

**Clay-Earth-Skin:
An exegesis of material and process in Kim Bagley's ceramics**

Kim Bagley
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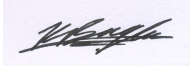
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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree Master of Arts in Fine Art,
Centre for Visual Art, University of KwaZulu-Natal: Pietermaritzburg, December
2010.

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Declaration

I declare that the following is my own, unaided work and that all sources used have been properly acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kim Bagley', is placed on a light purple rectangular background.

Kim Bagley

January 2011

Abstract

This study is a practice-led research project in the field of studio ceramics. It focuses on the materials and processes of making vessels and hollow sculptural forms by Kim Bagley, in partial fulfilment of the MAFA degree. The study is an examination of an intuitive approach to ceramic production expressing the chosen theme: clay-earth-skin. This theme is metaphorically linked to the physical origin (the earth) and skin-like quality of plastic clay and some hollow ceramic forms. The theme is also linked to the concept of materiality and the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss, concerning nature and culture, and Philip Rawson's 'potter's space'. These theoretical ideas are explored in terms of an intuitive, empirical approach to ceramic materials. The working process and finished works are contextualised in terms of the historical production of Peter Voulkos and the contemporary practice of Gareth Mason and Yo Akiyama whose work can be read as related to the researcher's through a common use of the clay-earth-skin theme in some form. This dissertation posits and elucidates the relationship between theory and studio practice. It takes the form of an exegesis, that is, a contextual translation, which seeks to both record and reflect on the making process, and what it reveals, using digital photographs and reflective writings. These tools facilitated the recognition that conceptual, theoretical ideas reoccur in the moments of making, within the studio context, which results in an integrated relationship between theory and practice.

Keywords

Ceramics, sculpture, vessels, ceramic materials, ceramic processes, materiality, clay, glaze, electric firing, ash glazes, stoneware glazes, practice-led research, metaphor, skin, geology, earth, Kim Bagley, Gareth Mason, Yo Akiyama, Peter Voulkos, Potter's space, Structuralism.

Acknowledgements and thanks

Gareth Mason's enthusiastic participation in the research is acknowledged.

I would like to thank my fellow master's students in ceramics: Fahmeeda Omar, Sharon-Lee Weaving and Leanne Frisinger for their support; and for talking about ceramics with me everyday. Thanks to Rifka Kirsten, Beth Ramsey and Mhairi Pattenden, postgraduate colleagues in the CVA ceramics studios, for their help and understanding while we shared working areas.

Thank you to Juliet Armstrong for her unfailing belief in me. I would like to thank Ian Calder for his patient, helpful supervision and his constant enthusiasm and encouragement. Thank you to my parents, to whom this dissertation is dedicated, for their understanding and help during my research.

Preface

To clarify, in this dissertation the first person will be used by the researcher, Kim Bagley, when referring to my own work or issues concerning my own work, which is mainly ceramics. This personal discourse has been adopted due to the exegetical nature of this dissertation, which is essentially a critical self-reflection in support of the studio-based research, the practical component of this Master of Arts in Fine Art.

The text in this dissertation follows a conventional dissertation format as outlined in the Centre for Visual Art, University of KwaZulu-Natal: Pietermaritzburg *style guide for postgraduate texts* (Calder 2009) except for two sections of Chapter 3. For these sections a catalogue-style format will be used. Images will be presented in the left-hand column, and text will be presented in the right-hand column, single-spaced. The catalogue text will be related directly to those images alongside which it is presented. This style is adopted because the section is a form of organisation of information rather than part of the discursive text. See further information in Chapter 3. Further, this format supports the self-reflective aspects of the chosen methodology, as outlined in Chapter 1 and constitutes an important part of the research. Conclusions will be drawn from the information in the catalogue section and elucidated in the main body of text. The catalogue text, presented as a number of sub-sections including keywords, is written according to a set of criteria which is outlined immediately before the catalogue in the main body of text. The listed keywords and phrases are used as an organisational principle drawn loosely from informatics with the intention to facilitate a re-reading of my practice and self-reflection. These textual reflections on my making-process describe and analyse those images and the process which they illustrate.

Unless otherwise stated all illustrations are photographs taken by myself and are of my work. In the main body of text all photographic sources that are not my own are directly referenced.

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Clay-Earth-Skin: An exegesis of material and process in Kim Bagley's ceramics

Chapter 1

Introduction

This research will consider the relationship between theoretical aspects of ceramic production and practical issues of making (concerning processes, materials and concepts) in Kim Bagley's ceramics. The research will demonstrate how the materials and processes of ceramics: clay, glaze materials are manipulated to create ceramic objects, where physical qualities of the materials are closely related to the meaning of the work. The work will explore the potential of the materiality of clay and metaphorical possibilities within the theme: clay-earth-skin.

This dissertation forms part of an MAFA that focuses on the practice of studio ceramics, both vessel-based and sculptural forms. This is a practice-led research project and consequently research will include the planning, making, reflecting on and exhibiting of ceramics. The studio based component will be presented as an exhibition including a large scale sculpture (*RumiNATION Resting* 2009), a series of ceramic vessels (including *Fondre* 2009-2010) and a series of related digital images (*Rummage/Rheumage* 2009-2010).

Practice-led research is also known as practice-based or performative research. It is defined by Gray (1996, 3), quoted in Haseman (2006, 105) as research which is 'initiated in practice', prompted by issues of importance to the practitioner and implemented through studio-based practice 'using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us practitioners'. Practice-led research remains a contested term in the ongoing debates on the relationship between art and research covered in texts by Leavy (2009), Barrett and Bolt (2007), Malins and Gray (2004) and Mäkela and Routarinne (2006), among others. However contested, universities including the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the University of Pretoria (UP website, 2010) have added practice-led degrees to their course offerings at doctoral level indicating a changing status in visual arts research in South

African academe in line with trends in other countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia where practice-led research degrees are more widely offered.

Outcomes of this research will be presented as an exhibition of ceramics and digital images alongside this dissertation which will take the form of an exegesis which I mean to be a supporting record of my research. For this dissertation, what I mean by exegesis is a type of translation (this is discussed further in the text below). The dissertation will function primarily as evidence of the creative process; of reflecting on that process and to rationalise the planning of the MAFA exhibition. It will also situate the work in the context of international ceramic practice and articulate new ways of thinking prompted by the written and studio-based engagement. More detailed aims and objectives of the research will now be outlined.

Aims and Objectives

The research will therefore be a studio-based inquiry that explores the relationship between materiality and conceptual expression in my ceramics. The research will consequently be concerned with ceramic materials and processes and how they can be used to create meaning (express concepts or ideas). Ceramic materials, in this research, are broadly defined as clays and glaze materials for use in studio ceramics. Methods include the steps, both conceptual and physical, a ceramist goes through to plan, make, fire and present ceramic work. My study asks: can materiality be used to create meaning in ceramics and how can materials and processes be used to generate ideas? These questions will be focussed as follows: the ideas to be expressed or the meaning to be made will be sourced from the materials and methods themselves. Specifically the research will be centred around the clay-earth-skin clause in the title of the project, explained in more detail later in this section. The expressive possibilities to be investigated will be those focussed around the physical nature (for example: plastic, tactile, brittle, mineralogical) and natural origins (for example: geological, petrological, crystalline) of ceramic materials and processes. Though the subject of the research is connected conceptually with geology and petrology, research will involve empirical issues and the creation of visual metaphors

in clay rather than conducting scientific, geological experiments, in order to locate the project in the visual arts.

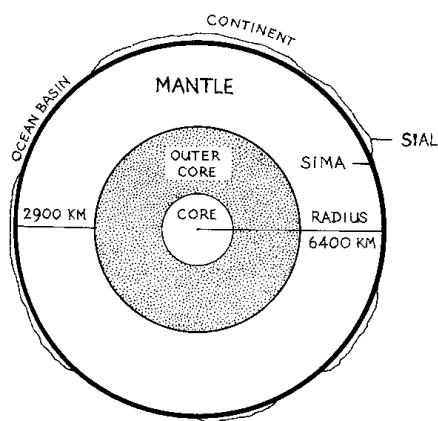
My research will therefore address the intersections of materials, processes and concepts. Both materials and processes will therefore be interlinked as potential purveyors of content. Focussing on these intersections, the research will involve the production of ceramics and digital photographs together with this dissertation which records and analyses aspects of the creative process. This analysis is presented in the form of an exegesis, the structure of which is based on Barrett and Bolt (2007, 203-205). The exegesis and exhibited visual work should be viewed as closely linked, as two ways of 'telling' (visual and textual) that explore the metaphoric significance of ceramic materials and processes.

The potential metaphoric significance of clay, the material, in the production of meaning in an artwork is evident in Fisher's foreword to a popular contemporary ceramics technical manual:

The basic material of clay - largely feldspars, and quartz, - covers three-quarters of the surface of the earth. Clay's physical origins are in ancient mountains - mountains which have decomposed into the substance we know so well. Clay is mud, the most humble of materials. It is the exact substance of the earth. It is the soft stuff that squishes between our toes. Ceramics has a long history, which can be made even longer (in a material sense) if we trace its raw materials back to the original composed stone. (Fisher in Reijnders 2005, 7)

The sentiment embodied by that statement will be central to this research. Clay is abundant and inexpensive, literal earth. However its 'physical origins', linked to its useful physical properties, are not always a central thematic or visual concern in studio ceramics. In this regard, Rawson indicates a polarity in ceramic production: at one pole are ceramics that are so highly finished that they show no evidence of clay's earthy origin (Rawson 1971, 13) whilst at the other 'there is no attempt to hide [clay's] affinity with the earth' (Rawson 1971, 12). The research, in both its written and studio-based expressions aims to focus on the latter; hence the word 'earth' in the project title. The mineral components of clay and glaze, as explained by Reijnders, and then simplified for this introductory, illustrative

purpose, form as a result of the weathering process. The weathering process involves the gradual breaking down of cooled magma: the earth's crust (2005, 273-277). In books on geology and in books on ceramic technique the earth may be drawn as a simple diagram, for example:



22. A simplified section of the globe.

Figure 1: Sutherland, B. 2005. *Glazes from natural sources: a working handbook for potters*. 2nd ed. London: A. and C. Black, 2005. pp 15.

Such illustrations and explanations make it possible to imagine the crust of the earth as a skin around the magma mantle. This metaphor is one reason for the inclusion of the term 'skin' in the project title. The crust-skin metaphor can be used similarly when considering a ceramic vessel or hollow form - a thin outer skin with the capacity to hold another substance. Rawson (1971, 192) eloquently connects vessel forms to figurative ceramic sculptural forms. He uses the term 'potter's space' to label the sense that ceramic pots occupy a particular kind of space that they both 'define' and 'contain' (1971, 192). Rawson attributes a particularity and specialness, verging on mysticism, to this kind of space. He also cites several historic examples of sculptural forms made using techniques and aesthetics associated with vessel making, thus occupying this 'potter's space'. In the example he uses South Indian 'large pottery animals' made from thrown, altered and joined pots. I noted that the clay becomes the animal's skin alining this example with my own interest in the clay surface as an embodied form. In this way clay can be used to express the plastic, elastic and mobile qualities of animal skins.

To extend the clay as skin metaphor, my experience of throwing clay provoked thoughts of skin. A form, freshly thrown from a plastic clay body has a specific appearance and

sensual, tactile quality that I link to skin. Clay-earth-skin becomes an interconnected and multilayered theme that relates to both physical and metaphoric aspects of working with and thinking about clay in the studio context. The research aims to reveal aspects of this complex, material theme, both in a visual, tactile manner; and through the exegesis.

Another objective of the exegesis is to prompt further questions about the way ceramic materials and processes convey meaning.

The exegesis will be preceded by a contextual review which relates the creative output to historical and contemporary practice and theory. This contextual information will include discussions about work by ceramists who engage conceptually with the physicality or materiality of ceramic materials and processes, (reveling in and) revealing the nature of ceramic material, content and concept. My historical sources and (indirect) studio influences include the work of Peter Voukos in the USA, the *Mingei* movement and the avant-garde postwar Japanese ceramists of the *Sodeisha* and *Shiko-kai* groups. Significant contemporary ceramists are Gareth Mason (UK) and Yo Akiyama (Japan). These artists share some conceptual aims or just an attitude to materials and process that I can relate to in my own art work. This context indicates the globalised nature of my ceramic production. Access to information from many places through the internet has facilitated a desire to look beyond local practice for inspiration and affinity concerning issues of materiality in ceramics. Paradoxically these sources of physical, tactile objects are often only presented as digital ephemera or miniaturised printed forms. Regardless of limitations in formats I have been able to access these international instances in which ceramists express, and grapple with, materiality. This has contributed at least in part to the formulation of the following research questions.

Research Questions

The dissertation asks broadly if materiality can be effectively used to create meaning in ceramics and more significantly, how can materials and processes be used to generate ideas during the creative process? More specifically: I wish to explicate how, and probe why I use clay and other ceramic materials to create meaning that is concerned with the physical nature, and origin, of ceramic materials. As an extension of these questions and in

line with Barrett and Bolt's (2007) emphasis on the importance of the creative process to creative arts exegesis, the research asks what is revealed during my creative process, around the clay-earth-skin theme?

These questions are contextualised as follows. Clay and glaze materials are almost all found in the earth's crust and are often mined, milled, mixed and packaged so that their origin is not immediately apparent (Sutherland 1987, v). Contemporary ceramists, Yo Akiyama, Gareth Mason and myself appear to be unified in their expressions of the primal qualities and origin of clay and other ceramic materials. These ceramists appear to reveal aspects of materiality including, for example, plasticity in their finished objects. They reveal rather than conceal visual and tactile effects of process. The research questions will be answered by considering this context, through a descriptive, self-reflexive account of studio processes, presented in this text, through the exhibition itself and through a 'contextual review' (Malins and Gray 1995, 9). These broad research questions will be answered in three distinct but overlapping phases: situating practice, practice and reflecting on practice. Each phase includes more specific questions underpinned by theoretical positions presented by technical, historical and theoretical writings.

