit 3, Outcome 3

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to examine the practice of at least two artists, with reference to two artworks by each artist, referencing the different historical and cultural context of each artwork.

Key knowledge

- art practices related to artworks in more than one historical and/or cultural context
- artworks from different historical and/or cultural contexts that reflect the artists' interpretations of subject matter and influences
- the use of art elements and art principles to demonstrate aesthetic qualities and communicate ideas and meaning
- the materials, techniques and processes used in the production of the artworks
- a range of recognised historical and contemporary artworks.

Key skills

- analyse ways in which artworks reflect artists' interpretations of subject matter, influences, cultural and historical contexts and the communication of ideas and meanings
- analyse and discuss ways in which artists use materials, techniques and processes
- analyse the ways in which artists use art elements and art principles to demonstrate aesthetic qualities
- research and discuss art practices in relation to particular recognised historical and contemporary artworks.

Unit 4, Outcome 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to compare the methods used by artists and considerations of curators in the preparation, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in at least two different exhibitions.

Key knowledge

- the methods and intentions of public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, university art galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, outdoor spaces and online galleries in exhibiting artworks
- the curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and displaying artworks in current exhibitions
- the methods used by and considerations of artists and curators working in galleries in conservation of artworks, including lighting, temperature, storage, transportation and presentation of specific artworks in current exhibitions
- the processes associated with the production, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in current exhibitions
- the characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study

Key skills

- identify and describe the characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study
- describe and compare the methods of and intentions in exhibiting artworks in public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, university art galleries and museums, outdoor spaces and online galleries, which have been visited in the year of study
- analyse how specific artworks are presented in different exhibitions and demonstrate an understanding of the artists' and gallery curators' intentions
- analyse and evaluate curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and presenting specific artworks for display
- analyse and evaluate methods and considerations involved in the conservation of specific artworks related to exhibitions visited in the current year of study

Heide III Central Galleries

In response to John and Sunday Reed's legacy, Heide works to inspire creative talent, collaborating with emerging and mid-career artists as well as celebrating those who have made major contributions as contemporary artists.

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Curator Biographies

Lesley Harding is Artistic Director, Heide Museum of Modern Art. She joined Heide as curator in 2005 after holding curatorial positions at the Arts Centre, Melbourne and National Art School, Sydney, and regularly publishes and lectures on modernist and contemporary Australian art. Her work has appeared in *Art and Australia*, *Art Monthly Australia*, *Artlink* and *Meanjin*, and in 2009 she co-authored *Cubism & Australian Art* with Sue Cramer, for the Miegunyah Press imprint of Melbourne University Publishing.

Lesley has co-authored four books about Heide history: *Sunday's Kitchen: Food and Living at Heide* (2010) and *Sunday's Garden: Growing Heide* (2012), *Modern Love: The Lives of John and Sunday Reed* (2015) and *Mirka & Georges: A Culinary Affair* (2018), all published by Melbourne University Publishing in partnership with Heide Museum of Modern Art and the State Library of Victoria.

Glenn Barkley is a Sydney-based independent curator, artist and valuer. He is a co-founder and current Associate Curator of The Curators' Department. He was previously senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (2008–14) and curator of the University of Wollongong Art Collection (1996–2007). Between 2007–08 he was director and curator of the Ergas Collection.

Barkley has written extensively on Australian art and culture for magazines such as *Art Monthly*, *Artist Profile* and *Art and Australia*, as well as for numerous catalogues and monographs. He has a diverse area of interest and knowledge including public art; artist books and ephemera; outsider art and marginal art forms; public and private collection management and development; and horticulture.

Alison Britton (UK)

Biography

Born in the London suburbs in 1948, Alison Britton was part of a radical group of 1970s Royal College of Art graduates. She has worked from a London studio for over four decades and has an extensive history of international exhibitions, including in Japan and Holland frequently in the first twenty years. Britton was awarded an OBE in 1990. Her retrospective that year toured the UK and concluded at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam. In 1996 a solo exhibition of her work travelled to museums in Australia. Britton has also curated a number of exhibitions, including *British Ceramics* for the British Council in former Czechoslovakia in 1984 and *The Raw and the Cooked* (with Martina Margetts) for Modern Art Oxford in 1993, which toured to the Far East and Europe. She taught in Ceramics and Glass at the Royal College of Art from 1984 to 2017.

Britton's retrospective, *Content and Form*, was held in the Victoria and Albert Museum Ceramics Galleries in 2016. She has held recent exhibitions in London, Oslo, Geneva and Copenhagen, and was included in *Kneaded Knowledge: The Language of Ceramics* curated by Edmund de Waal and Ai Wei Wei, in Graz and Prague in 2016–17, and in *Things of Beauty Growing: British Studio Pottery*, at the Yale Center for British Art, USA and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge in 2017–18. Her book *Seeing Things: Collected Writing on Art, Craft and Design* was published by Occasional Papers in 2013.

Alison Britton's work is held in many international public collections, and she has been represented by Marsden Woo Gallery, London, since 1998.



Alison Britton studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

An interview with the artist



Alison Britton studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Describe your approach to art making. Do you begin with an idea, concept or issue, or do you start by exploring materials and/or processes?

I begin with a half-formed idea of something I want to investigate that is new in some way—a small step in a fresh direction in the light of what I have made before. I don't want to make anything twice. I never draw before making—I don't want to be limited by a drawing, it is more open-ended and exploratory, sorting out the form in three dimensions. I can build what I would not draw. Sometimes tests of colour combinations, of painted slips, may also be triggers for a new piece.

How do the formal elements interact with the function or meaning of your work?

I am not interested in *function*. I choose to make hollow pot forms because they have basic, intrinsic qualities and historical and cultural contexts through millennia of human life. An object having an interior and an exterior is full of metaphors and questions to answer in different ways. The *meaning* for me in my work is to aim, again, for a lucky strike with a new hollow form and spontaneity with layered forms of painting on surfaces.

Is your practice collaborative with any other artists/artisans/technicians, or do you complete every stage of the making process yourself?

I complete everything by myself except glazing. With larger pieces I have an assistant to help me pour glaze, taking the weight of larger things. Pouring and dipping processes over asymmetrical forms can be unpredictable, or like ballet. I stopped spraying glaze in around 2005/6 to embrace the greater risks inherent in pouring.

What effect would you like your work to have on viewers? What do you hope to communicate?

Visual surprise, wit, an unfamiliar jolt in a known framework.

How evident or present are your personal beliefs and values within your art?

As the artist it is hard to judge whether or not, or how viewers perceive my beliefs and values. I would hope they are never bored, but are a little jangled. Having made pots for over four decades my surrounding culture has moved from modernism to postmodernism though they do overlap.

Which artists or practitioners in other fields have influenced your practice?

Over 50 years of practice there are many I could list. I was taught by Hans Coper. I greatly admire Jacqueline Poncelet and Richard Slee, among my colleagues. It has often been painters that I find relevant, and also folk art across a broad historical reach. I am a museum addict. For my generation of students, we felt an obligation to find some creative patch that was our own, distinct from what other colleagues were interested in although in conversation with it. The membrane between modernism and postmodernism has been of great interest.

What else inspires you?

Novels, trees, films, crockery, ideas about the everyday, subtexts.

Is there a quote that sums up an idea expressed in your artwork, or is particularly meaningful to you as an artist?

'The pot is an ordinary object, a vehicle for making images of disparity and connection, sculpture and painting, or *form and fiction*. Pleasure in making ceramics has a lot to do with accepting the balance of control, and the lack of it; constraint and freedom.' We are more used to reading the pairings of 'Form and Function', and 'Fact and Fiction'. In 1995 I had an exhibition Germany called *Form and Fiction*, and wrote that sentence in a magazine article about the show.

Art vs Craft—where does ceramics fit? Do you think contemporary (Western) culture favours ideas and innovation above skills and tradition?

I think that serious ideas and innovations are underpinned or informed by knowledge of traditions and skills in some aspect of their conception and their development into things. Ceramics is a material as well as a discipline. It can be used to many different ends and purposes. You can fit it where you need to, if it interests you as a plastic substance and a means of making form. I like the ambiguity of culture and category; it creates gaps and overlaps to play with. There is a thread of possibility running between the three words art, craft, and design. They can blur or overlap in the being of a piece of work, with its ideas and materials and skills. The back blurb of my book *Seeing Things*, 2013, says that my writings 'review the unstable place of craft in the spectrum of art and design'. The instability is creative, I think there is room left for exploration and new thinking. (In Britain the rise of the craft brewery—very popular in the past decade—seems to have rescued the word 'craft' from shame in a wider public, when it is attached to beer.)

