

Ceramic Narrative: Storytelling and Ardmore Ceramic Studio

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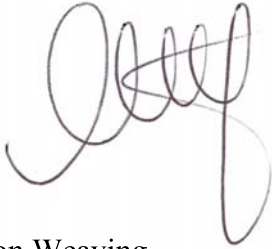
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Declaration

Except where acknowledged to the contrary, this dissertation is the original work of the candidate. It has not been, nor is it submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sharon Weaving', with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the importance of narrative in Ardmore ceramic ware and determines how and to what effect ceramic narrative is used by Ardmore Ceramic Studio. It gives a historical overview of narrative in ceramic wares of English potteries from the eighteenth century to date, as a means of contextualising and locating the influences of Ardmore narrative ceramics. This paper examines selected narrative works, by artists such as Andrew Sokhela and Wonderboy Nxumalo, with reference to Noverino N. Canonici's writings regarding Zulu oral literature. One of the intentions of this paper is to illustrate how the fundamental elements of Zulu storytelling play an influential role in Ardmore ceramic narratives. Narrative as a means of communication, education and entertainment is assessed with reference to Ardmore examples. This dissertation investigates the potential to use ceramic narratives as anthropological research tools. The focus of this paper is to investigate the use of ceramic narrative in disseminating information and creating social awareness.

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Prefatory Note

1. The Harvard method of referencing is used in this dissertation.
2. Throughout this paper the Ardmore Ceramic Studio is also referred to as Ardmore.
3. The title of literature cited is in italics.
4. The glossary follows the final chapter.
5. The glossary is followed by a list of illustrations which are presented in the order in which they appear.
6. Illustrations appear in relevant sections in the text.
7. Due to a variety of sources of imagery, it is not possible to achieve a consistent image resolution. Some of my own fieldwork / documentary images had to be taken through glass housing works in display cabinets.
8. Processes of research include the photographic documentation of Ardmore ceramic ware.
9. Each URL reference is given a code, such as URL 1, in the body of text. The complete URL address appears alongside the relevant code in the list of references.
10. The list of references follows the list of illustrations.

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Introduction

Research into the use of ceramics as a means of education and social awareness for my Honours paper, *Ardmore Positive: Ceramics in HIV/AIDS Education* (2009), prompted further examination of the importance of narrative in Ardmore ceramic ware. Therefore this dissertation aims to further investigate how, and to what effect, ceramic narrative has been used by the Ardmore Ceramic Studio. As a student of ceramics, I find the use of narrative in Ardmore's functional ware and figurines an interesting development in the use of ceramics as an 'activist' art form to make social comments and increase public awareness.

Chapter 1 will outline relevant literature available and supply a guideline to the research methodologies I shall be using in assembling information. The readings in this chapter will attempt to answer the general question 'what is narrative' and aim to introduce the reader to the empowering capacity of narrative. As a whole this section will serve as an introduction to the term 'narrative' and will discuss the origins and purposes of narrative in art. In so doing I hope to achieve a greater understanding as to why narrative is used in contemporary artworks.

Chapter 2 will continue with a definition of narrative within the ceramic context and further discussion of the origin and use of contemporary ceramic narrative. This section aims to situate present-day ceramic narrative, specifically that of Ardmore, in relation to the narrative function of wares produced by various English potteries from the eighteenth century onwards. This information will serve as a precursor to the analysis and consideration of Ardmore ceramic narratives in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 will provide information on how and why Ardmore has used narrative in their ceramic ware. I shall discuss Zulu oral literature with the intention of illustrating how the fundamental elements of oral storytelling exist in Ardmore visual narratives. I shall also investigate the use of narrative as a means of communication, education and entertainment with reference to Ardmore examples. Bearing this in mind I plan to explore the potential to use Ardmore visual narratives as anthropological research tools. This section continues to examine the role of the image and attempts to identify various factors influencing the type

of image chosen. The process whereby the viewer decodes the image and internalises the message is to be investigated. I shall include images of Ardmore ceramic ware providing narrative examples to corroborate the abovementioned discussions.

1. Narrative: An Overview

This chapter provides a brief outline of the literature available and a guideline to the research methodologies used in collecting information for my research paper. Research into the use of ceramics as a means of education and social awareness by the Ardmore Ceramic Studio for my Bachelor of Art Honours in Visual Art paper, *Ardmore Positive: Ceramics in HIV/AIDS Education* (2009), prompted further examination of the importance of narrative in the ceramics produced at Ardmore. Although the Ardmore narratives depicted are specifically related to the experiences of the local artistic community, the stories transcend the boundaries of language thus appealing to a national and international audience. My analysis of the images, narratives and ceramic ware produced for the *Ardmore Positive* exhibition, at the Tatham Art Gallery, increased my awareness of the importance of storytelling in the work of the Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

The artists are willing to use their art and ‘lived experience’ as a means of educating others, telling their stories and reflecting on the behaviour of contemporary society by visually narrating personal experiences. The interpretive freedom of the viewer to interact with the pieces broadens the meaning of the works; there is no ‘prescriptive message’ which the audience is required to decode and internalise.

As a student of ceramics I find the use of narrative in the functional ware, tableaux and figurines of Ardmore an important break from the conventional approach of artists when exploring the social function of art in a typical two dimensional fashion.

The rationale of this dissertation is supported by three compelling motives:

- Concept and power of narrative
- Metaphorical functionality
- Visualisation of anthropology

The motives are discussed with reference to the following review of available literature.

Literature Review

Concept and power of narrative

A Theory of Narrative, written by Rick Altman, attempts to answer the question ‘what is narrative?’ Altman views the practice of storytelling as one of cultural importance. Storytelling receives much of its influence from the capacity of a story to be communicated in various ways, be it in an oral, written or pictorial format, or via performance. Narrative exists independently of the media, giving it concrete form, and is therefore easily transportable and flexible in its application to new methods of communication. Consequently narratives from previous generations remain pertinent to contemporary society (Altman 2008: 1). This publication provides an understanding of narrative in the traditional sense. It explores narrative as an entity easily transferable from one recognisable medium to another (oral story, printed tale, painting, comic strip, film) and to events of daily life (Altman 2008: 327).

Altman (2008:10) defines narrative material as requiring minimal textual characteristics to produce a narrative. This is reflected in the work of the Ardmore Ceramic Studio where minimal text is included to support the images. This enables the image-based stories to transcend the limitations imposed by language on text-based narratives and therefore appeal to a greater audience. Narratives require action, without action there is only portraiture. Narrative is produced when objects are set into motion by a series of actions. Actions play a pivotal role in narrative and therefore theorists often summarise narratives in terms of actions alone (Altman 2008: 11). Edward Branigan states that ‘narrative is a way of experiencing a group of sentences or pictures (or gestures or dance movements, etc.) which together attribute a beginning, middle, and end to something’ (Altman 2008: 6). Altman discusses how the reader follows the narrative, presented in images, depicting a character moving from action to action and scene to scene. The reader takes on the role of the narrator and, this process referred to as ‘following’, activates both the character and the narrator (Altman 2008: 15). Narratives can be read in many ways. Whether constructed of words, images, sounds or bodies, all narratives depend on the ‘following’ process (Altman 2008: 21). The ‘following’ process is evident in the Ardmore narratives

and assumes various formats including that of the comic strip, tableaux, figurines and sculptural functional ware.

Richard Brilliant, a Professor of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University, wrote *Visual Narratives Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman Art*. Brilliant discusses the idea of narrative as communication through visual images and the process of demonstrating, informing and persuading the audience without the use of words. Narrative art consists of serialised images used to tell stories of various kinds. Brilliant emphasises the role of the work of art itself in making the meaning of the story accessible to the audience through the visual narrative (Brilliant 1984: 11). This publication examines the historical development of narrative and discusses how narrative functions as a means of social commentary and transformation. Brilliant discusses the role of the artist in presenting a message and the significant role of the viewer in deciphering the messages. He emphasises the relationship existing between artist and viewer and the influence this has on the successful translation of a visual narrative.

According to Brilliant, movement away from storytelling to reading allows the reader to formulate their own ideas regarding the written material presented to them. The writer conceives the story in one way and the reader comprehends the story in another. Since reading is primarily a visual activity, it superficially resembles the process of 'reading' a work of visual art. However, an artwork is not a straightforward symbolic code. Visual images have a potentially infinite capacity for verbal expansion. Viewers become their own narrators, changing images into a form of internalised verbal expression. When artists arrange their images in a definite visual field, viewers are at greater liberty than listeners / readers to choose how and in what sequence to experience the narrative (Brilliant 1984: 16). In the presentation of visual narrative it becomes the essential task of the artist to ensure that the observer understands the story and message (Brilliant 1984: 18).

The publication, *Telling Stories to Change the World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims* (hereafter referred to as *Telling Stories to Change the World*), is a global collection of papers commenting on the power of narrative to build communities and increase awareness and understanding of human rights. The writings are edited by curator and historian Rickie Solinger; Madeline Fox, an educator and researcher enrolled in a Doctor of Philosophy course in Social

Personality Psychology at the Graduate Centre of the City University of New York; and Kayhan Irani, a Community Arts Practitioner facilitating art programmes in immigrant communities.

Telling Stories to Change the World discusses how stories and ‘lived experiences’ are used by people to challenge institutions and critically analyse oppressive relationships, thereby facilitating the creation of more inclusive and legitimate alternatives (Solinger, Fox and Irani 2008: xi). The various papers included in this work examine projects in which storytellers use dance, exhibition, archives, ancient scrolls, community meetings and community theatre, newspapers, the internet, children’s’ illustrations and other formats to create narratives drawing on personal history and resonating beyond individuals to increase global awareness of various social concerns, the importance of the community and every individual’s right to physical safety and education. The papers examine the transformation of the participant’s identity from victim to spokesperson through the use of narrative (Solinger, Fox and Irani 2008: 1).

Evidence of the empowering capacity of narrative is manifest in the work of Ardmore artists, including Andrew Sokhela’s education plates (Figures 21, 23, 32 and 33), Roux Gwala’s *Monster AIDS Pot* (Figures 22, 31 and 37), the commemorative plates (Figure 36) and Wonderboy Nxumalo’s plates (Figures 17-20, 24 and 25). The process of visual representation has enabled the artists to tell their stories and freely express their concerns thus coming to terms with many of the problems they face.

Through imagery, the artists are empowered to tell their stories and make their voices heard. Voices from previously marginalised groups are able to make their grievances known by depicting their ‘lived experiences’ visually.

Telling Stories to Change the World illustrates the global use of storytelling by groups of people as a vehicle for launching practical solutions to their social predicaments. The act of storytelling implies the requirement of a voice and listeners and the realisation that storytelling can overcome coercive silencing. The Ardmore ceramics emphasises the role of narrative in addressing issues of a sensitive nature thus increasing the awareness of the plight of many individuals in the immediate community, in Kwa-Zulu Natal and further afield. Telling stories of indignity, tragedy and hope involves the narrator in acts of

transformation whereby experience and identity become interchangeable. Although these stories reflect the ‘lived experiences’ of individuals in the Ardmore community, the narratives are depicted in a non-specific manner encouraging the inter-changeability between storyteller and audience. The viewer can potentially identify with the story as reflecting their own experiences and consequently feel that their voice has been heard. Since a story has the potential to transform, a storyteller can be viewed as playing the role of a social activist (Solinger, Fox and Irani 2008: 6). I believe that Ardmore artists have assumed this role as their direct approach to sensitive issues reflect a concern for community behaviour and an attempt to increase public awareness initiating change.

Wahid Omar, from the University of Kabul, wrote the paper *From Storytelling to Community Development Jahori, Afghanistan*. Omar played an important role in the implementation of community projects in Afghanistan, receiving awards for teaching and writing, and has a Doctorate in Philosophy in oral tradition and community development. Omar believes that storytelling is not merely an antiquated art form but appears worldwide in its various expressions as a typical part of modern life (Omar in Solinger, Fox and Irani 2008: 195). Omar writes that in order to understand what people are thinking it is necessary to listen to their stories. To effectively utilise the information received from the stories, one needs to be aware of the cultural, physical and spiritual environment of the community. Omar concludes that storytellers and stories serve as a powerful resource for developing projects and dialogues within communities (Omar in Solinger, Fox and Irani 2008: 200).

Metaphorical functionality

A practising ceramicist since 1974, Matthias Ostermann’s interest in narrative arose due to his enthusiasm for stories, myths and legends. He wrote the book *The Ceramic Narrative* (2006) in which he discusses the use of narrative in ceramics and how artwork transcends the boundaries of the purely decorative. Ostermann discusses the function of narrative in contemporary ceramics to illustrate personal visions, private stories, memory, relationships and identity, social and political commentary. Consequently the ceramic object is viewed as a means of projecting a message. Ostermann uses the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* to define ‘narrative’ as ‘a tale, a story, a recital of facts, especially told in the first person; a kind of composition or talk that confines itself to these’ (Ostermann 2006: 7). Ceramic

narrative assumes a pictorial format involving an image directly connected with an identifiable ceramic object.

Ostermann maintains that ceramic narrative includes the concept of the story and any image portraying a specific message as a visual sequence and association of ideas. The image moves beyond the ornamental and decorative to illustrate a story intending to provoke a considered response from the viewer (Ostermann 2006: 7). Ostermann explores the stylistic changes in iconography reflecting the visual language and concerns of each particular culture and era. Literary narrative illustrates the contemporary themes of struggle and human condition which prevail throughout centuries of image-making in ceramics (Ostermann 2006: 9). These themes are reflected in Ardmore ceramic ware, although the subject matter differs, the use of ceramic as a means of social commentary continues.

Ostermann proposes that the narrator's intent is to re-invent and re-work popular cultural themes, such as using the comic strip to create new thought-provoking genre of imagery expressing pertinent issues. This is evident in the genre specific to Ardmore characterised by the use of animals depicting human behaviour to convey a message. Generally, the concerns expressed in narratives might have a political bias and / or incorporate themes of memory and personal history reflecting the artists' experiences (Ostermann 2006: 127). Ceramic images can be reflections of the artists' lives and experiences; stories they tell about themselves which place the narratives within a broader human context.