Situating practice

Chapter 2 will explore mainly ancillary or contextual questions to situate the research in the broader practice of ceramics, historic and contemporary, local and international (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 198). More specific questions I aim to address are:

- How does my work relate to that of other contemporary makers, specifically Gareth Mason and Yo Akiyama, concerning ceramic processes (Reijnders 2005, 18); raw materials (Reijnders 2005, 273-277, 303-304); conceptual aims (de Waal 2003)?
- How is my work similar to and different from other work? (Fernie 1995, 323 on analysis/synthesis)
- How does my production fit into (or differ from) the continuum of historical ceramic production, locally and internationally? (de Waal 2003)

Practice

In Chapter 3 I will document my creative processes following the structural suggestions of Barrett in Barrett and Bolt (2007, 198), in asking:

- What are my conceptual objectives in the studio? (de Waal 2003)
- What are my material and process choices? (Reijnders 2005, 18)
- What leads me to make those choices? (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 198)
- How do choices of materials and processes interact with conceptual and philosophical objectives?
- What meanings and concepts are embedded in ceramic materials, with a focus on the geological origin of clay and how do I respond to these? (Sutherland 1987, 1-13; Reijnders 2005, 303-304; Clark 2001, 10)
- What production methods, use of materials or choice of materials is most appropriate for exploring the skin-clay-earth metaphor?
- What kind of symbolic meaning can be conveyed with the use of certain ceramic materials? (de Waal 2003).
- What meanings and concepts are imbedded in the processes I use; with a focus on the skin-like quality of thrown clay?

Reflecting on practice

Intertwined with the documentation of my studio process in Chapter 3, I will reflect on that process. The form is again based on Barrett's text in Barrett and Bolt (2007, 198). I aim to interrogate issues such as:

- What are my typical production processes? (Reijnders 2005, 18).
- What methods proved useful to track the development of a finished, exhibition-ready piece? (records including for example photographs, drawings, diagrams, sketches, written notes that refer to ceramic materials, clays, slips, glaze recipes, firing schedules).
- What is the aesthetic and conceptual significance of different points in my production? (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 191).
- What is the role of intuition, chance and risk in my production? (de Waal 2003)
- How is my personal context (my history, education and lineage of producers) evident in my production? (de Waal 2003)

In answering the questions that have been posed in the three phases, I intend to reflect on materiality and meaning in ceramics in the contemporary studio context. My research hopes to make a contribution to the following broader research context:

Current and Past research

Relevance of Project

This study posits itself in broader research into ‘materiality’, that is, investigating the significance of the material attributes of an artwork. Contemporary theorists, such as Paul Carter (2004) in his *Material Thinking*, address the notion of materiality in the visual arts. Carter indicates that the creative process is often inaccessible to outsiders such as critics or historians, leaving a gap in their analysis of art (2004, XI). They lack the ‘material thinking’ of the artist. Carter’s book aims to ‘articulate the character, techniques and outcomes of creative research in a way that preserves the material difference of its discourses’ (Carter 2004, 7). Although Carter’s text is not specifically about ceramics I can see how materiality is a central concern in ceramics.

The often quoted centrality of technique and process to ceramists makes materiality and ceramics a particularly relevant subject for my study. Fisher (in Rejnders 2005, 9) suggests that ceramists are often accused of being unnecessarily interested in technique. Ceramics is often theorised as a discipline that is obsessed with technical issues. This is acknowledged in most texts on the subject but few engage with it on a conceptual level in significant depth. As practice-led research gains momentum this appears to be changing. Livingstone (2009) writes about the challenges of evaluating work where the emphasis on technique and process has shifted (‘de-centred’). He also uses examples of his own work alongside other practitioners such as David Cushway to illustrate the ways materials and processes can be looked at within conceptual creative practice. Using examples that do not fit into previously accepted definitions of craft, though clay and ‘familiarity’ of ceramics is present in the work, he is able to express ideas about the physical attributes of clay and the history of ceramics. He also discusses the presence of new media such as video in contemporary practice within this vein. My own use of digital photography to preserve moments of ephemerality and capture light in the *Rummage/Rheumage* relates to

Livingstone's ideas about using non-ceramic presentation media to shift the way ceramics is perceived as a discipline.

Livingstone's argument concludes that: 'extended examination of material has begun to develop an extended vocabulary for ceramic practice and as such has seen a relocation of process and technique'(Livingstone 2008, 110). My study will function as part of this vocabulary, however my emphasis on the process in the studio sets it apart from Livingstone's study. He is mostly concerned with the finished or performed work. I see that Livingstone's study as well as my own exists as part of an ideological framework that stems from the broader context of contemporary and historic practice.

The ideological context of the research project will be the globalised practices of contemporary Studio Ceramics as posited by (de Waal 2003). Contemporary ceramics owes much to the publication of seminal texts on studio practice in the 20th century such as Leach's *A Potters Book* (1945) which was also noted by Garth Clark and Wilma Cruise in South African historical studies of studio ceramics. Leach's philosophies about pottery set the scene for an anti-industrial, materials-based approach to ceramics that embraced an intuitive approach to clay (Jones 2007, 52) influenced by the Mingei (Japanese folkcraft) movement advocated for by philosopher Soetsu Yanagi (Frolet 1991, 9-17).

The Mingei or folkcraft movement in Japan celebrated the kind of beauty that emerges intuitively and often appears rough and casual (Pearse 1991). Soetsu Yanagi, philosopher, collector and cultural enthusiast was the central protagonist in the Mingei movement. His writings on Mingei were influenced by William Morris's ideas about the Arts and Crafts movement in 19th century England as well as aspects of Walter Gropius on the Bauhaus. (Pearse 1991). Mingei objects are theoretically everyday objects made by ordinary people for everyday use and possess an effortless, unconscious sense of beauty and a respect for the materials and processes used in their making (Pearse 1991). Ideas about Mingei folkcrafts were also acculturated in 20th Century studio pottery, particularly in what became known internationally as Anglo-Oriental ceramics; also being strongly and stylistically evident in South African studios documented by Garth Clark (1974) and Wilma Cruise (1991). This manifested itself in what came to be known as Anglo-

Orientalism, becoming canon for most of the 20th century, in most of the western world, including South Africa (Cruise 1991). While the popularity of predominantly brown, thrown anglo-oriental vessels has waned, certain contemporary practice, including my ceramic production reflects to an extent on this historic canon. Contemporary practitioners including Gareth Mason also appear to reflect on this historic studio ceramics canon whose work in turn inspired aspects of my production. It is significant to me that Mason and Akiyama also use an intuitive, materials-based approach to ceramic production, foregrounding the essential physical qualities (materiality) and geological origin of ceramic materials. In replicating the natural forces of geological formation -in this instance extreme heat- Mason uses high-firing reduction kilns (Mason 2008, 49) whilst Akiyama uses oxy-acetylene torches (Jones 2007, 152).

Relationship to current practice and knowledge

The basis of my ceramics research will utilise and extend the art historical research of Susan Rabie (1993) and Cherie Erasmus (1994). They were both MAFA ceramics graduates of the CVA in the early 1990s. Both students conducted research into expressive American ceramics in the 20th century. Although not taught by the CVA's studio-founder of Ceramics, Hilda Ditchburn (who retired in 1981), their 1990s ceramics evidences some of the formal legacies of Ditchburn's modernist studio ceramics (Vurovecz 2008) in their expressive concerns with ceramics materials.

Rabie focussed on the figure of Peter Voulkos and artists who continued his legacy of wheel-thrown and constructed ceramic sculptures. I consider myself, as well as Gareth Mason and Yo Akiyama, as indebted to the legacy of Voulkos whose work became a global phenomenon. Erasmus (1994) focussed on the 'partial form' in American ceramics with Voulkos as a starting point.

My studio-based inquiry is in line with the practices of artists such as Akiyama, Mason and others who approach the use of clay with a sense of 'spirited expressive freedom' to let the material behave as naturally as possible in their formative processes, from construction to firing. However there is very little formalised practice-led research in the field of studio ceramics in South Africa.

Rationale of Project

In conceptualising my approach to documenting my research, I have structured my ideas on the basis of Practice-led research as defined by Malins and Gray (1995, 9) who suggest that practice-led researchers should ‘be aware of the critical context of practice and research, and to use the contextual review to situate the researcher and to help generate and raise the level of critical debate’. Douglas, Scopa and Gray (2000, 1) trace the emergence of dialogue about practice-led research in an academic context to the Matrix conferences at Central St Martins School of Art in London in 1988 and 1993. In South Africa pioneering practice-led research has been carried out by Leora Farber, a practice-led PhD student at the University of Pretoria and director of the research centre, Visual Identities in Art and Design at The University of Johannesburg. In addition to the significance of her own doctoral research project (notably funded by the NRF and the University of Johannesburg) she led a colloquium on Practice-led research in October 2009 at the University of Johannesburg. In reflecting on these records of practice-led projects in visual arts, my study anticipates a contribution to the development of a new approach to the integration of text- and practice-led studies of contemporary visual art at University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Centre for Visual Art.

Materials, Methods, Conceptual Framework

Concepts

To investigate the subject of the research, the geological origin and skin-like quality of clay, two related metaphors have been identified to be used thematically and conceptually to initiate studio practice. They are clay-earth and clay-skin metaphors, related to the geological origin (Sutherland 1987, 1-13) and skin-like quality of raw clay. The potential visual similarity between ceramic works and the rocks from which ceramic materials are derived from will be attempted in this project. Notable are similarities in texture, form and colour of rocks from igneous through metamorphic and sedimentary (Sutherland 1987, 2-9). Further, the metaphors can be ideologically linked to the structuralist dichotomy of nature and culture as theorised by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1970). I can see that ceramic materials are taken from ‘nature’ and changed by the human hand and then transformed by fire, under certain cultural rules from within ‘culture’, becoming artefacts of that culture.

In *The Raw and the Cooked* Lévi-Strauss argues, through an analysis of South American myths that ‘empirical categories--such as the categories of the raw and the cooked, the fresh and the decayed ... can be used as conceptual tools with which to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in the form of propositions.’ (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 1). In adopting this perspective, I will discuss the potential of similar categories in the conceptual analysis of ceramic works produced by myself and by other artists.

Central to both physical and theoretical aspects of the research, the theme of ‘clay as earth’ and ‘clay as skin’ will be used to set-up binary oppositions of culture and nature in structuralist terms as defined by Fernie (1996, 352). From nature there is the origin of the materials, a vast source of inspiration and meaning, and from culture there is the familiarity of rotation and circularity in the making of ceramics and the vessel as a familiar form. Fisher (In Reijnders 2005, 8) asserts that in ceramics, ‘circularity keeps reappearing’, and points out that this is a product of the methods studio ceramists use to make objects out of clay, not the physical properties of the material (Fisher in Reijnders 2005, 8). The writing of Rawson, mentioned in the preceding section also contributes to my conceptual framework. Partly as a result of my training at the CVA (in the Ceramics Studio's legacies that stem from the teaching of its founder Hilda Ditchburn) and historical local context (identified in reference to ceramics by Clark 1974, and Cruise 1991) I have a predisposition to create hollow forms in both my vessel-based (*Fondre*) and figurative works (*RumiNATION Resting*).

The studio methods I use are based on the deployment of intuitive ways of working with materials that expose rather than mask the look and feel of clay. This approach or attitude to materials and processes comes from personal familiarity with the material, though the historical precedents of this approach to materials are also addressed in my dissertation. This is traced to a range of postwar ceramists who focussed on Mingei ceramic practices in Japan (Sori Yanagi 1991, 7), the development of theory of Anglo-Orientalism from Japan, Korea and the United Kingdom (for example Bernard Leach 1945). Rawson (1971, 84-85) notes that this intuitive approach is derived from Japanese tea ceremony wares; especially good examples of which were produced from 1300 to 1600. He observed that the ceramics

are characterised by irregularity and roughness from rapid, confident and unselfconscious production. This irregular visual language was appropriate for tea wares as tea ceremony facilitates contemplation and physical contact with these tactile objects. Rawson indicates that this Zen-buddhist aesthetic became self-consciously unselfconscious; developing into a specialised, sought after, 'dignified' (Rawson 1971, 84) style. Rawson suggests that this visual language which interrupts qualities of evenness and regularity associated with the dominant visual languages in ceramics requires 'an act of self-conscious sophistication' (1971, 85) requiring the viewer to understand the norm to enjoy the subversion of it.

Although the work of 'revolutionary' potters belonging to the *Shiko-kai* and *Sodeisha* groups (including artists such as Yagi Kazuo) (de Waal 2003, 109-115) was created in reaction to Japanese traditions including tea wares, I feel that their work is relevant to the conceptual framework of this research. While the political, national and historical conditions of my ceramic work is quite different, their desire to find different ways to use and present clay as a material is something that holds some relevance. Their position regarding clay can be explained by a few words of the *Shiko-kai* manifesto, quoted by de Waal (2003, 109): 'Since we have been brought up by the earth which is warmer than a mothers heart, we will efface ourselves by means of the earth'. Their work wholly embraced clay as a material with the intention to let the clay speak for itself, believing that the previous generation 'smothered' it. (de Waal 2003, 109). de Waal also translates '*sodei*' as a reference to 'an earthworm wriggling in mud'. In the close connection to the physicality of clay, unusual use of wheel-thrown elements and the use of 'fragmentation and reconstruction' (de Waal 2003, 113) their approach is significant to the ongoing development of my work.

I will position my research inquiries within the varied historical context described above; borrowing and appropriation forms part of my (post)postmodern attitude to production and processes. I borrow and appropriate theories, attitudes and working methods in my studio work where ceramists seem to enjoy embracing the earthy quality of clay.

Methodology and methods

Researchers in the creative arts have begun using the exegetical process to ‘discuss and replicate the process of studio enquiry’ (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 195). Barrett emphasises that the exegetical method presupposes that studio production is research (Barrett and Bolt 2007, 202). Creative arts exegesis can involve the decoding of visual language, materials, technologies, production processes and the visual development of ideas in creative arts production. Decoding is taken here to mean looking back at my process through looking at evidence of that practice and the pieces themselves and reflecting on them, identifying and discussing links to theory.

Academically, ‘exegesis’ as a methodological term has been more usually associated with theology, although it is used as a creative arts research tool. Erickson (2005, 222) describes the process of exegesis for beginning theological exegetes as ‘the ‘science’ of discovering what a communication, such as a biblical text, meant to its original author and readers’. Exegesis is therefore a contextual translation that is then used by the exegete for the production of meaning in a contemporary context. Many of the essential qualities of exegesis can be usefully applied to research in the creative arts, and in this case, the visual arts, and specifically ceramics. Barrett advocates for the exegesis as an important part of creative arts research. She likens the exegesis to a meme, an evolutionary unit of cultural production that adapts because it reveals knowledge that emerges specifically from studio practice and is by nature replicable, making an exegesis useful for creating ‘alternative modes of understanding’ (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 162).

