

FROM HERE ON OUT

01 . 08 . 19 - 20 . 08 . 19

@ the Engine Room, Massey University Whiti o Rehua.

Curated by Teresa Collins and Hanahiva Rose.

Thank you to Tim Larkin, Shannon Te Ao, Ella Bates-Hermans, Emerita Baik, Simon Morris, Harry Culy, Aylar Raven-Pearce, Monique Redmund, Kim Baker and Hamish Mckay.

DAVE MARSHALL

Dave Marshall is an artist working between conceptual practice and pottery, both and neither. He has a BFA in Sculpture from Ilam School of Fine Arts (2010). Dave currently lives in Whanganui.

HANA RAKENA

Hana Rakena is a ceramic artist from Ngāi Tahu and Ngā Puhi. She has a BA in English language from Canterbury University. Hana exhibits with Masterworks Gallery, Avid Gallery and Form Gallery.

JAKE WALKER

Jake Walker is an artist who works with both painting and ceramic media. He is represented by Hamish McKay and Ivan Anthony Galleries, and exhibits both in New Zealand and overseas. Jake was until recently living and working in Featherson, and is now based in Hobart.

MAIA MCDONALD

Maia Robin McDonald (Ngāti Mutunga, Urenui Marae and Te Āti Awa, Parihaka) is a cross disciplinary artist working primarily in uku (clay). She currently resides in Taranaki. Maia is represented by Kreisler Gallery.

ANA ITI

Ana Iti (Te Rarawa) is an artist whose work often includes text and writing. She lives and works in Te Whanganui-a-tara.

This text features email correspondence between the artists and curators. We asked a few questions with the intention to open up conversation surrounding origins and scope of their clay practice, to look at the relationships between one another, to other ceramic artists, communities, and histories in Pōneke and Aotearoa.

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- 1. How and when did you start working with clay? Have you had formal training, are you self taught, or a mixture of both; are you engaged with a wider community of makers? What was it that drew you to the medium; has this initial interest been what continues to drive your practice?*
- 2. Are there artists, architectures, environments, relating to clay and ceramics that inspire your work? These can be as broad or specific as you like.*
- 3. How do you source materials? Is this process significant to your practice?*
- 4. What do you think the ceramic aspect of your work brings? Do you always work in clay? If not, what do you consider the relationship between your clay and non-clay works? Can clay's histories be communicated through media other than itself?*
- 5. How do you engage with clay's materiality, and the fact that it is a natural resource? Through clay, does your work speak to environmental conditions or issues?*
- 6. Does your work speak to specific identities, histories or narratives? How do you think clay as a material enables us access to those stories? How does clay engage with its surroundings, both physical and conceptual, inside and out of the gallery setting?*

*

DAVE MARSHALL

1.

I started working with clay for the final year of my sculpture degree. By that point, I'd tried a lot of things, and developed a method of working where I would try and take the path of least resistance. I looked around and found that there was a kiln, clay and glazes, all untouched for about a decade. It was also very unfashionable at that time. After being loaded up with art theory, I would say clay felt like a 'dumb' thing to do, like 'low-brow', so I was like, this is perfect! I asked one of my tutors, who was in her seventies, about clay, because she had some previous experience. She showed me how to make a pinch pot, which took about two minutes, then gave me some technical information that was all wrong. I think she had forgotten a lot. Then I was free to spend that year just playing with clay, no one knew what I was up to, so they just left me to it. So, to begin with, I was institutionally educated about art, but self-taught in terms of clay. That also felt good. Then, after a few years I became a member of the Wellington potters association, again, because it was like this great, overlooked facility, and took throwing lessons with Shige Ohashi, who was a fantastic living resource who I was drawn to because he never advertised himself as a tutor. So then I learnt about throwing, which really is a discipline. It's like yoga or something, very physical, which I probably needed at the time.

2.