The message portrayed by the artist in the narrative may differ from what the viewer understands when responding to the images. The results vary due to the range of personal life experiences and influences the viewer draws on in attempting to make sense of the illustrated narrative (Ostermann 2006: 143-144). Ceramic work used as a means of social and political commentary reflects the artists' response to present-day concerns. The intention is to create thought-provoking imagery encouraging viewers to examine the issues and question their responses. Narrative of a social and political nature demands examination and questioning on the part of the viewer (Ostermann 2006: 189).

Critic, writer and curator, David Whiting believes that vessels are as much about metaphor and message as they are about performing functional roles in daily life. The metaphorical

function plays an integral part in the ritualistic and celebratory role of the vessel (Whiting in Ostermann 2006: 95). He suggests that the domestic scale and familiarity of ceramics encourages an approachability which provides a compelling platform for modern observation and storytelling. This notion can be related to Ardmore ceramics as the forms produced are readily identifiable as domestic-ware thus encouraging individuals to approach the objects and view the narrative on a more intimate level.

Ostermann (2006: 219) writes that irrespective of how ‘...we may choose to express and renew our narratives, their subject matter still remains central to the important issues we face, both as individuals and as members of a community, regardless of our culture and ethnocentricity’. His words emphasise the important function of narrative in commenting on pertinent concerns within contemporary society. The manner in which Ardmore has successfully utilised narrative for this purpose is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Visualisation of anthropology

I have included the following anthropological publications in my research as I consider Ardmore ceramic narratives to be a method of recording human behaviour through the telling of stories. I therefore find it important to discuss the connection between art and anthropology. In a sense the Ardmore ceramic narratives fulfil an anthropological function, where the term ‘anthropology’ refers to the studies of people from various cultures in their natural settings, as defined by Patricia Leavy (2009: 6). The ceramic artworks serve to document the responses of a community to various social issues and record daily events in the lives of community members. Although I do believe that the positioning of the ceramic pieces in an art gallery tends to shift the focus from an anthropological to an artistic viewpoint, I would like to investigate the possibility that these pieces exhibit both an anthropological and visual function irrespective of the setting in which they are displayed. I believe that the narrative element of Ardmore pieces play an important role in connecting the aesthetic and the anthropological.

In her book *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, Patricia Leavy (2009: 11) endorses the use of the arts as a means of research by qualitative researchers due to the broader range of investigative and communicative tools the arts provide in successfully retrieving and relaying various social meanings in anthropological studies. According to

Leavy (2009: 12) the arts are capable of illustrating process which in turn reflects the unfolding nature of social life. Therefore what is captured by the art form corresponds with what is occurring in everyday life. Leavy believes that the arts exhibit congruence between subject matter and method (2009: 12). Since the arts are a representational form, Leavy (2009: 13) suggests that they are highly effective in communicating the emotional aspects of social life. For example, Leavy feels that theatrical representations of an experience can convey certain aspects of 'lived experience' that textual form cannot. Dramatic presentations connect with audiences on deeper, more emotional levels evoking compassion, empathy, sympathy and understanding. Leavy therefore suggests that arts-based practices are effectively used in creating critical awareness and raising consciousness in situations of race and / or gender, in challenging dominant ideologies and in studies involving identity work where research involves the communication of information concerning experiences associated with difference, diversity and prejudice (Leavy 2009: 13).

According to Leavy (2009: 13) identity research confronts the stereotypical ideas maintaining the disenfranchisement of certain groups and limiting the outlook of other groups due to their biased 'common-sense' ideas. Leavy lists the goals of identity-based research as challenging stereotypes, building empathy, promoting awareness, and stimulating dialogue. I believe that these aims are reflected in Ardmore narratives where the artists depict 'lived experiences' to educate the audience (Figures 21 and 23). The reality of the 'lived experiences' challenges the idea of the stereotypical personality-type affected by a pandemic. Once people recognise themselves in the narrative, they are more likely to be empathetic towards the characters. Leavy (2009: 13) suggests that identity-based research raises awareness by giving a voice to those who have been marginalised because of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion and disability. In her writing Leavy (2009: 14) re-emphasises the importance of using arts-based research in accessing personal narratives as she believes that individual stories are silenced in scientific research.

Anna Grimshaw's paper *Reconfiguring the Ground: Art and the Visualisation of Anthropology*, in the book *Anthropologies of Art*, discusses the notion of visual anthropology and how this concept encompasses a much broader range of concerns relating to vision and visibility. Grimshaw refers to the anthropology of the visual as 'the

study of visual systems and visible culture' (Grimshaw in Westermann 2005: 199); the visual is the object of anthropological investigation. Visualisation of anthropology refers to anthropology as the object of visual inquiry (Grimshaw in Westermann 2005: 199).

Grimshaw states that, by conducting fieldwork, the researcher is exposed to a significantly visual experience. The lack of familiar cultural and linguistic understanding causes the researcher to closely observe visual cues in order to comprehend the situation through intense observation of gesture, expression and movement. Grimshaw believes that a discrepancy exists between the sensory experience of fieldwork and the established academic language used to document fieldwork. There is a translation from pictorial towards textual in which the density of detail is reduced and filtered in favour of simplicity and clarity. However, the '...mantra of modern anthropology, the importance of 'going to see for yourself'...' (Grimshaw in Westermann 2005: 197) demonstrates that first-hand observation forms an integral basis for knowledge collection.

Grimshaw considers the possibility of presenting anthropology in various public spaces, specifically art galleries, and questions whether the space would then be conceived as an ethnographic site in its own right. Grimshaw debates the matter of whether the work would be recognised as anthropological or judged as a work of art. Increasingly artists have begun to challenge and re-work conventional forms of ethnographic knowledge as displayed in contexts of museums. Grimshaw questions how anthropologists might engage differently with visual objects and gallery display, to utilise particular cultural spaces in another way through an exercise of the ethnographic imagination. If anthropology was approached from the perspective of artistic practice, Grimshaw queries the type of artefacts, textual and non-textual, which would constitute the discipline. How would these artefacts be produced and displayed, what knowledge claims would be made for the artefacts and what would the basis of these claims be? (Grimshaw in Westermann 2005: 203). In her writing Grimshaw (in Westermann 2005: 204) suggests that anthropologists, like many artists, work with found everyday materials to create objects acquiring meaning only once situated in conventional anthropological settings such as museums.

Methodology

In order to research this topic, I have found it most appropriate to use a qualitative, empirical methodology including narrative inquiry, research interpretation and phenomenological research (referring to ‘lived experience’), substantiated in the following discussion of methodological readings.

‘Lived Experience’

Max van Manen, author of *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, defines methodology as logos (study) of the method (way) (van Manen 1997: 28). Methodology can be referred to as the theory behind the method, which includes the study of the specific research method one should follow, and the reason for choosing this method (van Manen 1997: 27). Methodology is essentially the pursuit of knowledge using a particular mode of inquiry (van Manen 1997: 28). According to van Manen (1997: 27), the philosophic framework of methodology from a human science perspective includes the general orientation to life, the view of knowledge and the notion of what it means to be human which is linked to or implied by particular research methods. I consider this an important approach in the study of my research topic due to the distinctly human element of the ceramic narratives I plan to discuss in Chapter 3.

Van Manen explains the term ‘lived experience’ as involving one’s ‘immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life’ (van Manen 1997: 35). ‘Lived experience’ has an ordered structure and one is not usually aware of ‘lived experience’ in the here and now, but rather reflectively as a past presence. Van Manen suggests that ‘lived experience’ is linked to phenomenological research, where ‘the aim of phenomenology is to transform ‘lived experience’ into textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his / her own lived experience’ (van Manen 1997: 36). Phenomenology, the science of phenomenon, is a term that was used by the philosopher Kant to distinguish the study of objects and events (phenomena) as they appear in one’s experience from objects and events as they exist in themselves (van Manen 1997: 183). The understanding of ‘lived experience’ is important in investigating why

specific images have been used in Ardmore ceramic narratives. Van Manen writes that phenomenological inquiry is similar to an artistic activity; it is an attempt to creatively come to terms with a particular phenomenon of life in text that is all encompassing (1997: 39). Ardmore uses imagery and storytelling to capture 'lived experience' in various ceramic formats.

Conversational interviewing and close observation are qualitative methods of collecting 'lived experience' data (van Manen 1997: 53). Van Manen emphasises that experiential reports and / or 'lived experience' descriptions (verbal or written) are seldom indistinguishable from the 'lived experience'. All memories, reflections, descriptions, interviews and discussions in connection with 'lived experiences' become transformations of those experiences. One's own life experiences are immediately accessible to one in a way that no one else's are. The personal descriptions of 'lived experiences' makes one realise one's own experiences are possibly the experiences of others too (van Manen 1997: 54). The interview is a means of exploring and collecting experiential narrative material which is a resource for developing a greater understanding of human phenomena. Conversational interviews are used to develop communicational relations with the participant in clarifying the meaning of their experience (van Manen 1997: 66). As van Manen reiterates, expressions of experience through images in narrative ceramics allows a greater audience to connect and identify with the experience (van Manen 1997: 54).

Van Manen (1997: 74) discusses the use of art as a source of 'lived experience' and how concise artistic material is commonly used for phenomenological human science. Each artistic medium has its own language of expression. Objects of art are visual, tactile, auditory, non-static texts; a specific language with its own grammar. Artists are involved in giving shape to 'lived experience'; therefore products of art are, in a sense, 'lived experiences' which have been transformed beyond the usual configuration of human experience (van Manen 1997: 74). 'Lived experience' plays an influential role in the choice of images depicted by the artists. Images derived from 'lived experiences' make the stories more convincing for the viewer; enabling the viewer to identify with the narrative.

Methodologies

Laurie Schneider Adams, author of *The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction*, suggests that no specific formula exists when using words to describe an image or an object in its entirety, irrespective of the medium (Adams 1996: xiii). The different approaches to describing and interpreting art constitute the methodologies of artistic analysis. Adams suggests that since every work of art is an expression of its culture (time and place) and its producer (the artist) and is dependent on the medium from which it is made, the resultant artistic product is an immensely complex piece (Adams 1996: xv). The existence of various methodologies illustrates the number of meanings associated with a single artwork. Many different factors contribute to the creation of an image and therefore no single approach to understanding an artwork can be completely definitive (Adams 1996: xvi).

A formalist analysis will be used to discuss the Ardmore ceramic pieces. I will consider the formal elements existing in the work as these constitute the basis of the artist's visual language. The formal elements of a work refer to line, shape, space, colour, light and dark and how these elements are arranged to create a design. Formal analysis of an artistic composition considers how each element contributes to the overall impression made by the work. This is important when determining the meaning conveyed by the particular elements incorporated in the ceramic pieces. Adams suggests that the viewers' responses to these elements within the image are partly responses to the viewers' sensory experience in relation to the world (Adams 1996: 17-18).

The Ardmore Ceramic Studio is associated with a distinctive style of making and surface decoration, an important consideration when discussing the ceramic pieces produced. Meyer Schapiro is quoted by Adams as defining style as a 'constant form - and sometimes the constant elements, qualities, and expression - in the art of an individual or a group' (Adams 1996: 24). The philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel connected stylistic change with cultural developments and believed that art is a meaningful expression of those who produce it and therefore can be read as an artefact or historical record of a culture (Adams 1996: 24). This idea can be applied to the subject matter of Ardmore ceramics as the work reflects their view of what is taking place in the artist community and makes a comment on current societal behaviour.

According to Adams (1996: 36) iconography is the way in which an artist ‘writes’ the image as well as what the image itself ‘writes’; the story the image portrays. An iconographic approach to works of art considers the meaning of the subject matter. This approach is therefore important when discussing the narrative subject matter of the Ardmore pieces.

Allan Kellehear writes in *The Unobtrusive Researcher: A Guide to Methods* that social research is typically either empirical or theoretical (Kellehear 1993: 8-9). Empirical research extends beyond simply using books and articles to include gathering information from other sources, usually people. Empirical research generally refers to the collection of data from active inquiry using inconspicuous methods such as written and audio-visual records, material culture, and observation (Kellehear 1993: 5, 8-9). Art, music and film can be used as sources of information for empirical research. Theoretical research involves the use of text-based sources to discuss a point through logical reasoning (Kellehear 1993: 9). In addition to an empirical-based research approach, I will be using a degree of theoretical research in addressing how narrative has been used in art to express artists’ opinions on various social issues.

Darrell Dobson, author of *Transformative Teaching: Promoting Transformation through Literature, the Arts and Jungian Psychology*, discovered that qualitative research methods are not rooted in scientific epistemologies about the nature of knowledge and research. Dobson’s way of thinking is influenced by Elliot Eisner who, amongst other researchers, argues that science is only one of many varieties of research, referred to as quantitative methods, and although such approaches to research are important, inquiry does not need to be based on the methodology of natural sciences in order for it to be considered knowledge (Dobson 2008: 31). Research can therefore be conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods. Dobson cites Denzin and Lincoln when defining the term qualitative as implying ‘...an emphasis...on processes and meaning that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency’ (Dobson 2008: 31). The use of qualitative approaches involves the exploration of the ‘quality’ of the experience which is a clearly interpretive and subjective process, necessary in the study of the aspects of human life that give it meaning. Researchers are aware of the socially constructed nature of human reality and consequently qualitative studies are recognised as being valuable. Eisner explains the difference between

quantitative and qualitative research as paralleling the difference between producing science and creating art (Dobson 2008: 31).

Dobson writes that the recent view of qualitative research suggests that the arts perform more than purely decorative and entertaining functions (Dobson 2008: 32). In a similar vein to the sciences, the arts are a means of exploration into the nature of existence and a method to represent the outcomes of the inquiries. This view has resulted in the development and application of arts-based approaches to research using methods of inquiry, practice, and representation of the arts as a means of conducting, representing and disseminating educational research (Dobson 2008: 32). This viewpoint can be applied to Ardmore ceramics as the narratives depicted transmit an educational message to the viewer.

Eisner emphasises that since qualitative investigation concerns the study and representation of empirical (observed) aspects of the world, the arts provide effective research paradigms (idea, theory, and concept) to do so. Eisner states that '[t]he arts...have provided a long tradition of ways of describing, interpreting and appraising the world...[A]rt [thus], literature, dance, drama, poetry, and music are among the most important forms through which humans have represented and shaped their experience' (Eisner in Dobson 2008: 32).