Researchers in the creative arts use the exegetical process to ‘discuss and replicate the process of studio enquiry’ (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 195). Barrett emphasises that the exegetical method presupposes that studio production is research (2007, 202). Creative arts exegesis can involve the decoding of visual language, materials, technologies, production processes and the visual development of ideas in creative arts production. I will document and decode my own practice in the third chapter.

My study applies the concept of practice-led research in my productions of studio ceramics. Haseman (2006) identifies a shift from more 'traditional' qualitative and quantitative research paradigms, to new forms of practice-led research that are more appropriate for the visual art practitioner:

Researchers in the arts, media and design often struggle to find serviceable methodologies within the orthodox research paradigms of quantitative and qualitative research. In response to this and over the past decade, practice-led research has emerged as a potent strategy for those who wish to initiate and then pursue their research through practice. (Haseman 2006, abstract)

The question of whether the discipline of Visual Art should engage in research through practice was debated. Since the practice-led research began to be officially discussed at the Matrix conferences mentioned in the previous section: Rationale of Project, discussions have shifted 'from an ontological to a methodological question' (Douglas, Scopa and Gray, 2000) as practice-led research has gained momentum. It appears very little research of this nature (practice-led, critical and self-reflective) has been conducted at South Africa universities and even less within ceramics. Malins and Gray (1995) 'proposed that research can be an important factor in the development of defining and elaborating this [craft disciplines including ceramics] critical context. Conversely this lack of critical context could be seen to hamper research in the discipline.'

Malins and Gray (1995, 6), Barrett in Barrett and Bolt (2007, 6) and Haseman (2006, 104) suggest that due to the nature of practice-led enquiry, emergent, adaptable methodologies from several disciplines are appropriate to this type of research. The proposed methodologies include: an intuitive, rigorous experimentation with materials based on the tacit knowledge of the practitioner leading to the production of an exegesis.

The methods in line with the methodological approach will include a combination of analysis and synthesis, in the art historical sense, (Ferne 1996, 323), using evidence of practice (see primary resources) and the finished object itself. This analysis and synthesis will address the physical making, mental development and finished piece and identify the interconnections of these.

The research design will be empirical (Kellehear 1993, 8) in that it is based on a physical interaction with ceramic materials and processes and the analysis of ceramic objects, completed or in process. This study is constructed on the assumption that specialised insight can emerge from the tacit knowledge of a visual arts practitioner. Malins and Gray (1995, 3) suggest that ‘the informed, intimate perspective of the reflective practitioner leads to a greater degree of insight only possible from experiential, ‘tacit’ knowledge.’ The tool for this reflection will be exegesis.

The main part of my dissertation takes the form of a visual catalogue with images and text that is structured to provide consistent records and allow for reflexive inquiries about my methods of production, processes of work, and materials, together with associated sources and concepts. The template captions the following:

Commentary Template: Process Images

- Title of piece; Medium and Date; final dimensions
- Photo Credit
- Dimensions of piece in process (if significantly different to the final dimensions)
- Literal *Material* (plastic clay; stoneware; chicken wire; paper);
- Descriptions of production *Process* illustrated by that image (thrown; slab built; poured slip; glazed - ie what happens in the image or happened just before that image was recorded);
- Production Stage, relative to starting and completion (finished work; preliminary/ planning stage; drying)
- Conceptual/ideological Notes (for that piece at that stage of completion - observations of that particular part of the process - made in retrospect)
- Keywords that will aid in categorisation at a later stage - words which describe physical or conceptual characteristics of the image and the part of the process it represents.

These captions or commentary will be used to elucidate issues dealt with in the research questions. The notion of captioning is neither arbitrary nor specifically prescribed by a single methodology. I arrived at this method of assessing each photograph and the part of

the process it represents through Lévi-Strauss's idea of categorisation of 'mental patterns' (1970, 10):

I have always aimed at drawing up an inventory of mental patterns, to reduce apparently arbitrary data to some kind of order, and to attain a level at which a kind of necessity becomes apparent, underlying the illusions of liberty. (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 10)

I would like to categorise visual and conceptual patterns, in terms of materials and processes. Beyond the value of Lévi-Strauss's ideas for captioning, his work is relevant in terms of further thematic issues in my work. Lévi-Strauss, from his position as ethnographer, in *The Raw and the Cooked* aimed to illustrate how 'empirical qualities' including 'the raw and the cooked' could be used 'as conceptual tools with which to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in the form of propositions.' (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 1). The idea of the raw and the cooked lends itself to a ceramic analogy - the two states: the fired and the unfired or; regarding materials: the milled and the mined. Lévi-Strauss's writing focusses on mythology rather than on visual art production, but such dichotomies can be used to understand the creative dialogue I create through my work.

Captioning also stems from the notion of categorisation used by archaeologists, art historians and museologists to categorise objects for study or accessioning to museums. Rawson (1971, 6) asserts the limits of conventional archaeological or art historical forms of classification that 'archaeology-- and even art history--look only at the external characteristics of pottery, to classify them according to modern categories of significance, and locate them in a historical system of thinking, which is a special phenomenon of our time.' In this study I will categorise the process of making.

The primary sources (and part of the research output) for this project are the ceramics produced by Kim Bagley, during the course of the degree, together with documentation of the process of producing those ceramics. The documentation includes journal entries, sketches, notes, glaze recipes, glaze tests, photographs of works in process and the works in process themselves. These records of the conceptual and physical development of works will provide clues that may prove useful in reflecting on and analysing the creative process. For clarity of meaning these will be referred to as *evidence of practice*.

Materials and Processes

My literal studio processes involve an intuitive and experienced approach to throwing and altering, cold reassembly, electric firing, experimentation through trial and error; theoretical knowledge and bi- and tri- axial blends for glaze tests, especially ash glazes. I also used photo-documentation which is dealt with in detail in Chapter 3. Dripping slip/ slip-casting/grass was a new technique for me but which stems from experience in working with clay. The sourcing of materials: red slip, other slips, stained bodies, stoneware clay, wood ash and grass cuttings came from both my own environment and through ceramic suppliers.

Dissertation Structure

In chapter 1 I have laid out the nature and aims of the study. Exegesis as a term has been introduced and explained. Chapter 2 and 3 will be the body of that exegesis.

Chapter 2 will begin with locating the research in the context of contemporary and historical ceramic practices through contextual review. This will include examples of influential practitioners. Both literature (for example catalogues and reviews) and practice (exhibitions and ceramic pieces) will be taken into account. The relevant literature is then summarised to show the theoretical aspects of the project. Through consideration of the practice dealt with in the previous section, this will take the form of relevant art critical, art historical, philosophical and conceptual writings. Therefore the philosophical, conceptual and discursive position of the study will be presented.

This contextual review will be followed by a 'discussion' of what took place in the studio - the process. Several forms of working documentation (such as journal entries, sketches, notes, glaze recipes, glaze tests, photographs of works in process) and works in process could be important to this part of the research paper. These records of the mental and physical development of works will provide clues that may prove useful in an analysis of the creative process. For the clarity of meaning these will be referred to in this paper as *evidence of practice*. Some of these preparatory and documentary sources, including

journal entries, notes and sketches will provide access to the tracking of developing ideas, insights into material choices and the reasons for application of specific methods and technologies.

By keeping a journal the individual is able to 'take over their own development' (Harré, 1983 p.257). Reflexive monitoring of creative process in journals helps us to become reflective learners, both on-action and in-action to examine our own self-development. Journal use, is related to Harre's way of formulating agency in terms of 'powers to be' and 'powers to do'; the dialectic between reflexive powers, action, reflective judgment and the growth of understanding and competence. Thus keeping a journal produces a continuity of self- understanding and eventually it helps us to understand the complexity of our own creative processes. (Pigrum 2007, 7)

However the main tool for recording my creative processes will be documentary photographs. In the analysis these will be included as a series of photographs of moments representing a series of points in the production. These are accompanied by reflective commentary as described in the previous section. Photographs taken of works in process provide a visual and literal record of moments of visual, technical and ideological significance that are often lost or hidden in the final, installed piece. This analysis of evidence of practice and finished pieces will be used to create a general picture of my studio practice and to help deduce what was discovered in the studio process. Bolt suggests that the 'task' of the exegesis is 'to produce movement in thought itself' and 'takes the form of concrete understandings which arise in our dealings with ideas, tools and materials or practice'. (Bolt in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 33). My practice will also be considered in the context of other contemporary practitioners including Mason and Akiyama. My application of theoretical ideas already dealt with in chapter 1 and 2 will be readdressed to establish the nature of the relationship between practice and theory in my ceramics.

Chapter 2: Exegesis

Contextual review incorporating literature survey

The aim of the dissertation is to support the practice-led nature of my MAFA. Hence this section presents significant literature, influential artists (ceramic works and practitioners) and my own background as a ceramist to contextualise the study.

Practice of significance to this project will include individual ceramic works, exhibitions of completed ceramic works and works in progress that appear spontaneous and gestural, in line with 1950s work by artists such as Peter Voulkos (Clark 2002, 29-35) and reveal the innate physical qualities of clay (Reijnders 2005, 273-293) in form, texture or general visual effect. This will include my previous practice and work by contemporary international ceramists Gareth Mason and Yo Akiyama.

The illustrations that follow offer a sample of the main issues to be investigated in the 'practice review' (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 188). In my ceramic practice I am interested in the natural appearance (igneous, geological) of the ceramics, and note the visual tension between the rock-like surfaces and textures and their often vessel-like forms (which suggest utility and function).

This chapter functions as a means to communicate the context of my research including influences, inspiration and the historical practices which inform my work. The context of the research will be explored in two major areas, that is by examining ceramics by contemporary makers that relate to my production and by examining historical practices which have contributed in some way to how or what I have produced for this research project. Through this contextualisation I intend to gauge where my production lies in relation to contemporary ceramic practice. I will suggest how my practice deviates from and where it is similar to the work of other ceramists working within a similar conceptual paradigm.

The historical context of this study is located by de Waal (2003, 8-25), in stating that ceramic practice in the 20th century that was characterised by a seemingly free, expressive

and intuitive use of clay. The output under the large umbrella of expressive, intuitive ceramics, often initiated on the wheel, ranges from the bold, brash work of American ceramist, Peter Voulkos to founding Anglo-Oriental ceramist, Bernard Leach. These icons and their adherents represent two very different yet related approaches to ceramics which value a sense of expressive spontaneity in studio ceramics. Both 'schools' advocated for the importance of the primacy of the innate or 'true' qualities of clay, in one form or another. In addition, work by many of these artists show evidence of cross-culturalism, particularly notable in the 'movement' known as Anglo-Orientalism.

Contemporary practice, related to the research project, which can be considered as developing from the historical ceramics discussed above includes the work of Gareth Mason, Yo Akiyama, and the candidate. The significance of this practice lies in similar approaches to materials and the themes of clay. The issues of cross-cultural connections and an embrace of international materials, philosophies and techniques. All these artists, as discussed below, highlight the geological origin of clay and other ceramic materials. In the 21st century, in an increasingly globalised world and where in artistic practice cross-cultural borrowing is fairly usual. My inquiry focuses on three artists who use clay and ceramic materials and their origins (the earth) as intrinsic parts of the subject of their work.

Two contemporary practitioners, Gareth Mason (UK) and Yo Akiyama (Japan) have been selected for discussion because they appear to deal with the conceptual and technical issues related to my practice and are influences on my practice. My choice of these ceramists is neither random nor exhaustive, as I simply have a connection to and an understanding of their work based on my own studio practice. When I look at work by these artists or read articles written by or about these ceramists and their work I understand my own practice more and get ideas about potential physical or conceptual processes.

I met Gareth Mason at the ISCAEE (International Society for Ceramic Art in Education and Exchange) Kenya Symposium in 2008, in which I participated with CVA colleagues (along with Professor Juliet Armstrong). Mason gave a paper on contemporary ceramics in the UK, including his own work and exhibited a piece at the Nairobi National Museum together with the other ISCAEE delegates. He also gave a throwing demonstration. I found

his attitude to clay to be similar to my own and hence I felt inspired to improve my throwing on a technical level. On my return to South Africa I maintained contact with Mason and began researching his ceramic work. My main experience of his work has been through photographs of his pieces, which photograph particularly well due to contrasts between matte and shiny and due to varied and interesting surface texture. This is significant as a process in my research, considering my use of digital photography as a medium to convey ideas about the nature of clay. Coincidentally I discovered the work of Yo Akiyama in 2008, in an article by Frank Steyaert (2005) in an Australian ceramics journal, *Ceramics: Art and Perception*. I connected with his visual language immediately, at a time when I was searching for ways to explain how I was beginning to manipulate clay to reveal its innate qualities. Steyaert articulated ideas around Akiyama's work that provided conceptual backing for the work I was doing at that time. From these role-models I thought it necessary to begin an exploration in which clay and its physical attributes become my central focus.

Peter Voulkos

The visual heritage of Mason and Akiyama includes the work of Peter Voulkos. The confident, gestural spontaneity I believe is the hallmark of much contemporary practice including my own. Peter Voulkos (1924-2002) is considered a 'major figure' (Slivka 1978, v) in 20th century crafts in the USA. His expressive, often large-scale ceramics consist of constructions of wheel-thrown and slab-built clay. Slivka suggests that the ceramic work he produced from 1949-1959 was 'revolutionary', 'start[ing] a whole new ceramics movement' in the USA (Slivka 1978, 6), and worldwide. Slivka writes that Voulkos was significantly interested in the material, clay, itself, experimenting with it and experiencing it. He learnt everything he could about it from others but also learnt about how the material behaves through his personal experience of working with it (Slivka 1978, 6).

During his many demonstrations throughout the country, Voulkos creates his pieces while an audience watches, much like a fine jazz musician creates music while he is playing before his audience. He is so secure in his craft that he is able to trust his spontaneity, trademark of Voulkos oeuvre, as a precise reflex of knowledge,

experience, and timing. He does not plan his pieces in advance or draw on paper. (Slivka 1978, 78)

Voulikos is quoted by Slivka as saying the following during a demonstration at the ‘Tenth Annual Super Mud, Pennsylvania State University in 1976’ (Slivka 1978, 78): ‘The quicker I work, the better I work. If I start thinking and planning, I start contriving the designing. I work mostly by gut feeling. The thing about clay is, it’s an intimate material and fast moving.’ (Voulikos in Slivka 1978, 78-79). She cites him further as

not subjectively confessional or revealing of himself in his work. His process of work, the interaction of work and energy mutually begetting each other, is the self-revealing subject of his work. Voulikos wants students to see the *use* of technique---to understand where technique can lead, rather than to focus their attention on the technique itself. (Slivka 1978, 79)

Also significant is Voulikos’ experience and attitude to raw clay: ‘There are few potters who have used native clays and earth glazes to the extent Voulikos did’ (Slivka 1978, 9). He dug and processed his clay at university during his first experiences of clay during a compulsory ceramics course taken during his senior year.