To begin with, I had seen some photos of Japanese Shino pots, which I thought were cool, but the only ceramic artist I knew was Robert Rapson, who I was lucky enough to meet about eight years later at the Wellington Potters. Robert was also the first artist I visited for this project, (although not in this set of photos) simply because he was geographically, the first potter I knew of outside of Wellington. He made these really fucked looking ceramics, that were mostly boats, and I thought that was really funny. If I saw, say, a broken fence, some roadworks, a re-run of a dead celebrity, or a seagull, it made me think, great, anything can be a ceramic! That's what was inspiring, that it felt like anything could be inspiration, the dumber the better. Recently, it's been more about the natural environment, less about taste and culture. The natural environment becomes the inspiration, and I hope the pots speak back to that. Potters inspire me too, but I'm more interested in their outlook, and the local history, than anything specific about their work.

3.

That's the best bit. It's pretty much most of the work. I tried to source everything locally, and in the process it has taken me to all kinds of places, and I have met all kinds of people. The people and places are all quite unassuming, but also really interesting if you put the time in. I mean, a clay pit is not exactly an appealing thing to most folk, so these are never major scenic destinations, nor are the people major celebrities living on some higher plain of etence. I guess that's what this walking project has been about, just people and places, but not really pots. I hope that comes across.

4.

It's definitely taught me a different way of working. Like, I've had to learn a bit of geology, chemistry, history, some of it being very localized knowledge. Especially when it comes to throwing, it's a fantastic meditation. There's no bullshit. If you're not focused, then you probably won't make a pot. If you are using all kinds of tricks, or lifting knowledge from too many places, I think that will show up in a pot too. Like if you watch all this stuff from the U.S. or Japan, it doesn't make sense, because it's all slightly different materials and processes. There are lessons that you learn working with clay, that can apply to everything. Like if you don't treat the clay well at the start, everything will fall apart later on, that kind of thing. Apart from that, I think the biggest thing it teaches you is to value the unassuming, which can work for any media.

5.

I think it slows you down a bit, the more involved you get with it. Like, when people start out, they go apeshit about the electric kiln being opened, but they usually end up disappointed. Also, if you try and rush the drying time of a pot, things are way more likely to go wrong. Once you adjust your expectations, then if things go wrong, it's usually in the right way, if you know what I mean. In terms of a natural resource, you don't need to engage with anything, but it's all there if you wanna go there. I think of it like a relationship. You wouldn't go to your friends place and take all their food or belongings without asking, would you? Yeah, you get a whole lot of free stuff, but so what? You burn your bridges, and that stuff becomes a burden, weighing you down. You know when you are being a greedy bastard. I've done it, so I know. I'd say that those projects that came from that place, didn't work out well. If I take clay from somewhere, I try to offer something back, even if it's only aroha, and then you develop a relationship with that place that can be quite profound. Oh, one more thing, it has taught me to realize what the real cost of a cup is, like all the mining, the labour and the energy consumption, all that side of things, becomes a lived understanding about the costs of human industriousness.

6.

Certain types of people tend to get attracted to different mediums. Clay has a lot of variety, coz some people come for the brown earth, some for hot designer lifestyle objects, and some come for the shiny, chintzy porcelain. At the moment I am definitely working with a particular narrative here around alternative communities and pottery in Aotearoa in the last half of the twentieth century. So that's just one narrative. I could talk about drinking raspberry soda from a crass novelty erotica mug, and that would tell another story. One thing I would say about ceramics is that it's all very tactile, like a remedy for too much heavy-headed disembodied time. It's a cliché, but it's grounding.

HANA RAKENA

1.