Questions for students

1. How does Britton use the Art Elements: Line, Colour and Form in her work? What about the Art Principles of Proportion, Rhythm and Space? What effect does this have on you as a viewer?
2. Given that Britton states that she is not interested in function, what effect does the addition of what appear to be spouts on her pots have on the meaning of her work?

For further research

View Britton's Peter Dormer Lecture at the Royal College of Art, Battersea, 2016:
<https://vimeo.com/194026916>

Kathy Butterly (USA)

Biography

Born in Amityville, New York in 1963, Kathy Butterly received a Bachelor of Fine Art from Moore College of Art, Philadelphia in 1986. In 1990 she received a Master of Fine Art from the University of California, Davis.

Selected solo exhibitions include *ColorForm* at Manetti Shrem Museum, Davis, CA in 2019; *Thought Presence* at James Cohan Gallery, New York in 2018; *Kathy Butterly*, a solo exhibition for *Open Spaces: A Kansas City Arts Experience*, Kemper Museum of Art, Kansas City in 2018; *The Weight of Color* at Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica, CA in 2015; *Enter* at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York in 2014; and *Kathy Butterly: Freaks and Beauties*, Opener 10, at the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Saratoga Springs, NY in 2005.

Kathy's work has been in numerous group exhibitions including *Regarding George: Contemporary Ceramics in the Spirit of the Mad Potter* at Boca Raton Museum of Art, Boca Raton, FL in 2018; *Pretty Raw: After and Around Helen Frankenthaler* at Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA in 2015; *Figuring Color: Kathy Butterly, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Roy McMakin, Sue Williams* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA in 2012; *The Jewel Thief* at the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY in 2011; *Dirt on Delight: Impulses that Form Clay* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA in 2009; and *Carnegie International* at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA in 2004–05.

Kathy Butterly lives and works in New York City and Searsmont, Maine. She is represented by James Cohan Gallery, New York and by Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica.



Kathy Butterly
Constant 2014
clay, glaze

14.9 x 11.1 x 8.3 cm

Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery,
New York

An interview with the artist

Describe your approach to art making. Do you begin with an idea, concept or issue, or do you start by exploring materials and/or processes?

I start from a generic cast form created by pouring wet clay into a plaster mould made from a generic, store-bought vessel. I choose generic vessel orientated shapes because in the early stage they are like a blank canvas—they have no meaning and what I am after is to find meaning in a form. I have three forms that I have been predominantly working with: a pint glass, a fish bowl and a vase purchased from West Elm. *Multi* was from a pint glass. I have been using the same plaster mould of the pint glass for over 20 years and have not been bored with it. I always find new meaning because the world keeps changing.

I don't ever come to a work with a preconceived idea about how it will be made. I use slip mixed from earthenware and porcelain in my plaster moulds, and while the cast form is still malleable, I alter the clay by pinching, pulling and folding until I connect with it and see something in it that resonates. I then refine the piece, carving and smoothing its surfaces, which is kind of like three-dimensional line drawing. Then the vessel is fired and glazed—always repeatedly and often upwards of 30 times—which allows me to paint surfaces and build volume with accumulated layers of glazes and clay. My work is an exploration of what materials can do and how I can speak through them. I usually work on several pieces at once. I am a solitary worker. I listen to public radio, or local news, music, or have silence while I work. This all adds to the thoughts that go into making my work.

Which art elements and principles do you use most prominently in your work?

I am currently considering line and colour most strongly. An emphasis on importance changes during different periods—before, it was gesture and scale. Line is important for me now because HOW it is used has meaning and evokes a message—I feel the same way about colour. I think of myself as a painter who happens to work with clay.



Kathy Butterly studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

What effect would you like your work to have on viewers? What do you hope to communicate?

I have always tried to be very honest with my work. I don't think of a viewer when I am working. I think that if I am not holding back and being honest the work feels generous in its many ways and the viewer gets it and feels something—basically, I want people to feel something.

How evident or present are your personal beliefs and values within your art?

I believe I am very aware of my personal beliefs and values. Values and personal beliefs do change and one develops new ideas—as one is open to all things that happen in our lives and the world at large. For me, art and life are practically the same thing, so as my life becomes more expansive, so does the risk taking and understanding in my work.

Which artists or practitioners in other fields have influenced your practice?

Early influences in my career were George Ohr, Ken Price, Ron Nagle, Viola Frey, and I studied with Bob Arneson, so they are all part of my history—part of my DNA, but at the moment and for many years now, what has been on my mind has led me to different people.

I think of Joan Mitchell, Alice Neel, Amy Sillman, Edvard Munch, Antonello da Messina, and so many more. Joan, Alice, Amy, Edvard for their lines, colours, gestures, and emotion. I love to look at the way Messina painted portrait busts... the way he painted was as if he was tenderly sculpting.

Many years ago, I read something Louise Bourgeois once said, and it has stuck with me. She was discussing her use of repetitive lines and said that when she draws a line over and over, it's as if she is brushing the hair of someone she loves. Essentially, that love and consideration is in each stroke.¹

What else inspires you?

Inspiration comes to me through many things. I am influenced by the world around me and inspiration comes by allowing myself to see, feel, witness what is before me... I never know when/what I will be inspired by, but when it happens, it's a high.

Questions for students

1. How do Butterly's use of strong, vibrant colours combined with toppling, slumped and collapsed forms create meaning in her work?
2. Does your interpretation of Butterly's work change if you consider them as figurative rather than purely as ceramic vessels?

For further research

View Butterly discussing her “perfectly flawed” work: <https://vimeo.com/58784087>

¹ “The repetitive notion of a line, to create an object [...] the endless repetition of waves, rocking a person to sleep, cleaning someone you like, an endless gesture of love.” Louise Bourgeois, in Jerry Gorovoy and John Cheim (1988) ‘Louise Bourgeois Drawings’, Robert Miller Gallery, NY/Daniel Lelong, Paris, p.138.

Kirsten Coelho (AUST)

Biography

Kirsten Coelho was born in Denmark in 1966. She graduated from the University of South Australia in 1988 with a Bachelor of Design (Ceramics) and then continued her studies to complete a Master of Visual Art in 2004.

Coelho works in porcelain creating works that fuse the formal and the abstract. A fascination with monochromatic high-fired glazes has led her to develop a palette of glaze colours for her works that have their influences in the Song Dynasty in China and the Joseon period in Korea. Coelho's works also make reference to archetypal household items reflecting on nineteenth and twentieth-century migration and exploration. Each piece considers associated purpose, and is imbued with multiple social and cultural histories and interpretations.



Kirsten Coelho studio photograph
Photograph: Tony Kearny

Coelho exhibits regularly in Australia and internationally. Recent solo exhibitions include *New Work* at Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane in 2018; *Portrait* at Tweed Regional Gallery, New South Wales in 2016; *In the Falling Light* at Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra and Newcastle Art Gallery in 2015; and *Towards the End of the Day*—the Sidney Myer Australian Ceramic Award at Shepparton Art Museum, Victoria in 2012. Selected group presentations include at Masterpiece London Art Fair with Adrian Sassoon in 2019; *The Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Divided Worlds* at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2018; Art Basel Hong Kong in 2017; PAD Design Fair, London with This Is No Fantasy + Dianne Tanzer in 2018; TEFAF Maastricht with Adrian Sassoon in 2016; and *Ormolu*, a collaboration with Julie Blyfield at Gallery Funaki, Melbourne; Jam Factory, Adelaide; and The National, Christchurch in 2018–19. Coelho's work is held in state and national public collections in Australia and internationally.

Kirsten Coelho lives and works in Adelaide, South Australia and is represented by Sullivan + Strumpf, Sydney, Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane, and Adrian Sassoon, London.

An interview with the artist



Kirsten Coelho studio photograph
Photograph: Tony Kearny

Describe your approach to art making. Do you begin with an idea, concept or issue, or do you start by exploring materials and/or processes?

My approach in many ways is multi-levelled. I tend to work under the umbrella of a general theme and make objects that relate to that theme. When I begin a new cycle of work I always begin by making a simple object like a cup, to bring my mind and hands back into familiarity with the clay. I then build up from there to make bigger and more complex forms on the potter's wheel.

Which art elements and principles do you use most prominently in your work?

Tone, light and form are constant drivers in my work. Tone and form are elements I am always reappraising as I make my pieces and light is a vital ingredient in the display of my work.

How do the formal elements interact with the function or meaning of your work?

