

Authenticity,
AUTHORSHIP &
AUTOMATION :
Contemporary Ceramics

Slade School of Fine Art
University College London



- 19098411



Hard copies: Ceramic slip decorated plaque, with transparent glaze and lava glaze on the rim

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Authenticity

Part 1: Authenticity

1) Introduction

Clay holds memory, it remembers 100,000s of years of movement in the earth. Even if you master the medium and use all the tips and tricks, it sometimes, still won't listen to you. It cracks, explodes, slumps and crawls. Clay is susceptible to fail in a multitude of ways. Ceramics is a highly volatile medium. Not only that, but it is a

painstakingly

slow

process

with a delayed outcome

meaning it takes at least 2 weeks to see even a small, finished piece.

Unlike painting and drawing, there is no immediacy to your decision making. So, why do so many people choose to work with a material that is so notoriously frustrating?

In William Morris' seminal essay *'The Aims of Art'* he states man has two moods, that of energy, and that of restlessness. *'Men's lives are compounded of these two moods in various proportions. This explains why they have always, with more or less of toil, cherished and practised art.'*¹ Morris proposes art to improve wellbeing, and in ceramics specifically, play is a characteristic of the medium. *'Froebel's gifts'*, an exercise for children created by pedagogue and inventor of kindergarten, Friedrich Froebel. It is an exercise in which a series of different materials are given to children to play with. The final, most advanced 'gift' is clay. *'Clay [is] the most malleable of all. It's rigid, it's soft, and there's a whole range of things a child could build with it.'*² Clay is also an ideal material as it's malleable in time, you can take it backwards and forwards by wetting it to reverse mistakes. There's a reason why so many people partake in pottery workshops for leisure, and so many people in retirement become garden shed potters.

Further down the line, there is mixing and creating your own glazes. Glazes are just like a science experiment, *Glazy.com* is filled with glaze fanatics, testing home-made mixes and sharing them online. *'It will lead you satisfyingly down obsessive, hobbyist rabbit holes in search of say, a glaze that imitates foaming lapis*

¹Morris, *'The Aims of Art'* 1887

² Mars, *'Froebel's Gifts'*, 99% Invisible, 2019

lazuli.³ Artist Aaron Angell describes the ceramic studio as a '*quasi-alchemical world of heat and chemistry*.'⁴ Even Digital methods like Ceramic 3D printing and Decals also save time to make space for the '*room-for-play*'⁵ outlined by Walter Benjamin in '*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*'

I will be investigating Authenticity, Authorship & Automation in Contemporary Ceramics. How was it made? Who made it? Where? When? Was it mass produced? What's their societal status? how does it affect a works value? Was it hand or machine made?

2) Great British Wheel throwers and Practical research.

I'm currently undertaking practical research trying to learn to throw on the wheel. I've always felt guilty calling myself a 'Potter' when I can't throw. Until recently I've not been particularly drawn to the act of throwing myself, but I've always found the work of master throwers like Lucy Rie and Rose Cabat outstandingly beautiful, just not my style.

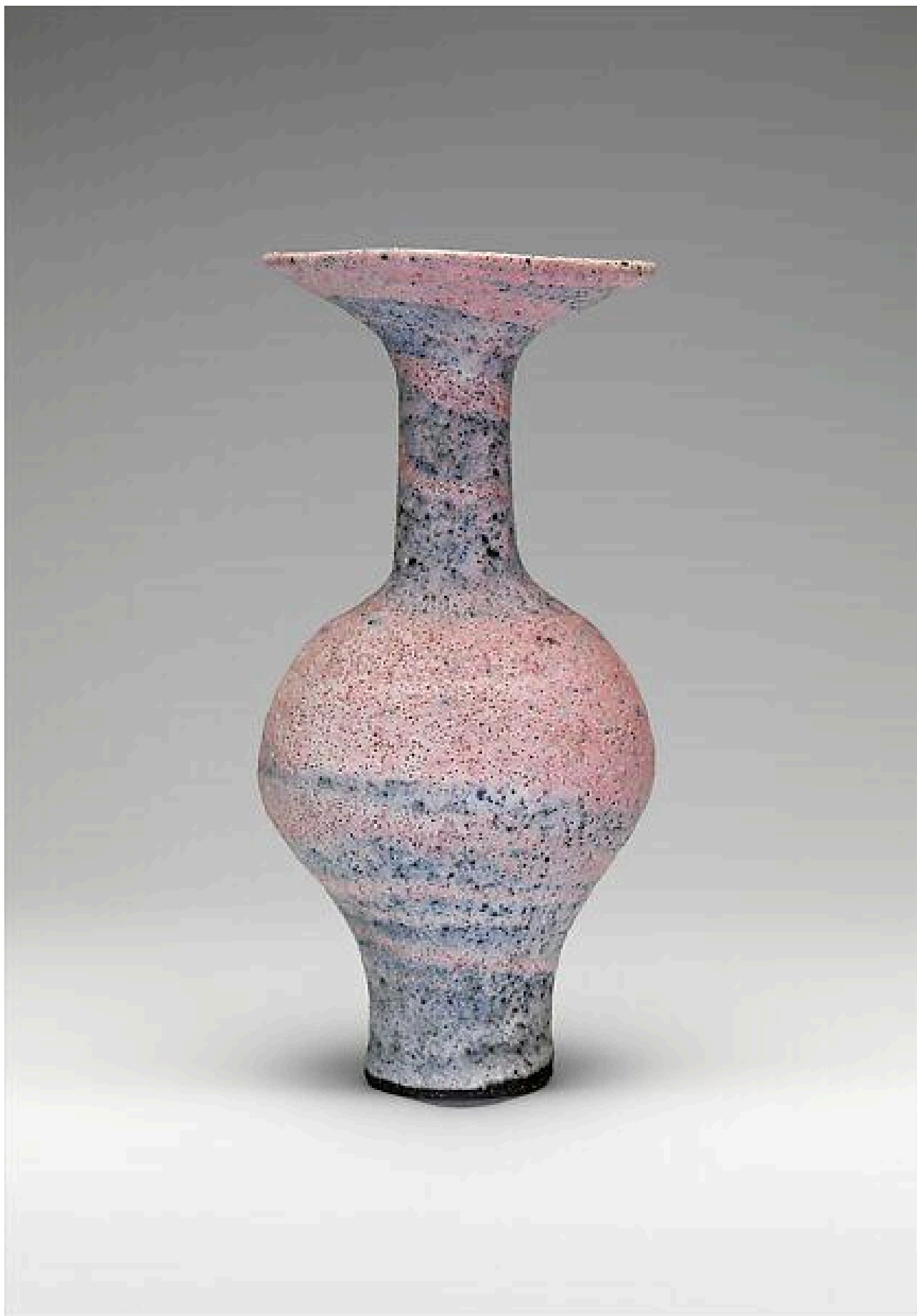
I'm doing a class at one of the most well-known members studios in London. It's worlds apart from the ceramics studios I've used before, think Stoke Newington professionals taking an evening class. It seems like every ceramicist I know over the age of 35 began wheel first, before hand building ceramic sculpture, making larger works, slip casting and other means. This is not so much the case these days, as more and more young people enter ceramics through hand building over the wheel. The wheel just takes such a long time to learn - '*It's a really big deal, to be honest with yourself about the pottery wheel, you're going to spend 2 years on it getting good, when you can actually have a stronger voice, faster, in hand building*'.⁶ I felt a lot less guilty however, once I found out Anthony Quinn, Head of Ceramics at Central Saint Martins, can't throw either. However, I think if I'm writing about ceramics, I should probably learn to centre at the very least.