A mix of self taught and formal training. I took night classes while getting my English Language degree, and worked with Chris Weaver in Hokitika for 6 months, helping him in his studio in the mornings and doing my own work in the afternoons. I took weekend courses with Robyn Stewart, Phillip Luxton and Rick Rudd early on, and later I took a course with Peter Stitchbury, and assisted on one of Wi Taepa's week long courses. I also did the second year of Otago Polytech ceramics degree with Laurence Ewing. My Mum actually got me into pottery when she took a 6 month full time course with Chris Weaver (the only one he's taught, I think). She had already introduced me to a lot of crafts; spinning, weaving, knitting, embroidery, sewing, hooked rugs... but we were both really excited about the possibilities of clay. I came home for the holidays after 7th form and we made a lot of pottery, we got a book out of the library and mixed up some glazes (not very successfully), we used a kick wheel and I learned to make coil pots using long thin coils.

I always loved making things, and clay offered the potential for making 'serious' things that would last – whereas the fibre arts had been soft and a bit fragile in comparison. It seemed kind of magical to take some malleable clay, shape it and work on it until I was happy with what I'd made, and then fire it into something hard and permanent. It still seems intense and elemental working with clay. I love the simplicity of starting with earth and forming it with basic tools and my hands and lots of time and care, and then giving it over to the flames of the kiln. The process is meditative and responsive, it feels like I'm in relationship with the material, and the work is only partly of my making.

So yes, I guess the initial interest has held.

2.

Māori carving, weaving and gourds. My father's pounamu carving, he learned to carve in his retirement. Rocks, shells, land formations. I spent a lot of time in my 20's rock climbing and hanging out in rocky places. Red and Black figure vases. Chihuly's glass sculptures. Lucy Rie and Hans Coper. Potters I was lucky enough to learn from, particularly Rick Rudd who's fat coiling and scraping technique I still use for my work.

3.

I've always used Abbott's clays from Abbotsford near Dunedin, where I studied. I love the colour of this sculptural clay, it has very warm tones in reduction – and it is important to me to use local clays. As Abbott's have closed down, I'm now looking for a new supply. I'll have to learn more about clay from the different parts of Te Wai Pounamu so I can find and mix clay with the texture and colour that I'm looking for.

~~4~~ 5.

I totally engage with the clay's materiality, it's a relationship that I've been working on for 20 years. The work is meditative, receptive and sometimes demanding, and requires listening and responding to the material. My vessels reference landforms, plants, shells and the human body, to me clay is the only material for these. My relationship with clay is like a collaboration with plenty of give and take, occasional annoyance, and when things are going well there's wonder and satisfaction.

6.

Hopefully the work is not too specific as I want it to provide a space for people beyond descriptions or thinking in words.

JAKE WALKER

1 & 2

I worked with clay in my first and only year of attendance at Otago School of Art, it was a surprise second favourite media after painting at that time. After that, I didn't think much about it until the early 2000's, when I became interested in 1950-60s ceramics – they were mass produced and fairly easy to find in second hand shops in Sydney at the time. Initially, I never had much of an interest in ceramic art. I was drawn mostly to functional objects. In 2011 my partner and I took a weekend pottery course, the idea was to throw some bowls but my impatience led me to hand building, and in turn, sculpture.

My first clay sculptural works were based on Ian and Claire Athfields house. I lived there for a time as a child and had already painted it many times. The house was full of pottery and looked like it might be a ceramic object itself, so the idea made sense to me. After returning to New Zealand in 2013 I joined the Wellington Potters Association. They have a great little library of ceramic and pottery books, and I started looking at ceramic artists work in more depth there – Peter Voulkos was a notable discovery.

3.

I really wish I had time to find dig up and process my own clay but alas I order it from a supplier. One day I'd like to source and fire natural clay. I'm not a particularly accomplished potter in a technical sense, and clay doesn't really want to be frames.. so after some experimentation I found a clay supply that is reliable and usually comes out of the kiln in one piece!