Aside from the sheer dynamics of his own creative presence, Voulikos’s great contribution to modern ceramics is his ‘non-technique’ technique. Whereas previously the ceramics medium had been too precious, or too humble, or too industrial, too laden with technical no-no’s and virtuoso traps to encourage artistic freedom, the daring Voulikos challenged the medium to creative adventure. He trusted the material and what it would do and his own intuitive power with it; he committed himself to the energy that grew from this interaction. (Slivka 1978, 101)

Even if indirectly, the work and ideas of Voulikos remain a strong influence on my production.

Gareth Mason

Gareth Mason is a contemporary British potter. He was educated in ceramics at what was then the West Surrey College of Art and Design, Farnham, (now the University for the Creative Arts) where he completed a BA in ceramics. His work is mostly wheel-thrown vessels that are gas-reduction-fired. Mason’s favourite (and dominant) shapes are bottles

and bowls (Mason 1998, 16) and he likens their form to the human traits of ‘openness and secrecy’ (Mason 1998, 16).

His work is informed by a range of ideas, ceramic practices and objects (Lobascher 2006, 20), many of which I feel are relevant to my research. A major inspiration is Far Eastern ceramics (Mason 1998, 16) including Japanese Tamba wares (Bevis 2008, 49). He also uses materials associated with the Far East including a porcelain clay body and celadon glazes (Lobascher 2006, 20). This material palette is combined with a keen interest in found objects, in the geological sense. In Caroline Whymann’s catalogue essay ‘Open to Interpretation’ I read that found objects have been an interest of Mason’s since he was a student. The essay refers specifically to the exhibition ‘An unfolding narrative’ (1 May- 10 June 2007), a solo show of Mason’s work at Blackwell The Arts and Crafts House in the UK. Whymann indicates that Mason utilised ‘glacial deposits’ in the work on this show. He incorporates raw minerals into the surfaces of his pieces, rather than adding finely milled rocks into a glaze in the conventional fashion explained in detail by Sutherland in *Glazes from Natural Sources* (1987). At the ISCAEE Kenya symposium, Mason became interested in the iron-rich red soil of the Kenyatta University Campus where the symposium was held and included it in pieces he made during the symposium (personal observation 2008). On a field trip during the symposium he also picked up pieces of obsidian (a type of black igneous rock that is dense and glassy due to being formed by the rapid cooling of magma (Sutherland 1987, 2)) for use in future works. The expression of geomorphic materiality is evident in the following photograph of Mason’s ceramics which I took at the symposium.



Figure 2: Mason, G. Thrown and altered clay vessel with red soil, in progress, Kenyatta University Ceramics department. Photograph by Kim Bagley 2008.

Another essential element of Mason's practice is the element of risk: 'Obsessive-compulsive flirtation with disaster is the only process that keeps me creatively on my toes, engaged, alive.' (Mason 2008, 49). Mason's work is an unconventional version of the fairly orthodox practice of making thrown, glazed, and then reduction-fired porcelain pots. Through his interruption of classical forms through confident gestures made with the fingers or through inclusions of rocks and other found objects - pushing the limits of safe, typical practice 'Mason's work manifests a strong visual and tactile aesthetic that reverberates with the emotional experience of being human' (Whymann 2007). Considering Whymann's comment the melding of nature in the form of geological or petrological inclusions and the touch of the human hand together with the vessel as a universal cultural signifier, Mason's work could be read as a conversation between nature and culture.

Gareth Mason appears to 'toy' with revealing the origin of ceramic materials in his work. His work is spontaneous and fresh, though his approach to the wheel can be exacting. He

uses his considerable ability at the wheel and his knowledge of glazes to produce expressive forms that transcend technical skills (personal observation 2008).

Yo Akiyama

Yo Akiyama is a third generation artist working in Kyoto, Japan (Steyaert 2005). He works on a monumental (6m+) scale as well as a smaller, table-top scale and creates sculptural forms with cracked and blistered ceramic surfaces. He creates these surfaces by selective rapid drying of wet clay forms such as thrown cylinders using a blow torch, thereby using artifice to replicate the appearance of the earth's metamorphic process. Akiyama then peels back the rapidly dried surface, manipulating the form and even turning a cylinder inside out. (Jones 2007, 152; Steyaert 2005, 92). Akiyama then generally fires his work during a long reduction firing, resulting in a black, carbonised surface (Jones 2007, 152). Steyaert likens his works to 'fossilised seeds from giant prehistoric trees' and 'broken fragments of lava ... still smouldering' (Steyaert 2005, 91). Del Vecchio (2003, 170) describes Akiyama's work as 'at once harsh and beautiful'. In observing images of Akiyama's work and his piece *Geological Age V* (1992) at the Victoria and Albert museum, like Mason's, I would describe Akiyama's signature aesthetic as neither smooth nor orthodox and his sense of beauty as rough and arresting.

Conceptually Akiyama works with a metamorphosis metaphor (Akiyama in Jones 2007, 152) as a formative aspect of ceramics. He conceptualises the process of firing clay to the point of ceramic change as a metamorphosis, describing it as a death and then a birth. There appears to be a strong sense of metaphor in Akiyama's process and finished work including the metaphor of the formation of rock by the earth through a natural process of change. Akiyama likens the relationship between the interior and exterior space and the surface of his work to the earth's crust which forms through a gradual metamorphosis from magma to rock 'just like, for example, when we imagine the overhead earth's surface while staying in a limestone cave, or the inside stalactitic walls while standing on the earth's surface.' (Akiyama in Jones 2007, 152). In drying and firing, Akiyama's rock-like vessels go through a comparable process of metamorphosis, though it is much faster version to that which takes place in the earth.

Andy Goldsworthy's *Rivers and Tides*, (DVD, 2001) provided an opportunity for me to reflect on the role of photo-documentation and video in recording art-making processes. The format allows for the compression of real-time and space, aiding for reflexive review. Goldsworthy's work exists for most people only as photographs or digital moving images. The ephemerality of his installations in nature is suspended by the possibility of documentation. Although this documentation is not objective, it appears so closely related to the object that is being photographed. Sontag calls a photograph 'a part of, an extension of that subject; and a potent means of acquiring it, of gaining control over it.' (Sontag 1973, 155). Goldsworthy revealed to me the potential of documentation to show people my work as I want it to be seen. However, photography changes the physicality of an object, altering its material or perhaps in its own way drawing attention to qualities of the ceramic material, the tactility of clay. Goldsworthy's photographs serve as a record for himself that he can mentally return to a piece once the sometimes stressful or tiring day of creating has passed. The example of Goldsworthy gave me a significant methodological impetus in making decisions about how to record my own creative processes in ceramics.

Literature Survey

The critical and instructional writing pertinent to the project is outlined below as a sample of key texts.

Anton Reijnder's *The Ceramic Process* is a technical manual from the European Ceramic Work Centre in the Netherlands. The EKWC is an international workshop where ongoing technical and creative research in ceramics is carried out. The centre champions actual physical discovery over the romantic lore that surrounds the dominant anglo-oriental-style instruction of most of the 20th century in the West, espoused in Leach's *A Potter's Book* (1945). In line with the work of the EKWC, the book was written for both the trained ceramist and the 'visitor' to ceramics as a medium. Here I have taken the term 'visitor' from Garth Clark (2007, 103). He uses the term in an article, 'Fortress Ceramica Answered Prayers', to describe practitioners who work predominantly in other media but who have produced some ceramics during their career. Incidentally, in the same article, Clark argued,

three years ago, that the chasm between ceramics and other fine art practices has shrunk considerably in the 21st century, and that the nature of making ceramics itself is changing.

The greatest sign of health might well be to eventually find our Fortress [sic] in ruins, still visited, remembered and respected for its once pivotal role in our history. But before one is overcome with nostalgia, one should remember why it existed in the first place, and why we did not use the existing infrastructure of the arts; the fortress was built because of aesthetic apartheid and some unfathomable Modernist fear of clay. With this in mind its demise may not be that sad. Death does feed life. (Clark 2007, 104)

Mark Del Vecchio's *Postmodern Ceramics*, text traces the development of post World War II ceramics in the West. Garth Clark wrote the main body of discursive writing in the book, contextualising the philosophical and historical background of contemporary production from an outsider's perspective.

A prominent writer of practitioner-initiated critical writing is British ceramist, Edmund de Waal, author of *20th Century Ceramics*. de Waal presents a critical view of ceramics within the broader context of visual art with a level of tacit knowledge that informs his writing. de Waal critically examines ceramic objects within a postmodern mode, foregrounding multiplicity and inter-textuality. He challenges the presence of sharp distinctions between cultures and the sanctity of tradition in contemporary ceramics: 'With cultural markers that were once specific and highly inflected like the raku techniques of Japan, now used as expressive tools, and with more 'anagama' kilns in use in America than Japan, the idea of hegemonic traditions has disappeared' (de Waal 2003, 212).

Wilma Cruise herself also a practitioner, presents a South African perspective on similar issues to de Waal. Her introduction (1991, 10 -13) to *Contemporary Ceramics in South Africa*, positions the dominant paradigm of institutionally accepted South African ceramics in the mid to late 20th Century (Modernist Anglo-Orientalism) in relation to more recent, postmodern shifts brought about by various influences, including American trends. There is not a more current reflection on South African ceramics.

Susan Rabie's MAFA thesis *Multi-piece ceramic sculpture in America (West Coast): After 1945* (1993) is a study of ceramists who were important to the so-called 'clay revolution' of postwar America (Rabie 1993, 3) including Peter Voulkos. Rabie argues that the idea of the 'multi-piece' ceramic sculpture became an important approach in the 1950s and 1960s in the US (Rabie 1993, xi); used by artists to realise expressive, sculptural ceramics in contrast to the dominant more restrained European styles.

Rabie links Voulkos to the New York school of Abstract Expressionist painters by their common, anarchic attitude towards established conventions in art. She also links both parties to gestural calligraphy (1993, 10) and ideas from Japan. Rabie suggests the Abstract expressionists's gestural application of paint to be a potential inspiration for gestural aspects of Voulkos's ceramics. (1993, 5). However she warns that the physical nature of clay itself (plastic, malleable, quick to use) was a more dominant influence on Voulkos's style.(1993, 7)

Rabie concludes her study by highlighting that these ceramists 'all set out to discover the essential characteristics and the wide possibilities of the ceramic medium' (Rabie 1993, 79). Rabie sees these artists as achieving a sense of freedom and spontaneity in their work through using multi-piece techniques. Rabie emphasised the importance of gesture and chance in the process of working by both these groups. (1993, 7). Voulkos worked as he went along rather than initially planning a piece, responding spontaneously to the plastic clay as he worked with it. Voulkos had a major impact on many other ceramists of succeeding generations including John Mason, DeStaebler and Frey (Rabie 1993, 80) whether directly or indirectly, in the case of Gareth Mason and myself.

Practice as Research: approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry, edited by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt is a collection of essays on aspects of practice-led research. It covers diverse topics such as exegesis, invention, methods and methodologies, author theory, practice versus praxis, tacit and experiential knowledge and examples of successful practice-led research projects. It proved to be a fundamental text to the project as it offered many perspectives on research that comes from practice in the creative arts.

The principle theory that this project is based on is the idea of practice-led research also known as ‘performative research’ (Haseman 2006, Abstract) , ‘practice-led research’ (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 1) or practice as research (Haseman 2006, 100), placing the researcher as a ‘reflective practitioner’(Malins and Gray 1995, 3), foregrounding the importance of tacit or experiential knowledge. It is research which is initiated and performed through a physical engagement with materials and an engagement with the critical context of production.

In artistic practice, we constantly question the underlying assumptions and meanings related to the materials and methods that we use - it is not just about making meaning with what we have at hand, but of making new ways of making meaning through practical invention. (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 191)

An aspect of practice-led research theory, which is applicable to this project, is exegesis. Bolt indicates that the exegesis is critical to practice-led research and ‘rather than just operating as an explanation or contextualisation of the practice, the exegesis plays a critical and complementary role in revealing the work of art’ (Bolt in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 31).

Paul Carter’s *Material Thinking* (2004) presented the most comprehensive text about materiality in visual arts research. Invention, collaboration and locality were his major interests. While this text does not deal specifically with the crafts he uses several metaphors that draw from craft disciplines, such as weaving, in the way he explains materiality, bringing a sense of tactility to his writing that showed while it told his story. Although his central concern was materiality in collaborative works, this text is important because in itself it reveals process. He talks about working titles and incomplete analogies, revealing his writing process as well as the process of the artworks he discusses.

My Personal Context

Some of the broader, issues this research will touch on include transnationalism (Vertovec 2009, 3), globalisation and the nature of international contemporary ceramic production (de Waal 2003, 212). On searching for a term suitable for describing the broad position from which I produce ceramics, international, transnational and global, once conflated give

one a sense of my making, which is not defined by a single specific nationalistic or cultural heritage. Vertovec defines the complex, yet broad, term, transnationalism, as ‘sustained linkages’ between private individuals (also business, NGOs and other non-governmental groups) across national borders (2009, 3) and positions it as a ‘manifestation’ of globalisation (2009, 2).

While Vertovec focusses his studies on issues surrounding the migration of people; transnationalism in this research is used to explain the flow of ideas about ceramics, which move back and forth across national borders. I continue to interact with artists such as Gareth Mason across national lines, sharing ideas and techniques. International ceramists remain some of my seminal influences. My education, in South Africa, has international aspects in itself. I have been taught by Juliet Armstrong, who studied in the UK and in South Africa and by Ian Calder. They have both travelled extensively overseas (personal communication 2009) and both of whom were taught by Hilda Ditchburn (1917-1986). Cruise (2005, 142-143) asserts that Ditchburn met and communicated with Bernard Leach himself in 1950 in the UK on the subject of creating an oil-burning stoneware kiln. Cruise also indicates that Ditchburn admired the ceramics of Anglo-Oriental potters such as Leach and Michael Cardew, though ironically Anglo-Orientalism in South Africa was a male-dominated style which would have ‘sidelined’ female potters such as Ditchburn (Cruise 2005, 142). Thus, the lineage of tutors that have led to my ceramic output and by default, this research, includes in a direct way, the hybrid tenets of Anglo-Orientalism which enjoyed a strangle-hold on South African studio ceramics even into the 1980s (Cruise 2005, 142).