Last year for the Adelaide Biennial I made a body of work entitled *Transfigured Night*. It was displayed in a completely darkened space with only directional lighting on the work—a 14m plinth displaying 73 pieces of white ceramic vessels. The lighting was imperative to the reading of this work. When I set up my work I often work closely with lighting to try and obtain a painterly 2D/3D reading of the work.

Tone then plays an important part here, I use white matt glazes often and like to see how the pieces absorb light and create shadows.

Is your practice collaborative with any other artists/artisans/technicians, or do you complete every stage of the making process yourself?

Mostly I work on my own and undertake all processes myself, although recently I have begun to work with ceramic artist Susan Frost. Susan assists me with kilns and other tasks in the studio. This has helped me so much and it enables me to extend the scope of my practice.

What effect would you like your work to have on viewers? What do you hope to communicate?

I am hoping for a reflective perhaps ambiguously nostalgic response, but it is hard to preempt what someone will take away from the work. I try not to think about that too much as it is an element I can never control. I think I would like to communicate the ever-changing nature of objects around us. How their perceived use is altered by a change in context—be that light, environment, culture or history.

How evident or present are your personal beliefs and values within your art?

I think the action of making is elusive, as you strive for one thing... that thing changes and alters in your imagination and is often never what you set out for it to be. One of my favorite elements of art practice is being surprised by something that you've made that you didn't imagine until you see it in front of you.

Which artists or practitioners in other fields have influenced your practice?

I am greatly influenced by painters ... I wish I could paint!! Cy Twombly, Wilhelm Hammershoi, Russel Drysdale, Fred Williams, Ian Fairweather, Chardin and Morandi.

All of these painters, in very different ways, so eloquently articulate the ineffable and the power of what surrounds us.

What else inspires you?

Older objects—glassware, enamelware, historical ceramics, eroded surfaces, poetry, stories. The work in *An Idea Needing to be Made: Contemporary Ceramics* draws inspiration from enamelware of the 1800s that immigrants brought from Asia and Europe to Australia. The illusion is made by creating a rim of iron oxide on the porcelain to mimic the corrosion of cast iron enamelware.

Is there a quote that sums up an idea expressed in your artwork, or is particularly meaningful to you as an artist?

A friend, the artist Helen Fuller told me of a John Cage quote once: "From the work comes the work." This has always resonated with me... the only way to develop new ideas and new works is to just keep working!

Art vs Craft—where does ceramics fit? Do you think contemporary (Western) culture favours ideas and innovation above skills and tradition?

I think ceramics is such a versatile and mimetic material that it is embedded in our culture, in so many ways—through industry, science, visual art and craft, design. There are so many applications.

I think an artist chooses materials and skills to articulate a concept and that material can change to suit the concept. It is an interesting construct as we would say some one working with clay is a craftsperson yet a painter is an artist... and yet both approaches involve knowledge of material, concept and skill. I don't think it is always true that Western culture favours ideas over skills and tradition—in a sense you can't have one without the other... they can sit hand in hand or perhaps be a reaction to one another too.

Questions for students

1. Coelho lent Heide her collection of small ceramic dogs for the Wunderkammer room in the exhibition. Whenever Coelho finishes a pot, she fashions a small dog figure to use the last piece of clay. Do you have studio habits that somehow signify the work you have made?

For further research

View Coelho discuss her work alongside other exhibiting artists in the 2012 Sidney Myer fund Australian Ceramic Award at Shepparton Art Museum (SAM) in Shepparton Victoria:

<https://vimeo.com/channels/419770/45570738>

Pippin Drysdale (AUST)

Biography

Born in Melbourne in 1943, Pippin Drysdale has been working in her studio in Fremantle, Western Australia for over 45 years. She holds a Diploma in Advanced Ceramics from the Western Australian School of Art and Design and a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts from Curtin University, Perth.

Drysdale has always seen the ceramic form as a three dimensional canvas, translating her intuitive responses to her surroundings and experiences. Specifically, the Australian environment has been the dominant influence in her work. Through her lavish use of colour and lustres and her precision of line she has captured the minutiae of mapping a vast and varied landscape.

Drysdale has held over 50 solo exhibitions in Australia and internationally, including in Paris, Osaka, Boston, Brussels and London. Her most recent exhibitions are *The First Central China International Ceramic Biennale: Cont(r)act Earth* at Henam Museum, Zhengzhou, China in 2016; *The First Biennale Internationale de la Ceramique*, in Saint Cerque, Switzerland in 2016; and at Sabbia Gallery, Sydney, in 2019. Her participation in major international art shows including TEFAF Maastricht and New York, PAD Design Fair, London, Masterpiece London Art Fair and the Salon of Art and Design, New York has brought her work to a wide number of collectors. The Duke of Devonshire has acquired significant works by Drysdale for the Chatsworth Collection and she is represented in over 60 public and corporate collections around the world.

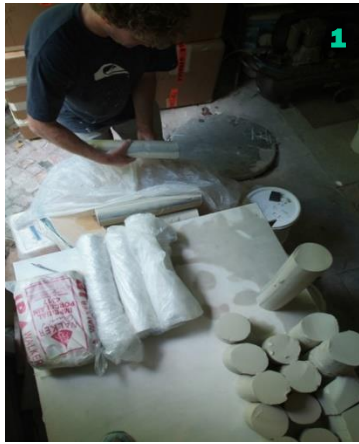
In 2007 Drysdale was awarded a Master of Australian Craft by the Australia Council for the Arts, and in 2008 the Art Gallery of Western Australia gave her the Artsource Lifetime Achievement Award. She was presented with a Living Treasure Award from the Western Australian Government in 2015.

Drysdale is represented by Adrian Sassoon, London, Joanna Bird, London, Sabbia Gallery, Sydney and Mobilia Gallery, Cambridge, MA.

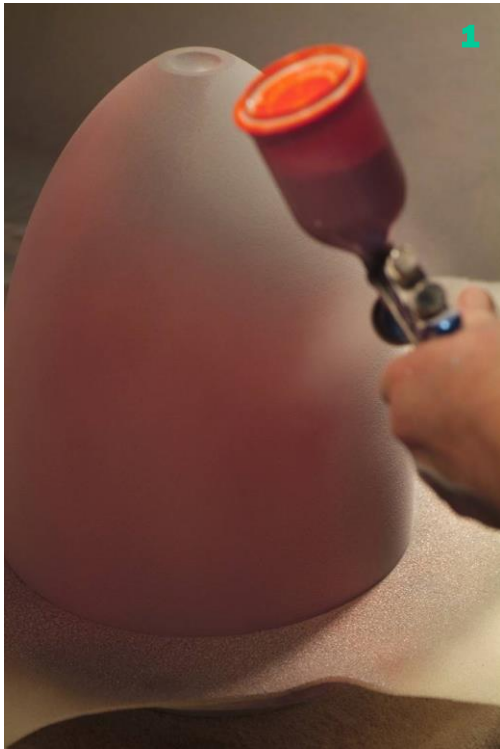


Pippin Drysdale studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Pippin Drysdale's Process in Pictures



1. I use two different porcelains and mix them 3-4 times in a pug mill.
2. Wedging the clay.
3. Throwing, and pulling up the wall of clay.
4. Turning and refining the rim on a vessel.
5. Finishing the rim with fine plastic for a high quality finish.
6. Turning in a foot ring.
7. Mixing glaze, then sieving it through a 150 or 200 mess sieve.
8. I make many test tiles to test glaze colour results.
9. Finishing the rim with lots of glaze to create a bleeding quality.



1. Using a gravity feed spray-gun to create layers and variations in in the glaze colours before incising lines.
2. Once glazed all over, using a tool to create a clear base.
- 3 and 4. Incising lines and creating shadows along the way.
5. When incising is partly finished, I fill in the line work with another colour.
6. I only paint a small patch, before incising another patch, and continue in this fashion.
7. Finished glazed works, prior to glaze firing in the kiln.



All images courtesy of the artist

Ernabella Arts (AUST)

Biography

Ernabella Arts nyangangka minyma pampa munu wati tjilpi, kungkawara munu yangupala tjuta warkarinyi nganampa arts-pangka nganana mukuringkula wangkaringi nganampa warka pulkaringkula kunpuringkula community nganampa wiru titutjura ngaranytjaku.

Ernabella Arts is a place where we senior women and men and young women and men practice and develop our art, in order to sustain, support and promote our cultural heritage, and to improve the lifestyle of our community's members.