³Angell, Thorne, Matson, '*That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio*', 2016

⁴ '1'

⁵ Hyun, '*Redefining the Allegory, Playfulness and Aura of Ceramic Art in the Era of 3D Printing*', 2020

⁶ Climaco, Hamilton, '#5 Meet Keith Simpson: The Ceramics Podcast', 2021



1. Lucy Rie, 'Vase'. 1979, Stoneware, British born, Austria, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

In week 1 and 2 I focused on centring before trying to throw or move anything upwards. The first step when throwing is not just getting it in the middle, but perfectly centred. It must be smooth, consistent, and equal, or it will go all over the place. It was incredibly difficult.

In week 4, I've finally managed to throw some bowls. Once you get used to it it's a lot more fun, it feels like you're gliding against the clay instead of fighting with it. I've always found the wheel incredibly frustrating, but this is a wonderful sensation, and I can see why people get addicted to doing it.



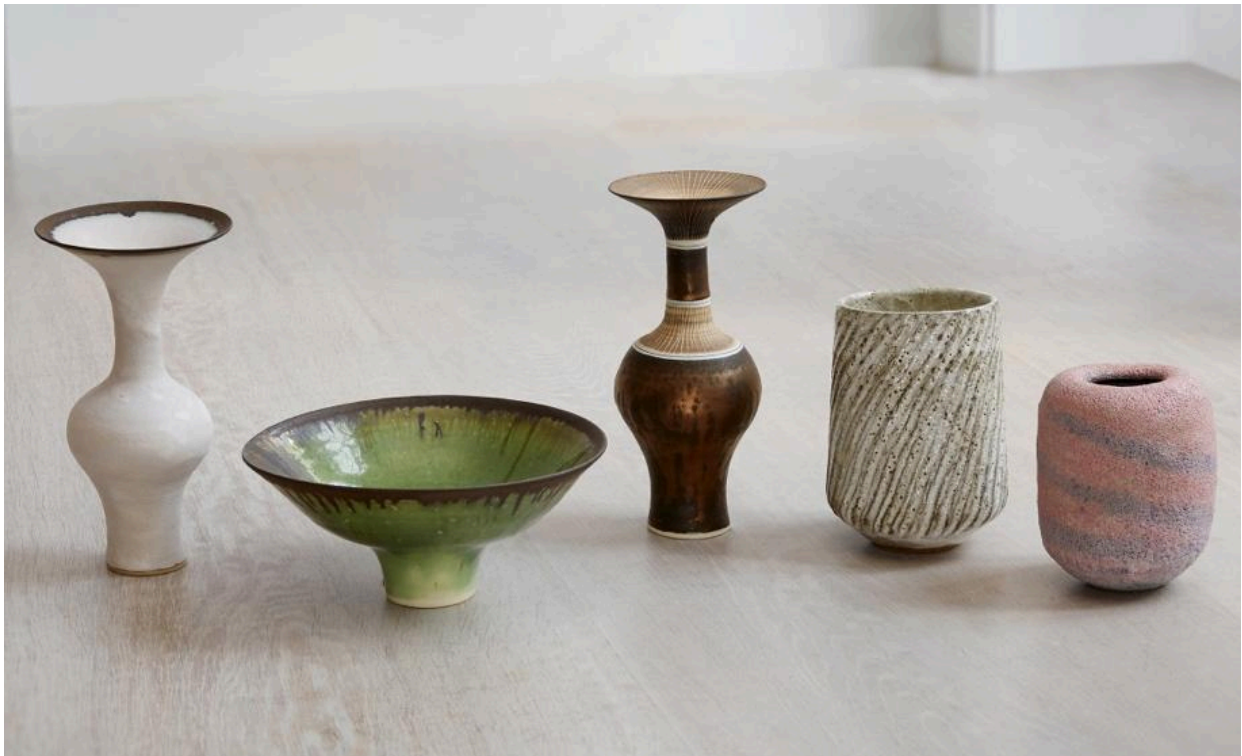
2. Artist 19098411, Bowls, 2023, Stoneware, London, United Kingdom

By week 5, I was able to throw a simple cylinder. By Week 8 I have managed to schmooze myself an internship working at the studio as an assistant Technician working on glazes. Result.

***‘Very few people in this country think of the making of pottery
as an art’ ‘its own language and inherent laws.’***

-Leach, 1940

Father of British studio pottery, Bernard Leach, in his essay *'Towards a standard'*⁷, argues that thrown and slip cast objects are more functional for daily use, however, lack personality and beauty. Leach believed that *'The want of artistic initiative on the part of manufacturers must be ascribed to the general lowering of taste under conditions of competitive industrialism, Good hand craftsmanship is directly subject to the prime source of human activity.'*⁸ Leach is not arguing against mass production of wares altogether but in his view, believes they are largely poorly designed and boring.



3. Lucy Rie, *Various Vessels*, circa 1980s, Stoneware, British born, Austria, Sotheby's, London.

3) Who makes ceramics? Where? Craft, Race & Gender.

Craft art has deep associations with race and gender; therefore, it is valued very differently to materials with masculine associations like painting, bronze, glass, and marble. All of which are considered unambiguously fine art. *'A gender component could be discerned. Many craftsperson's were women, and many worked in "soft"*

⁷ Leach, *'A Potter's Book'* 1940

⁸ "

*materials (textiles, clay).*⁹ Historically the labour performed in order to make craft-art has been poorly paid and performed by women, ethnic minorities, and working-class people.