Aspects of Anglo-orientalism and the contemporary ceramics Mason and Akiyama were already an influence on my work during 2008, towards the end of completing my BA Honours in Visual Art. Inspired by throwing demonstrations by Mason at the ISCAEE Kenya symposium, and under my CVA tutors, Armstrong and Calder, I developed a system of working with slabs of plastic clay cut from freshly thrown cylinders and bowl forms. The clay was left to harden, after throwing, for less than 3 hours which means that I had to work rapidly with the clay in placing it over an armature or mould made from semi-rigid materials including packaging materials, plastic, newspaper, wire and interestingly shaped

and textured organic debris. I may have a general idea of the form I would like to create, but due to the speed I have to work at and because the materials (clay and armature) create unpredictable results, I rely on intuition and improvisation rather than preplanning. Sculptural forms were then created by joining these abstract clay forms which have the visual qualities of a skin-like material.



Figure 3: Bagley, K. 2008. Untitled wall mounted piece. Stoneware, matte ash glazes and found metal shelf. Private collection. Photograph by K. Bagley, 2008.

The intuitive method of making these early abstract forms, including the one above, led to the production of *RumiNATION Resting*, the first major work in the studio-based aspect of this study. The process of producing work for this study is outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Exegesis in the studio

Studio Process

I began my MAFA with the idea to embrace the notion of chance, accident and spontaneous gesture; to be achieved through making sculptural clay forms that were started on the potters wheel. Essentially I was interested in producing work that referenced the spontaneity and scale of Peter Voulkos. During one of my first formal critiques early in 2009 it was pointed out by Michael Wille, an artist in residence and abstract painting lecturer from the USA that my style of throwing (fine, thin, careful but rapid) was fraught with reference to domestic functional pottery production and that if I wanted to capture the sense of Voulkos's practice I would have to adjust how and what I was throwing on the wheel.

As an abstract painter himself and with an almost direct connection to Peter Voulkos through his wife (personal communication) who worked directly with Voulkos, Wille had a sense of abstraction and the nature of what I thought I wanted to achieve. Wille's critical observation was significant for me and a long process of reflection followed.

Retrospectively, this reflection is explored in this chapter. After Wille's comment I began to think more carefully about what drew me to Voulkos and why clay interested me as a medium. This provoked thoughts about scale and sculptural formats, and ways of using thrown formats that were not as focussed on vessel-production. (Ironically vessels remain a dominant form in my work (*Fondre*), whilst the action and visual effect of throwing became less important). Consequent to reflecting on Wille's observation and through 'reflecting in action' (Schön 1983) while making work in the studio, my interest in clay as an expressive medium began to shift from a formal interest in imitating Voulkos's historical style, to considering clay through my own experience while considering his approach to it.

This chapter presents images and commentary of major work made subsequent to my series of realisations, outlined in previous chapters above. It is presented in the form of a structured catalogue of my production processes.

In the keywords section of each catalogue entry I aim to find recurring patterns of thought about images and concepts in my creative processes. The catalogue is preceded by the following thoughts on aspects of my production. These have been reworked from journal notes made during the making and through memory, aided by looking through my vast library of process photographs.

Glazing

For *RumiNATION Resting* (2009) an Ash glaze was applied to the bisque-fired ceramic sections which were then fired, in a neutral atmosphere in an electric kiln, to 1220 degrees Celsius. Rogers (2003, 170) defines an ash glaze as any glaze which contains a vegetable ash, though Rogers acknowledges that some ceramists define an ash glaze as one in which ash is the primary flux. The ash glaze used in *RumiNATION* was formulated by myself through trial and error, considering theoretical writing on ash glaze making by Phil Rogers (2003, 48 - 59) and more specifically, Rogers writing about Jim Robison's ash slip-glazes (2003, 142-147). Robison makes his glazes from simple mixtures of wood ash and clay (Rogers 2003, 143). Incidentally, Robison considers Voulkos and Soldner as influences on his work (Rogers 2003, 143). I became interested in formulating my own glazes after being involved with a university clay-digging trip near Eston. We dug an iron-rich, deep red clay, usable in the form of either a plastic clay or slip, which produced a bright red colour I have used, and continue to use. Inspired by the simplicity of Jim Robinson's glaze recipes I began combining the red Eston clay with washed wood ash from the department, developing a series of brown, yellow, black and tan ash glazes. The specific glaze used for *RumiNATION* was chosen for its varied colour and semi-matte surface and because it becomes a rich chocolate brown over the red Eston slip. The glaze choice was not merely visual (that is the glaze could be used to replicate the colour and variation in nguni cattle skin); it was also related to the concept of so-called hairy brown stoneware from the 1960s made in the wake of the popularity of Leach. Brown has become an unfashionable and dated choice of glaze-colour on thrown functional ware due to its association with studio ceramics of the 1950s and 1960s. This was confirmed by local ceramics dealer and gallery owner Sue Greenberg who confirmed that she avoids brown glazed pots as they do not sell easily. However I find my palette of browns offer a richness, warmth and variation that I

hope supersedes current negative associations with the colour. It was chosen deliberately to reference that era, to which I owe a substantial amount of my training and inspiration.

Fondre: initiated through chance

The 16 vessel forms that make up the *Fondre* (2009-2010) series were produced gradually, through trial and error over the last fifteen months. The idea for the first vessel was not preconceived. It began as a diversion, a way of messing around and using up the scraps I generated whilst throwing and working on my 'real' work. Ironically these playful experimentations have become the a major part of this project. I had been adding a number of different, unconventional materials to my throwing body including grass-cuttings. I had some grass-cuttings stored in a thrown and bisque-fired bowl. When I came to glaze the bowl I had no suitable container for the grass so I flipped the bowl over onto the head of my banding wheel. Quite unexpectedly the grass held the form of the interior space of the bowl. Some time after that I noticed the perfectly formed grass pile, unaltered, in my studio and, having some prepared slip that was too thin for immediate use I thought I might try preserve the beautiful grass form by pouring slip over it. I worked on the piece gradually over the next week applying more layers of different slips and studio scraps of varying levels of dryness - bits and pieces not quite substantial enough to warrant reconstitution. Once completed, the piece was left to dry, forgotten in the corner of the studio as I did not think I could get it off the banding wheel in one piece. I was surprised to find after a few hot days that I was wrong. As the water of plasticity evaporated and so as the piece shrank, it began to lift from the wheel head unaided. I put the piece aside and gradually (over the course of a few days) removed some of the grass cuttings from the interior of the vessel form.

After making this initial piece I attempted to replicate the process used to produce it and so produced a series of similar vessel forms, resulting in the final 16 that make up *Fondre*. The 16, as a group, indicate a journey or a number of variations on a process and theme. They became like little experimental sketches each one subtly different from the one before it. Perhaps because I had not initially intended to exhibit these pieces, it seems I allowed myself the freedom to simply play with clay and react intuitively to the material,

clay, as it changed from dry powder to slip to plastic clay, fast dried to crack, dried, rewetted, slow-dried and eventually fired.

I chose the title *Fondre* retrospectively. The word in its meaning and origin, etymologically, inferred both vessel forms (fonts) and the idea of melting. This made an oblique reference to the clay-earth metaphor. ‘ORIGIN late 16th cent. (denoting the action or process of casting or founding): from French fonte, from fondre ‘to melt.’ This meaning is sourced from the Mac OS Snow leopard digital dictionary.

The Significance of Photography

Photography was chosen as a method of recording my making process because I had used it successfully in the past. In 2008, for the University of KwaZulu-Natal Honours graduation exhibition I used the digital camera to record how sections of a series of modular ceramic sculptures fitted together. The photographs functioned as a reference for reassembly at various points in the making and firing processes and for exhibiting. I also experimented with photography beyond the level of mere documentation, exhibiting a small series of photographs taken during the making process alongside the modular ceramic works. These images were close-up shots of raw, freshly thrown clay with high levels of contrast to emphasise the visual quality of light falling on wet, plastic clay. I realised for the first time how to preserve and share visual effects that interested me during the process that would be lost through drying, firing and glazing.

For this MAFA research project I have also taken photographs with two similar aims. Throughout the project I have used the camera to document my making process, facilitating reflection on that process. As Leavy indicates, photography presents a subjective point of view of the photographer, ‘a created perspective’ (2009, 215). My photo-documentation represents my subjective view of the studio process unfolding. Leavy likens photography (and other visual media) to creating a visual journal; personal and subjective, a manipulation of the world through my eyes. As an extension of how I saw my process, I decided, parallel to previous experience, that some photographs of ceramic works in progress can stand on their own as images for contemplation. This

prompted further experimentation within my clay-earth-skin theme. Leavy's metaphor extended and used and a reading of Susan Sontag's *On Photography* informed how I perceived and used my photographs within this project. Sontag (1973, 3) states that: 'in teaching us a a new visual code, photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe'. My photographs reveal important moments in my process that I deemed to be worth highlighting and drawing attention to.

I began by actively documenting stages of my production of major pieces. Several of these photographs, or key-frames (a term associated with animation and film-making) form part of Chapter 3. Reflecting on the photographs I found that during the making process I responded to what was happening with the piece itself, deviating from preconceived plans. My plans tend to be generalised and rough, anticipating such intuitive responses while working with the material. For example, the overall look of the finished *RumiNATION Resting* was affected by my response to cracks that formed during drying.

The tendency to crack under certain conditions is a characteristic of clay as a material. Therefore this response illustrates my conceptual interest in using the physical characteristics of clay (perceived by some as faults), as a visual language. In the following preparatory sketch the piece was intended to consist of a series of uninterrupted ribbon-like structures.

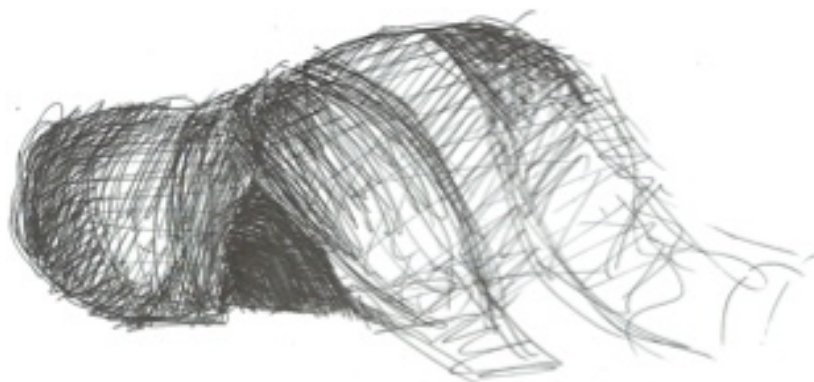


Figure 4:
Bagley, K. 2009.
Preparatory
sketch for
*RumiNATION
Resting*. Pen on
Paper. Collection
of the Artist.

However during the drying process some cracks occurred. Observing the cracks prompted thoughts about fragmentation and imperfection related to the theme of the show for which

the piece had been commissioned, 'Beauty is...'. Consequently, instead of remaking the cracked sections, I encouraged further controlled cracking. In addition, my original intention was to conceal the joins between sections that had to be separated to fit in the kiln, but in responding to the cracks I chose to reveal the breaks between sections. While ideas about using technical 'faults' as part of my visual language were already forming in my mind, looking back at the photographs and sketches I see that I made that aesthetic decision during the process of construction in response to how I saw the clay behave.

Parallel, and related to this documentation for self-reflection, I took some photographs with the intention of making visual meaning, not just to record my ceramic process in a mechanical way. I developed this idea gradually, eventually producing a series of digital images for projection as part of the final examination show, *Rummage/Rheumage* (2009-2010). Susan Sontag (1973) indicated that: 'to photograph is to confer importance. There is probably no subject that cannot be beautified; moreover, there is no way to suppress the tendency inherent in all photographs to accord value to their subjects' (1973, 28). In *Rummage/Rheumage* I have used photography to confer importance on small details or whole ceramic pieces, wasters and scraps to provoke thought about the expressive potential of my ceramic surfaces. For these images I paid closer attention to light, framing, aperture, shutter-speed and focus than in the documentary images. I favoured macro type close-up images, often with shallow focus, emphasising textures and surfaces. On the subject of 'tactile texture', Rawson (1971, 85) writes that: 'Tactile qualities can either be fortified by visual experience, or even inferred and experienced synaesthetically from sight alone'. (1971, 85). A successful photograph invokes this 'synaesthesia'.

The interaction between surface and light became a formal interest in making these images. The ability of certain surfaces to reflect or absorb light became a way of thinking about image making. With these images, I intended to focus the viewer's attention on my obsessive interest in rock like textures or the sketch like qualities of fired grass. Some images are of collapsed pieces not suitable for exhibition themselves but as a photograph they present aspects of my conceptual aims.

In presenting *Rummage/Rheumage* I chose projection to dramatically enlarge physical aspects of the ceramic work depicted in the images, potentially overwhelming the viewer with rich textures and surfaces that reveal the tactility of clay and glaze. This shift in scale is dramatic, presenting a different perspective of these surfaces, quite unlike the small vessels from which the images were taken. This shifts the scale from domestic to monumental, suggesting the vastness of geological formations from where the raw materials of the photo's subject are derived.

Projection gave me control over scale, and control over how the viewer sees the images. This choice was informed by Sontag (1973, 5) who discusses how the format allows the artist control over the order in which images are shown as well as the duration of time that the viewer has to see that image. She notes that this format allows more control for the artist but negates the physicality of the photograph.

The physicality of a digital photograph printed on paper would have added a new element of the material to the images I found difficult to resolve. I chose to negate that possibility by using this ephemeral format. While I am not denying the materiality of the digital format, it is by nature less tactile and physically accessible than paper. The tactility of the subject of the images is not compromised by another material element vying for attention from the viewer.

Essentially photography has allowed me to direct and focus the gaze of the viewer on my ceramic surface in a very specific way to prompt different thoughts and ideas about the aesthetics of my processes and choice of ceramic materials both in *Rummage/Rheumage* and in the catalogue in the next section.

MAFA works by Kim Bagley: a catalogue of visual images with commentary

This section is a catalogue of the processes used to produce the major ceramic works which make up the studio component of the MAFA: *RumiNATION Resting* (2009) and the series *Fondre* (2009-2010). This section forms part of the self-reflective aspect of this project and presents a record of how the work was produced physically; what is revealed ideologically, visually or otherwise during various stages of the process of making as well as during retrospective reflection on the production process. The catalogue consists of photographs taken by myself of the pieces at various points in their production, from the initial planning, armature production and initial building stages through drying, bisque-firing, glazing, glaze-firing and finishing.