Established in 1948, Ernabella Arts is Australia's oldest, continuously running Indigenous art centre. Ernabella Arts is in Pukatja Community at the eastern end of the Musgrave Ranges in the far north west of South Australia. Pukatja was the first permanent settlement on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY Lands). The Presbyterian Board of Missions founded the mission in 1937 and a craft room was established in 1948. The centre's reputation lies in the adaptability and innovation of the artists who have been introduced to many different mediums over the years. Today its varied group of artists is a mix of young and old, men and women.



Ernabella Arts Centre, South Australia
Photograph: Alex Craig

The artists of Ernabella Arts are always reinvigorating their organisation, seeing it through its evolution from a craft room into a culturally strong contemporary art centre. For over 70 years art centre members have been part of many exhibitions and residencies and their artworks collected by various institutions both public and private in Australia and around the world. These include Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs; Artbank; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Muswellbrook Regional Art Gallery, New South Wales; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; National Museum of Australia, Canberra; National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh; Parliament House Collection, Canberra; Powerhouse Museum, Sydney; Royal Perth Hospital; and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.

An interview with the artist

The following artists collaborated on Ernabella Arts' piece for the exhibition:

Alison Milyika Carroll	Marceena Jack	Langaliki Lewis	Lynette Lewis
Rachael Lionel	Vennita Lionel	Yurpiya Lionel	Janice Stanley
Renita Stanley	Carlene Thompson	Marissa Thompson	Tanya Williams

Pitjantjatjara woman Janice Stanley was interviewed on behalf of the group.

How did the work come to be made?

We were invited to exhibit and used the brief provided by curators as our starting point—the vessel as still life. We talked about the idea of a still life and what we might include and wrote a big list of objects we could make. Then all of the artists started making things.

Did you work individually or collaboratively?

We made collective decisions. We wanted to include all the things that are *rikina* (awesome) and relate to food and water in our culture. Generally one artist worked on each component, but we don't hold ownership when working on our art.

What did you make?

I made *kampurarpa* (bush tomatoes), which are important because they're traditional bush food that women used to collect and eat. They're little, like marbles. They can still be found but not until summer. Buffel grass has taken over the land. It is a weed and obstructs the *kampurarpa*—they used to be everywhere, but now they're not. There are *piti*, which are used when the women went out to collect food, they would wear them on their heads and bring everything back in that vessel. They're made from the roots of a particular tree.



Digging for honey ants, Atila, Mount Conner
 Photograph: CP Mountford, 1940
 State Library of South Australia,
 PRG 1218/34/1225D



Alkunjuna, winnowing grass seed, Mann Ranges
 Photograph: CP Mountford, 1940
 State Library of South Australia, PRG 1218/34/1291A

What other objects are included in the work?

In response to white fella still life we made vessels pertinent to Anangu life. There's *malu wipu* (kangaroo tail), which is a favourite food still to this day that we eat very often. We go out hunting, come back and feed the family. We eat the whole animal and the tail is the best bit. There are also two *wira* (cylindrical digging cups), which are traditionally smaller but the artists made them taller for the still life. And there's *mingklepa* (bush tobacco).

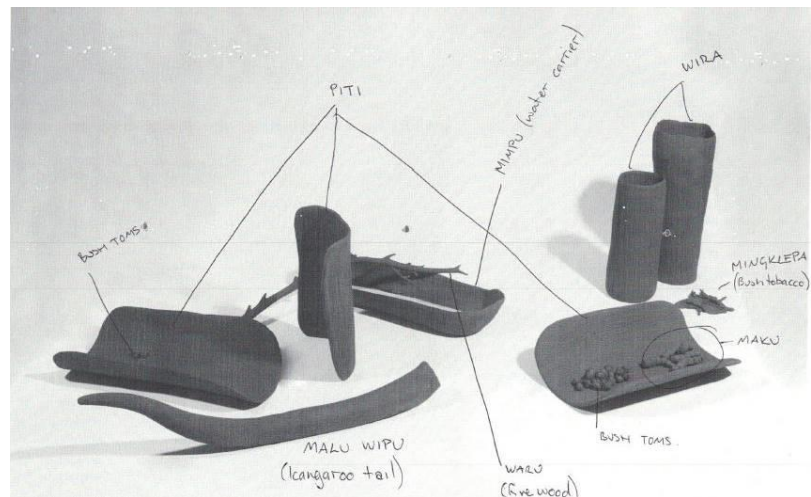


How did you choose the materials to make the work?

Black stoneware clay was selected as it is a strong colour choice. It evokes ashes but also survival. The works had only one kiln firing and most of the pieces are not glazed. The *mimpu*, which is used to carry water, has blue glaze to represent water and the *waru* (stick to represent firewood) has a tiny bit of green glaze on it to symbolize new growth. Alison Milyika Carroll, a senior artist at Ernabella who is also the Chairperson, was one of the lead artists on the project and she talked about how important it is to have water and life and strength as part of the work.

Woman (possibly Marinka Burton's mother) with digging stick, dish and grinding stones getting water at Aliwanyuwanyu waterhole, Musgrave Ranges
Photograph: CP Mountford, 1940
State Library of South Australia, PRG 1218/34/1217A

Photograph of *Wankaru*, annotated in Pitjantjatjara language
Courtesy of the artists and Ernabella Arts, South Australia



Artists' Statement

Wankaru (Surviving) pays tribute to *mai putitja* (bush food) and the vessels that were traditionally carved from wood used to carry *mai* (food) and *kapi* (water). *Mai putitja* was, until comparatively recently, the primary sustenance for the Anangu Pitjantjatjara people. The need to seek food consumed the psyche of peoples as they worked together to gather and hunt. Favourite *mai* included *malu wipu* (kangaroo tail), *kampurarpa* (bush tomatoes) and *maku* (witchetty grubs). In contemporary times, many kinds of *mai putitja* are still gathered regularly although they are not relied upon as in the past. Most *mai*, such as *maku* and *kampurarpa*, is mainly collected by women. This 'art of gathering' is connected to intricate knowledge systems into which women are inducted over the course of their lives. Many Anangu Pitjantjatjara songs and dances relate to these practices and the maintenance of supply.

For further research

View Alison Milyika Carroll, Chairperson, discussing the ceramics studio at Ernabella:
<http://www.ernabellaarts.com.au/ceramics>

All photographs in this section were sourced in collaboration with the artists and Ernabella Arts Centre.

Simone Fraser (AUST)

Biography

Simone Fraser was born in South Africa in 1951. She graduated from the Canberra School of Art in 1981 and completed post graduate studies at Monash University in 2000. She was inducted into the International Academy of Ceramics in 2018.

Selected solo exhibitions include *Iconoplastic* at Sabbia Gallery, Sydney in 2018; *Articulation: Aspects Creating Form* at Sabbia Gallery, Sydney in 2014; *New Work by Simone Fraser*, BMGART, Adelaide in 2012; *Contained Impressions* at Narek Galleries, Bermagui, New South Wales in 2013; *Timelines* at Sabbia Gallery, Sydney in 2011; *Past and Present* at Narek Galleries, Bermagui, New South Wales in 2009; *Simone Fraser* at Fusions Gallery, Brisbane in 1997; and *Simone Fraser* at Mura Clay Gallery, Sydney in 1998.



Simone Fraser studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Selected group exhibitions include *New Orientalia* at Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taiwan in 2018; *Masters Exhibition* at Clay Gulgong International Ceramics Festival, New South Wales in 2018; *Ceramic Perspectives: Contemporary Artists from Australia, New Zealand, Israel and Slovenia* in conjunction with the International Academy of Ceramics Congress in Sant Pau, Barcelona in 2016; *Interplay—Aesthetic Charm, Material Challenge* at Skepsi Gallery, Melbourne in 2015; *Ceramic Revisions II* at May Space, Sydney in 2017; *Third Shanghai International Modern Pot Art Biennial* at the Shanghai Museum of Arts and Crafts, China in 2012; *Bravura: 21st Century Australian Craft* at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide in 2009–10; and *Ceramics: The Australian and New Zealand Context* at Campbelltown City Art Gallery, Sydney in 2003.

Fraser has lectured in many tertiary institutions including the National Art School in Sydney. Her work is in numerous public collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taiwan; Museu del Càntir, Barcelona; International Modern Pot Art Museum, Yixing; and many regional galleries in Australia.

Simone Fraser is represented by Sabbia Gallery in Sydney and by Narek Galleries in Bermagui, New South Wales.

An interview with the artist

Describe your approach to art making. Do you begin with an idea, concept or issue, or do you start by exploring materials and/or processes?