In terms of linguistics, lots of African and Asian languages don't differentiate between the word's 'Art' and 'Craft'. In *'Art systems and semiotics: The Question of Art, Craft and Colonial Taxonomies in Africa'*, Susan Blier outlines how *'linguistic taxonomists for a long time frequently noted the 'missing' word for 'Art' in African languages, and in many languages outside of Europe.'*¹⁰ This is because the distinction between fine art and craft is a primarily Western one. This is the reason why African Art, as well as a lot of Asian Art, is delegated to museums as opposed to galleries and viewed as artefacts. *'To a considerable extent scholars of African art have turned to methodologies developed in the natural sciences. So similar is this approach to that of the natural sciences that one could easily have been studying a fern or orchid.'*¹¹

There are very few oil paintings outside of the European sections in museums, because historically the rest of the world's great works of art take the form of detailed tapestries, finely decorated porcelain, and intricate wood carvings. Craft objects can tell a story just the same as an oil painting. *'Conceptually this reinforces the distinction which has been made historically between African arts which are assumed to be materially oriented (i.e., as artifacts) and European arts which as seen to be manifestations of the mind.'*¹²

4) A return flight from Jingdezhen to Delft and a Urinal: Material Hierarchy

US based Ceramicist Michelle Im's uncle owned a ceramic factory in Jingdezhen, China. *'He used to produce Imitation-Dutch-Delftware windmills and clogs, we used to have all this stuff in our house. He was making imitation delftware...in China?'*¹³

Delftware is a style of Dutch ceramic heavily inspired by traditional Qinghua ceramics from China. These are classic white porcelain vessels with cobalt blue slip decoration. Im, in the same interview spoke about her work and how her uncle, although retired, will offer to help her facilitate the mass production of some of her designed objects in factories in China. *'You have to order 1000s of things to get made and put on a shipping pallet. They really can take my thing and make it exactly the same, and faster... and they don't get carpal tunnel or anything!'*¹⁴

4. Michelle Im, 'Tiger Butter dish', 2022, Ceramic, Slip on Low fire Clay, New York, USA

t, Craft, and Colonial Taxonomies in Africa' 1988
n of Art, Craft, and Colonial Taxonomies in Africa', 1988

Ceramics Podcast', 2021

Although she states she knows that they would sell, *'It's not going to be the same'*¹⁵, she feels they will become a different thing entirely.

In the 70s and 80s many Western artists went to China on ceramic residencies to search for handmade Chinese ceramics of the past seen in museums, however, as Chairman Mao *'decreed that handwork must be swept away'*¹⁶ they were instead shown the latest technology and methods of mass production.

But how do we distinguish between fine art ceramic objects and design? Marcel Duchamp's urinal was technically a slip casted mass produced ceramic. This piece, although it is ceramic, is decisively fine art. Ai Wei Wei, treats ceramic artefacts like ready-mades and works into them. In Joan Keys 1997 essay *'Readymade or Handmade'*. She outlines how a readymade object *'eliminates the presupposition that the artist has had any part in making that object'*¹⁷ The distinction doesn't lie directly to objects use-value. Critic Lucy Lippard dubbed this the *'dematerialisation of the object'*¹⁸ as the culture moved towards conceptual art and away from handmade objects.



Qinghua porcelain, Miepung vase with "Eight dragons among the clouds." Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Yongle reign (1403-1424), Jingdezhen workshop (Jiangxi province, China)



Flower or Tulip Vase, tin-glazed earthenware (Delft), about 1693, De Griexhe A factory (The "Greek A" factory), the Netherlands, operated 1657-1818, Period of Adriaen Kocks.



Souvenir Imitation Delftware, Made in China. Stoneware (2020) Likely mass produced in Jingdezhen

5. Citations above

There is hierarchy within in ceramics. It is viewed as 'amateurish' to use commercial glazes like Mayco or Stroke 'N' Coat rather than mixing your own slip and making glaze from scratch as *'Commercial glazes are other people's aesthetic decisions and cannot be changed, glazes cannot be mixed like paint to reveal a*

¹⁵ 11

¹⁶ Matson, *'That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio'*, 2016

¹⁷ Harrod, *'Craft'*, 2018

¹⁸ Lippard, *'Get the Message?'*, 1984

desired colour'.¹⁹ A regular gallery goer won't notice the difference, but within the studio there is a sentiment that '*you can fool the fans -- but not the players*'.²⁰

Artist Ken Price attracted attention within the ceramic world when he subverted this purist attitude that all colour needs to come from the glaze when it was revealed he used automotive paint and epoxy on his sculptures. Turning long-held material traditions on their head. Other West coast artists in the same circles were also presenting similar innovative multimedia works in ceramic such as Ron Nagle.



6. Ron Nagle, 'Handsome Drifter', 2015, Ceramic, glaze, catalyzed polyurethane, epoxy resin 3¼ × 4 × 3 inches; 10 × 10 × 8 cm, collection of Joachim and Nancy Hellman Bechtle.

¹⁹ Thorne, Matson, 'That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio', 2016

²⁰ Cage, 1967

AUTHORSHIP

Part 2: Authorship

5) Differing Ceramic attitudes in the US and UK, and *'That Continuous Thing'* Studio Culture

This year I spent time in the USA, in Chicago, Illinois at the ceramics department in the School of the Art Institute Chicago. After spending enough time in ceramics studios in both the US and UK, I heard the same anecdote a few times. The story goes:

*A potter takes their dog to the studio every day.
One day the dog dies.
the ceramicist decides to cremate it in their kiln.
They open the kiln door to a pile of ashes,
and to the artist's surprise....
a tiny delicate pair of glass lungs!*

*The dog breathed in so much glass from the potter glazing that it got
silicosis and died.
Accidentally making a glass cast of tiny lungs.*

It's a ceramic urban legend that perforates studios seemingly worldwide, usually followed by a lecture about you should always wear a Kn95 mask when glazing. The culture of the ceramic's studio is often overlooked, it was not mythologised in the same way that the painting studio has been until relatively recently. Peter Voulkus, a prominent figure in 1950s California clay revolution, dubbed it:

***‘That continuous thing, that energy... Sometimes it will peak in one person,
but it’s a combination of everything around you.’***

-Voulkus, 1950²¹

After making ceramics mostly in solitary for most of my life, I was in awe of just how seriously Americans take ceramics. The American Ceramics Canon boasts many big names such as Peter Voulkus, Robert Arneson, John Mason, Ken Price and Ron Nagle who gained notoriety after the huge ‘funk ceramics’ movement on the West coast. Ceramics is prolific in the US. it’s home prestigious institutions like Alfred and Cranbrook on the East coast, In Montana there’s the renowned Archie Bray Foundation. There’s also the touring NCECA, a massive ceramic conference held every year. All these institutions have a significant impact on Ceramic culture worldwide.