The photographs have been used as the main form of recording the production process (rather than textual description, notes or sketches) because photographs provide a vivid, visual record of that particular moment in the process that is usually lost in the final, exhibited work. *Photography* as a medium records light making it an appropriate medium. This appropriateness is linked to the importance of how light falls on a ceramic surface and by proxy how light falls on the surface throughout the process. Photographs are acknowledged to be subjective and selective by nature and in this context are not used to imply false objectivity. They indicate a personal choice of what constitutes a 'phase' of production. To the right of each series of images, which represent one stage in the production cycle, there is commentary which uses the following template:

Commentary Template: Process Images

- Title of piece; medium and date; final dimensions
- Photo Credit
- Dimensions of piece in process (if significantly different to the final dimensions)
- Literal *Material* (plastic clay; stoneware; chicken wire; paper);
- Descriptions of production *Process* illustrated by that image (thrown; slab built; poured slip; glazed - ie what happens in the image or happened just before that image was recorded);
- Production Stage, relative to starting and completion (finished work; preliminary/ planning stage; drying)
- Conceptual/ideological Notes (for that piece at that stage of completion - observations of that particular part of the process - made in retrospect)
- Keywords

This template is used for consistency and replicability in line with Barrett's notion of practice-led research as replicable. The subsections of the commentary template present an extended caption to the photographs. On captions Sontag (1973, 108) indicates that they 'tend to override the evidence of our eyes; but no caption can permanently restrict or secure a picture's meaning.' These captions are not meant to dictate what the viewer sees in the image but rather they represent my reflective response to the moment evoked by the image. The images help me remember what happened in my head and in my hands when that image was created.

RumiNATION Resting

Image	Commentary
	<p><i>1. RumiNATION Resting</i> (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009. 1.9m long</p>
	<p>Literal material, tools: Chicken wire, cardboard rolls, mosquito netting, masking tape, shredded paper, newspaper and discarded plastic bags. Literal process: A basic, semi-rigid structure was constructed from chicken wire, mosquito netting and cardboard rolls. It was stuffed with shredded paper and balled newspaper. The planning stage included drawings of cattle, sketches of ideas of the final project and measurements from which this structure was designed.</p>
	<p>Production stage: Armature building (just after planning stage) (Time: One week excluding planning)</p>
	<p>Conceptual/ideological notes: The 'found'-type objects - including industrial packaging were chosen for their physical properties: easily adjustable semi-rigidity, yet they possess a conceptual and visual quality of their own - the materials imply fencing and construction, packaging and improvisation. The shredded paper is much more visible than the outer layer of chicken wire, emphasising the temporary presence of mass in the inside space. At this stage the piece becomes like a literal negative space - I had to think about how the clay will look over the structure - not the structure itself. I had to think of how the armature will push the clay up or out (and how the clay will push the structure down through its sheer weight! This phase of construction was about both translating initial ideas and drawings into form but also about improvisation.</p>
	<p>Keywords: General; armature; inner; absent body; support, skeleton; start; guide; volume; temporary; assembled; experiment.</p>

Image

Commentary



2. *RumiNATION Resting* (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009. 1.91m long




Literal material, tools: Chicken wire, cardboard rolls, mosquito netting, masking tape, shredded paper, newspaper, discarded plastic bags, dowel rods, plastic clay and red slip.

Literal process: To create the clay form, wheel-thrown jars made from a white, grogged stoneware clay were cut open while still very wet and arranged over the structure. The process was necessarily rapid to create an unforced, casual visual style. Holes were cut into the slabs visible on the right hand side of the photograph for porcelain pegs to be added later. As the structure began to dry and shrink the semi-rigid nature of the structure helped prevent splitting of the clay surface, though some cracking was encouraged to give a fragmented appearance to the finished work. A red slip from a local clay was poured freely over the clay skin after some drying. The contours of clay slabs form a skin, suggesting the mass beneath.

Production stage: Plastic clay construction.

Conceptual/ideological notes: During this stage the clay is soft, jelly-like. The material comes closest to imitating the physical characteristics of real skin. By nature it covers, but it also reveals something of the structure it conceals. To retain some of this fluid appearance in the final fired work I was required to work rapidly and intuitively, constantly aware of how wet the clay is. This is conversely intense physical and mental work to create an appearance of unforced casualness. It is a quick clay sketch executed after practice and preparation that took much longer. The slip was poured quickly, almost at randomly for the desired aesthetic effect related in part to anglo-oriental slipware and suggestive of the varied hides Nguni cattle are known for. Nguni cattle were chosen for their current popular aesthetic appeal. They have become fashionable icons of contemporary culture, beyond their historic Zulu cultural roots.

Keywords: Skin; body; absent/present spine; mark; pelt; spot; gesture; pour; soft; tactile; reflective.

Image	Commentary
	<p>3. <i>RumiNATION Resting</i> (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009.</p> <p>Dimensions variable - the entire form is now slightly smaller than its plastic stage due to drying shrinkage, though it has been separated into smaller sections.</p>
	<p>Literal material, tools: Chicken wire, cardboard rolls, mosquito netting, masking tape, shredded paper, newspaper and discarded plastic bags, dowel rods, leather hard and dry clay and leather hard and dry red slip.</p> <p>Literal Process: As the drying process advanced the structure and clay skin were separated into three main sections and the paper was removed from inside the structure to facilitate further shrinkage. Dowels rods were used to prevent the weight of the clay from collapsing the structure.</p>
	<p>The skin is divided up - no longer a solid form. It was a race against time in the warm KwaZulu-Natal climate.</p> <p>Production stage: Deconstruction of the clay form and drying.</p>
	<p>Conceptual/ideological notes: This was the most difficult stage, technically - I tried to achieve a balance between allowing the clay behave as it does naturally (with minimal intervention) and protecting the integrity of the structure. This was achieved through selectively covering it with plastic, but allowing the atmosphere of the studio to dry the work. As in the previous stage, an appearing 'natural' was achieved through painstaking control. The whole 'skin' is broken down, cut up, separated. The images alongside make me think of butchery, of the systematic sectioning of an animal. It is a visual metaphor for human culture affecting and ordering the 'natural'.</p> <p>Keywords: skin; part; fragment; support; disassemble; matte; brittle; fold; break; crack; separate; 'pound of flesh'.</p>

Image



Commentary

4. *RumiNATION Resting* (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009.

Sections vary from 5cm to about 1m at their longest dimension, flat or sections.

Literal material, tools: Leather hard and dry clay; chicken wire.

Literal process: Once the clay had dried sufficiently to hold its form without the wire-paper structure it was cut up into smaller curved slabs and removed, where necessary, from the chicken wire. The fragments of skin rearranged can be read as a two dimensional image yet they are still impermanent in their unfired form. The larger sections were cut up so they would fit into the relatively small university kilns - typical of university ceramics departments. Small kilns (when compared with anagama kilns or other large walk-in or trolley kilns) facilitate and encourage frequent firings for multiple tests, in line with the experimental nature of university ceramic production and are suitable for firing the kind of functional vessel forms encouraged by the founder of the ceramics department, Hilda Ditchburn.

Production stage: Drying

Conceptual/ideological Notes: This stage is reminiscent of butchery practices as in the previous stage but it also reminded me of children's jigsaw puzzles. As the main sections, still recognisable as parts of an animal form, are further divided, some parts appear not to look like parts of an animal. They look more like abstract jigsaw puzzle pieces in much the same way as leather handbags or upholstered furniture may be made of animal skin but do not look like an animal. Rearranged for drying new associations based on shape, form and mark can be made. Some sections look like maps or line drawings on slightly curved surfaces. Skin has new meaning when it no longer holds a bodily form.

Keywords: map; trophy; upholster; cut; tear; rearrange; table-top; segmented; separated.




Image	Commentary
	<p>5. <i>RumiNATION Resting</i> (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009.</p> <p>Sections vary from 5cm to about 1m at their longest dimension, flat or sections.</p> <p>Literal material, tools: Bisque-fired ceramic (earthenware)</p>
	<p>Literal process: The biscuit-fired (990 degrees C) slabs are reassembled flat on the studio floor in preparation for glazing. Digital photographs of the form at the end of the building stage were essential aides to this step. The 'spine' of the cow form was used as a starting point for the pouring of glaze in a free manner, much like the application of slip.</p>
	<p>Some areas were left unglazed. The skin fragments change colour and the shapes and contours are made permanent - yet the form remains absent and the surface remains dull.</p> <p>Production stage: Bisque-firing</p>
	<p>Conceptual/ideological notes: The process, up until this point has been construction followed by deconstruction. Now a series of reconstructions begins. The first reconstruction included piecing together of all the fired parts referring to photographs of the 3-dimensional form in stage 2. The form was reassembled flat on the floor. It resembled a map or a model of a mountain ranges or tectonic plates, reminding me of my interests in clay as earth. It also looked like a fragmented and solidified cattle hide. Nguni cattle hides, like other animal hides are sold as floor rugs for contemporary domestic interiors - as flat pictorial versions of an animal. The marks and colours on the surface become more important than the three-dimensional animal form. This stage was another slow process of preparation to facilitate the quick application of glaze (by pouring) to add another layer to the appearance of an unforced, naturalness.</p> <p>Keywords: cheat; base; puzzle; porous; under; preliminary; humpty dumpty, flat.</p>




Image	Commentary
	<p>6. <i>RumiNATION Resting</i> (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009.</p> <p>Sections vary from 5cm to about 1m at their longest dimension, flat or sections, though each piece has shrunk to even smaller than the bisque-fired pieces.</p>
	<p>Literal material, tools: Ash-glazed stoneware.</p> <p>Literal process: After glaze-firing the slabs were reassembled flat on the studio floor. The pieces were fired in a neutral electric kiln to 1220 deg C.</p> <p>Production stage: Glaze firing and reassembling.</p> <p>Conceptual/ideological notes: The second reconstruction in anticipation of the final form is represented by this image. The pieces make a map-like almost flat image - related as in stage 5 to the concept of cattle hides as floor rugs or furniture upholstery. A new positive shape and its resultant negative spaces have been formed from the same shapes that make up the 3-dimensional form. The glaze texture and sheen is supposed to echo the appearance of freshly thrown, plastic clay. The fragmented appearance of the reassembled pieces is in some tension with the intended unforced, casual appearance of the whole form in plastic clay in stage 2. This tension is one of the many pairs of oppositional, but related elements in this work such as the positive and negative, form and surface, outer and inner and nature and culture.</p>
	
	<p>Keywords: flattened; reassemble; glaze; sheen; light; contrast; mark; marking; pour-mark; fragmented; multi-coloured; warm; tactile; ash glazes.</p>



Image	Commentary
	<p>7. <i>RumiNATION Resting</i> (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009. 1.8m long</p>
	<p>Literal material, tools: Ash-glazed stoneware, glue (polyurethane epoxy, wood glue and epoxy-based sealant), mosquito netting, shredded paper and kiln bricks.</p> <p>Literal process: A new, rigid but changeable structure was built from bricks and shredded paper to allow the cow skin to be reassembled upside down in the three sections originally separated during the drying stage. Plastic-coated glass-fibre netting was adhered to the inside of the cow skin to hold sections together. The front and middle sections are visible here - the middle section with its netting adhered.</p>
	<p>Production stage: Cold reconstruction.</p> <p>Conceptual/ideological notes: The positive spaces have to be recreated using structure which forms the outside negative spaces. Just as gravity was considered and used to my advantage in the earlier construction phases, so the reconstruction is done upside-down for convenience. I am working on recreating the interior of the cattle form using the fired clay plates that make up the form. Shifting oppositional elements continue to be a metaphoric and visual element of the documentation and consequent reflection on this work.</p> <p>Keywords: Assemble; form; support; connection; puzzle; 3D; suture; bits; section; improvise; construct.</p>

Image	Commentary
	<p>8. <i>RumiNATION Resting</i> (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009. 1m high, 1m wide at its widest point, 0.8m long.</p> <p>Literal material, tools: Ash-glazed stoneware, porcelain (pegs), glue, mosquito netting and clear acrylic.</p>
	<p>Literal process: Once glued each of the three sections (and the head) were flipped over and balanced on perspex trestle. If further balancing was required it was first simulated using studio wasters and other small vessels before an appropriate stand could be designed and made in perspex. Here the finished porcelain pegs are visible.</p>
	<p>Production stage: Cold reconstruction.</p> <p>Conceptual/ideological notes: Through a system of visibly quiet structures, each section of the original structure, now fired and glazed is restored to something similar to its original form in stage 2. The animal skin retains its animal form but the mass of the animal remains absent. Formally, the positive space is tangible and the negative space intangible, forming a striking series of air spaces. Visually, the piece now sits in tension between the idea of the transformed, fragmented, possibly unrecognisable hide and the recognisable, coherent, animate form.</p>
	<p>Keywords: Balance; fragment; floating; shoulder; forces; levers; weight.</p>






Image	Commentary
	<p>9. <i>RumiNATION Resting</i> (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009. 1m long</p>
	<p>Literal material, tools: Ash-glazed stoneware, glue, mosquito netting, clear acrylic (perspex), shredded paper and kiln bricks.</p> <p>Literal process: Once assembled and glued the ceramic and net structures were lined with 6mm thick, 50mm wide perspex strips to create a skeleton-like support structure. these were custom curved to fit the specific part of the structure by bending while hot and then cooling quickly to set rigid. These were adhered to the ceramic with an epoxy-based sealant. The acrylic functions</p>
	<p>similarly to the original wire and paper structure - it is semi-rigid and supportive, but this time visually minimal. The acrylic was also chosen for its weight as metal or other heavy, opaque materials would have made the weight of the piece impractical.</p> <p>Production stage: Cold reconstruction.</p> <p>Conceptual/ideological notes: The reassembled form is reconnected and supported in this stage. It is a reconstruction and a re-animation of the form. However it is not a seamless reconstruction, rather a suturing together which reveals the breaking up of the form in stages 3 and 4. Process and the symbolism or metaphor that can be associated with it are important to me as a practitioner. I want to reveal aspects of this process in the finished work. This stage helps reveal the literal fragmentation prompted by kiln size and the properties of drying clay which echoes the literal fragmentation of cattle skin as a changeable material used in the production of other objects. On a conceptual level it reveals to me the symbolic animal skin as metaphorically fragmented, changed and broken up rather than simple, whole and easily defined.</p>
	<p>Keywords: Skeleton; absence/presence; connections; connective tissue; solidity; practicality; transparency.</p>

Image	Commentary
	<p><i>10. RumiNATION Resting</i> (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009. 1.75m long</p> <p>Literal material, tools: Ash-glazed stoneware, porcelain (pegs), glue, mosquito netting and clear acrylic.</p>
	<p>Literal process: Once all three main sections were flipped over and balanced on their 15cm wide, 15mm thick perspex trestle (A-frame structures with plastic-coated wire cross-pieces), the head was added.</p> <p>Production stage: Final stages of the cold reconstruction</p> <p>Conceptual/ideological notes: The ceramic skin has finally been given a sense of floating, unaided - drawing the eye to form and surface quality. The force of the plastic ribs and gravity hold the form in place, but some practical issues of weight and leverage are yet to be resolved, without compromising the intended look of the piece. The addition of the head gives the fairly abstract, suggestive form a much more 'alive' or literal-animal quality. Without the head it is still devoid of that lively quality that suggests 'dead animal' rather than animal hide or animal carcass or even meat.</p> <p>Keywords: full skin; coherence - yet fragmentary; multi-coloured; yellow; red; matching; volume.</p>

Image



Commentary

11. RumiNATION Resting (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009.

1.8m long

Literal material, tools: Ash-glazed stoneware, glue, mosquito netting, clear acrylic (perspex), shredded paper and kiln bricks.