Narrative inquiry is a methodology of arts-informed qualitative research. In this methodology narrative is referred to as that which is studied and the means of conveying the findings. Since people lead fundamentally storied lives, the stories and self-reflections of the participants are used as sources of information. Narrative and story are a foundational means of knowing; methods of creating meaning and important ways of making sense of experience (Dobson 2008: 33). Since individuals experience the world 'narratively', education is understood to be the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories. Experience is understood 'narratively'; therefore Dobson believes that narrative inquiry is the most appropriate way to research experience (Dobson 2008: 34).

In the book *Making Sense of Social Research*, Malcolm Williams discusses the topic of research as interpretation. Williams writes that the act of interpretation is related to the individual, as individual interpretations of identical social situations differ from person to

person (Williams 2003: 50). In everyday life there is sufficient cultural continuity in known responses and actions to facilitate the understanding of meaning and behaviour. However this varies between cultural groups necessitating the services of an interpreter with cultural knowledge of the group. Max Weber, cited by Williams (2003: 50), believes this ability is accounted for by shared forms of rationality within a group of people. This does not mean that what is rational within one group is rational everywhere or that people always behave in a rational manner, but rather that when provided with some knowledge of rational behaviour in any social situation, it is possible to interpret the situation. However, certain behaviours in the existence of a particular group of people are better known and understood to them as opposed to how they would be perceived by an outsider e.g. the researcher (Williams 2003: 50).

According to Williams (2003: 54), each interpretation is unique to its environment and requires 'reflexivity, self-awareness and realisation' (Williams 2003: 54) of one's own position in relation to those researched. Tim May, cited by Williams (2003: 54), states that reflexivity concerns social positioning i.e. the positioning of the researcher and the researched. Endogenous reflexivity refers to the knowledge that one has regarding one's immediate social environs, how one reflects on this and how this knowledge consequently informs one's actions. Endogenous reflexivity assists the researcher in becoming aware of their own biography and therefore more aware of the effects the research actions will have on the researched and the wider community. As a researcher one has to be aware of one's presence on the research context and how this will affect the results. Referential reflexivity refers to the knowledge gained from an encounter with the ways of life and the ways of viewing a social world that is different from the researcher's world (Williams 2003: 54). Interpretive research is about discovering what it is that makes people different from or similar to ourselves (Williams 2003: 70).

Interpretation is necessary to understand how people respond to particular situations and why they behave in a specific manner. When interpreting narrative in artworks, it is important to understand the life experiences which have influenced the artists in choosing to relay particular stories and the types of images used. The 'depth' of the interpretation depends on the questions asked and the extent of the social resources held in common by the researcher and the researched. Usually when the researcher has many aspects in

common with the social world of the researched individuals, no great depth of interpretation is required (Williams 2003: 55).

Field research involving participant observation is an important tool in learning about a group through observation and conversation (Williams 2003: 49). As a researcher I know little about the social group I am researching and therefore will not be formulating standard questions to discover important aspects of the group. Standard questions often limit the range of responses which can be made by the participants. Conversational interviews with participants are often more effective in retrieving a range of concepts and views. Williams suggests that, for ethical or cultural reasons, a survey utilising standard questions would not succeed as a qualitative research tool. It is a method derived from Western society requiring a shared set of meanings between the researcher and the researched for success (Williams 2003: 50).

Therefore, to successfully research my topic, I will be using a qualitative, empirical methodology in conjunction with narrative inquiry, interpretative research and 'lived experience'.

Chapter 2 continues with a definition of narrative within the ceramic context and further discussion of the origin and use of contemporary ceramic narrative.

2. Ceramic Narrative: Historical and Contemporary Uses

Narrative: Origins and Uses

This section serves as an introduction to the term ‘narrative’ and discusses the origins and purposes of narrative in art. In so doing a greater understanding can be reached as to why narrative continues to be used in contemporary artworks with specific reference to the ceramic pieces of the Ardmore Studio.

Richard Brilliant (1984: 11) defines narrative firstly as a means of communicating via visual images and secondly as the process of showing, informing and persuading an audience without the use of words. In his writings, Niklas Luhman (2000: 19) suggests that art presents a functional equivalent to language thus supporting Brilliant’s theory that the purpose of visual narrative is communication. This point is reiterated in Luhman’s statement (2000: 19) ‘[a]rt functions as communication although - or precisely because - it cannot be adequately rendered through words (let alone through concepts).’ I believe that the issues raised by Brilliant and Luhman regarding the communicative function of visual narrative are relevant to the discussion of Ardmore narrative ceramics in Chapter 3.

The appearance of narrative in ceramic art is sourced to Roman times where serialised images were used in the art work, including ceramics, to relate various stories to the public. As such the art piece played an important role in the context of audience reception, as access to the meaning of the story was primarily via the visual imagery on the vessel (Brilliant 1984: 11). Due to the levels of illiteracy at the time, Brilliant emphasises the likelihood that visual signs were an important, if additional, means of communication (Brilliant 1984: 15).

Brilliant (1984: 16) views reading primarily as a visual activity superficially resembling the process of ‘reading’ a work of art. When ‘reading’ artworks Luhman (2000: 21) suggests that the viewer has the freedom to choose the sequence in which the images are observed. According to Brilliant (1984: 16) a work of art is not a simple symbolic code and the meaning behind the image is not revealed to the viewer at a single glance. The function of the image is to stimulate the viewer to interact with the visual content on a deeper level (Brilliant 1984: 16; Luhman 2000: 21). When discussing narrative, Brilliant

(1984: 16) comments that visual narrative, as opposed to textual narrative, presents fewer constraints to the viewer thus resulting in greater appeal to a wider viewership. The idea that visual narrative is more user-friendly in getting the message across is emphasised by the words of Luhman:

Art is unique in that it makes possible a type of communication that, in the strict sense of the word, avoids language along with the routines involved in language use. The forms of art are understood as communications, but without language, without argumentation. Instead of using words and grammatical rules, people employ works of art to communicate information in ways that can be understood (Luhman 2000: 22).

The use of art as a form of communication is evident in the ceramic narratives of Ardmore. The artists have chosen to use images to communicate their stories to viewers ranging in dialect and nationality and therefore do not rely on explanatory text to convey their message. The use of images as a visual language increases the number of people able to interact with the narrative thus taking the message further afield.

Brilliant (1984: 17) writes that visual imagery in the context of artwork has its own coding and decoding requirements. Works of art have a specific syntax, due to the apparent completeness and immediacy of the narrative and because the descriptive content has been deliberately selected by the artist from reality, even if reality is an imagined creature / mythological episode requiring some act of interpretation by the viewer. According to Brilliant (1984: 17), visual images potentially exhibit an infinite capacity for verbal expansion as, once images are arranged in a definite visual field, viewers experience a greater freedom to choose how and in what sequence they wish to interact with the narrative. Brilliant (1984: 16) suggests that meaning is generated in a work of art as a function of the relationship existing between two worlds; the 'fictional' world created by the author and the 'real' world. The connection between the two worlds is evident in the illustrative content of the piece (Brilliant 1984: 16).

According to Patricia Leavy (2009: 25), narrative is not merely a method of discourse but a 'basic phenomenon of life'. The telling and re-telling, writing and re-writing of stories are fundamental parts of social life and the study thereof. The daily sharing of narratives occurs when a person informs others 'about something' and that 'something' is 'an event -

something that happened'. Leavy (2009: 27) suggests that narrative is viewed as a frame through which people make sense of their lives. Through the narrative process people are able to conceptualise a life experience in various ways. This allows the individual to access and represent a particular topic from a variety of positions which assists them in coming to terms with the experience. Multiple representations of an experience aid the viewer in understanding the diverse viewpoints depicted (Leavy 2009: 25-29).

Ronald J. Berger and Richard Quinney, editors of the publication *Storytelling Sociology: Narrative as Social Inquiry*, write that narrative gives life events a sequential, logical order and establishes continuity with the past, present and the future (Berger and Quinney 2005: 4). People 'lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives' (Berger and Quinney 2005: 4) thus the function of narrative is to transform human experience into meaning. Berger and Quinney (2005: 5) propose that 'lived experience' can be understood through the stories people relate about their experiences. Stories are a form of communication enabling individuals to examine their lives, construct their identities and find purpose and meaning in their existence. Members of marginalised groups should be afforded the opportunity to speak their own truths and voice their own stories to create improved opportunities for themselves and their communities (Berger and Quinney 2005: 5). Ardmore has used visual narratives to voice the concerns of the artists and local people regarding the effect of HIV/AIDS on the community. The artists have documented their experiences and the stories of others in an attempt to educate the community through their artworks.

Berger and Quinney (2005: 6) view narrative as a new mode of global interaction enabling individuals to take personal concerns and experiences and make them public issues. Narrative has emerged out of the need to make various human rights concerns global and to bring about an increased understanding of diverse societies. The act of storytelling secures and increases one's consciousness and extends the reality of one's experiences. The storyteller has the ability to relinquish control over the story's meaning thus encouraging readers / viewers to interact with the story using personal interpretive and emotional sensibilities. According to Berger and Quinney (2005: 6) narrative assists in generating an understanding between the storyteller and the audience. This sense of understanding enables the audience to better comprehend the storyteller's 'lived experience', thus reducing the likelihood of the marginalisation of others, and simultaneously encouraging the formation of social bonds within communities (Berger and Quinney 2005: 8-9).

The Origins of Ceramic Narrative

This section aims to situate present-day ceramic narrative evident in the vessels, figurines and commemorative ware of the Ardmore Ceramic Studio in relation to the narrative function of ceramic ware produced by various English potteries from the eighteenth century onwards. Whiting (in Ostermann 2006: 95) writes that '[t]he twentieth – century ceramic narrative has essentially been a continuation and reinvention of the various commentaries and symbols that have covered ceramics, in various forms, for thousands of years.' Discussion concerning the origins of ceramic narrative will indicate the influences that eighteenth century narrative ceramics has had on the production of current ceramic ware. This will be further examined in Chapter 3 with reference to Ardmore ceramics. Furthermore Whiting (in Ostermann 2006: 105) believes that the domestic scale, familiarity and accessibility of ceramic wares continue to provide an effective base for artists to document social and political events of their time, as is achieved by Ardmore ceramic art.

Paul Scott (2001: 41) writes that with the development of the ceramic form in providing a basis on which to illustrate, ceramic products could be used for decorative as well as commemorative purposes and as a means of political commentary. In addition to this, the transfer print enabled nineteenth century British pottery factories to rapidly respond to daily issues, recording significant events and topical subject matter on the ceramic surface. The ceramic pieces served as vehicles for the dissemination of ideas concerning public issues and party politics and were used to sway public opinion and promote political causes (Scott 2001: 41).

According to Scott (2001: 116) ceramic images provided an ongoing narrative commenting on contemporary life. The immediate environment was used as subject matter for painted surfaces. Scott (2001: 142) suggested that the plate, shallow bowl and the ceramic tile were the most accessible forms on which artists could paint, print and draw. The flat plane and circular format of the plate offered an uncomplicated continuous surface on which to work. As a form, the plate had meaning in its domestic functionality and in its historical role as a picture plane and wall piece.

Hilary Young's publication, *English Porcelain 1745-95: its Makers, Design, Marketing and Consumption* (1999), gives an overview of the principal pottery factories in operation in the 1700s. Young's writings state that, from the early 1750s to the mid 1770s, many of the factories, including Bow, Chelsea and Derby, were producing figurines as a major constituent of the factory output. Potteries such as Chelsea manufactured their figurines exclusively to appeal to the upper class fashion-conscious echelons of society (Young 1999: 197). Consequently the factories concentrated on producing fashionably styled figures, vases and dessert wares aimed at the wealthy target market (Young 1999: 37).

Young (1999: 78) writes that the principal conventions, styles and subject matter of English porcelain figures were mostly influenced by Meissen porcelain produced by the Saxon factory near Dresden. According to Cooper (2010: 163), the finely modelled, painted figures and table services produced by Meissen established the factory's reputation as the foremost producer of porcelain in Europe. The Meissen prototypes were on loan to the English potteries and had a direct influence on the style of figurines produced, many of which were exact replicas of Dresden examples (Young 1999: 78). Young (1999: 80) lists the most important subjects taken from Meissen as:

...Senses, the Muses, the Arts, the Continents, the Elements, the Seasons, Commedia dell' [thus] Arte subjects, birds, dogs and other animals, musicians, gallants, street criers and traders, men and women in Turkish or Levantine dress, the chinoiserie figure group, shepherds and shepherdesses and the entire associated genre of the idyllic or erotic pastoral (Young 1999: 80).

The dining tables of the wealthy were usually decorated with small figures modelled in wax, sugar or gum by cooks and confectioners. The figurines were intended as ornaments for the home and were portrayed in a humorous, satirical manner modelled in various genres. However, the demand for figurines of a more permanent nature resulted in the production of the first porcelain figures at Meissen in 1727 (Cooper 2010: 159 and 163). Initially the porcelain Meissen figurines were commercially produced by Johann Gottlob Kirchner and Johann Joachim Kändler to fulfil a decorative purpose of arranging theatrical scenes depicting a recognisable story on banqueting tables (Harris 1974: 14). Kändler was renowned for his modelling of figurines in dramatic sculptural poses and his repertoire included subjects reflecting a mixture of the classical, exotic and contemporary qualities characteristic of the period. The most famous of these standard eighteenth century themes were the dramatic characters from Italian comedy, particularly the Harlequin figure

(Figure 1) recognisable by his colourful patchwork clothing (Harris 1974: 15; Cooper 2010: 163-164).



The production of figurines, such as *The Greeting Harlequin*, was influenced by the Italian strolling players who performed comedy theatre throughout Europe.

Figure 1: Meissen figurine *The Greeting Harlequin*, c1750.
Porcelain figurine. Photograph: In Harris 1974: 24.

The figurines were humorous depictions of court jesters characterised by flamboyant theatrical gestures (Cooper 2010: 164). The production of the figurines was influenced by the Italian strolling players known as ‘the Commedia dell ‘Arte’ ‘ (Figure 2).



Punchinello is an example of a porcelain figurine inspired by characters from the Italian comedy theatre.