²¹ Thorne, Matson, *‘That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio’*, 2016



7. Peter Voulkos, 'Untitled', 2001, Wood-fired stoneware, Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame.

In the 1986 essay 'American Potters Today' Alison Britton outlined the differences in attitudes towards ceramics by comparing Bernard Leach and Peter Voulkos and their differing approaches to studio ceramics. As the two most prominent figures at the time, *'It is hard to imagine two more different ceramic characters; Leach's work being genteel, refined, restrained, and understated, backed up by bookfuls of philosophy and advice, where Voulkos's is exuberant, loud, challenging, hyper-masculine, and promoted by a kind of teaching that was more mutually felt than ever articulated.'*²² Britton makes the case that this is because of different attitudes in America and Britain during and after the war *'Leach's pottery was set up between the wars, and Voulkos began working in clay in the expansive confident years after World War Two, when American art took the lead with Abstract Expressionism and all the gusto of the winning side'*²³ In the US Voulkos had no issue in getting ceramic works in galleries and his massive sculptures assembled with various thrown parts was seen as *'unproblematically sculpture.'*²⁴ In the UK, Director of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Chris Lilley stated *'Looking back over recent Western history, clay has primarily produced functional 'craft' the objects - in opposition to the category of 'fine art'. Furthermore, it has been relegated to the role of a mere preparatory stage for other more artist serious' sculptural mediums, including bronze.'*²⁵

Another reason for this more boisterous attitude towards ceramics is the fact the US doesn't have a weighty history of craft ceramics and mass production like the UK and China do, where ceramics evoke strong associations with industrial centres Stoke-on-Trent and Jingdezhen. *'In Britain the factories of Stoke-on-Trent loomed large in studio pottery's collective psyche as a nexus of exceptional skills finely regulated materials and highly organised procedures that make possible production in large flawless, and some would say soulless quantities.'*²⁶

Americans haven't inherited a fixed way of thinking about the material *'The ceramic world in America does, to an outsider, look beautifully and enviably established, led by a wide range of figures who have been working for over 20 years and have collectors interested in things made now and not 100 years ago.'*²⁷ Even though 'American Potters Today' was written almost 40 years ago, the thinking around ceramics in the art world in the UK is almost as orthodox as it was in the 1980s, with ceramics biggest household association being popular craft art Television programme 'The Great Pottery Throwdown' and BYOB pottery painting classes.

In the UK, if you choose to work with clay, the conversation around the object will go towards craft and the choice of clay as a material, even if that has nothing to do with the work. The American conversation around ceramic sculpture, isn't centred on craft, the conversation doesn't go towards it unless the sculpture is directly referencing the materials past. Ceramicists are allowed the same

²² Thorne, Matson, 'That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio', 2016

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²⁵ Elderton, Morrill 'Vitamin c: Clay + Ceramic in Contemporary Art', 2017

²⁶ Harrod, 'Craft', 2018

²⁷ Thorne, Matson, 'That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio', 2016

assumption of material as painters are. Painters are allowed to paint, because they are painters.

Clay can be a very loaded material, working with specific clay bodies can come with cultural connotations, such as Porcelain and terracotta, and this can be used to enhance a work's meaning. However, I think you should also be able to use clay as a sculpture material as sometimes readings about craft histories are completely irrelevant to what's being shown. *'There are delightful phrases of craftsmanship, earthliness and ancient culture that can be written elegantly into the ceramic object, but this is too readily assumed to be the case artists are regarded as having submitted themselves to a material world that has only certain tolerable readings.'*²⁸

²⁸ Thorne, Matson, *'That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio'*, 2016



8. @Cerameme, 2022, A meme referencing Maroon 5 lead singer Adam Levine's leaked DMs from his cheating scandal, and using a nice clay body, Montreal, Canada

In more recent years the difference between ceramic attitudes the US and the UK can be illustrated by the influx in ceramic meme accounts gaining popularity on Instagram posting niche ceramic memes, mostly from North America, this is because of the pervasiveness of their ceramic education. 'Ceramics education, in Britain in particular, all but disappeared in the late 1980s, specialist departments being removed from many schools will and art colleges.'²⁹ ceramics has been 'all but dropped from the school curriculum in Britain,' [replaced with] 'a dominance of

²⁹ Elderton, Morrill, 'Vitamin c: Clay + Ceramic in Contemporary Art', 2017

conceptual art teaching and concomitant deskilling of students.³⁰ Critic Lucy Lippard also identified this tendency towards conceptual art in the 1970's calling it a 'dematerialization of the art object, and a reaction against uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness.'³¹



9. Various @Cerameme & @gay4clay memes, 2022, memes, text, and images, US & Canada

On the other hand, 'sometimes if you take something away for a period it becomes attractive again'.³² Aaron Angell said of clays recent resurgence in popularity in the UK, 'To answer the question "why now?" — I think there is certainly a reaction against the kind of fabrication fetish that we have been seeing in a lot of work over recent years'.³³ This is something I felt in the US versus the UK. The US is so much more focused on technical teaching, not just in ceramic, but in all mediums (wood, bronze, metal, etc). This strict focus on technical teaching has its ups and downs for Fine Art teaching, but in terms of ceramics, getting rid of the departments almost entirely in universities across the UK was a huge mistake.

Ceramics is also taught as its own subject in many American high schools and the department is separate from sculpture in most universities. At SAIC, and many other US universities, it situated between sculpture and painting departments. Which makes a lot of sense. Historical associations aside, ceramic as a material is the most painterly form of sculpture, It's a bridge. Clay is the most malleable material. Many painters working with clay appreciates the formality of vessels, much

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³¹ Harrod, 'Craft', 2018

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³³ Thorne, Matson, 'That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio', 2016

like the boundaries of a canvas. American writer Rose Slivka wrote 'Craft Horizons' in *'The New Ceramic Presence'* in 1961 at description of clay at the closest form of sculpture to painting stating:

'The 'paint' the 'canvas' and the structure of the 'canvas' are a unity of clay. There are three extensions of clay as paint in contemporary pottery:

- 1) the pot form is used as a canvas.***
- 2) the clay form itself is used as paint three-dimensionally — with tactility, color, and actual form.***
- 3) form and surface are used to oppose each other rather than complement each other in their traditional harmonious relationship — with color breaking into and defining, creating, destroying form.'***