4 - 6

The relationship between paint and clay is central to my practice. Both materials have evolved over the years, but have been around for a long, long time. As an artist, you're dealing with media as old as humanity. When you look at an old piece of pottery you can see the hand of the maker in it – in this sense the object is a portal between life and death, now and then, it's a weighty exchange. A fresh out of the kiln ceramic piece seems to instantly carry some of that feeling evoked from ancient work and practice. We all have routines and relationships with ceramics, we eat and drink out of it, excrete into it. I think when my work succeeds it is because of the way it subverts the viewers expectation of what pottery is about. Something familiar is presented in an unfamiliar way. In Western society, painting is considered above craft. It hangs on walls – whereas pottery sits on the table. I guess my work is in a way making fun out of the privileged position painting is afforded. Craft is more about community – painting, in the wrong hands, can be about ownership.

(A short email Jake sent a couple of hours after the first).

I just took Pip for a walk to the top of the hill, she needed a nap and I needed some exercise. The soil around here is all clay, perhaps 5cm of topsoil if you're lucky. I want to dig some up and see how it cooks! It occurred to me that ceramics are a melding of the human and natural worlds. When we play with clay, we get to make our own volcanoes in which to make our own rocks. I guess I love pottery, particularly the rustic variety – because I get to experience nature and humanity in perfect 50/50 balance.

MAIA MCDONALD

1.

I first started working with clay in 2014. I would finish my shift at City Gallery Wellington and immediately walk to Vincents, a centrally located community arts centre, with a full ceramics studio and kiln. At the time Vincents was located across from the old Library and provided free clay and the opportunity to work in close proximity to outsider and self-taught artists. I had completed my BFA in Fine Arts and was drawn to the way I felt when working in the studio, unencumbered by the frameworks that existed inside of the Art Galleries and University systems. The clay was alchemical and held magical properties so closely aligned with our natural environment. Also, it was away from the dull and dreary computer rooms and sterile gallery spaces I had been making art inside of and seen art presented in over the years prior. Any good artist understands they are the conduit for vision, and with clay I felt my vision was realised in a way I had not been able to achieve previously.

2.

I studied uku, the Māori word for clay, at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Porirua for two years. Here my kaiako Wi Taepa had a very profound influence on my work. I know I was very confused by the divide evident in the University system I had existed in for several years. At the time I attended Massey, our study was very experimental and critical. Concept driven practice is very important, however I believe that culture and place are of great importance also. The idea of rest and work life balance needed to be addressed at the university as fellow students burnt themselves out. This may not seem relevant to the question, however, I believe our practice must evolve in a healthy way and the community of clay workers I admire have proven this time and time again. Papatuanuku is the mother and teacher of many great lessons, there were some very rewarding but painful moments that slowed me down and had me realise many ideas surrounding our inner and outer creative landscapes. How the art I continue to make comes from what I believe is a sacred space, due to the material I have chosen to work in.

3.

I like to keep all of my materials basic by nature - I am in no way making production work, therefore, I use a variety of clays. I never feel limited to the process, and I have even applied spray paint to clay surfaces. I have used clay as a performative material to interact with the community, to create sound, etc. The material of clay carries my personal language effectively, and that is why I feel it is significant to the way I work and why I will sometimes source the material through karakia, directly from the earth we walk upon.

4.

4.

To extrapolate on what I mentioned above regarding my practice and my concerns while using clay, as a conduit for ideas: I believe that Papatuanuku is sacred and choosing to work so closely with her as a mode of expressing very personal belief systems is of utmost importance to me as an artist, and as a person of our wider global community. I see the act of making my work, housed under the terminology of 'art', as a higher calling. One that can be derailed by capitalist structures, yet is free from these structures at the same time, if the artist as a conduit can harness their medium to do well by the audience it presents to. The artist can transcend the material and connect on a deeper level. Clay can do this very easily due to the very nature of its origins. Sometimes I work in pen and ink, coffee and water. Additionally, photography and performance, written word and poetry. I have performed as a musician over the years and will never limit myself to one area. However, as a human with a limited time here on earth, I wish to master a medium to convey broader and more nuanced areas of a subject or idea. Here I see the importance of my journey in clay as being very specific, clay speaks of clay. If you want to seek the history, seek the material and the surrounding environments and communities, not just the book.

5.