Figure 2: Meissen figurine *Punchinello*, date uncertain: c1735.
Porcelain figurine painted with coloured enamels. Height: 15.5cm.
Photograph: In Cooper 2010: 164.

The actors improvised scenes of well known plots referencing Greek comedy. The players inserted local references from the area making the performance / narrative relevant to the audience and recognisable throughout Europe (Harris 1974: 24).

Seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe was fascinated by this particular theatre and responded well to comedies featuring intrigue and romance. The familiar theatrical characters provided ideal subjects for figurine makers. Individual figures with expressive gestures could readily be grouped to form various dramatic scenes (Harris 1974: 24 and 28). Meissen figurines became an essential item on Europe's banqueting tables and were recognised as highly collectable decorative pieces (Harris 1974: 19).

In addition to modelling the human figure, Kändler produced figurines of animals. The mischievous, near human quality of monkeys made them particular favourites. They were intended to parody human figures, especially groups of musicians, giving the figurines a humoristic light-hearted feel (Harris 1974: 15). Ardmore artists are recognised for their use of animals, specifically monkeys, in visual stories commenting on the foibles of human nature (Figure 3).



Figure 3: J. J. Kändler. *The Monkey Band*, c1740. Porcelain figurines. Photograph: In Harris 1974: 16.

Although by the 1770s the Meissen influence had decreased, precise reproduction of the Meissen figurines continued (Young 1999: 80). By the late eighteenth century, once table displays were no longer fashionable, the porcelain figure was viewed as a work of art and transferred to the display cabinet (Harris 1974: 19). Young (1999: 187) writes that by the 1750s the English porcelain figures were set out in rooms other than the dining hall and used to decorate dressing tables of the aristocracy (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Chelsea, Gold Anchor Period. *Blackamoor Candlesticks*, c1765. Porcelain figurines. Photograph: In Harris 1974: 43.

The *Blackamoor Candlesticks* are an example of Meissen-like ware produced in the late 1700s illustrating the move to figurine production combining functionality and decorativeness. This utilitarian aspect of figurines ensured that they remained popular items in households. When considering Ardmore's candlesticks (Figure 29) in Chapter 3, I detect a similarity in form reminiscent of Meissen-like ware. Monkey figures have been used to create a narrative giving an informative purpose to a decorative, functional item.

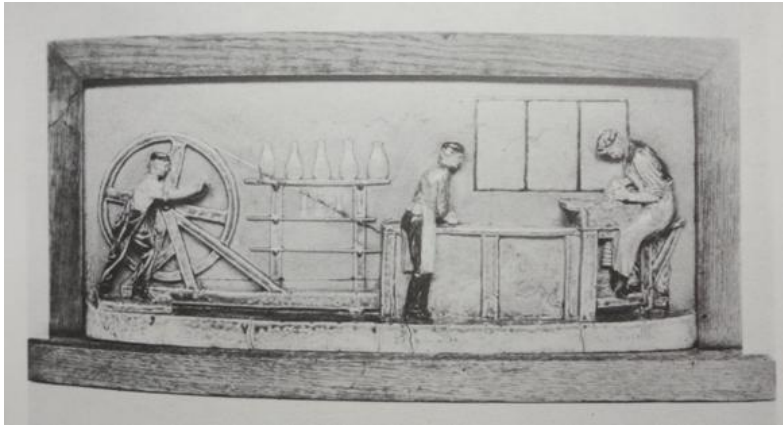
Figures were displayed on brackets or mounted with metal candle-branches in sets of five or seven as chimney ornaments (Figure 4). Smaller busts of philosophers and figures of military and political heroes, manufactured by the Derby and Bow potteries, were displayed on library desks. The politically charged figures were presumably put on view as a demonstration of political allegiances and civic virtue (Young 1999: 187).

The manufactured ceramic wares of Wedgwood, Doulton and Turner potteries demonstrated the use of narrative in recording the following:

- social activities of the upper class (e.g. hunting)
- standards of living (e.g. mansions and lands)
- romanticised views of agricultural life
- quaint domestic scenes
- animals (exotic and familiar)
- local news-worthy features (Harris 1974: 15)

Mythological narratives, historical stories and wares commemorating royalty were commonly produced in these factories. Doulton potters produced commemorative pieces,

usually vessels issued in limited editions commemorating the reign of various royal figures (Godden 1974: 309). Martin-ware relief-modelled plaques (Figure 5) showed the studio setting and the figures depicted potters at work (Figure 6) thus illustrating the work of a studio potter in the 1900s (Godden 1974: 315).



An example of a relief-modelled plaque demonstrating potters at work in a studio in the 1900s. A 'wheel' boy, 'bench' boy (preparing the correct amount of clay) and a 'thrower' are shown. This plaque serves an important function in documenting the role of each individual and the type of equipment available at this time.

Figure 5: Martin-ware. *Untitled*, c1900.
Relief-Modelled Plaque. Length: 41.3cm. Photograph: In Godden 1974: 315.



One of several Martin-ware figures documenting studio life in the 1900s. This figure tells a story of the thrower's role in the potter's studio; illustrating the type of vessels made, how they were made, and records the equipment used at that time. Martin's thrower can be compared with Figures 7 and 8 which serve to document the work and tools of a contemporary thrower in the Ardmore Studio.

Figure 6: R. W. Martin. *Walter*, c1900.
Height: 17.1cm. Photograph: In Godden 1974: 315.

The Martin-ware figures can be compared with contemporary Ardmore sculptures (Figures 7 and 8) documenting present-day studio life.



Figure 7: P. Gumbi. *Portrait of Sculptor / Thrower Sfiso Mvelase (side view)*, 2006. Earthenware painted with underglaze.
Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

An Ardmore figure reminiscent of Martin-ware figures documenting studio life. A comparison can be made between the two figures (Figure 6 and 7) to determine whether any similarities exist, and what developments have been made, in the studio environments.

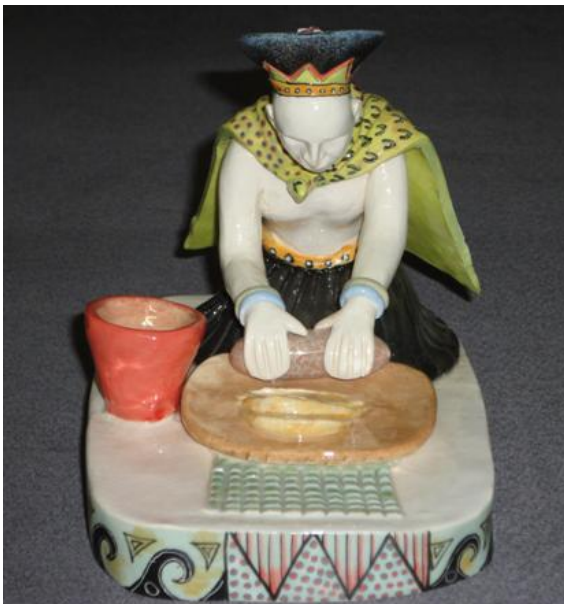


Figure 8: Detail: P. Gumbi. *Portrait of Sculptor / Thrower Sfiso Mvelase (front view)*, 2006. Earthenware painted with underglaze.
Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

Note the attention to detail in this work. The type of dress, throwing equipment, potter's wheel and thrown pot can be compared with those recorded in figure 6. Figures 5, 6 and 7 serve as important records for historical and anthropological purposes.

‘The Arcadian Dream’ is a persistent theme of eighteenth century figurines illustrating the notion of the [idyllic contentment](#) of rural life. Peasants and rural craftsmen were popular subjects depicted with a variety of farm animals and indigenous birds. The rural figures were treated as quaint colourful subjects; and agricultural activities such as sowing and reaping were presented as romanticised outdoor diversions. Although these figurines serve as a reminder that eighteenth century Europe was primarily agricultural, idealisation of rural life continued and no attempt was made to present a realistic view of peasant life. The porcelain figurines were aimed at a wealthy aristocratic market who was not interested in the plight of the peasant. Popular porcelain figures of a romanticised rural nature became showpieces of the Victorian parlour (Harris 1974: 38).

Ardmore figurines present rural figures performing important daily chores as opposed to the idealistic treatment of rural subjects by the eighteenth century figurine makers. Figures 9 and 10 illustrate the realistic portrayal of rural life by Ardmore Studio. Contemporary rural figurines serve to recognise and commend the women for the duties they perform in the community.



Ardmore figurine of a rural woman performing an important daily chore of grinding meal. The figure is clothed in traditional wear illustrating her status in the community and emphasising the pride she takes in performing her duties.

Figure 9: N. Nsundwane and A. Shabalala. *Woman Making Meal*, 2009. Earthenware painted with underglaze. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.



The figure has been realistically portrayed as opposed to the idealistic representation of rural life in the eighteenth century. The figurine acts as a tribute to rural women and serves to document their duties and role in the community.

Figure 10: N. Nsundwane and A. Shabalala. *Woman Making Meal (side view)*, 2009. Earthenware painted with underglaze. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

The term ‘Staffordshire figure’ generally refers to the nineteenth century earthenware figures of a simple uncomplicated kind, mass produced at low cost for the cottage, rather than the stately home (Godden 1974: 280). Staffordshire figures first appeared in the 1820s made from plaster-of-Paris moulds (Haslam 1975: 53). Potters depicted subjects such as topical events, contemporary heroes and heroines, royalty and theatrical characters appealing to the target market (Godden 1974: 280). The Staffordshire potters used imagery from contemporary entertainment for their figuration (Haslam 1975: 53). Potters often specialised in ornate figures and groups mounted on footed bases. Many of the figurines documented social occasions of the time and acted as commemorative pieces capturing historical events (Godden 1974: 280 and 285).

The Staffordshire figurines produced by Ralph Wood illustrated, amongst others, the popular figures of shepherds and shepherdesses, demonstrating an idyllic rural lifestyle. Wood modelled exotic animals such as lions and elephants set on bases giving them a domestic functionality as book ends and mantelpiece ornaments (Godden 1974: 104). Wood created the popular Toby-jugs (Figure 11), i.e. functional vessels manufactured in the shape of figures illustrating men drinking ale and smoking pipes. The jugs were generally arranged in groups depicting a companionship shared by aristocratic men of the eighteenth century (Godden 1974: 105).



Figure 11: Staffordshire Toby Jug *Admiral Lord Howe*, c1770-80. Earthenware. Height 24.5cm. Photograph: In Cooper 2010: 158.

Increasingly ornate figures were made in the early nineteenth century to emulate the porcelain examples. The figures produced by the Wood and Caldwell partnership in the early 1800s were good imitations of the more expensive, earlier porcelain wares. Their aim was to make the figures available at prices typically paid at fairs or markets (Haslam 1975: 50). The Doulton artist George Tinworth made sets of small Lambeth stoneware figures and groups which proved popular and were readily collected. Typical examples of these depict mice (Figure 12) or frogs in human pursuits (Godden 1974: 298). In the latter part of the nineteenth century the ceramic market was flooded with mass produced figures attempting to meet the demand for cheaper ceramic wares. A wide range of ornamental wares was produced incorporating historical, religious, literary, theatrical, criminal and sporting references (Haslam 1975: 14).



A selection of stoneware Tinworth 'toys'. These figures, especially the mice and frogs, engage in light-hearted human activities.

Figure 12: G. Tinworth. *Play Goers*, c1885-1905. Stoneware. Height: 14cm. Photograph: In Godden 1974: 306.

The preceding historical review of ceramic narrative and figurine production has provided relevant information demonstrating the influential sources used by Ardmore artists in creating their specific brand of ceramic narrative. This section served to emphasise Whiting's initial comments indicating the existence of contemporary ceramic narrative as derived from the production of various narrative wares from the eighteenth century to date exhibiting comparable documentary functions. Ceramic narrative in South Africa has been effectively used by Ardmore in relaying community concerns to a local and global audience. Their achievement highlights the continued application of narrative to the works of contemporary ceramists in an attempt to make social comments via ceramic ware in present-day society.

Contemporary use of Narrative in Ceramics

This section explores the use of narrative imagery in contemporary ceramics as a precursor to the discussion, in Chapter 3, of how Ardmore has employed narrative in their ceramic art pieces.

In his book, *The Ceramic Narrative*, Matthias Ostermann writes that the context of ceramic narrative deals with 'a pictorial format, one involving an image associated intimately with an identifiable object' (Ostermann 2006: 7). Ostermann expands on this idea by suggesting that the image does not purely relate to a story, but can portray a specific message / visual sequence and association of ideas. The visual narrative usually refers to human activity / drama beyond merely fulfilling an ornamental and decorative function. The intention of the narrative is to provoke a contemplative response from the viewer. Ostermann (2006: 9) believes that narrative continues to be a pervasive and adaptable vehicle for the expression of human concerns irrespective of the art form it emerges in.

Visual images commonly used in narratives are those dealing with mythology and re-explored archetypes such as:

- Cultural icons reshaped into new idioms
- Personal visions
- Private stories and memory

- Exploration of the human figure as it embodies aspirations, relationships and identity (Ostermann 2006: 7).

Ostermann (2006: 9) writes that throughout history, the development of the ceramic narrative object has incorporated technical and material advances in craftsmanship and methods of production. The ceramic object has recorded stylistic changes in iconography reflecting developments in visual language and associated concerns of particular cultures and eras. These changes are also documented in the content of the narrative depicted on the art objects. As in oral and written traditions, the same narrative themes, and often identical stories, have been told at different time periods in a variety of ceramic contexts. The significant historical themes of ‘struggle’ and ‘human condition’ demonstrated by every culture’s creation myths, heroic legends, parables and fairy tales appear in oral and literary narrative and are evident in ceramic narrative. These themes pertaining to humanity continue to prevail throughout centuries of image-making in ceramics. Many narratives illustrate man’s need to re-explore universal and often unresolved ideas preoccupying man’s thought processes. Such themes refer to existential issues concerning mortality, identity as individuals existing as part of a community, the need for survival, love and acceptance. All forms of narrative serve as a powerful vehicle for expression of such issues (Ostermann 2006: 9).