I usually begin with an idea or concept. I also draw and research around those ideas. My recent work for example comes from a deep personal experience in which I refer to the use of the vessel in ritual practice (*Iconoplastic*, Sabbia Gallery, 2018). I wanted them to symbolise an alternative message to the authoritarian, masculine, ritual vessels associated with some religious practice. I wanted to suggest a different dialogue, one that embraces beauty and the feminine. Icons freed from constraints of ritual and patriarchy. It is also a reference to the plastic medium itself and its place in the visual arts.

Through this rather protracted process of making, glazing and firing I achieve deeper resolution of my concepts. I complete every stage of making, glazing and firing myself. I feel that the process itself is an intrinsic creative part of the work.

The ubiquitous nature of the vessel—the fact that it is familiar to everyone—allows me to open up an immediate dialogue or conversation with the viewer who can then focus on the content and ideas within it.



Simone Fraser studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Which art elements and principles do you use most prominently?

I don't overtly focus on any of these now. I felt the need over time to be more intuitive rather than to be confined by a structure or concern for a formula. However, I think it's important to be well grounded and informed initially. When evaluating and discussing aesthetic considerations with students. I certainly find these art elements and principles a good tool in discussion and moving to some resolution with their work.

Ceramics, for instance, demands a high level of technical skills, which can stifle the creative process if allowed to dominate. I feel creating, unencumbered by too many constraints, is very important. That said, given the three dimensional nature of the medium and what I do, obviously *form*, *proportion* and *texture* are important in my work. The implied volume—giving shape to the *space*, for example, is critical to my work.

The Japanese aesthetic—the beauty of imperfection or *wabi sabi* has always played an important part as to how I see things.

What effect would you like your work to have on viewers? What do you hope to communicate?

The fact that the vessel form is so universal, means that I can make my own statement whether that be a surface one—looking at history or landscape or, in the case of my latest works, the ritual vessel. This allows viewers to make their own evaluation of the work and hopefully obtain something from it. I have ideas that I put out into the public space, which may or may not stimulate the viewer. I don't try to justify my work.

How evident or present are your personal beliefs and values within your art?

That remains for the observer to say—I think that the vessel allows for diverse interpretation. My recent work is a very personal response to the patriarchy within religious structures.

Which artists or practitioners in other fields have influenced your practice?

Alexandra Englefriet is a Dutch performance artist who uses her whole body in the environment to shape and mold clay in the land space around her. I like painters such as Ben Quilty who has a very expressionistic and visceral way of working with the painted surface. I have travelled extensively so generally all art has been influential. My mother is a painter who has also worked with clay for many years. She introduced me to clay at a very young age. I then had a very good grounding in the arts at art school, but my primary influencer was ceramic artist Alan Peascod, who focused on the Middle East and its history when most looked to the East and its aesthetic.

What inspires you?

As we are forced to join a world of fast communication with little time for deliberation, we equally need to follow the trail of our imagination in the silence of our inner domain. We need to 'see' and renew our inspiration, connecting with our origin in mind and all the while taking another step outward. The melting pot of references in this body of work—from the fossil, the archaeological, the environmental to the contemporary, have melded to produce a personal timeline in clay that still allows individual interpretation. Touch is an important aspect of the work – the trace of the human hand, the finger mark, the scrape. It's about a context—a narrative, unfolding through its layers, while still referencing the timelessness of a tradition.²

Art vs Craft—where does ceramics fit? Do you think contemporary (Western) culture favours ideas and innovation above skills and tradition?

The age-old question!!

Clay is just another medium. Unfortunately, it has suffered through history from being associated primarily with function thus 'relegating' it into the *crafts* basket. There's really nothing wrong with skills and tradition or function for that matter. We should acknowledge the ceramic object/vessel in history as being the time capsule of mankind and pay homage to that tradition. We need to also appreciate the medium attracts diverse and broad practitioners.

The art/craft debate in the past was wrapped up in the history of the journeyman, guilds and apprenticeship systems where many hours of labour doing repetitive tasks in order to attain a level of proficiency in a 'craft' occurred before moving on. Craftmanship or the way the object was made was very important. These works could be reproduced many times. There was no particular concept

² Simone Fraser in *Artist Profile #27* on her solo show (2014) titled: *Articulation: Aspects creating form*.

behind these crafted objects—they were/are what they are—they could be seen as emotionless, if you like. This is where the debate about art versus craft had its genesis, maybe—that craft is seen as without concept or devoid of emotions and Art the opposite. For some clay still has this stigma. It is hard to divorce this history from the medium.

As part of that response I do think that some contemporary thinking at the moment is certainly seeing skill as a negative—that craft skills are no longer relevant, impeding creative thought—deskilling is becoming a popular view. The idea being paramount.

On one level I agree with this, in that problems arise when technique, attaining skills, methodology—call it what you will—take precedence and the concept becomes either non-existent or stultified as a result. We see this especially in ceramics when the myriad of things like glaze technology, throwing, mould making, firing etc., starts to take on an all-encompassing role in the creating process.

On the other hand, using the medium in whatever context—conceptual or otherwise—certainly does require a base skill level in order to progress or even start. Very much like any other area of the arts. Attaining these skills should not be seen as an impediment to creating art or render the work artless. The idea that skills or craft knowledge can just be learnt when needed is not so easy either. It should be acknowledged that certain levels are not always easily attained and require a deal of time and commitment. The act of learning a skill can actually enhance and help the creative process, proffering more considered ideas rather than hindering it.

So to sum up—every generation of artists needs to make its mark and ceramics is no different. I think it's important to understand history—to look back and see what has gone before. We don't need to throw everything out. There is creativity in process. A learnt skill doesn't negate the content of a work or render it emotionless. I think this is at the crux of the debate. Balance is the staff of life.



Simone Fraser studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Questions for students

John McDonald, art critic for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, says of Fraser's work:

The most daring, called *Landscapes*, are a mixture of greens, yellows and blues, applied with the verve of an Abstract Expressionist. For a ceramic artist to work with such freedom she must first have a mastery of technique. The next, much harder phase is to take leave of convention—and ceramics, more than most art forms, is completely besotted with its own traditions. Fraser obviously loves her medium and pays homage to its antiquity in these works that look weathered at the moment of their birth. It is no small feat to create pieces that seem both ancient and brand new; vessels that are as hard as stone, but with the colour and subtle life force of a coral reef.³

3. Abstract Expressionism is a style developed in the 1940s and 50s by action painters such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning and early colour field painters such as Mark Rothko. It is simultaneously abstract, expressive and emotive, and is often characterised by gestural brush-strokes and the impression of spontaneity. Can you see conventions of Abstract Expressionism in Fraser's work?
4. How does Fraser use Art Elements and Principles to create the dual effect of appearing 'both ancient and brand new?' What effect does this have on you as a viewer?
5. Fraser says of her work, 'I have always seen my forms as metaphors or symbols.' What might her work *Chalice Series II*, with its use of both dry glaze and gold lustre, symbolise?
6. Fraser mentions the concept of *wabi sabi* as influential to her practice.⁴ What evidence of this can you find in her work? How does this concept impact your own practice as an artist?



Simone Fraser
Chalice Series II 2018
 dry glaze, gold lustre, mid-fired ceramic
 34 x 28 cm
 Collection of Julie Claessens and John Stubbs
 Photograph: Greg Piper

For further research

View Fraser's presentation at Clay Gulgong, 2018, as she discusses her practice: <https://vimeo.com/278606135>

³ John McDonald, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 21, 2011

⁴ *Wabi sabi* is a Japanese term that refers to a way of living that finds beauty within the imperfections of life and accepts peacefully the natural cycle of growth and decay. In *Wabi Sabi Simple* (2004), author Richard Powell summarises the concept as, "nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect."

Gwyn Hanssen Piggot (AUST)

Biography

Gwyn Hanssen Piggot was born in 1935 in Ballarat, Victoria, and completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at the University of Melbourne in 1954. From 1955 she was apprenticed to the Australian potter Ivan McMeekin at Mittagong, New South Wales, and later trained with leading practitioners in the UK, including Bernard Leach, Ray Finch, Michael Cardew and Alan Craiger-Smith. The Austrian artist Lucie Rie was also an important mentor. During her distinguished and productive career Piggot established studios in London and France as well as in Australia. She died in London in 2013.



Gwyn Hanssen Piggot studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist's estate

Devoted for many years to the rich traditions of functional ceramics and the long-term study of Asian and European pottery, Piggot was renowned for her beautifully crafted production-ware and her skill in wood-firing. In the late 1980s she turned her attention to grouping works into still life arrangements. Her consideration of tonal graduation and her signature arrangements of ceramic vessels into families, clusters and trails reflect her concerns of formal purity and beauty, together with her profound relationship with pots—‘useful, everyday, ordinary pots’—that she said were her ‘daily pleasure mines’.