Literal process: The integrity of the front section (the shoulders and neck) was called into question so it was flipped back upside down and adjusted accordingly. The trestle structures are visible behind the front section. To make a skin one needs the contours underneath the skin.

Production stage: Cold reconstruction, running repairs, fine adjustments.

Conceptual/ideological notes: Without the support of the original wire and paper structure, this unevenly weighted section required more support to achieve the look of a believable animal form. The importance the relationship between the clay form and the support needed to create the desired negative spaces (including a hollow cavity) is highlighted by this image. Grappling with technical and logical issues are essential to achieving physically sound and aesthetically expressive structure. Trial and error remains a part of my working process from materials testing to final installation.

Keywords: Reset; repeat; balance; support; mend; invert; clamp.

Image



Commentary

12. *RumiNATION Resting* (2009), Stoneware, porcelain and found objects, acrylic support. Photograph by Kim Bagley, 2009.

1.8m long

Literal material, tools: Ash-glazed stoneware, porcelain pegs, polished earthenware horns, glue, mosquito netting, plastic-coated steel-cabbling and clear acrylic (perspex).



Literal process: The finished piece, installed, at the KZNSA gallery in Durban.

Production stage: Finished, installed work.

Conceptual/ideological notes: The piece is shown here in its completed state as part of an exhibition with the theme *Beauty is...* The following is taken from the artist's statement of the catalogue for this exhibition, START The Nivea Art Award: 'My work sits in the tension between a calm, domestic animal that I deem beautiful and an engagement with some of the multiple forms of beauty that animals may represent in South Africa. The cattle form is suggested by a skin of clay. . . Skin is sensual and tactile but it is also external. Yet while it is a container, in the process of containing it can reveal content and meaning and capture the construction of beauty itself.' The completed piece with horns and pegs is both an animal form and a fragmented skin. The colour and surface and the controlled and carefully finished pegs suggest the piece is resolved and finished yet the fragmented form suggests tension provokes questions about the relationship between skin and form.

Keywords: Fragile; vulnerable; large; professional; finished, shell, body.

Grass Bowls - *Fondre* Series

Image	Commentary
	<p>1. <i>Fondre</i>; Coloured clay and porcelain slips; grass cuttings. 2009-2010; Dimensions variable: 25-30cm diameter X 8-12cm height. Photograph by K. Bagley 2010 30cm banding wheel; 11cm high thrown bowl used as a mould.</p>
	<p>Literal material, tools: Dried grass cuttings; thick porcelain slip inlaid into banding wheel; left to dry completely.</p> <p>Literal process: A thrown and glaze-fired bowl was filled with slightly damp grass cuttings and left to dry completely. A thick Porcelain slip was spread on the head of the banding wheel (manually rotated metal wheel on a central axis pictured in the top photograph as opposed to a high-speed potter's wheel) and scraped back to leave porcelain in the grooves of the wheel head. This was left to dry. The banding wheel was turned over; and placed onto the bowl of grass cuttings. Both were flipped over and the bowl removed to reveal a grass form that replicates the inside space of the bowl. For the first few pieces I only used grass but as the series progresses I added soap (grated pure soap or dishwashing liquid) and through trial and error was able to flux some of the remaining grass ash when firing to stoneware temperature.</p> <p>Production stage: initial</p> <p>Conceptual/ideological notes: The notion of the interior space of a bowl is interrogated as the bowl is used as a mould for the grass form. The grass in turn will be used as a crude hump-mould in the next stage of the process. The grass form is made up of a network of interlocking fibres that hold the form of the original thrown bowl, yet remain impermanent - easily disrupted by wind or my physical intervention.</p> <p>Keywords: Grass, mould, web, fibre, interior space, negative space, network.</p>

Image



Commentary

2. *Fondre*; Coloured clay and porcelain slips; grass cuttings. 2009-2010; Dimensions variable: 25-30cm diameter X 8-12cm height.

Photograph by K. Bagley 2010.

Literal material, tools: 30cm banding wheel; 10cm high grass pile, Grass cuttings; thick red clay slip - ochre-coloured in its green form.

Literal process: The banding wheel is gently and slowly turned while slip is poured, first on the edge (protruding from beneath the grass) and then onto the grass - irregularly and only a little at first to prevent the weight of liquid slip from collapsing the whole piece;

Production stage: Early; wet stage

Conceptual/ideological notes: This stage involves applying slip to the unstable, unusual hump mould formed in stage 1. Some of the grass fibres will remain embedded in the resulting clay form and remain as integral to the finished piece - as grass in its current form, or as silica-rich grass ash. In this way a record of this early stage of making will be included in the final piece/ The interior of the bowl will be, in part, defined by this unstable grass mound. How (speed of pouring or turning the banding wheel, volume, drying time between layers) I apply the slip further determines how the grass changes shape and ultimately determines the form of the bowl. At this stage the piece looks like an inverted bird's nest splashed with mud. It is unstable and easily disturbed but as the slip is added and dries the grass and clay form a stronger structure.

Keywords: Mix, soak, meld, slippery, border, base, skeletal, wet, coax, layer, blend, blur, web, pour, caution/risk, contrasts, unstable.

Image



Commentary

3. *Fondre*; Coloured clay and porcelain slips; grass cuttings. 2009-2010; Dimensions variable: 25-30cm diameter X 8-12cm height.

Photograph by K. Bagley 2010.

30cm banding wheel; 10cm high grass pile.

Literal material, tools: Grass cuttings; thick red clay slip - ochre-coloured in its green form.

Literal process: For this particular piece the red slip was spread on the edge of the banding wheel to create a uniform, red edge with porcelain sprigged rings. The slip is left to harden slightly before more is poured on.

Production stage: Early/ wet stage

Conceptual/ideological notes: Even though the final piece will look untouched by the human hand and spontaneous - some direct manipulation is sometimes needed. The patience, time and effort sometimes required to achieve a sense of effortlessness or an appearance of naturalness seems paradoxical. The idea of inversions and oppositions is revealed in this series as it was in *Rumination Resting*.

Keywords: Drip, splash, pour, coax, slip, liquid, balance, patience, seep.






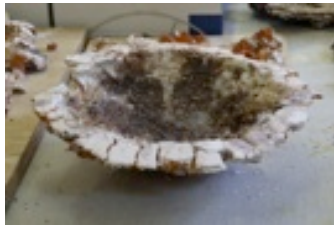
Image	Commentary
	<p>4. <i>Fondre</i>; Coloured clay and porcelain slips; grass cuttings. 2009-2010; Dimensions variable: 25-30cm diameter X 8-12cm height. Photograph by K. Bagley 2010.</p> <p>Literal material, tools: 30cm banding wheel; 9.5cm high grass pile, Grass cuttings; thick red clay slip - ochre-coloured in its green form, white stoneware slip; thin porcelain slip; dry porcelain scraps.</p> <p>Literal process: Layers of slip are built up with drying time in between - eventually covering the grass and becoming a thick layer. Scraps of dried clays are sprinkled on top. These absorb some of the water from the slips, speeding up drying and creating some tension.</p> <p>Production stage: Initial, wet stage.</p> <p>Conceptual/ideological notes: Each layer brings potential for another variation of colour, texture and pattern - one has to evaluate when it is sensible to stop adding more slips and scraps, with an awareness that the slip must be thick enough to support itself in firing. It must not be too wet either - or the piece will collapse or become misshapen. It is a process governed by tacit knowledge of the behaviour of clay over an unstable structure like grass gained through observation, practice and trial and error. These pieces were studies or sketches, some successful, others disastrous, of the physical interaction between different clay bodies at different stages of wetness as arranged in ways I found visually appealing. The physical tension between different bodies was used for aesthetic or expressive effect whereas in most ceramic practices such tensions are routinely avoided to create strong forms with physical integrity. This indicates that my interest in clay and ceramic materials for this series is principally about appearance, especially related to geological formations, rather than about the construction of vessel forms.</p> <p>Keywords: cake, positive, sprinkle, spread, pour coax, fidget, edible, layer, balance</p>

Image	Commentary
	<p>5. <i>Fondre</i>; Coloured clay and porcelain slips; grass cuttings. 2009-2010; Dimensions variable: 25-30cm diameter X 8-12cm height. Photograph by K. Bagley 2010.</p>
	<p>Literal material, tools: 30cm banding wheel; 9.5cm high grass pile, Grass cuttings; thick red clay slip - ochre-coloured in its green form, white stoneware slip; thin porcelain slip; dry porcelain; brown clay and red clay scraps of different sizes.</p>
	<p>Literal process: layers of slip are built up with drying time in between - eventually covering the grass and becoming a thick layer. Scraps of dried clays are sprinkled on top. These absorb some of the water from the slips, and with time the whole piece reaches an even level of wetness. The piece is then left for a few days (depending on the weather - most of these were made in hot summer and dried over the weekend). In some pieces bits of bisque-fired shards are added - functioning like oversized grog.</p> <p>Production stage: Completed wet stage.</p>
	<p>Conceptual/ideological notes: At this point the pieces begin to take on the look of geological forms. While wet, and partly due to their scale, the pieces also resemble unknown food stuffs or elaborately iced cakes. Food and cooking are aspects of culture that have some links to nature - the origins ingredients such as flour. People take control of aspects of nature to sustain themselves.</p>
	<p>My interest in Lévi-Strauss's structuralist ideas also springs to mind - the raw and the cooked - parallels between pottery and cooking in the dichotomy of nature and culture. Can my ceramics be read as symbols of exploring the dichotomy of nature and culture? I recall my older sister baking and icing a cake to represent all the layers of the earth's crust for a high school geography project. Perhaps this was the original seed for the idea of this series? There is possibly a connection with memory and identity here - my memory of enjoying familiar, interesting tactile experiences of baking and cooking. This is also the earliest memory I have of considering the subject of geology or of imitating rock formations.</p> <p>Keywords: Food, stuck, sand, rock, dome, bell, cake, pizza, topping, balance, vulnerable, soft, closed crack split shrink</p>

Image



Commentary

6. *Fondre*; Coloured clay and porcelain slips; grass cuttings. 2009-2010; Dimensions variable: 25-30cm diameter, 8-12cm height.

Photograph by K. Bagley 2010.

29cm diameter; 9cm high bowl form.

Literal material: Grass ash; bisque-fired ceramic.

Literal process: Once dried, the bowl form is then removed from the banding wheel. It is then placed on a thrown and bisque-fired disk, upside down (as it was made) and fired in an electric kiln to 980 degrees Celsius. Note the grass ash still attached to the inside of the bowl. It is extremely fragile and unstable - but creates an amazing network of white (or slip-stained) thread-like forms. Some pieces in the series were then re-fired to 1220 degrees Celsius to further affect the colour and strength of the pieces. I brushed on or poured glaze onto small areas of some pieces or placed a few small glass beads on them before the second firing to create an almost infinite variety of textures and surfaces.

Production stage: bisque fired.

Conceptual/ideological notes: After bisque firing, the crumbly state of non-vitrified plant-ash was noted as a valuable tactile material. This possibly represents an inversion of the modernist tendency to make ceramics permanent; in modernist pottery, ash was a significant glaze material, requiring high stoneware firings in order to flux and become fixed and permanent in utilitarian wares. In my work ash could be read as an emblematic invocation of nature and the assumed variability of the natural world. This is at a tension with the cultural context and socially fixed/ritualised functions of modernist table-wares (see Lévi-Strauss).

During the early stages of construction the forms were ephemeral and non-rigid, but now have been made permanent. Due to my unconventional construction method the pieces often came out cracked and bits break off, emphasising the fragility and brittle nature of fired ceramics and visually linking the works to geological formations.

Keywords: Fragile, permanent, crumbling, rough, hard, unchanging, geomorphic, open, bowl, web, finished/unfinished, set, solid, brittle.

Conclusion

The common threads between *RumiNATION Resting* and *Fondre* include careful attention, in the moment of making, to the clay itself and how it behaves as well as a manipulation of both positive and negative spaces during the process of production. The notion of positive and negative spaces is exciting to me. It is something simple and fundamental to art making. It is taught at the very beginning of ones very first drawing class to create awareness of the tension between both positive and negative spaces in a successful 2- or 3-dimensional piece. The catalogue shows that the relationship between positive and negative spaces is an important aspect of my work and making process. This formal element is related to the hollow, vessel form, to Rawson's 'Potter's Space' discussed in Chapter 1. How I make forms - as hollow forms by throwing or over a grass-mould - revolves around the making of a changeable, pliable skin-like structure which in turn sets by drying and then firing. The physical capacity of clay to hold a hollow form has become intrinsic not only to the way I make ceramics but how I think about and conceptualise my work thematically. Material has become subject on a number of different levels.

Another aspect of my work that is relevant to the process-centred objectives of this dissertation is the notion of the vessel. I make vessel-like structures and employ techniques, such as throwing, which are associated with vessel-production. Yet, I do not make functional ware. My use of the vessel can be said to be symbolic, expressive or metaphoric. My work may take the form of a vessel or allude to the idea of vessels. The idea of the body as a vessel or conduit is interesting and addressed for its metaphoric potential by Malcolm Christiansen at the Caversham Centre for Artists and Writers, where I attended a two-week residency in February 2010. My production process and its relationship to the metaphoric vessel was demonstrated through the catalogue in the previous section.