Ostermann (2006: 9) states that through the inherent diversity of the ceramic object, where ‘ceramic object’ can refer to a container / drinking vessel, ritual / commemorative object or an architectural component, a number of venues for exploring narrative by function and association are provided. This can lead to a further level of contemplation and involvement on the part of the viewer / user. The object is often linked to the image it supports. In some instances the object is the image and becomes a metaphor for a more subtle, indirect message (Ostermann 2006: 9). The painter Marc Chagall (1887-1985), was well aware of the effectiveness of the ceramic object in his own ceramic work, especially work of a domestic nature, with its tendency for touch and handling (Ostermann 2006: 10). The domestic quality enables the ceramic object to immediately enter into the personal space of the viewer as opposed to the physically distant and less tangible work of painting on canvas (Ostermann 2006: 10).

David Whiting (in Ostermann 2006: 95) writes that metaphor and message have long been associated with pots and perform an integral part of their ritualistic and celebratory role as well as their domestic function. The idea that message was as important as medium came from the thoughts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century fine artists. Ostermann (2006: 205) suggests that from the artist's point of view, narrative content exhibits ideas ranging from personal reflections to political and / or social statements. Ceramic objects and the contextual arrangement thereof convey specific messages according to the artist's deliberation of a particular topic. Indirect messages require viewers to participate in deciphering the significance of why specific familiar objects have been appropriated by the artist in their narrative, and identify the symbolic and associational roles these objects assume. Since the message is not prescribed, the viewer may continue to re-evaluate these roles along with their responses in the hope of expanding their perceptions and creating narratives specific to themselves (Ostermann 2006: 205).

According to Whiting (in Ostermann 2006: 95) narrative has never been entirely absent from mainstream ceramic production in factories, city and country workshops. The domestic functionality and familiarity of ceramic products encourages an interaction between the viewer and the ceramic item. Consequently ceramic articles provide a suitable basis for recording narratives and social observations and serve as a central part of the political, satirical, spiritual and self-examining tools of modern art. Ceramic objects are used to make comments expressing relevant ideas in the viewer's space (Whiting in Ostermann 2006: 105).

Ostermann (2006: 127) suggests that these ideas might reflect a political bias and / or incorporate themes of memory and personal history depicting the artists' own experiences. Ceramic images can be expressions of artists' lives and illustrations of their stories (Ostermann 2006: 143). The autobiographical approach to certain narratives utilises ceramic images to reflect themes of inner growth and conflict. The use of human figure imagery is most potent when related to self-revelation and self-exposure. Work dealing with these themes requires courage on the part of the artist as the work demands introspection and a public sharing of private information (Ostermann 2006: 143). According to Ostermann (2006: 146), ceramic objects incorporating narrative as a form of social documentary, attempt to articulate through gesture, title and symbolism, personal situations witnessed first hand.

Neil Brownsword (Ostermann 2006: 147), a ceramic artist from the United Kingdom, comments on his experiences relating to the human context of narrative in his work (Figures 13 and 14):

Subject matter has tended to draw upon many aspects of human anxiety; low self-esteem; disillusionment with the lack of control we are able to register upon our lives, and flawed expectations of relationships. Dealing with issues like these not only serves as a means of catharsis, it helps to concentrate my need to question and reinforce a deeper understanding of why these intimate feelings arise (Ostermann 2006: 147).

Brownsword's comments reiterate why narrative is used by artists. Visual narrative serves as a means of dealing with sensitive issues which people are often unable to address verbally.



Figure 13: N. Brownsword. *Drifting in Circles*, 2003.

Combination of thrown, hand-built and cast components using varied clays and glazes.

Height: 39cm. Collection: unknown.

Photograph: Neil Brownsword, date unknown (Ostermann 2006: 146).

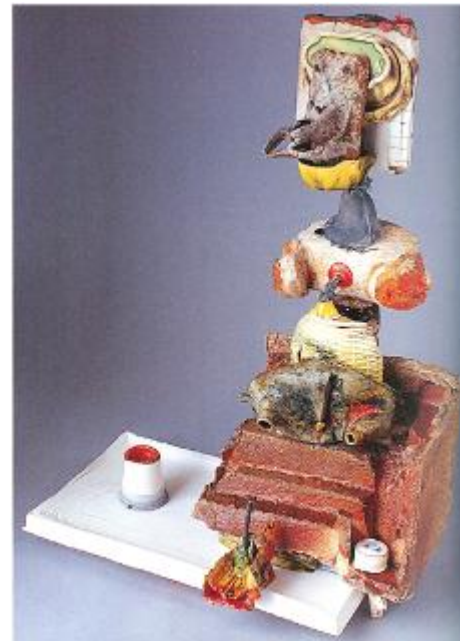


Figure 14: N. Brownsword. *Something So Pure Can't Function No More*, 2003.

Combination of thrown, hand-built and cast components using varied clays and glazes.

Height: 43cm. Collection: unknown.

Photograph: Neil Brownsword, date unknown (Ostermann 2006: 146).

According to Ostermann (2006: 167), the depiction of the human figure can be extremely self-revealing and is therefore prevalent in most narratives. Where the human figure is central to the narrative, it forms the focus of all important questions and unsolved issues

relating to the specific narrative. The figure functions on either an iconic or symbolic level, or as a visual metaphor / representation. Ostermann (2006: 167) suggests that the presence of a figure in ceramic narrative demands introspection on the part of the viewer and calls for an examination of important issues reflected in the narrative. The response evoked by the human image can vary from humour to affection and anger, depending on what the artist intended. Usually the images illustrating the narrative do require a response from the viewer and a questioning of the message depicted (Ostermann 2006: 167).

Ceramic narratives depicting artists' responses to relevant problems and concerns have the potential to function as a means of political and social commentary. The artists' intent is to create specifically thought-provoking imagery challenging the viewer to examine the presented issues and question their responses.

Ostermann (2006: 189) lists viewers' responses as falling into one of the following points:

- A complacent acceptance of existing cultural stereotypes (e.g. gender roles)
- Helplessness / passivity in the face of current wars / political and economic crises
- Avoidance in dealing with personal and public problems

Artists present imagery in various ways depending on the type of response they wish to evoke. The narrative can assume a mildly satirical, ironic, shocking (Figure 22) or comical (Figure 29) format all of which demand further examination and questioning on the part of the viewer (Ostermann 2006: 189).

In Ostermann's text (2006: 199), the Canadian ceramic artist Paul Mathieu comments on the use of functional ceramic ware in conjunction with the depiction of narratives. He characterises domestic ware as 'innocent, familiar, functional, decorative and commemorative' (Ostermann 2006: 199). These descriptive terms tend to reinforce the often ambiguous relationship existing between the physical ceramic form and the narrative events illustrated. By using domestic ware as a means of making social and / or political comments, the subversive is brought into homes and daily lives at a domestic level (Figures 15 and 16). This reinforces the purpose of ceramic narrative to continuously expose the viewer to social and political concerns in the most mundane and domestic circumstances. Mathieu (Ostermann 2006: 199) refers to ceramics as the 'memory of

humankind' since ceramic objects have the potential to exist for extended periods of time thus serving as a means of record-keeping.



Figure 15: P. Mathieu. *'Disasters' Series, Shoah 1933-1945, 1999.*

Slip cast porcelain salt and pepper shakers with enamels and lustres, 15 x 10 x 10cm.

Collection: unknown.

Photograph: Rory McDonald, date unknown (Ostermann 2006: 199).

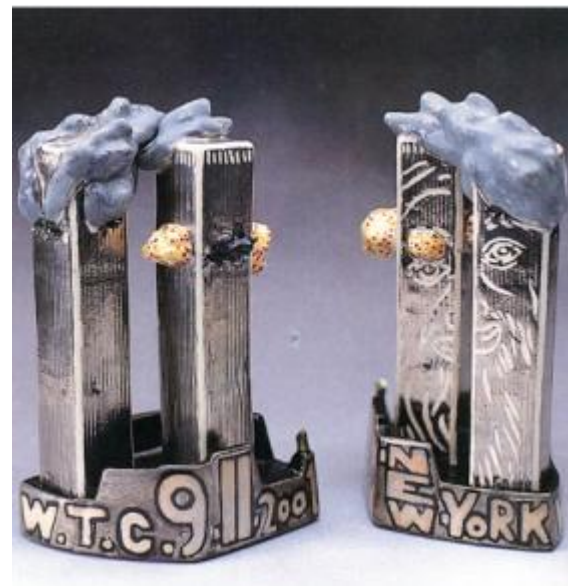


Figure 16: P. Mathieu. *'Disasters' Series, W.T.C., 09-11-01, 2002.*

Slip cast porcelain salt and pepper shakers with enamels and lustres, 25 x 10 x 10cm.

Collection: unknown.

Photograph: Rory McDonald, date unknown (Ostermann 2006: 199).

Essentially the function of contemporary ceramic narrative is viewed as a continuation of the initial purposes for which it was developed. The narrative function of ceramic wares was originally created to record the way of life, personal experiences and significant events of the time. The function of narrative has continued over the years to assist artists in making social statements and documenting history. This sentiment is re-iterated in Whiting's comment '...the twentieth century narrative in clay is simply a regeneration of what it has long been – the pot as ornamental image, a mirror of the society and the values that produced it' (Whiting in Ostermann 2006: 105). Although the function of ceramic narrative has remained the same over the decades, the issues raised change accordingly.

In Chapter 3, I examine how Ardmore uses ceramic narrative to record daily life, personal experiences and contemporary concerns. Images of ceramic wares are included to provide examples of the various subjects discussed.

3. Narrative and Ardmore Ceramic Art

This chapter will provide information on how the Ardmore Ceramic Studio has used narrative in their artworks as a means of social commentary. I will discuss the interrelation of Zulu oral literature, with reference to Canonici's book *Zulu Oral Traditions*, a publication resulting from years of research and teaching on the subject, and the narratives created by the Ardmore artists. I would like to illustrate how the basics of oral storytelling can be applied to visual storytelling, therefore demonstrating the similarities in the aims / goals of the verbal narrator and the visual storyteller. The role of images in the artworks will be discussed with reference to specific Ardmore ceramic works and the process whereby the viewer decodes the image and internalises the message is to be investigated.

In her thesis *The Narrative and the Commemorative in the Ceramic Vessels of Hylton Nel, Wonderboy Nxumalo, [and] Grayson Perry*, Jennifer Kopping (2006: introduction) writes on her explorations of the ceramic vessel as a means of conveying the narrative and the commemorative in the works of these artists. Kopping's research concludes that the depiction of narrative and commemorative subject matter on ceramic pieces challenges the way in which the vessel is perceived. The domestic nature and functional qualities of the vessel are expanded upon and the viewer is challenged to recognise the vessel as existing within the broader sphere of the visual arts. According to Kopping (2006: introduction) the narrative content of the ceramic object extends the parameters determining how the audience views or reads the object. The additional factors of language, text, sign and image initiate a dialogue between the viewer and the narrative content. Kopping (2006: introduction) believes that these considerations are capable of further communication and extension of the visual narrative.

In her writing Kopping (2006: introduction) proposes that the visual storytelling process enables the artist to reveal their identity and sense of place in the world and assists them in coming to terms with that world and the associated challenges encountered. I feel that Kopping's consideration of the storytelling process is relevant when taking into account why Ardmore has used narrative in their ceramics. Pictorial narrative has facilitated expression of the artist's opinion of various social events in a visual manner. The chosen images situate the artists within their environments and reflect the type of experiences they

are exposed to. In addition to Kopping's views, I feel that the pictorial storytelling process allows the artist's comments to be far-reaching since the visual format crosses the barriers imposed by language thus increasing local and global awareness of general societal challenges faced by individuals today.

Kopping (2006: 4) writes that the contemporary narrative vessel becomes an object of contemplation and confrontation. Examination of disconcerting images often generates feelings of unease amongst the audience, as known and accepted behaviour norms are challenged. A significant example of the use of such imagery is the body of work produced by Ardmore for the 'Ardmore Positive' exhibition held at the Tatham Art Gallery in 2008. The disturbing imagery brings to the fore various issues relating to HIV/AIDS thus challenging the audience to evaluate their behaviour, the behaviour of others and the stigma associated with the disease. Consequently the viewer is no longer passively involved in the interaction with the vessel, but assumes the role of active participant as the physical existence and narrative content of the vessel challenge the viewer to review their sense of reality (Kopping 2006: 5).

The ceramic vessel therefore serves as a medium to facilitate dialogue between the viewer and the visual narrative. Artists use the images as signifiers of metaphorical, social, historical and symbolic suggestions which the artist intends the viewer to interact with (Kopping 2006: 6). The ceramic vessels are products of the artist's 'lived experiences' expressed from their subjective and cultural points of view (Kopping 2006: 9). Kopping (2006: 12) suggests that the narrative operates as an informative tool to encourage improvement within society. Although the narrative does not make direct reference to the viewer, the viewer can identify with the story. The narrative allows the viewer to 'enter a dialogue between art and life' (Kopping 2006: 85) encouraging the viewer to formulate the stories independently and interpret them according to their 'lived experiences'.

I feel that Kopping's sentiments re-iterate what the Ardmore artists hope to achieve by using narrative in their ceramics and that is to engage with the viewer in an attempt to educate and encourage behavioural change within the community (Figures 17 and 18). Kopping (2006: 12) feels that the 'ethical dimension' of the narrative shifts the emphasis from the 'self' (artist) to the 'other' (audience) and consequently the narrative artwork illustrates the artist's sense of responsibility to others and their well being. This is evident

in Nxumalo's plates warning his community of the dangers of HIV/AIDS. The warning and message is not directed to a specific person, but rather to the community as a whole (Kopping 2006: 32).

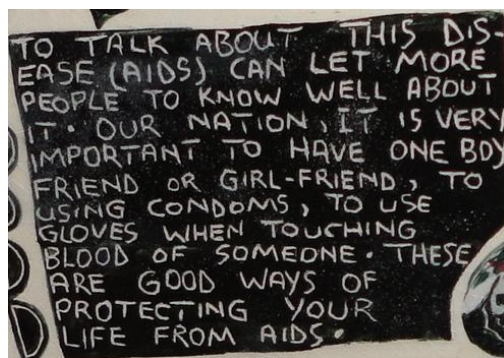


Nxumalo's monkey figure assumes a didactic pose, facing the viewer in a conversational manner with hand poised as if in the process of directing the viewer's attention to the text on a 'blackboard'.