Working with clay is very journalistic to me, and I tell stories through my work. It is a way to connect to the spirit of the land and my own wairua. I am also very mindful of the permanence of clay and the impact it has on our environment. Like any other natural resource, we must take only what we need. As a global community if we all continue to believe we are entitled to take more than what is needed it is easy to see we cannot sustain ourselves in any endeavours we choose to undertake.

6.

My work moves in the realms of the physical and spiritual, while coming to an understanding of cross cultural identities and politics. I am learning about my own personal history and whakapapa, while learning the history and whakapapa of clay, and all the value systems inherent. It has been an extremely difficult area to study and understand, due to the small number of people who undertake the practice, (in Aotearoa and Māori culture historically) as materialism within westernised systems is prevalent in our society. Our current social system is geared towards supporting the dominant culture, and my field of study is certainly not the dominant one. However, I have a very solid understanding of the frameworks my work exists in after working in the arts sector and educating myself inside of the pākeha university context and Māori Wānanga. I studied at Massey for seven years, graduating in 2008, attending Te Wānanga o Aotearoa from 2016-2017. I think it is important to mention this as my practice has been shaped immensely by my education and training.

ANA ITI

1.

I began working with clay last year in preparation for making a large scale artwork, *Only fools are lonely*. Beforehand I had no experience working with clay, except for playing around with it a little as a child! I haven't had any formal training, however I was guided through different processes, how they work, and different ways to think about them by my friend Dave Marshall. And of course the universal teacher YouTube.

I'm not really part of the ceramics community but I have definitely benefited from the community resources available through the Wellington Potters association.

What initially drew me to use clay was an interest in referencing a particular artwork by Shona Rapira Davies, Te Waimapihi, or what is commonly known as Te Aro park. Davies and a group of friends handmade and glazed over 30,000 ceramic tiles to realise this piece of public sculpture.

2.

I am interested in finding my own clay, there are a few places I know of that I keep in the back of my mind for future use. For *Only fools are lonely* I purchased from a potters supplier because of the sheer quantity of material I needed to use (550kg), It was difficult for me to quantify digging that amount myself. This commercial potters clay is engineered and of mixed origin, partially from Aotearoa and with material from other places mixed in.

For *From here on out* and an upcoming work in New Plymouth, *beyond the ash cloud*, I am using clay from Matauri bay which is near to the area where my family comes from in Northland. Matauri bay clay is most often exported and used in cosmetics as well as for scientific ceramics and doesn't often reach the local market, the clay I'm using here was a gift.

3.

I read an artist statement from Shona where she said that her engagement with new materials was all about making mistakes and learning, and that for her this was one of the most vital and exciting parts. Because of this bold approach I felt encouraged to embrace the opportunity to make work in material I was unfamiliar with and try to remain open to the imperfection and even failure.

Dave also remains steady in the back of my mind, as we studied together at Ilam and I've seen him working with the medium since then. I remember his different experiments and especially an iconic pair of white ceramic bichon frise which may have also been bongs?

Then there are the brick works that were once around Pōneke and the labour of the prisoners who transformed the material of Pukeahu into the bricks used to construct early infrastructure. The large scale Kilns used to fire these bricks can be viewed on the ground level of Hiakai, the bricks themselves are also easy to spot as they have an arrow scored into them.

4.

I use clay when projects call for it, the same way I use other mediums.

5.

For me the environmental issues that my work speaks to are very broad, our relationships to the earth, land, and the history that is contained within.

6.

When I work with clay I always think about my own relationship to the land and the wider references that are contained within its use. I think about the way it is formed, fine particles of all kinds of matter that are blown or accumulated and stick together to form a new substance. Within this as well is the purakau of Hineahuone's creation, and of course clay as the tinana of our ultimate ancestor Papatūānuku.

This publication will be followed by a short text, written by Teresa and Hanahiva, to accompany the exhibition. It will be available online at the Engine Room's website and in the space over the next few weeks.