-Slivka, 1961³⁴

Someone in the 60s speaking about ceramics this way is really refreshing, as even today in the UK, ceramic art is spoken about in a way that often feels dismissive. *'Since these early days of big work and big reputations, Americans have been less hampered than the British by categories and definitions ('Is it art? etc.) This is not to say that there is no distinction drawn between pots and sculpture, but it does not seem to matter as much; things are more open, more can be risked; pioneering is a national characteristic.'*³⁵

6) 'Craft' (derogatory) and Ceramic Cowboys

Artists have made attempts to interrogate these distinctions between fine art ceramics and mass production. The Ken Price project *'Happy's Curious'* In 1972 was a 6 year long project intended as a homage to Mexican folk pottery. It ended in 1978 with an exhibition of the same name held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The project was intended to critically investigate and deconstruct classifications of cultural objects as 'fine art', 'folk art', or 'craft'. The pieces made for *'Happy's Curious'* were intended to be sold in a regular Tao's shop front. To express *'tacit political sympathy with ceramic workers. But when it finally finished in 1978, the pieces were not for sale at all but rather on display at the largest museum on the West Coast. The objects themselves went through a similar transformation. The Mexican folk pots were not replicated faithfully, but rather translated into an array of fetishized formal objects — flat ciphers of real worlds referents.'*³⁶

³⁴ Lynn, 'American Studio Ceramics: Innovation and Identity' 1961

³⁵ Thorne, Matson, *'That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio'*, 2016

³⁶ "

In attempting to make work in collaboration with folk potters, Price ended up furthering himself from his supposed brethren. *'They were 'the first to plant themselves at the very limits of their craft, in a gesture of dissatisfaction and ambition, but theirs was a quixotic stance from the outset. While the boundaries of workmanship could be straddled, they could not be vaulted, as there would then have been no place to gesture towards.'*³⁷

Volkous on the other hand instead of referencing craft-art, denounced being a 'potter' entirely to be taken more seriously; *'Those interested in such traditional values would henceforth be obliged to constantly defend their conservatism. Voulkos had helped to initiate an endgame in which the only way to be an avant-garde potter would be to deny one's status as a potter entirely.'*³⁸ Voulkos' Otis group in LA was a boys club consisting only of male artists, of course they could just decide to decry craft labels surrounding their work and be listened to. This denunciation of craft *'staked out at Otis left the future of ceramics in a state of radical doubt.'*³⁹

³⁷ „

³⁸ „

³⁹ „



10. Robert Arneson, 'Toilet: Life Size', 1964, Ceramic

Another important figure that laid the foundations for contemporary ceramics in the US is Robert Arneson who is widely considered the father of Funk Art. He paved the way for the Californian aesthetic, or 'Funk Ceramics' which is still hugely influential today. He began making his 'toilet wares' in the late 60's with various forms of genitalia as handles, or enlarged breasts inside urinals *'What better way to establish himself as an artist alongside some of California's most recognized sculptors than to feature the toilet as the universal symbol of contemporary ceramics in Western culture, exclaiming, "It is 100% ceramics, man!"'*⁴⁰ The piece 'Toilet: Life Size' looks as if it's covered in faeces. Like Volkous' & co's machismo attitude towards clay, Arneson is also working with ceramic in a laddish manner, using toilet humour as direct inspiration. Some of his works feel like doodle straight out of the margins from a teenage stoner's notebook.

Peter Voulkos is to ceramics, as Jackson Pollock is to painting. This is one of the foremost reasons, ceramics is taken more seriously as a sculptural medium in the US. The American ceramics canon is inundated with Machismo. This exaggerated masculine use of the material during the California clay revolution between 1954 to 1959 is the root of US contemporary ceramic history. In reviews from the 1960s, Men in American ceramic art reviews get called 'pioneers' and 'cowboys.' Using this sort of language, at that time, about working in clay would be unthinkable if it was applied to a woman artist.

Grayson Perry has also said conflicting things about the term's 'ceramicist' and 'potter' over the years. In the introduction of 'Vitamin-C' with Chris Lilley, he is outspoken about the validity of ceramic art and quoted as saying he refers to himself a 'Potter' rather than a 'Ceramicist' deliberately to distance himself from his peers in the world of studio ceramics. The year after however, in an interview in 'New Wave Clay' he states, *'Craft has shot itself in the foot by calling itself "craft"'*⁴¹ And goes on to say that people who make pots, or tapestries should stop complaining about not getting work into art galleries, *'if you call yourself a potter, you'll be in a craft shop won't you? Bernard Leach and everyone made this ghetto that still exists: mimsy domestic sculpture, which is fine but if you want to go out onto the ocean of art you have to have an ocean-going ship and it's called "artist"'*⁴² All of this talk about what terms to use to place yourself within the medium lack self-awareness. Why don't you just say that you're an Artist? Then you'll be taken seriously! -- said the all the white men.

⁴⁰ Sevis, 'Exhibition 38 NEW CERAMICS', 2019

⁴¹ Morris, 'New Wave Clay: Ceramic Design', 2018

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11. Grayson Perry, 'Voting Patterns', 2012, Ceramic, Victoria Miro Gallery, Islington, London.

There is immense privilege that comes with being able to just announce to the world what your work is. The reality is if you are a woman or artist of colour no matter what you might say about yourself or your work, others might just say it's '*mimsy domestic sculpture*'⁴³ If you are a woman artist working with soft sculpture or clay, other people will decide whether you are a 'craftsperson' or a 'real artist' for you. Flippantly calling ceramic domestic sculpture 'mimsy', feels dangerously close to just going ahead and calling it 'girly'.

I will return to Perry later, as I am very fond of his work with decals, however, he is lauded way to highly with making ceramics an 'acceptable' fine art medium with his 2003 Turner prize win. It feels harder to lump Grayson perry in with the machismo attitudes of the American studio potters. Perry accepted his Turner prize as 'Claire' he describes this as his 'female alter ego' as opposed to his gender identity. Most of the of the time Perry is male presenting. Perry can work in work in a medium considered traditionally feminine and still have it be considered a subversive and rock and roll. There is a sense of irony to the way Perry talks about working with ceramics '*we revel in the inauthentic, the simulacrum and the quotation.*'⁴⁴ If it was a woman or artist of colour working in clay wouldn't be seen that way.