Figure 17: W. Nxumalo. *Can We Talk About It*, c2001.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.



The monkey engages with the viewers encouraging them to read the informative text conveying a non-judgmental message. Nxumalo uses the monkey character to discuss sensitive topics without pointing fingers.

Figure 18: Detail: W. Nxumalo. *Can We Talk About It*, c2001.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

Zulu Storytelling

In order to understand the contemporary narratives of the Ardmore ceramic artists, I believe that it is important to be aware of the role that storytelling has played in Zulu culture throughout the years. As Del Vecchio (2001: 106) states ‘...no artist works without connections to his or her past, nor without inspiration from the history of art...’. Exposure of the artists to familial storytelling has to a certain extent influenced the choice of imagery used to illustrate the ceramic narratives. In depicting contemporary events, the artists continue to draw on the influences of Zulu storytelling in the use of animals to represent human characteristics and behaviour. Detailed information regarding this subject is provided by Canonici who conducted extensive research into Zulu storytelling with the Department of Zulu Language and Literature of the then University of Natal.

In his writings Canonici explains that the stories told in a community generally reflect occurrences within society (Canonici 1993: 54). Similarly Eisner (2008: xv) considers storytelling to be associated with the social behaviour of human groups and lists the function of stories as:

- Teaching behaviour within the community
- Discussing morals and values
- Satisfying curiosity
- Dramatising social relations and problems, conveying ideas and portraying fantasies.
- Preserving knowledge by passing stories on from one generation to the next (Eisner 2008: xv)

While the basic elements of Zulu storytelling are evident in Ardmore narratives, there has been a development in the type of imagery used to represent present-day phenomena. Contemporary narratives deal with a variety of new issues requiring a revised method of illustration to appeal to the viewer. Nowadays the images used are often influenced by comics and media such as popular television shows (Figures 19 and 20).



The title of this narrative makes reference to a popular television sitcom of the same name dealing with the everyday experiences of 'ordinary' people. I feel that Nxumalo's decision to use this as a title emphasises the fact that AIDS has now become a part of many 'ordinary' people's lives.

Figure 19: Detail: W. Nxumalo. *Days Of Our Lives*, c2001.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.



In this narrative Nxumalo gives ghost-like qualities to AIDS emphasising the unexplained nature of the disease. The sinister visions surrounding the monkey create a sense of bewilderment and fear of the unknown, emotions that are highlighted in the text.

Figure 20: W. Nxumalo. *Days Of Our Lives*, c2001.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

The comic format is effectively used in Ardmore educational narratives due to the ease with which comics are read. Comics are useful in disseminating information in areas with low literacy levels as complex concepts are reduced to imagery and explained as a story thus making them easier to understand. This straightforward storytelling approach ensures a highly effective means of communicating important information to communities (Eisner 2008: xv).

Ardmore uses contemporary imagery in a comic format to explain present-day social concerns. It is important that the narratives remain current in order for the viewer to identify with the story depicted (Figures 21, 23, 32 and 33).

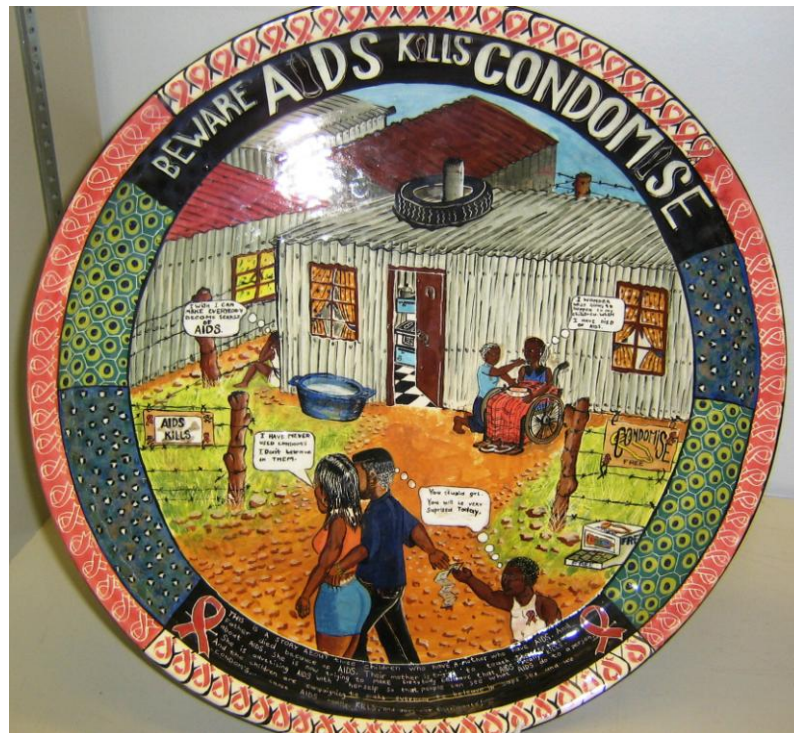


Figure 21: A. Sokhela. *Beware AIDS Kills Condomise*, c2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

Narrative and Communication

In his book *Zulu Oral Traditions*, Canonici (1996: 176) suggests that the foremost aim of any form of communication is to convey a message. He continues further in this vein writing the following:

Literature is a highly skilled form of communication, therefore it represents a very sophisticated way of conveying a message. This can be openly and directly stated, or conveyed by symbolic representations to be decoded intellectually and emotionally. For the message to be remembered, it must be striking in content and memorable in form. Folktales have been the instrument of social education for many centuries. The message is not always readily understandable: the various aspects of theme may need to be clarified, weighed and opposed to one another in order to perceive the revelation of hidden forces that shape both society and the individual (Canonici 1996: 176).

I find that Canonici's thoughts regarding literature as a form of communication are relevant when discussing how images are used to convey a message. The image content amounts to a visual language communicating on a pictorial level with the reader. I believe that Ardmore's ceramic narratives are prime examples of how images are used to create a visual language. Artists use specific images and signifiers to tell a story and transmit a message to the viewer. In some cases the message conveyed by the image may not be immediately understood by the viewer. It is important that the viewer identifies with and interacts with the image in order for the message to be recognised and internalised. Arresting imagery has the potential to attract the viewer directing his / her attention towards the narrative. Once the viewer formulates an association between the image and the message, there is an increased likelihood that the message will be remembered. Therefore on re-exposure to the image, the associated message will be brought to the fore. Visual narratives are currently used by Ardmore artists as an instrument to educate the community in a manner similar to that in which folktales have traditionally been used to instruct society.

Folktales

According to Canonici (1996: 66), prior to the introduction of literacy, the dramatic re-enactment of folktales was considered the most powerful medium to teach people what to think and how to think. William Bascom defines folktales as 'set in any time and any place, and in this sense they are almost timeless and placeless' (Canonici 1996: 88) and can therefore be applied to contemporary situations. A traditional repertoire of images and structural elements available to the storyteller are utilised to produce a story incorporating the traditional and the new. Stories represent the way in which people explain reality to themselves. As artistic representations of life, folktales challenge and potentially initiate change.

Canonici (1996: 67) writes that '[f]olktales are 'images of private conduct and public morality' '. Social and moral values are taught and absorbed through emotional involvement of the audience in the performance / narrative / imagery of folktales. The audience realises the outcome of specific behaviour by following the images in the story. The more the audience identifies with the character the greater the likelihood of their

recognising themselves in the story and learning from the message conveyed. This potential to instigate action through narrative is evident in the images used in the AIDS-related Ardmore ceramics. The visual imagery transcends the boundaries of language and literature in the education and communication of a global audience.

According to Canonici (1996: 56) folktales consist of a range of tale-types namely human, animal, ogre and trickster. Narrative themes are connected with the tale-type. A human story deals with themes such as jealousy, love and problems of inheritance whilst animal stories touch on issues associated with the lack of basic needs such as hunger and disease. Canonici (1993: 54) comments that the customary tales told over the years in a community mirror the society in which they were created. A narrative is considered to be a product of the society from which it originates and a message to the society to which it is directed. The performer / artist / narrator of the story assume the function of entertainer, social critic and educationist. Folktales aim to entertain and instruct simultaneously, even when the moral is not openly stated (Canonici 1993: 155-156). Adaptations are made by the narrators to ensure that the tale remains relevant to their audience, reflecting on contemporary society as opposed to events of the past (Canonici 1993: 54). This suggestion is significant when discussing the types of narratives depicted in Ardmore ceramics. The images document stories relevant to immediate events taking place in the community. Often the recorded experiences are identified by individuals outside of the community, experiences they can relate to on a personal level such as the death of a family member, conflict and / or exposure to the AIDS pandemic.

Canonici's list of commonly used folktale themes are summarised as follows (1996: 178):

- Transformation but not the destruction of life
- The responsibility of each person for their own actions
- Discrimination between good and evil, powerful and weak, rich and poor
- Central importance of marriage and family
- Anyone must be prepared to sacrifice and suffer

In researching the Ardmore ceramic narratives I have found that the above themes do appear in the visual stories, specifically those commenting on HIV/AIDS. The ceramic narratives address the artists' attempts to transform individual behaviour by providing instructive information via visual imagery and educating individuals to accept

responsibility for their actions. It appears that the didactic quality of the visual narratives is reminiscent of that of traditional folktales thus indicating that the artists, whether on a conscious or subconscious level, have drawn on their 'lived experiences' and exposure to folktales to visually create their stories.

Human Folktales

Canonici (1993: 71-72) defines human tales as those concerned with human vices which tend to instruct on social behaviour, while satirising the weaknesses of human society (Figure 22). Generally the faults that are severely criticised are greed, gluttony, jealousy and stupidity.



The Monster AIDS Pot is an example of how the human folktale has been incorporated into ceramic narrative to make a visual comment on human behaviour. This work is a culmination of the artist's fears, concerns and anxieties regarding the impact of HIV/AIDS on his fellow artists, family and community. The direct approach of the narrative has the effect of challenging the viewer to recognise the enormity of the crisis.

Figure 22: Detail: R. Gwala. *The Monster AIDS Pot*, 2005.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 56.5 x 22.5cm.

Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

In addition, human folktales are defined as follows:

In 'human' stories the humans are real people (not representations of character types) in a world partly real and partly fantastic, who are required to interact with strange creatures and monsters as well as with one another...The human stories seem to express the concern of man's sense of insecurity, his anxieties, fears and doubts. They are serious and complex, employ symbolism and present polarities, and could be regarded as philosophical statements (Canonici 1993: 70-71).

In his writing Canonici (1993: 91) explains that the folktale serves a variety of functions within society. Folktales illustrate the consensus of opinion on which the social interaction of a society is based (Canonici 1993: 156). The manner in which individuals within a community interact is reflected in the narratives of the community. Andrew Sokhela uses his ceramic narratives to comment on human behaviour thus making the audience aware of the community standpoint on various societal issues (Figure 23).

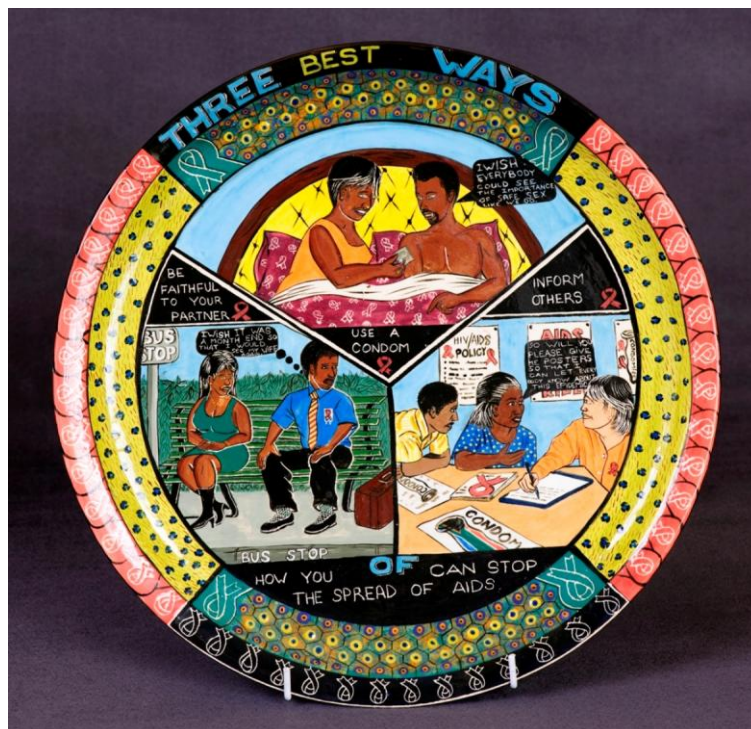


Figure 23: A. Sokhela. *Three Best Ways*, 2001.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.
Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

Canonici (1993: 91) writes that folktales give an idea of the social structures existing in a community and identify the individuals fulfilling specific roles. Folktales reveal the individual and social concerns of the group and consequently bind people in a common unity. These elements of folktales are reflected in the Ardmore narratives demonstrating the anthropological importance of folktales and visual narratives in understanding the workings of the associated community. Each storytelling method is highly personal and influenced by the individual's experiences in a way that is comparable with individual artworks produced by an artist. Canonici (1993: 91) comments that a story is adapted to meet the existing needs of the audience. A shift of emphasis in the performance is made to

please or reproach a specific person in the audience or to support a political line. The folktale therefore becomes a type of social commentary, in the same way that visual narrative does by depicting imagery reflecting on contemporary events and social issues.

‘Collective Memories’ and ‘Tradition’

Canonici (1996: 2) writes that population groups identify themselves according to language, customs, culture and achievements of great leaders. The aforementioned identifiers form part of the ‘collective memories’ of a group which are passed on generationally via traditions recorded either orally or in a written format. In addition to the verbal and written format, I would include the visual image as an additional method of documentation to record the ‘collective memories’ of people. An example of visual documentation is evident in the narrative artworks of Ardmore. In certain works the artists have illustrated various narratives relating to themes of Zulu culture and history to record the ‘collective memories’ of the local people. The images commemorate the historical achievements of previous leaders and the Zulu nation and are used as a means of conveying stories of greatness from one generation to the next.