The catalogue has presented a detailed description and analysis of my production process. It helped me in my consideration of how to show the finished pieces by making me think carefully about the spatial and conceptual elements of the work. The Jack Heath Gallery where the work was shown can be a difficult space to show domestic scale ceramics due to

the visually dominant architecture and the comparatively large size of the main gallery space. Through careful consideration of the (varied) physical and conceptual attributes of the work to be shown, afforded by the evidence to be found in this dissertation, I was able to plan and install the exhibition in a critical and informed manner to show each piece or series to its best advantage with available resources. For example *Fondre* was shown as a single installation in the ‘tutorial room’ which is a more intimate space than the main gallery and therefore more suited to the scale of the work. This did mean that the exhibition was broken up into several different rooms which affected how it was perceived by the viewer. Further details of the exhibition are discussed in the next section.

Exhibiting the work

The exhibited photographs were both a product and by-product of the catalogue system adopted. For exhibition, selected images were projected on a large projection screen in *Rummage/Rheumage*. These exhibited images were a direct result of experimenting with a camera to record my working process. Photography allowed me to preserve a particular moment in the process to help with self-reflection at a later stage, but also resulted in some highly detailed macro images which expressed issues of geology, the earth, skin and the nature of ceramic materials, that is, the similar issues dealt with in the ceramic works and dissertation. The use of digital photography as a documentary tool and as another medium to be exhibited allowed me to control, to a greater extent than merely by exhibiting ceramics, how the viewer sees my work. Projection also facilitated a shift in scale.

My intention to investigate clay-earth-skin as a theme remained consistent despite a radical change in working methods and scale over the course of the study. Photography gave me the means to be less concerned with the strength and integrity of an individual piece and be more concerned with the expressive qualities of clay, beyond convention. Conversely, installation as a presentation method required a good understanding of the relative fragility or robustness of the pieces exhibited as tangible ceramic forms. Earlier in the *RumiNATION Resting*, I worked with clear acrylic sheet, a visually unobtrusive material, to create a support structure for the ceramic sections. The visual quality of the ceramic was not to be compromised in making the sculpture structurally sound.

In *Fondre* I was able to almost completely remove physical supports for the hemispherical vessel forms, eliminating the traditional plinth-pot relationship found in most conventional displays of ceramics. I chose to suspend 16 structurally sound vessel forms, evenly spaced, from a horizontally oriented square plastic frame (each side 3 meters long) that itself was hung using a system of cords from the gallery picture rails and light track. This frame was above eye-level in a darkened room and the line used to suspend the vessels was unobtrusive. The vessels, which themselves formed a square, were lit using focussed spots. Presentation at waist height invoked a suggestion of fonts, inferring ritual and familiarity but suspension gave a sense of the vessels floating, challenging familiarity and shifting focus. They appeared as precarious, fragile, hemispherical forms. I see them as conduits for a multitude of different tactile surfaces, an exhibition of material possibility in clay.

The photographic record gave me the means to realise a change in scale - it gave my small vessels and forms monumental scale without requiring the ability or resources to make monumental work. *RumiNATION Resting* is a large scale piece made using a more common method of realising large works with small kilns. It was separated into sections which were re-assembled after firing. This proved cumbersome and complicated, more time was spent in assembling than in physically manipulating the clay into a form. In *Fondre* weeks were spent manipulating the clay with careful nuance. The process revolved around the materials rather than around logistics of presentation. Materiality became much more important as did the earth element of the clay-earth-skin theme.

The photography in *Rheumage/Rummage* may have in some ways negated the materiality of the works depicted, but in other ways it drew closer attention to the clay or ceramic surfaces, emphasising materiality. My research is therefore related to Livingstone's: it is part of that 'distinct genre' (2009, 109) of work that looks closely at materiality in ceramics but which resists the usual criteria of 'craft criticism' (2009, 108). It is work, that despite being about ceramic materials and their manipulation, resists the usual evaluation criteria associated with craft and the role of the hand. I also found, as in his study that the use of a non-ceramic medium (digital photography) supported this claim, becoming a literal 'relocation of process and technique' (Livingstone 2009, 109).

Exegesis as a methodological tool and the catalogue format was tested as a means of creative self-reflection. The process facilitated an accessible arrangement of intuitive occurrences in the studio so I could track the sources of ideas and the development of new ideas in my work. Photographing works as they developed, then cataloguing images and writing text interactively allowed me to see what my working process revealed. This taxonomy, though related specifically to this project could be adjusted and repurposed for other thematic investigations in ceramics. The systematic way of titling and commenting on work revealed my habits of creative behaviour, including a recurrent interest in both the interior and exterior space of both vessels and figurative forms. The potential to create hollow forms using ceramic materials in different ways is linked closely to my thematic clay-earth-skin theme, but also opens up further discussions about the literal body, including gender and the female form and the potential for expression through the hollow clay form.

Despite an initial resistance to presenting hollow forms as vessels, as in *RumiNATION Resting*, the vessel remain a strong motif in my ceramics, a suitable conduit for expressing materiality.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

In Chapter 1 the theme clay-earth-skin was introduced and explained as central to this practice-led research project. These three words became markers of consistency through this dissertation, becoming useful descriptors to focus the scope of the research both text- and studio-based. The metaphoric possibilities of this theme were further explored in the exegesis body in chapters 2 and 3. In chapter 2 the metaphoric potential of this theme was indicated through a discussion of historical work of Voulkos and the Japanese avant-garde postwar ceramists; and the contemporary practice of Mason and Akiyama. The significance of *clay as earth* is particularly relevant to these practitioners. Mason's interest in surface as gesture is related quite closely to my *Fondre* series which also share the sometimes rock-like qualities of Mason's work. Yo Akiyama's unusual and extreme use of materials and processes results in works that reveal the expressive potential of the materiality of clay. After these ceramists were discussed my context was highlighted; and related to both international contemporary influences (Mason and Akiyama) and as coming through the lineage of my teachers, traceable to the influence of Bernard Leach. This indicates the postmodern, international approach I have to my work as well my linear position in the history of Studio Ceramics.

It is evident through my attraction to and affinity with the 3 key practitioners that my practice is driven in part by the historical precedents of Voulkos and the contemporary work of Mason and Akiyama. However, as is evident in Chapter 3 by the development of my own building process for *Fondre*, my alliance with these artists is with their attitude to, and contagious passion for, clay as a material. I may have borrowed some technical ideas from their practices such as Mason's interest in incorporating unprocessed ceramic materials or other substances unusual to the ceramics studio such as rocks, or Akiyama's expressive use of cracked clay surfaces; but imitation became a relatively less important element of my alliance with their practice. More important was Akiyama's interest, understanding and explanation of clay as a medium with its own specific physical qualities that can be used metaphorically to express ideas about geology and metamorphosis. His

interest in firing as metamorphosis and metaphor gave me access to a new way of thinking about the clay-earth-skin theme. With Mason's practice it was his risky, experimental approach that included pushing clay beyond the established, nominal limits of materials and processes in studio ceramics that was most influential.

As is reported in the catalogue in chapter 3, during this study I have experimented with materials and processes, beginning at first on the wheel, creating sculptural forms that negate the domestic function of the vessel. This was possibly influenced by the modernist assumption that sculpture is more serious or legitimate in comparison with the domestic-scale vessel form. I assumed that sculpture expressed materiality more effectively than vessel production because I linked vessel-production to thrown and glazed domestic ware which often negates physical qualities of clay that may affect the intended utilitarian function of the object. These physical qualities include roughness and a tendency to crack during drying, both of which I have exploited in my practice. As the research developed, my construction methods and scale changed. I worked on domestic-scale vessel forms as they served the purpose of creating surfaces and textures which emphasise the physical properties and geological origin of ceramic materials. Whilst these vessels started off as less important than my thrown work, they became a central concern as they were apt expressions of my theme.

Despite aspirations to the heritage and style of Peter Voukos, prompted in part by Michael Wille's comment as discussed in Chapter 3, the small-scale vessel remains a recurrent form in my production and proved to be a successful vehicle for exploring the physical properties of clay. Removing the technical problems associated with large scale work I was able to focus more fully on the expressive potential of ceramic surfaces and forms in exploring the clay-earth-skin theme. The studio approach remained intuitive and experiential. The conceptual theme, clay-earth-skin really came to fruition when my studio process had a greater emphasis on working with the physical material - more touching, playing with, pouring, sprinkling and manipulating clay and less planning, assembling, reassembling and installing. Thus *Fondre*, the newest work exhibited was more effective in blending material and conceptual aims than the earlier *RumiNATION Resting*. Some of these pieces look quite geological which is perhaps echoed in their form. While

RumiNATION Resting is a far more literal presentation of clay as a skin-like structure, in their relatively thin construction the vessels of the *Fondre* series also suggest skin, crust and earth simultaneously, though in a less overt manner. However they partly resist literal interpretation as celestial ‘bodies’ and suggest function and ritual by their scale.

The conceptual basis of the project was introduced in Chapter 1, touching on Lévi-Strauss’s dichotomy of nature and culture and Rawson’s ‘potter’s space’ as ways of understanding ceramic practices within the context of this study. My recurring interest in positive and negative spaces and the creation of hollow and vessel-based forms became evident through the catalogue section of chapter 3, indicating the relevance of Rawson’s ideas to my ceramic work. My frequent use of dichotomies and oppositional terms in my self-reflections in chapter 3 such as interior and exterior and positive and negative (space) and references to food, cooking and the body in relation to my ceramics echo Lévi-Strauss’s concerns. The retrospective titling of my exhibited works indicates links with these theoretical concerns and an interest in metaphor and double meanings - multiple layers of meaning in multiple layers of fired clay. The process of reflection, in the catalogue indicates an openness to multiple readings of my work. This system proved to be a useful way to re-read my own working process which also helped to reveal the presence and centrality of the theory of Lévi-Strauss and Rawson in the studio context.

The system of self-reflection to which photography was integral also led to the presentation of *Rummage/Rheumage* which allowed me to obliterate the notion of domestic scale in *Fondre* creating a blurred but dichotomous visual conversation between the two works.

Clay and other ceramic materials (though often presented as pure powders devoid of their earthly origin) and production techniques (often revolving around hollow forms), employed by the ceramist, are not innocent. They have their own inherent meaning, a conceptual dimension and a history (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt 2007, 191-192) which is echoed in my practice. Where the studio process supports this notion alongside thematic intentions, coherent research that emphasises materiality can be realised in the studio context. The geological origin of these materials and the skin-like quality of clay lend a

level of meaning to my work that prompts further questions about the possibilities of constructing meaning through materiality in ceramics. A new investigation dealing specifically with the relationship between ceramics and land could build on this.

Through this study it became evident that in my ceramics the relationship between the context, theory (including the history) and practice of ceramics (including the making process and presentation) was thoroughly integrated, sometimes becoming indistinguishable from each other. My creative process was influenced strongly by the theoretical writings of Rawson and Lévi-Strauss, and the creative process helped reveal meaning in their writings. In reflecting on my studio processes, theoretical interests, influences and completed works I was able to understand my creative process in a manner that will continue to contribute to my future practice. I propose that this method of reflecting on studio processes, and my system of presenting reflections, both photographic and textual, could be used successfully by other practitioners in ceramics or other media seeking to understand the relationship between theory, material and process to further their own creative practice.

List of Illustrations

Please note that this list of numbered figures does not include the images that form the catalogue section of Chapter 3. The reference notes for these images are as follows:

Digital Photographs, Bagley, K. 2009. *RumiNATION Resting* in progress, CVA ceramics studios. Photographs by Kim Bagley, 2009.

Page 42-53

Digital Photographs, Bagley, K. 2009-2010. *Fondre* in progress, CVA ceramics studios. Photographs by Kim Bagley, 2009, 2010.

Page 54-59

Figure 1: Book illustration, scanned. Sutherland, B. 2005. *Glazes from natural sources: a working handbook for potters*. 2nd ed. London: A. and C. Black, 2005. pp 15.

Page 4

Figure 2: Digital photograph, Mason, G. Thrown and altered clay vessel with red soil, in progress, Kenyatta University Ceramics department. Photograph by Kim Bagley 2008.

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Figure 3: Digital photograph, Bagley, K. 2008. *Untitled* wall mounted piece. Stoneware, matte ash glazes and found metal shelf. Private collection. Photograph by K. Bagley, 2008.

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Figure 4: Drawing, scanned, Bagley, K. 2009. Preparatory sketch for *RumiNATION Resting*. Pen on Paper. Collection of the Artist.

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Appendix

The MAFA exhibition, consisting of my ceramics and supporting projected digital images, was held at two venues (the CVA's Jack Heath Gallery, and at my ceramics studio) on 11 and 12 August 2010.

Artist's statement to the MAFA exhibition component

The work exhibited here represents the concrete outcomes of a process of studio research utilising the metaphors of clay-as-skin and clay-as-earth.

With these metaphors as a starting point the work explores philosophical and technical themes including careful attention to the clay itself and how it behaves, its geological origin as well as a manipulation of both positive and negative spaces during the process of production. The work includes predominantly vessel forms or forms emerging from vessel shapes. As a practicing artist I am intrinsically involved with the relationship between interior and exterior forms, which in turn create a tension and release between both positive and negative spaces.

Beyond these formal concerns of space and form, my work deals with two literal themes, linked to place and belonging. The two themes are the earth and cattle. The Nguni bull or cow is a cultural symbol of wealth, rurality, Zulu and general African cultural identity as covered extensively in research by Maguerite Poland (1996). Land, earth, ground and all that is associated with this is has been contested from colonial times through to the present. Both cattle and the earth are linked by the notion of skin - as a literal pelt or as the earth's crust. The earth's crust being the source of ceramic materials. Vessels are like skins in that they cover and contain - making their form appropriate for these themes.

Considering the vessel metaphor, visual references to skin and coverings or of the tension between what is seen and what is hidden below have broader conceptual underpinnings. The complex history of wheel thrown and altered Western Studio Ceramics is also addressed, particularly in *RumiNATION Resting*. Such works begin their 'lives' as vessels made on the potter's wheel which contributes a specific aesthetic quality regardless of the shape of the finished form. I see the distinctive throwing rings as contour lines, following the form and enhancing it. My glazing and other surface coverings are purposefully simple; primarily designed to give the surface a gentle skin-like sheen to emphasise the form. The form itself, in turn, reflects on clay in its unique plastic state as it is removed from the potter's wheel.

In other pieces such as the *Fondre* series my interest in the qualities of clay itself become even more pronounced. Cracks and other 'faults' are encouraged as they demonstrate the physical qualities and beauty of the material at different points in the production process. Experiments in purposefully rudimentary ash, clay and soap glazes seek to explore the physical characteristics of ceramic materials, creating surfaces that emphasise rather than disguise the origin and properties of their ingredients.

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