In art critic Lucy Lippard's 1978 essay '*Making Something from Nothing (Towards a Definition of Women's 'Hobby Art')*'⁴⁵ Lippard talks about how men artists will make work taking inspiration from work typically delegated to 'women's art' and then be taken seriously by the art world. In the 70s, Navajo rugs were exhibited in New York, '*They were eulogised as neutral, ungendered sources for big bold geometric abstractions by male artists*'⁴⁶ Feminists were quick to point out that these 'strong' geometric rugs were essentially women's 'craft'. The exhibition did not include any names of the people who made the rugs. Artists like Frank Stella took inspiration from the shapes used on the rugs were seen as innovators as '*borrowings from 'below' must still be validated from above.*'⁴⁷

Lippard also talks about Claus Oldenburg's soft sculpture '*It took a man to make fabric sculpture acceptable, though his wife, Patty, did the actual sewing.*'⁴⁸ It's the same story in many fields where a woman will say something, and then a man says the exact same thing and is hailed as an insightful, hilarious, genius. '*Sometimes men even dabble in women's spheres in the lowest of low arts - hobby art made from throwaways by amateurs at home. When a man makes say a macaroni figure, it tends to raise the sphere rather than lower the man.*'⁴⁹ In the case of men taking Inspiration from things like macaroni figures, this can be likened to the way some men will make sweeping statements like 'women aren't funny'. To assume something is a joke, is to assume the person making the joke is smart enough to make the joke. When a man makes something like that people will

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⁴⁴ Lucy Lippard, '*Get the Message?*', *Plume*, 1984

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assume he is doing it ironically, when it is a woman, the assumption is that she lacks the intelligence and/or skill to make real art.

7) Everything's Bigger in Texas: Scaling up.

Another reason ceramics has a much stronger association with sculpture in the US is because of how much easier it is to make ceramics there due to the sheer size of the country. There is more space for larger kilns and larger studios, and its car centric culture makes it easy to move heavier pieces and materials. At SAIC there were so many people building giant ceramic works, as it was logistically a lot easier to start and finish a piece like that there than in Europe.

Historically there has been differing in attitudes towards clay as sculptural material in different regions within the US, when the exhibition '*New Talent*' at the MoMa opened in New York in 1960 it received little acclaim, critic Slivka attributed this to the fact that the '*sculptures were in clay and New York was snobbish about the material.*⁵⁰ This is likely the result of the East Coast's closer ties to Europe. Ceramics didn't receive the same praise on the East coast until the 1981 exhibition '*Six Ceramic Sculptors*' at the Whitney Museum of Art. Critic Rosalind Krauss concluded that that '*To be a ceramicist-sculptor in the 1950s and 1960s was in some essential way to be marginal to "sculpture" ... in the semantic associations to pottery, ceramics speaks for that branch of culture, which is too homey, too functional, too archaic, for the name of "sculpture" to extend to it.*⁵¹

In 2007 Jun Kaneko changed the face of ceramic sculpture in Pittsburgh making his monumental 'Dango', the world's largest hand built ceramic sculptures. Kaneko is considered by many in the states to be a '*rockstar ceramicist*'. The sheer scale and ambition of his works in the 1990s and 2000s had a huge impact on many American ceramicists working today. '*Whether I'm making a large or small object, in the end I hope it will make sense to have that particular scale and form together and that it will give off enough visual energy to shake the air around it.*⁵²

Artist Jesse Wine stated in an interview '*you could argue that working on an expanded scale is an ego or macho thing*⁵³ in relation to there not being many large ceramic sculptures. In retrospect, I started scaling up my own work to be taken more seriously. There is a lot of talk in ceramics about a thing called the 'ceramic ego' when it comes to building big or structurally complex work as there is even more chance of the chaos that comes with working with the material as it increases in size.

⁵⁰ Thorne, Matson, '*That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio*', 2016

⁵¹ "

⁵² Kaneko, 2005

⁵³ Thorne, Matson, '*That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio*', 2016



12. Jun Kaneko photographed stood amongst 'Dango', Laurie and Charles, 2021, Lifetime Achievement Sculpture awards.



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13. *Jun Kaneko, photographed inside his specially built giant brick kiln, 2007, The New York Times, New York*

8) New directions in Sculpture, Strange clay, Getting Stranger.



14. Willy Reed, 'Neon Sign', 2023, Lava Glazed ceramic, Guerrero Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

There has been a great number of exhibitions focusing on clay in recent years such as The Philadelphia ICA's 'Dirt on Delight: impulses that form clay', Hauser and Wirth's Ken Price retrospective, and 'Barrio Barrio' at Guerrero Gallery. (Which showed this glorious Lava Glaze sculpture by artist Willy Reed.) The most recent exhibition 'Strange clay' at the Hayward Gallery, was a brilliant retrospective of

contemporary ceramics and its new direction and a welcome change in attitude towards ceramic in the UK showing a broad range of ceramic sculpture.



15. Takuro Kuwata, 'Untitled', 2016, Frieze Art Fair, Regents Park, London, UK

Takuro Kuwata is a Japanese Ceramicist who's 2016 work dominates the poster for the exhibition due to its striking nature. Kuwata's work plays with the unpredictable nature of ceramics. There are a few Japanese ceramic artists who focus on the chemistry of the glaze over the shape of the clay, keeping their recipes a tightly kept secret. Which is why you don't see as much of this crazy brightly coloured thick gloopy glaze work coming from anywhere else.



16. Katy Stout, 'Untitled', 2021, Genevieve Hanson; Courtesy Of The Artist And Jeffrey Deitch, New York.

Brooklyn based artist and designer Katie stout describes her functional-non-functional ceramic sculptures as *'Naïve pop, it's a characterization of furniture as it is traditionally understood and the motifs of suburban life'*.⁵⁴ She subverts utilitarian forms and function. Her use of bold, bright, shiny glaze evokes a feeling of childhood. In her exhibition at the Jeffrey Deitch gallery Stout created a full-size playground on gallery mezzanine from ceramic. There is a piece in this exhibition that looks like those old playground spring toys, but this is thing is a giant, vaguely creepy ceramic, with accents of gold lustre and some silly plastic on its head.

Her use of lustres and different textures is rich and playful. This along with her thatched works link bank to craft methods. My favourite work of Stout's is this large baby blue birdbath. There's something about large scale ceramics designated for outdoors that is very practical. There is a beautiful sense of weight to this object that contrasts with the use of light-coloured underglaze.

⁵⁴ Stout, 'Visiting Artist Lecture: Katie Stout', 2022



17. Katy Stout, 'Birdbath Fountain', 2021, Ceramic, R & Company Gallery, New York, USA.

Nicki Green is a transgender ceramic artist whose work primarily focuses on the Jewish tradition of the Mikvah. A ceremony where Jewish women partake in a ceremonial wash on a Friday. Her work is a reflection on her dual identity of being both transgender and Jewish. Green combines ceramic technical skill with concept in such a beautiful way. *'Clay is a trans material. I am interested in the mutability of this material practice; the way clay's plasticity allows it to perform as other materials and simultaneously reveal inherent material qualities and processes through production.'*⁵⁵ She works with porcelain and objects that *'remain anchored in their humble industrial beginnings while subtly but rigorously theorizing gender and its*

⁵⁵ Green, 'Art Matters', 2019

relation to the question of bathing and care in the era of the bathroom bill.⁵⁶ Green is referencing the discourse surrounding trans people and bathrooms as well as her conflicting feelings surrounding a ritual she feels excluded from as a trans woman.