Canonici (1996: 2) defines ‘tradition’ as the handing down, passing on and entrusting of what has been experienced and achieved in the history of the community. Since tradition is not a static concept, the passing on of a tradition is usually integrated with personal experiences making the tradition relevant to contemporary society. In this case I am referring to tradition in the sense of storytelling; tradition influences the types of stories told, how the stories are told, the characters represented and the symbols incorporated. I feel that tradition in conjunction with sources of inspiration provided by Halsted-Berning (Weaving 2009: 12) influence the production of Ardmore’s contemporary ceramic narratives.

Canonici (1996: 3) quotes Vansina in defining tradition:

Tradition calls for a constant *return to the sources*. An oral text must be listened to, learned by heart, inwardly digested like a poem and carefully examined to make it yield up *its many different meanings*, contained in an alien system of ideas and images, since the body of tradition is **the collective memory of society** which *is explaining itself to itself*. Learn how a society thinks before trying to interpret its traditions (Canonici 1996: 3).

Vansina's ideas on tradition are important when analysing Ardmore narratives. The narratives depicted contain elements specific to the collective memories of the artist's community. These elements have been passed on through generations to the artist, remaining within the artist's subconscious to be expressed via a visual language. The artist's personal experiences have an important influence on how the elements are re-interpreted. The re-interpretation allows the artist to communicate traditional elements in a contemporary manner via visual imagery creating a relevant narrative appealing to today's audience.

Canonici (1996: 3-4) explains that oral traditions are forms of verbal art using language and gesture. 'Language is a symbolic means of human communication, as it employs symbols (= words) to describe things, facts and events in the 'real world' '. Canonici's explanation leads me to believe that visual imagery is a form of language utilising signs, images, patterns and colour to communicate a message symbolically. Particular symbols are chosen to illustrate the artist's 'lived experiences' of his 'real' world. According to Canonici (1996: 4) verbal language 'is used to communicate life events, personal and communal experiences and concerns, human struggles, fears and successes.' Similarly visual language is used to communicate 'lived experiences', make social comments and interact with an audience. However, visual language can take communication a step further in that the reading of an image is not limited to a particular language group. Images illustrating human fear and the primary need for safety, shelter, means to live, education, health and food appeal to people globally irrespective of language or nationality. Images transcend boundaries and are therefore capable of global communication.

Canonici (1996: 6) writes that the verbal artist is inspired by the community and their problems, and uses language and images as a means of creating a meaningful experience for the audience. The artist acts as the 'voice' of the people, demonstrating their needs, fears and social comments through performance (Figure 24 and 25). In my opinion Canonici's sentiments are reflected in Ardmore's ceramic narratives. The artists assume the 'voice' of the local community illustrating their needs, apprehension and opinions. The artists draw on their 'lived experiences', the experiences of others, individual opinions and social comments to create a visual representation of a community.



Figure 24: W. Nxumalo. *Believe in Me*, c2001.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.



Nxumalo's *Believe in Me* emphasises individual and collective fears in the face of the unknown 'ghost'.

Figure 25: Detail of W. Nxumalo. *Believe in Me*, c2001.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

Narrative: Education and Entertainment

According to Canonici (1996: 53), in traditional societies performance was used to convey knowledge and educate the community. The performance consisted of three levels necessary for education: 'the cognitive level, whereby knowledge was imparted; the emotional level, whereby each member became emotionally involved and imbued in the

community spirit; and the behavioural level, whereby the individual was expected to apply the community's ethos to every aspect of his / her life' (Canonici 1996: 53).

Similarly Ardmore ceramics has assumed a didactic role in disseminating knowledge and raising awareness via visual imagery. This is evident in the work of Wonderboy Nxumalo, Andrew Sokhela and Punch Shabalala amongst others. I believe that the three levels required for education, as mentioned by Canonici, are met by Ardmore's visual narratives. The visual narratives provide educational information in the form of a story thus meeting the cognitive level required for education. The artists appeal to the viewer on an emotional level as the characters portrayed are derived from personal experience or the 'lived experiences' of others, thus making the characters more believable. Identification with the characters increases the viewer's response to the narrative and the greater the likelihood of change at a behavioural level.

Canonici (1996: 64) suggests that the storytelling performance serves as a 'communicative experience leading to education in a broad sense: education of feelings with regard to community life; intellectual or cognitive education based on the observation of nature and of human behaviour; moral and ethical education that informs individual behaviour.' I believe that the narrative in Ardmore ceramics aims to provide a communicative educational experience for the viewer. The images used are emotive appealing to the audience to observe the narrative from a personal standpoint. In recognising that the characters represent 'real' people, the artists attempt to educate the audience to show greater empathy towards those experiencing misfortune in their community.

Sokhela's plate *Three Best Ways* (Figures 23 and 26-28) is an instructive tool illustrating three important methods of educating others in preventing the spread of AIDS. Each scene (Figures 26-28) presents a familiar situation which many people identify with. The element of familiarity encourages the viewer to interact with the image and recognise the informative message the artist aims to communicate.



Figure 26: Detail: A. Sokhela. *Three Best Ways*, 2001.
 Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.
 Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.



Figure 27: Detail: A. Sokhela. *Three Best Ways*, 2001.
 Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.
 Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.



Figure 28: Detail: A. Sokhela. *Three Best Ways*, 2001.
 Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.
 Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

According to Canonici (1996: 170-171), the ‘milieu’ or setting of a narrative refers to where the story takes place, the time or historical period in which the events occur and the social circumstances giving rise to these events. The ‘milieu’ establishes the cultural context of the story. Social circumstances illustrate the way of life, beliefs and traditions of the characters depicted in the narrative. Canonici (1996: 177) writes that the theme / central idea of a narrative is conveyed by all the elements making up that story. This central idea unifies the narrative giving meaning to the story. A theme can be used to express the philosophy of life, the beliefs, customs, taboos, fears and traditions of a society as represented by the narrator and the target audience (Canonici 1996: 177).

I believe that the role of the artist is interchangeable with that of narrator and performer in fulfilling a number of functions, namely entertaining, critiquing and educating. This is evident in the ceramic narratives which are created to appeal to viewers in a similar fashion that tales appeal to an audience. The artist’s narratives act as critiques of current society, often providing humorous reflection on events the artist has emphasised as areas for concern. This approach encourages the viewer to interact with the narrative and take from the story the message the artist wishes to express. According to Canonici (1996: 178) folktales aim to entertain and instruct simultaneously; entertainment is the means and education is the end result. The power of the story, the clarity of the message and the

ability of the audience to identify with the situation influences the success of the visual narrative. Therefore narrative should be entertaining and engaging in order for the intended message to have an impact on the viewer.

Fables

Canonici (1993: 65-66) refers to fables as animal folktales ('Ezezinyamazane'), making use of animals as general representatives of human characteristics. Fables are widely used to represent human society in the guise of animals. The animals are not used to signify a specific individual but rather assume the function of universal human characters in a technique referred to as 'distancing and removing' (Canonici 1993: 65). This practice allows for the freedom of the criticism of society, witty social satire, moral education and entertainment (Canonici 1993: 66). Animals are used to metaphorically represent human behaviour, criticising social and personal weaknesses in a humorous manner (Canonici 1996: 88). The following quote (Canonici 1993: 66) re-iterates this train of thought; ' [a]nimal' stories are distinct from 'human' stories in that although the animals behave in every way like humans in the real world, they represent not individual people but human character types. The animal stories may be described as comic satires: they give a critical yet tolerant and humorous assessment of human nature' (Canonici 1993: 66).



Figure 29: P. Shabalala. *Monkey Candlesticks*, 2008.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 39 x 20cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.
Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

The *Monkey Candle Sticks* (Figures 29 and 30) made by Sfiso Mvelase and painted by Punch Shabalala, are examples of how animal folktales are used in a contemporary, comical manner for moral education.

Canonici (1993: 66) explains that '[f]olktales do not look for what is 'animal' in man, but rather for what is 'human' in animals.' Animal folktales are used to represent the daily problems and difficulties experienced by humans (Canonici 1993: 68). Ceramic plates painted by Nxumalo exhibit a fable-like quality where the monkey assumes human characteristics in narratives commenting on HIV/AIDS. The objective viewpoint of the monkey allows the artist to make a critical statement regarding society without pointing fingers at specific people.

Canonici (1996: 91) lists the following animals as commonly representing human qualities in Zulu tales (cross references to Ardmore works mentioned in my text are in square brackets):

Ihhashi - the horse - (appearing in rather modern tales only) strong and fast, but his strength is exploited. [Scott 1998: 55-56]

Inyoka - the snake - betrays even his friends, as he intends to bite and kill. The python is often, however, a benevolent doctor who knows the greatest medicines. [Scott 1998: 31]

Impungushe - the jackal - as sly, selfish and greedy; a recent import into Zulu folklore.

Impisi - the hyena - as a glutton, a simpleton and a coward. The unsuccessful trickster in pan-African folklore, but rather a recent import in Zulu folktales.

Indlovu - the elephant - as a slow and ponderous character, serious and dutiful, but lazy and pretentious at times. [Scott 1998: 44, 53, 58 and 70]

Ibhubesi - the lion - strong and powerful, but foolishly self-confident for his own good. [Scott 1998: 26, 34 and 36]

Imvubu - the hipo [thus] - as slow and stupid. [URL 1]

Impunzi - the springbok: he is kind and carries people to safety. [URL 2]

Imbila - the lazy dassie or rock rabbit.

Imfene - the baboon - very fast and active, but lazy and stupid at the end and easily taken in by the trickster. [Scott 1998: 79]

Ingwenya - the crocodile: cruel, sadistic and foolish, easily persuaded to do stupid things. [Scott 1998: 31 and 56]

Ufudu - the tortoise - as a slow, steady and wise old man, capable of outwitting even the trickster. [URL 3]

Unogwaja - the pan-African trickster hare. [URL 4]

Uchakide - the slender mongoose, the Zulu star trickster (Canonici 1996: 91).



An example of how monkeys have been given human characteristics to fulfil a didactic role in educational narratives.

Figure 30: Detail: P. Shabalala. *Monkey Candlesticks*, 2008.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 39 x 20cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

Generally the most commonly used animals in Ardmore narratives are the monkey (Figure 30) and to a lesser degree the zebra. Shabalala mentions that monkeys and zebra were used to depict irresponsible sexual behaviour amongst humans. Due to the taboo nature of topics such as sexual intercourse and HIV/AIDS, it was initially considered necessary for the artists to use animals to represent human behaviour when discussing sensitive subjects (Shabalala in Weaving 2009: 17). However, Halsted-Berning's encouragement of open discussion of sensitive topics amongst Ardmore artists has prompted them to use the human figure in narratives dealing with such themes (Weaving 2009: 13).

The Image and its Role

This section discusses the role of the image in visual narrative and attempts to identify the various factors influencing the type of image chosen.

Patricia Leavy (2009: 215) writes that one should not underestimate the power of the image and the role it plays in society. Thought-provoking images are capable of capturing people's attention in powerful ways. Images can be used by artists in a highly emotive and politically evocative manner to draw the audience's attention to relevant issues (Leavy 2009: 12). An example of the power of the image is evident in the *Monster AIDS Pot* (Figure 31), a ceramic work illustrating the fear of the unknown.



Figure 31: Detail: R. Gwala. *The Monster AIDS Pot*, 2005.
Earthenware painted with underglaze, 56.5 x 22.5cm.

Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

The use of the image in Ardmore ceramic narrative illustrates the artist's perspective of what is happening in society. Through images the artist comments on various social and

political events making their views known to the public. On contemplation of the artwork, the visual comments can potentially initiate critical thought in the viewer. The cartoon format of Andrew Sokhela's plates provides an example of how the artist presents his view of human behaviour via a story (Figure 32). The storyline is straightforward and readily followed by the viewer, thus enabling interaction of a greater number of people with the artwork. A high level of literacy is not required for the viewer to understand the message which is conveyed via images. The images utilised are often drawn from the artist's 'lived experience', representing observations of daily life and events as experienced within the community. Leavy (2009: 215) suggests that visual imagery represents a created perspective of the artist as opposed to a 'window onto the world'. In other words images are chosen subjectively by artists to illustrate their observations and opinions of a situation as opposed to objective images which would provide a neutral depiction. Visual narratives depicted from a personal viewpoint increase the humanitarian angle of the story thus appealing to the viewer to interact with the characters on a more personal level. Sokhela's clear ceramic narratives are educational, extending beyond the boundary of language thus emphasising the potential of the image to be far-reaching and influential.



Figure 32: A. Sokhela. *Youths New Struggle*, 2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

According to Leavy (2009: 216) cultural norms and values, which change over time as they are contested and negotiated, shape the production of visual art. Visual art can encourage people to critically assess certain aspects of society such as behaviour patterns and societal beliefs in order to promote social change. Leavy (2009: 220) suggests that the ability of images to raise the levels of consciousness in viewers is often greater than what is achievable via text. The power of visual images to focus the viewer's attention on critical issues is immediate. Visual images and cultural symbolism are used to re-imagine shared images in a new context and correspondingly cause people to re-assess situations from a different perspective (Leavy 2009: 220). Ardmore visual narratives provide examples of images used to increase the awareness of the viewers and bring about social change. This is evident in the ceramic narratives recording the effect of HIV/AIDS on the community. The images document human behaviour, illustrate the information necessary to educate people and commemorate the lives of artists who have been affected by the disease.

Ardmore narratives exhibit a 'universality' of theme, a term discussed by Kopping (2006: 7) in relation to Nxumalo's painted narratives. She states that although the ceramic artworks of Nxumalo are created in a specific social context and influenced by a particular cultural heritage and 'lived experience', the documented themes appearing in his narratives are universal in form, content and symbolism. Kopping's ideas on 'universality' of theme can be extended to include the narratives of other Ardmore artists, specifically relating to the topic of HIV/AIDS. Kopping (2006: 29-31) feels that through Nxumalo's work we see the role of narrator and educator as performed by the artist in the hope of imparting practical advice and knowledge to the community. Nxumalo's domestic plate forms fulfill a didactic function in conveying important messages via image and text to the viewer.

In connection with the concept of 'universality' of theme, Marschall (in Weaving 2009: 7) writes that many artists attempt to develop clear signals and deliver unmistakable messages using specific imagery. Mass popularisation of AIDS symbols and the development of a strong associative link between the symbol and message results in the symbol successfully conveying a message on its own. 'Symbols perform an important communicative function in certain societies and cultures where subjects such as safe sex, promiscuity and the use of condoms are banned from public and private discussion' (Marschall in Weaving 2009: 7).