During her lifetime Piggot was internationally acclaimed as one of Australia’s most significant and influential artists. Among many career highlights, she received the Order of Australia Medal in 2002, exhibited extensively overseas including at Tate St Ives, and had a major survey exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne in 2005. Her work is held in the collections of all Australian state galleries; the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; and in major public and private collections internationally, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the Fina Gomez Collection in Paris.

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott

Excerpt from the catalogue essay by exhibition co-curators Lesley Harding and Glenn Barkley



The exhibition takes as its starting point the contributions of the late Australian artist Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, whose interest in and interrogation of the vessel and the still life tradition ushered in new ways of thinking about function, purpose and display. Her widely acclaimed work possesses a kind of talismanic power and functions as a bridge between certain types of ceramics practice in the twentieth century and the present.

Pigott began her formal training as a potter with Ivan McMeekin, though this was preceded by her careful study of Sung pots in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. Through McMeekin Pigott was introduced to the 'Anglo-Oriental folk aesthetics'¹ then prevalent in England with the titular heads of the movement, Bernard Leach and Michael Cardew, at the

height of their influence. From 1958 when she went to England through to her return to Australia in the early 1970s, Pigott saw important ceramics collections and met with most of the leading potters who were then moving through the UK. She worked with Leach and Cardew, became friendly with Lucie Rie, and eventually established her own pottery in France.²

In Pigott's work, from her earliest functional ware to her concluding ambitious 'trails', there is an apparent fusion between the austerity of Rie and the earnestness and proof-in-labour of Cardew and Leach. But her later artworks additionally display correlations to the practices of major figures in the world of painting, beginning with Giorgio Morandi and extending to Robert Ryman and Mark Rothko, through to the materials-based minimalism of the Korean Dansaekwha group, and by extension the more recent conceptual abstractions of the Korean-American artist Byron Kim.



Installation views

An Idea Needing to be Made: Contemporary Ceramics 2019
featuring works by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott
Photographs: Christian Capurro

¹ Grace Cochrane, *The Crafts Movement in Australia: A History*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1992, p. 209.

² A comprehensive account can be read in Tanya Harrod, 'Portrait of an Artist as a Young Woman: Gwyn Hanssen Pigott 1935–1973' in Jason Smith, *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott: A Survey 1955–2005*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2005.

In the context of this exhibition Pigott's work is a rich source of ideas, posing questions for the still life tradition, the relationship between ceramics and other forms of visual expression, and importantly, notions of object value and functionality. As Pigott herself explained:

It is alarmingly contradictory; to make pots that are sweet to use and then to place them almost out of reach. To make beakers that are totally inviting and then to freeze them in an installation. Worse still, to take so much time with each piece, carefully trimming and turning and removing most marks of the throwing, to glaze with exacting precision, waxing inside even the simplest, smallest beaker to ensure a sharp, drawn edge. There has been an alarming turnaround. Old friends may indeed be worried.³

All of the artists in *An Idea Needing to Be Made* explore this push–pull dynamic in some way. They use the language of the vase or the bowl or the container. Their works, generally speaking, have holes in the tops and even in the sides—they can be used if the need arises. But to what end? 'We, of course, could change all that in a flash', Pigott wrote of this duality, 'drink from the cup, cup the bowl, pour the bottle: and that would be perfectly all right. Lovely even. Pleasure. For a while.'⁴



Installation view

An Idea Needing to be Made: Contemporary Ceramics 2019

featuring works by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott

Photograph: Christian Capurro

Questions for students

1. How has the exhibition design impacted the presentation of Gwyn Hanssen Piggott's work? What effect does this have on viewers?
2. Which of the other artists in the exhibition have been influenced by Gwyn Hanssen Piggott's practice?
3. Research the work of Georgio Morandi, Robert Ryman, Mark Rothko and the Korean Dansaekwha group to find evidence of how they influenced Gwyn Hanssen Piggott's practice.

For further research

View excerpts from *A Potter's Film*, which details Hanssen Pigott's process from throwing and turning to glazing and firing: <https://www.creativecowboyfilms.com/movies/a-potters-film>

³ Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Truth in Form: Pulled Back Simplicity', *Studio Potter*. 26 (1): 5–8, 1997.

⁴ Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, artist's statement, *Confrontations*, exh. cat., Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, 1993.

King Houndekpinkou (FRANCE)

Biography

Born in Montreuil, France, in 1987, King Houndekpinkou is a Franco-Beninese ceramicist who lives and works in Paris. In 2012

Houndekpinkou's discovery of the six ancient pottery kilns of Japan encouraged him to visit Bizen, Japan each year to acquire further knowledge and experience beside local potters. He was seduced by their spiritual and ceremonial approach to creating ceramic works, which seemed reminiscent of Benin's animist cult of voodoo. Following this epiphanic experience, Houndekpinkou developed *Terres Jumelles*, a cultural program that fosters cross-cultural dialogue between the various pottery sites of Benin and Japan through the local practices of ceramics in both countries.

Today, Houndekpinkou blends clays and other materials from all continents to create works that combine creativity, craftsmanship, cross-cultural understanding and spirituality. He cultivates an attraction for the 'beauty of imperfection' and purposely scratches, tears and repairs clay bodies which are often disfigured by texture and clay overload. His work has been showcased internationally at art fairs, museum exhibitions and biennales in Australia, Benin, Hong Kong, Japan, Morocco, Senegal, Spain and the USA.



King Houndekpinkou studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

An interview with the artist



King Houndekpinkou studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Describe your approach to art making. Do you begin with an idea, concept or issue, or do you start by exploring materials and/or processes?

When I started ceramics my purpose was to see how the four elements (earth, water, air, fire) translate who I am into tangible handmade objects. It's like undertaking a matter-driven psychoanalysis. Clay, which is the material I interact the most with, has existed since the dawn of humanity. It is infused with all the knowledge available on Earth. Like an encyclopaedia. It can easily access one's subconscious to reveal different aspects of our personality, our past, our story... Therefore, I like to say that I 'consult' the clay and prefer not to pretend that I will succeed in imposing something too specific to it before I touch it (i.e. concept, title or particular purpose or message). Titles, concepts and ideas come during the making process and my interaction with the materials. They refine as I reach the end of the production. I have a visceral approach to art making.

Which art elements and principles do you use most prominently?

Form: I start a piece by throwing a vessel form on the wheel that constitutes the main body/structure I play on. It is my 'canvas,' my playground. It needs to be strong enough so I can build onto it and add clay (often 2-3 times the weight) so it doesn't collapse. It needs to be elegant, with a top and a bottom. It needs to have beautiful curves and lines. How do I know a form is good or not? I rely on my intuition, my eyes. My senses are my best judges.

Texture is how I infuse my vital energy into my work, through texturing the surface of my wheel-thrown forms by hand. I like to 'disfigure' the primary lines of the vessel using clay and glaze-based textures (e.g. spikes, bumps, cracks). It's an intuitive process that I really enjoy. My main inspiration for texturing my works comes from the Voodoo altars in Benin, West Africa. There, during rituals, priests pour/place diverse substances, matters or objects onto a large, earthen lump in order to connect with the deities. As the texture accumulates onto the lump, it turns into a beautiful, lively, colorful and abstract 'sculpture,' though the intention is not to create an artwork but to reach spiritual enlightenment. I see myself in that process. The intention is spiritual but the outcome is a tangible and artsy translation of the soul.

Rhythm: When adding clay/texture onto the main body of the thrown piece, my hands work frenetically and I engage in a sort of trance with the matter. It's a performance in itself. The result is shown on the final piece. In contrast to that, the earlier stage of my process, which is wheel throwing, requires more calm and precision. I like how these two stages contradict one another; one is intense and the other quieter, but that's how the work finds its balance.

Is your practice collaborative, or do you complete every stage of the making process yourself?

I do everything by myself from beginning to end.

What effect would you like your work to have on viewers? What do you hope to communicate?

I don't expect anything in particular from the viewers but I enjoy when they manage to complete the works with their own imagination. This interaction fascinates me because it proves that the work has reached a certain depth of with their mind. However, I often get comments along the lines of 'Oh, your works look like creatures from the sea,' or 'Oh, your textures look delicious.'



King Houndekpinkou studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

Which artists or practitioners in other fields have influenced your practice?