18. Nicki Green, 'Splitting/Unifying' 2019, toilet tanks, slip spigots, and medical sink laver with faucets, glazed vitreous China with epoxy and found slip spigots, 54 x 40 x 36 inches, Kohler & Co

This sink was also made on a residency at the John Michael Kohler Art Centre, Kohler is a specialist plumbing and bathroom products company. This mixture of found bathroom parts and hand built and hand painted parts harkens back to

⁵⁶ Westin, 'Nicki Green' Artforum, 2019

Duchamp's readymade urinal, which is an object found in bathrooms divided by binary gender. Splitting/Unifying is a complicated, layered sculpture and an exciting use of ceramics as a medium.

AUTOMATION

Part 3: Automation

9) The Potter bots are coming! Ceramic 3D printing, decals & Digital methods

In Walter Benjamin's seminal essay '*Art in the age of mechanical reproduction*' he proposes that mechanical reproduction can devalue the aura of an art object. In the beginning when discussing ancient forms of mechanical reproduction, he mentions slip cast terracotta. I think Benjamin's argument can most easily be applied to slip casting and Decals. Decals are one of the most digital elements in ceramics as it is an exact photograph whereas ceramic 3D printed and slip casted objects are still slightly unique.

INCLUDEPICTURE

"http://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0202/2919/3828/products/charles-and-dianna-china_1200x1200.jpg?v=1613233800" * MERGEFORMATINET

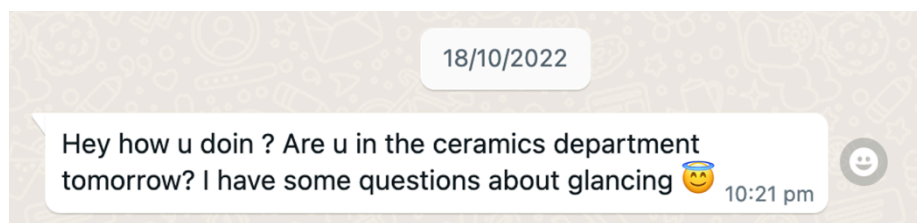
19. Churchill China, 'Charles & Diana Wedding Mug', 1981, Ceramic, London, UK 20. Grayson Perry, 'Titled', 1996, Glaze Earthenware, Laurent Delaye

Grayson Perry, who has long used decals as a tool in his work, stated people will often treat decals as a novelty '*oh look it's a picture on a ceramic!*'⁵⁷ rather than using it as a method of printing on ceramic. His use of British public figures next to political statements, especially the ones with the royal family. Feel intensely British, I have always associated decals with those Charles and Diana wedding mugs that

⁵⁷ Tovey, "Grayson Perry CBE", *Talk Art*, 2020

you find in so many British households. Perry's work feels like the grotesque underbelly of these traditional mass-produced British ceramics with their rich and messy surface texture. Adult prince Williams face is slapped on top of himself as a baby, popular phrases associated with the middle and working class are plastered all over the vessels in inlayed with slip such as 'Our Boys' and 'NIMBY!'.

Although ceramic 3D printing is of course a digital method I don't believe there is always that same sense devaluing the aura of the object. The reason why early ceramic 3D printed pieces of the 90's struggled to make much of an impact in the art world is because it was being used in the same way you use any other 3D printing materials and relegated to design use. It was seen as a novelty. A lot of the conversation was about the printer of itself and whether it was built by the artist. It was more about the fact it was 3D printed, with many artists posting satisfying videos of their printers printing the pieces, fixating the process in a way not dissimilar from the way throwing is fetishized. In a lot of early works, you do get the sense of the digital process devaluing the aura of the object.



21. Text from friend 2022, Chicago, Illinois USA

I was in the studio one day when a friend who was new to ceramics but taking a Ceramic 3D printing class came in and asked me for some advice about glancing (glazing) using the airbrush, so I showed him how to load it up and left him to it. He had made some wonderfully intricate clay vessels using his renderings and the printer. 20 minutes later he comes back and asks me why his pieces are falling apart. He brought them over to show me and I see why, the clay was still completely soaking wet! He hadn't even let the clay dry - or bisque fired them! Ceramics 101. This story got a laugh out of the department. How did he not even know what a bisque firing was? yet he still made these beautiful vessels after a few weeks, that by hand would've taken years to learn the traditional route. I found this beginner's mistake amusing but also interesting. The way people used to strictly enter ceramics through from the wheel, then later some skipping the wheel and starting out hand-building sculptures; now there are even some people starting to enter ceramics through 3D printing. A digital method that couldn't be more different. However, the difference with ceramic 3D printing is you can't treat it like a regular 3D print, the hand and the ceramic process must still be involved, no matter how perfectly you render it.

The Ceramic 3D printer is the most interesting attempt to control clay. It works by extruding clay through what is essentially a giant slip filled syringe on a robot arm being controlled by a computer. Ceramic 3D printing was first invented in the 1990s. In 2022 it is mostly done by making a rendering on Rhino, Grasshopper or Blender then submitted into Cura or Ruby to convert the rendering into spiralized

instructions for the machine. Clay is vastly different to a lot of other materials normally used in 3D printing as it remains wet and malleable so in some ways it can be more forgiving, or more complex. If the rendering isn't perfect, it can be patched up with a bit of slip by hand. It can be taken once its finished and twisted, squished, given handles or decoration. Things can be printed flat and attached it on later. If somethings wrong, it will just give you a droopy line instead of the machine stopping all together. Renderings don't have to be quite as precise. Some contemporary artists working with the medium have leaned into these trail lines created inside structures as supports bringing them to the surface. Clay has its limitations however, as it doesn't defy gravity very well due to its nature of it being printed very wet causing a droopy look at times.



*22. Pictured: The Ceramic 3D printer, -----(my own work), 2022, School of the Art
Institute of Chicago, Illinois USA*



23. Oliver Van Herpt, 2017, 'Curves in Printer', Ceramic 3D print

Oliver Van Herpt is a Dutch artist and early adopter of ceramic 3D printing, he usually prints pieces with hyper smooth surfaces in the same way as PLA prints, like in his 'curves' series, but in his 2014 project *'Adaptive Manufacturing'* the forms are more organic, and they look like they've been made with paper or raw clay. This is because Adaptive manufacturing uses local materials capturing *'how technological production has replaced the craftsman and thus removed all traces of human and local influence.'*⁵⁸



24. Oliver Van Herpt, *'Adaptive Manufacturing'*, 2016, stoneware 3D prints

Keith Simpsons is another artist whose inventive use of colour porcelain in 3D printing is impressive, he layers different colours to create these odd striped surfaces, this would be near impossible to create by hand. These cups look like a ball multicoloured string. He then attaches this old school looking traditional earthenware handle which juxtaposes the modern 3D printed surface which is made with arguably the most manipulated and man-made clay body, cone 10 colour porcelain. He attaches both parts which have been fired separately using coloured epoxy, a plasticky goop that looks like pink chewing gum. The standard with ceramic design objects is normally to conceal any use of epoxy to fix an item. Simpson cleverly Includes it in the design. If he were to attach a handle to the piece while it was wet by hand it would ruin the neat lines of colour. This is an incredibly interesting object in its contradictions between old and new methods.

⁵⁸ Morris, *'New Wave Clay: Ceramic Design'*, 2018



25. Keith Simpson, 'Beaver Tooth Trucker Mug', 2021, pigmented porcelain 3d printed, pigmented epoxy, earthenware clay, terra sigillata, Alfred University, USA.



26. Misa Yo, 'Untitled', 2022, 3D printed ceramic stoneware & glaze, Chicago, USA.

27. Misa Yo, 'Fuzzy Skin Series', 2022, 3D printed ceramic stoneware, Chicago, USA.

Misa Yo is a contemporary artist utilising the organic look of the drooping hanging lines made during the extrusion process, although these objects look organic this is often a very calculated and difficult process. These vessels look so unique, it would be very hard to make them with traditional methods. 3D printed works that lean into the look of the extruded coils rather than away from it are so much more interesting to look at.

Jolie Ngo is a mixed media artist working primarily with the ceramic 3D printer she uses it in a way that feels very futuristic and vibrant, a lot of her objects

are vessels. The surface of her work is rich with embellishment, she often uses the airbrush, gloop glaze and high fire ware to create gradients and texture. Although her works are 3D printed, they have a handmade feel to them. Ngo rejects the sleek lines and minimalistic designs found in earlier forms of 3D printing opts for a maximal decorative nature that harkens back to maximalist slip decorated ancient vessels made by hand. Ngo describes her vessels as *'bright cyborgian pottery objects that acknowledge early ceramic traditions while smiling towards the future. Working with tools that are digitally forward'*.⁵⁹



28. Jolie Ngo, 'Printed 3-legged vessel with plastic cyborg flowers', 2021, coloured porcelain, plastic, glaze, epoxy, R & Company, New York, USA.

Ngo's work is *'engaged in exploring the tension between past and future, probing the synergy between handmade arts and technology.'* and *'[maintains] a sense of tactility, intimacy and sensitivity often achieved in traditional handworks is paramount to my practice.'*⁶⁰ Often artists working with digital methods will stick to sleek and sterile looking surface to achieve a 'modern' look to their objects, especially within 3D printing.

⁵⁹ De La Vallière, 'Say Hi to | Jolie Ngo', ATLAS, 2021

⁶⁰ 11

Ngo's work plays into the appearance of ceramics 3D prints. Printing with clay doesn't look like pieces printed with other materials. They contain a lot more imperfections. She plays into the idea of a decorative ceramic vase by opting for maximalism. *'I lovingly dress these familiar forms with hand painted geometric patterns or hazy gradients and affix embellishments all over their surface to bring my hand back into the equation. This interplay of the machine and my hands results in creation of objects that resist definition.'*⁶¹ These pieces remind me of retro futurism and how 60s media about the 'future' was so bright and optimistic. Ngo's work feels hopeful for the future of ceramics.



29. Jolie Ngo, 'Bubble Vessels', 2020, coloured porcelain, plastic, glaze, epoxy, Tyler McGillivray, USA

Coming back to ceramics as a craft medium, many of the artists working at the forefront of ceramic 3D printing in new, creative, and interesting ways are women. Interestingly, I am yet to see any 'is it art or is it craft?' discourse surrounding 3D printed work. Possibly, it's because people are too busy discussing automation and whether the machines will take over or not, but also maybe it is in part because technology is profoundly gendered and therefore masculinize whatever you make.

⁶¹ 11

Since working with ceramic 3D printing myself, I have felt the 'craft' assertions from others about my own work dissipate completely. Could this be a new way for women ceramic artists to be taken into higher consideration in the art world?



30. @Cerameme, 2020, Meme, Montreal, Canada

Conclusion

Authenticity, Authorship & Automation. Or to put it very simply - what, who, how (and a bit of where). The masculine and feminine connotations that come with 'hard' and 'soft' sculpture materials discussed in the writings of Lippard and Blier are very apt when applied to clay. Clay is soft – and hard. This divergence is a literal and a metaphorical one. Ceramics are one of the earliest forms of art - and one of the earliest forms of production. This distinction between 'Art' and 'Craft' is still being argued today, but it is often used to discredit the work of women and artists of colour. The historical connotations that come with the material can greatly affect the perception of a work.

The US and UKs differing views on ceramics illustrate this well. The UK views it primarily as a craft medium due to its long history of production in Stoke-on-Trent. Whereas the US views ceramic as a sculptural material. One of the main reasons why the US takes ceramics more seriously as a sculptural medium is due to the macho roots of its historical canon. This exaggerated masculine use of the material during the California clay revolution between 1954 to 1959 is the root of US contemporary ceramic history.

The Art vs Craft debate is heavily gendered. The relegation of ceramics to just a craft material and lack of regard for ceramic sculpture in the UK is an

unfortunate one. As outlined by Rose Slivka, ceramics when we view ceramics objectively, it is an excellent material that can be used to bridge the gap between painting and sculpture.

The Ceramic 3D printer is a fascinating intersection of art, history, and technology. This juxtaposition is shown beautifully in Keith Simpson's porcelain works, which is a design object but has all the layers and multitudes of a fine art object and captures the PotterBot's attempt to control an uncontrollable ancient material.

There is no other material that has the same properties as clay. This is why bronze, glass and so many other materials are normally casted from clay forms. It can defy gravity; you can move it around fluidly with your hands before it stiffens. You can embellish the surface in so many ways. Clay is an incredible, versatile material for artists to work with.

WORD COUNT: 7982

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