I grew up in Paris, France. I live and work there, so I would instinctively refer to Swiss artist Giacometti (1901-1966) and French artist César (1921-1998). I am inspired by their visceral and poetic ways of working with the matter but I wouldn't say that they have a direct influence on my work. Rather I would say that I see myself in their ways of working/thinking. César's approach to compressing wrecked cars in a scrap yards to create a sculpture is bold and crude, yet the result is very elegant, lively and beautiful. Giacometti had a poetic way of talking about his practice. He was also a great observer and humanist in my opinion.

What else inspires you?

These days I am inspired by how people can be unconditionally generous to one another in the way they communicate, give and create. I want to be more and more generous with people. It's not always easy but I work on it the best I can.

Is there a quote that sums up an idea expressed in your artwork, or is particularly meaningful to you as an artist?

Just do it!

Questions for students

1. The titles of Houndekpinkou's work include *Fireworks Over Sakura* and *Organika—Viscerally Yours*. What do his ceramic forms remind you of? If you were to give them titles, what would they be?
2. Houndekpinkou often uses clays he has sourced from different locations around the world in combination to make one ceramic work. What challenges would this present to a ceramic artist?

For further research

View Houndekpinkou's presentation at Clay Gulgong, 2018, as he discusses his practice:
<https://vimeo.com/278965861>

Nicolette Johnson (AUST)

Biography

Born in London in 1990, Nicolette Johnson was awarded a Bachelor of Photography with Honours from the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane in 2011. She began practising ceramics in 2015.

Johnson's work draws on traditional pottery techniques which span millennia. Her forms marry the organic and the handmade, echoing botanical symmetry and patterns found in the natural world. In the imagination, these patterns become petals on a flowering plant, scales on a reptile, downy plumage of a bird, or even ancient archeological artefacts. Johnson's making process is meditative and labour intensive, and she often spends weeks on a single pot, as hundreds of clay protrusions are added individually, by hand, to the surface of the vessel.

Johnson's first solo exhibition was *Blume* at Paper Boat Press Gallery, Brisbane in 2018. Selected group exhibitions include *BAD@MoB* at the Museum of Brisbane in 2019; *Manifest*, part of the Australian Ceramics Triennale at PW1, Hobart in 2019; *Designwork 03* at Sophie Gannon Gallery, Melbourne in 2019; *Material Thought* at Modern Times, Melbourne in 2019; *Ceramics 2* at Maunsell Wickes Gallery, Sydney in 2018; *Designing Women* at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne in 2018; *Unleashed* at Artisan, Brisbane in 2018; *Makers Take III* at UAP Warehouse, Brisbane in 2018; *Relics Today* at Modern Times, Melbourne in 2018; *Vase & Vessel: An Ode to Morandi* at Saint Cloche Gallery, Sydney in 2018; *Artefacts* at SpACE@Collins, Melbourne in 2018; *Emerge* at Paper Boat Press Gallery, Brisbane in 2017; *On Paper, Of Clay* at Saint Cloche Gallery, Sydney in 2017; and *Gulp* at 1 Trafalgar Street, Woolloongabba, Brisbane in 2016.

Nicolette Johnson's work is held in the collections of the Museum of Brisbane and the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. She currently lives and works in Brisbane and is represented by Sophie Gannon Gallery, Melbourne.



Nicolette Johnson studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

An interview with the artist

Describe your approach to art making. Do you begin with an idea, a concept, an issue, or do you start by exploring materials and processes?

I often begin my making process by thinking about what ideas and feelings I would like the work to elicit in viewers, and from there I make a series of sketches. Doing preliminary sketches is a good way to escape the bounds of what might be possible or impossible to make with clay and instead allows me to focus my imagination on forms that could bring forth those ideas and feelings. I enjoy the challenge of turning a two-dimensional shape into a functional three-dimensional object.

Sometimes materials and processes are dictated by limitations. For instance, in making *Dark Tower* and *Particle Vase* I had to use steel-reinforced epoxy, which is not a material I usually use. The reason for this is that my kiln is only 50cm tall on the interior, so in order to make works that stand taller than 50cm I have to make and fire them in two separate sections and then secure them together at the join after firing.

Which art elements and principles do you use most prominently?

Form, texture, and repetition are fundamental aspects within my art practice. My work is influenced by traditional familiar pottery forms (think narrow bases, wide shoulders, flared-out lips) which are then altered and made strange by the addition of hundreds of hand-sculpted protrusions. As a whole, these protrusions create a new texture over the pot, almost like a coat of armour. The undulating surfaces mimic repetitive patterns found in nature, such as the radiating spines on a cactus, scales of a fish or the plumage of a bird.

Is your practice collaborative with any other artists or technicians, or do you complete every stage of the making process yourself?

While I do work on every stage of these pieces, from conception to firing, alone in my studio, I have gained immeasurable knowledge from other potters in my community, which helps me become a better artist and craftsperson, and I do consider this a kind of collaboration. I find that potters—in all stages of their careers—are particularly generous with information and observations, and the mutually beneficial relationships I have formed since the beginning of my practice have been invaluable.

What effect would you like your work to have on viewers? What do you hope to communicate?

It is my hope that the works convey a sense of power and mystery. There is a tension between the uncanny, alien texture of the pots and the seemingly ancient, geological, patinated surface treatment,⁵ simulated by a wash of manganese oxide before firing. There is also a tension between the visual weight and strength of a pot covered in a thick layer of protruding spheres, and the inherent fragility of the physical material.

⁵ *Patina* is a thin layer that variously forms on the surface of copper, bronze and similar metals, or certain stones, and wooden furniture, leather or any similar acquired change of a surface through age and exposure. Pertaining to metal, *patina* describes a green or brown film produced by oxidation.

My aim is to make pots that look as if they have always been here, as if they were spirited into existence this way instead of being made by hand in a studio. If, hypothetically, I didn't make them, where could they have come from? Possibly an archaeological dig site, or maybe from another planet? I enjoy mythologising my own works and this is the effect I'd like it to have on others.

How evident or present are your personal beliefs and values within your art?

On surface level there might not be an immediate connection between my work and my personal beliefs, however it could be that the work taps into my deeper interests of spirituality, history, and the value, energy, and symbolism people have placed in objects since time immemorial.

Which artists or practitioners in other fields have influenced your practice?

I am profoundly inspired by the artist Louise Bourgeois and the way her work is imbued with emotions like love, pain and fear, as well as how she has threaded her personal history and childhood memories through each of her works.

Simone Leigh is an American contemporary sculptor whose work centres women of colour and examines culture, history, and the female body. Her sculptures are powerful and commanding, and often challenge the association of femininity with fragility.

I am also inspired by artist Shari Mendelson, whose work is reminiscent of ancient glass vessels but on closer inspection are revealed to be made of recycled plastic. The opalescence and translucency of these pieces bestow them with a sense of preciousness and value that belies the humble nature of the material.

What else inspires you?

To be quite broad, I am endlessly interested in the universe and the unknown, mythologies across different cultures, religion and the occult, and geometries found in nature.

Questions for students

1. Discuss Johnson's use of colour and form and what effect/s this has on viewers.
2. Watch the video below and describe the contrast between strength and fragility in Johnson's work. Evaluate how successfully this is communicated to viewers through her work.

For further research

This short video gives an insight into Johnson's practice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQYbzA7k7Ns>

Kang Hyo Lee (KOREA)

Biography

Kang Hyo Lee was born in Korea in 1961 and is widely regarded as one of the finest Korean potters working today. He creates contemplative abstract minimalism through the use of traditional Puncheon/Onggi techniques that manifest in the shape of thrown and hand-built vessels with creamy liquid surfaces and elegant sculptural forms. His restrained pieces belie the kinetic energy he imparts—each painterly gesture informs the textural surface of his works. A practitioner of Korean martial arts, his sinewy movements become a dance with the clay.

Combining basic forms such as the moon jar, platter, water jar, and large-scale Onggi pot with liquid white-slip, the energy conveyed in his works is rich as well as expressive.

Kang Hyo Lee has exhibited all over the world and his work is held in many important public and private collections including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; British Museum, London; Incheon World Ceramics Center, Korea; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Art Institute of Chicago; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Musee National de Ceramique de Sevres, France; and the International Ceramic Museum, Faenza, Italy.



Kang Hyo Lee studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

About the artist

Kang Hyo Lee's making process involves his whole body—the large scale of his pots requiring huge sweeps of the arm to manipulate gigantic coils of clay. Onggi are traditional Korean earthenware vessels with an origin dating back to 4000-5000 BC. *Ong* is the Korean word for pottery and refers to the vessel's bowl form. Earthenware clay is more porous than porcelain, which makes these vessels more suitable for fermenting vegetables to prepare traditional Korean foods including kimchi and soy sauce. Kang Hyo Lee is considered an Onggi Master but considers his pots as sculpture rather than merely as functional storage vessels.

According to Curator Lesley Harding, 'His vessels, perhaps more so than others in the exhibition, function as part of a tradition of making in which history is omnipresent.' While they traditionally vary in size and shape, onggi are all porous and therefore 'breathable.' This porosity helps push out impurities in foods, making them suitable for storage. The relatively low cost of earthenware clay means that they are affordable for most people. Due to low firing temperatures, onggi are rarely found in archaeological sites, as they decompose quickly.

Kang Hyo Lee's pots are made with a combination of coiling and turning techniques and are glazed in a similarly theatrical way as their making, with the artist flinging slips at the pots and mixing them by hand as they are turned slowly on a wheel. They are coated with a clear glaze to finish.

Questions for students

1. Describe Kang Hyo Lee's use of the Art Elements of Shape, weight, volume, scale, texture

For further research

This film made in 2014 gives an excellent insight into Kang Hyo Lee's practice:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayDjp4yvF3o>

Kate Malone (UK)

Biography

Born in London in 1959, Kate Malone attended Bristol Polytechnic where she received a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Ceramics and went on to attain a Master of Arts in Ceramics from the Royal College of Art, London in 1986. She was awarded an MBE in 2019.

Selected solo exhibitions include *Inspired by Waddesdon* at Waddesdon Manor, Aylesbury in 2016; *A Celebration of Clay* at One Canada Wharf, London in 2014; *Next to Nature* at Blackwell, The Arts & Crafts House, Bowness-on-Windermere in 2005; *Ceramic Rooms—At Home with Kate Malone and Edmund de Waal* at the Geffrye Museum, London in 2002–03; *The Allotment*, a touring exhibition in 1998–2000; and *Fruits of the Imagination* at Dover Street Gallery, London in 1997.



Kate Malone studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

She has created numerous large scale and public commissions including a façade of 10,000 hand-glazed tiles for 24 Savile Row, a seven-storey building in London in 2015; *The Bud* for Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland, USA in 2012; *Wall of a Thousand Stories* for the Children’s Reading Room at the Royal Jubilee Library, Brighton Public Library, Sussex in 2005; and *Mother and Daughter, Pots of Symbols* for offices at the Old Bailey in London in 2001.

Malone’s work is held in many public collections including the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; the Geffrye Museum, London; the National Museum Wales, Cardiff; the Rothschild Foundation for Waddesdon Manor, Aylesbury; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Kate Malone lives and works in Kent and London. She is represented by Adrian Sassoon, London.

An interview with the artist

Kate Malone kindly created video responses to our interview questions, which can be found here: <https://www.heide.com.au/education/education-resources/videos>

Questions for students

How do you think Malone was influenced by Gaudi’s *La Sagrada Familia* in her work *A Gaudi Swirl Pot*? Consider colour, shape, and form.

Further research

<https://www.katemaloneceramics.com>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jrbz_S1hq9c

<https://www.enhancetv.com.au/video/the-great-pottery-throw-down/52930>

Laurie Steer (NZ)

Biography

Laurie Steer is a full-time potter specialising in wood-fired ceramics based in Mount Maunganui, New Zealand. He studied at the Waikato Institute of Technology and received scholarships to the Sydney College of Arts, RMIT University and Auckland University of Technology, where he completed a Masters of Art and Design. Steer trained under the late Barry Brickell, the creator of the Driving Creek Railway and Potteries in Coromandel and one of New Zealand's most celebrated ceramic artists. He worked with Brickell over a period of 15 years and was likely one of the last apprentices Brickell took on before his death in 2016.

Steer's work questions and experiments with the received tenets of ceramics production while maintaining strong links to the ancient traditions of pottery. His vessels often sprout strange protuberances or spikes, assuming fantastical forms that operate in the area between fine art and ceramics. Like Brickell, he places emphasis on the importance of place in ceramics production and sources his own local clays. Steer's work has been exhibited in Auckland and Wellington.

Laurie Steer is on the council of Ceramics New Zealand as well as being a Director of the Driving Creek Railway Arts and Conservation Trust. He is represented by Bowerbank Ninow, Auckland.



Laurie Steer studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

An interview with the artist

Describe your approach to art making. Do you begin with an idea, a concept, an issue, or do you start by exploring materials and processes?

I start by making conventional domestic shapes. My process usually follows the narrative: once upon a time there was a humble potter who made nice pots but slowly descended into madness, violence and despair only to be reborn through fire into flaming ecstasy. The end. I enjoy ruining a perfectly good pot in the same way as a child enjoys pulling the wings off a fly. It is exhilarating to yield terrible destruction over beauty. I am like a professional torturer, or a scientist in an animal testing facility. I feel sorrow but not remorse. For something new to be made, sometimes something old has to be broken.

How do the formal elements interact with the function or meaning of your work?

All my work is functional but how it functions is often a mystery. Frankenstein's monster was a man made of other men. A different sort of man, deranged, confused, struggling for identity. Born out of a terrible struggle and seeking revenge and love.

What effect would you like your work to have on viewers? What do you hope to communicate?

I don't care what people think. I make everything for myself. Sometimes I imagine that I care what an audience thinks but it never lasts. Sometimes I wish I cared, but I don't. James Turrell said it beautifully, 'It's enough for me to say that the flower is for the plant. If bees and florists are interested in it too, fine. I hope to make something that is important to you, but I have to make something that is important to me.'⁶

How evident or present are your personal beliefs and values within your art?

Embarrassingly obvious. Being an artist is a terrible curse. I have to make all this horrible stuff to understand the world, my life and all the chaos and beauty in it.

Name any artists or practitioners in other fields who have influenced your practice and describe how these influences have influenced your work.

1. Barry Brickell: Taught me how to be free. Showed me the disease of convention. Demonstrated a new way of life through acceptance of personal truth and work.
2. Francisco Goya: Drew all the things we wished weren't real. Slept on a warm bed of philanthropy. Pioneered bad news.
3. Mark Rothko: Made everyone cry and then killed himself.

What else inspires you?

Bad weather and natural disasters. I'm continually impressed with how little mother nature cares about the continuing existence of our silly little species.

⁶ Cited online at <http://www.conversations.org/story.php?sid=32>

Is there a quote (of yours or someone else's) that sums up an idea expressed in your artwork, or is particularly meaningful, or pertinent to your process as an artist?

There is an old sign in the kitchen at Driving Creek Pottery that reads 'Blessed are the cracks, for they let in the light.' Apparently Leonard Cohen or Jesus Christ said something similar.

Art vs Craft—where does ceramics fit? Do you think contemporary (Western) culture favours ideas and innovation above skills and tradition?

I think people make the same things over and over again because they don't have any new ideas. Pretending to tread water in a non-changing eternity is more comfortable than accepting that life is a crazy mess. I think people who religiously wear the craft hat are like junkies, etherised by accepted traditions, blobbing around wearing somebody else's underpants. A life spent trying to be not quite as good as somebody else is far easier than aspiring to greatness. I do not respect any hierarchy of East or West, innovation, tradition or otherwise. Talent arises in strange places and transcends location and culture. The division between art and craft is a tiny thread, usually defended rigorously by people who practice neither. I am a craftsmen who makes art who may be lying.



Laurie Steer studio photograph
Courtesy of the artist

For further research

Here is a video showing Steer's practice in New Zealand: <https://vimeo.com/280657053>

Exhibition Design

The exhibition name comes from an essay by Alison Britton titled 'Things and Work' published in her book *Seeing Things: Collected Writing on Art, Craft and Design*, Occasional Papers, London, 2013. The essay discusses the objects that Britton has in her studio and which were assembled for the exhibition *Life and Still Life* at the Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, Surrey in 2012: 'For an object to belong in a study collection, though it sounds a bit pompous, means it might have an impact on what you make, be part of a kind of growing tactile vocabulary. You don't always know why you bought or kept a thing until its moment arrives and it seems suddenly to promote an idea needing to be made'.

This concept is realised in the exhibition in the two side rooms at the back of the gallery: one has a series of shelves which display objects from the artists' studios, together with the exhibition designers and curators, while the other takes the form of an oversized display vessel, which contains test glazes and tiles, and broken pots.



The image above (courtesy John Wardle Architects) shows the design for the open display table featured in Heide's Central Gallery. For a time lapse video of the installation of this gallery, see: <https://www.heide.com.au/education/education-resources/videos>