The ‘universality’ of theme in addressing HIV/AIDS issues continues in the narratives of Andrew Sokhela. The story illustrated on Sokhela’s plate, *The Brutall Killer [thus]* (Figure 33), provides insight into present-day human relationships. Sokhela uses a straightforward cartoon strip format to emphasise the central scenes of the narrative. The format is easy to follow and the images speak for themselves without relying on text to convey the story. The comic strip in visual art has become popular in presenting a familiar visual language readily comprehended by a diverse audience (Marschall in Weaving 2009:7). The appeal of the comic strip lies in the concise, direct narrative depicting human figures interacting in everyday situations.

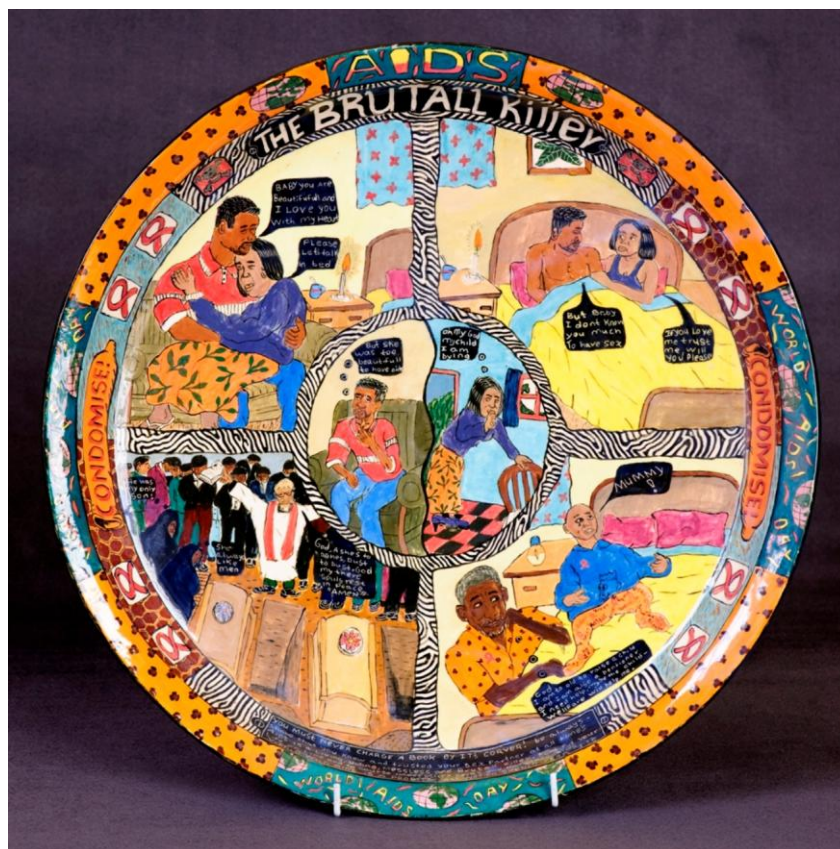


Figure 33: A. Sokhela. *The Brutall Killer [thus]*, 2001.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 38 x 38cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

Sokhela’s works are examples of Ardmore’s move to use human as opposed to animal figures when discussing sensitive issues. His rational approach to the topic impresses upon the audience a sense of reality of human frailty and vulnerability. Sokhela’s story (Figure 33) is set within a border of key images namely condoms, red AIDS ribbons and ‘skull and cross-bone’ icons. The key images serve as visual summaries of the narrative

emphasising important factors that the viewer should take note of. The images function in a manner similar to that of key words in that they provide a basic outline of the narrative content. In addition to the use of key images, the setting of the narrative assists the viewer in identifying with and understanding the social circumstances and lifestyle that the characters are exposed to. The 'setting' of a narrative is defined by Cohen (in Canonici 1993: 146) as '...the social, moral and religious code' whereby the characters operate. If the viewer is able to recognise and understand these 'codes', he / she is better able to appreciate why the characters behave in a particular way.

The capacity for the ceramic narrative to appeal to the viewer and fulfil the aim of the artist does not rely primarily on the images used. In discussing literary works, Canonici (1996: 172) suggests that their success '...is judged by the author's ability to produce a good story (plot), to convey a clear message (theme) in a good style, and to create images of life-like people who move and act like real people in real life...The more life-like a character is, the more easily can the spectators / readers identify with him or her'. Although Canonici evaluates literary works, I feel that the same parameters, whereby he determines the success of literary narratives, can be applied to determine the effectiveness of ceramic narratives. Therefore the quality of the plot, theme and life-like nature of the characters contribute to the success of the narrative. If these narrative elements are believable, the viewer is more likely to respond to the story and interact more completely with the message conveyed.

Image and Meaning

Leavy (2009: 215) points out that although visual imagery is used to represent an experience or event, the final artwork does not necessarily produce a single unified response from the audience. The images in an artwork evoke multiple meanings because of the various experiences influencing the artist's choice of image and viewer's reaction to the image. Visual images are used by the artist to portray a particular 'lived experience' and / or make a social comment. The images chosen are those the artist relates to and feels are best suited to convey their thoughts. However, since the viewer brings their 'lived experiences' to the interpretation of the artwork, they respond to the images in a way that makes sense and is meaningful to them and not necessarily in a manner anticipated by the artist. Jeanne Prinsloo (in De Lange, Mitchell and Stuart 2007: 5) adds that the meaning-

making process viewers use to read images, is socially and culturally embedded. The reading of images is influenced by the social and cultural framework people access; artists, educators and researchers therefore need to identify this framework and recognise how this shapes / limits the reader's interpretations (Prinsloo in De Lange, Mitchell and Stuart 2007: 5).

Leavy's list of visual images (Leavy 2009: 215-216) are summarised as follows:

- Unique (to the artist)
- Able to evoke particular emotional and instinctive responses from viewers. A response will be evoked irrespective of whether the viewer identifies directly with the image. The response may not be that which the artist was hoping for, as this is dependent on the 'lived experiences' influencing the viewer's interpretation of the visual narrative.
- Typically retained in the subconscious without engaging the same conscious interpretive process when dealing with text. The viewer is able to recall an image more readily, especially powerful imagery. Flashbacks to the image may be experienced in a manner similar to recalling a word although not a passage of text. Potent narrative images can assist in teaching and bringing about social change as various elements depicted can cause the viewer to recall the image and consequently the related message.
- Selected to represent an event and are stored in the memory where they are readily available for mental recall. Myths, fables and tales retold over the years have significant images identifying the story as such. Thus when particular images are depicted, viewers who have been exposed to the relevant myths / fables will recognise the image as pertaining to those specific tales. The viewer will respond to the image and the message associated with the image in a manner similar to that which the artist intended.
- Powerful, lasting and processed differently to text and sound. The viewer does not require high literacy levels to understand the message the artist is attempting to convey. Visual language, unlike text, does not create a language barrier limiting the number of people reached. Images are open to individual interpretation as opposed to a written document where greater parameters within the text determine how the text is interpreted. Freedom of interpretation assists the individual in storing and recalling the messages decoded (Leavy 2009: 215-216).

The visual conventions and expectations of a community assist the artist in determining the type of image suitable for the narrative. The artist must consider whether the depicted image is offensive, whether culturally specific moral standards have been accounted for and ensure that community sensitivities are respected. Often viewers respond more strongly to easily identifiable scenes such as those illustrating ordinary people's lives. The realism of the image assists the viewer in engaging completely with the message (Marschall in Weaving 2009: 5). The aim of the artist is to engage with the audience via a visual language. This encourages the viewer to interact with the image, reflect on what is seen, discover and personally interpret the conveyed message (Marschall in Weaving 2009: 5).

Images produce an array of emotions and responses. Deterrent images confront the viewers with a formidable reality effective in prompting behaviour change. However, Marschall (in Weaving 2009: 5) suggests that deterrent images are often stereotypical and not true reflections of 'lived experience'. Shock tactics in the context of South African society and culture are often counterproductive as the viewer rejects the objectionable scenes instead of learning from them. This 'othering' of people through the use of deterrent imagery removes them from a reality with which the viewer can identify Marschall (in Weaving 2009: 5). Research proposes that the use of motivational positive images is more effective in reaching viewers and encouraging engagement with the image and message. Positive images assist in the facilitation of open debate regarding sensitive and controversial issues (Marschall in Weaving 2009: 5).

In order for a visual narrative to be considered successful, the images chosen should fulfil a series of criteria outlined as follows:

- The image must be successful in publicly representing a confrontational issue that many people avoid discussing
- The visual signifiers utilised should be of a sensitive and inoffensive nature promoting interaction with the narrative
- The chosen signifiers should be effective in conveying a comprehensible message
- The visual images must emphasise the sense of urgency and seriousness of the issue
- It is necessary for the narrative to emphasise the human aspect of the issue thus initiating an empathetic understanding as opposed to presenting bland, impersonal educational messages (in Weaving 2009: 6).

A single image can serve many purposes and therefore plays multiple, complex roles in art. The placement of an image in a range of settings allows the image to take on different meanings depending on the viewer and the viewing site (Sturken and Cartwright in Weaving 2009: 6). 'Images enable the art-makers to persuade others to either share or reject certain views and values. The capacity of the image to affect the viewer depends on the greater cultural meanings invoked and the social, political and cultural contexts in which the images are viewed' (Sturken and Cartwright in Weaving 2009: 6).

The meanings evoked by an artwork are influenced by the viewer's ability to relate to the visual documentation of the story. This occurs irrespective of whether the story illustrated is of immediate relevance to the viewer, i.e. representing daily occurrences tangible to the viewer, or whether the documented stories are of a historical nature. Leavy (2009: 215) suggests that narratives of a greater socio-historical context deal with details recognisable by different people and therefore evoke a response in a varied target audience. The responses differ depending on how the viewer relates to the images. A positive or negative reaction is determined by the type of 'lived experiences' the viewer draws on when decoding the narratives.

Meanings are derived from a complex social relationship involving the image, artist, how the viewer interprets / experiences the image and the context in which the image is viewed. An image does not generate a single meaning. Multiple meanings are created each time an image is examined. Each viewer creates his own meaning from the image and therefore a universal message is rarely conveyed. Since personal experiences and associations influence the viewer's deciphering of an image, the meaning intended may not be what the viewer discovers. This does not necessarily mean that the image is incorrectly interpreted or that the message is unsuccessfully conveyed (Sturken and Cartwright in Weaving 2009: 7).

In addition to personal and social influences, I believe that the context in which an artwork is observed affects how the viewer reads the narrative image. A ceramic vessel or plate exhibited in a cabinet or on a plinth is elevated to a level beyond that of mere functionality. The item is removed from the familiar domestic realm when displayed in a formal gallery space. The unfamiliar setting may initiate feelings of alienation and intimidation inhibiting the viewer's interaction with the object. Thus the viewer may read the narrative as

relevant to others as opposed to themselves. The type of display space chosen must therefore be carefully considered to ensure a successful narrative presentation.

Visual Narrative, Anthropology and Ardmore

In this section I aim to investigate the potential of Ardmore visual narratives to be considered as useful anthropological research tools.

Leavy (2009: 216) proposes that all art, regardless of medium, is a product of the time and place in which it is created. She suggests that the artist's purpose resembles that of an actor functioning within society. The artist's work is a result of the influences of 'lived experience', family life and childhood tales, community life, education, and the political situation of the country. These circumstances influence the type of narratives created to document immediate and historical events. As an actor narrates a story through words and actions, so the artist assumes the role of storyteller within the community narrating stories via images.

According to Leavy (2009: 216) many artists use their work to document personal experiences, 'lived experiences' of others and significant community events. Leavy (2009: 215) compares visual art production with the process of 'journaling' and views visual art as the documentation of 'lived experiences' using imagery as opposed to text. The visual recording of 'lived experiences' and contemporary society provides useful information to the anthropologist. Artists use select images to reference the essential components of the narrative they wish to document. Since minimal text is used unambiguous images are required to successfully convey information.

Leavy (2009: 216) believes that visual art can assist in anthropological research as art functions as a record-keeper and communicative device. This is evident in Ardmore narratives where visual images are used to document human behaviour, community concerns and events (Figures 34 and 35). Observation of the images enables the viewer / researcher to learn more about community life, how individuals interact socially and the challenges faced by individuals within the community.



Figure 34: Detail: P. Gumbi. *Tribute to 6 Ardmore Artists*, c2006. Earthenware painted with underglaze. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

This narrative piece documents the type of work Ardmore produces, the fact that each piece is hand painted and that the underglaze paints are decanted into ice trays instead of using artist's palettes. This piece functions as a record-keeper and commemorative device.



Figure 35: P. Gumbi. *Tribute to 6 Ardmore Artists*, c2006. Earthenware painted with underglaze. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

This tableau pays tribute to 6 artists, recording their role in the Studio. Each individual is named and shown to be performing a different function ranging from painting animal figures to producing domestic ware such as tea pots, bowls and large vessels. Studio life is presented as a social affair, artists working together in an amicable manner. Note the mugs of tea on the table, paintbrushes and cell phone on the bench.

From 1957 anthropologists were encouraged to use visual art in research. The images recorded by the artists provided a significant source of information assisting researchers in determining various patterns relating to individuals and society (Leavy 2009: 216). The

anthropological role of ceramic art is evident in Ardmore narratives where artists capture contemporary society in their visual stories. The realistic images comment on family life, behaviour, relationships, living conditions, mode of transport, dress, social interaction and community concerns to name a few. In this case, visual art is able to provide further information relating to the study of humankind by documenting ‘lived experiences’ (Figure 21).

Visual artworks act as commemorative devices recording historical events and remembering the lives of people who have played an important role in their community (Figure 36). This is evident in the Ardmore commemorative plates. In these works the artists are honoured for the contributory roles they have played in the local and global success of the Studio.



Figure 36: A. Sokhela. *Wonderboy Nxumalo*, date uncertain: c2009.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

Leavy (2009: 216) writes that ‘art acts as a barometer for change in society’ and that art is labelled as ‘...’public objects’ through which symbolic meaning is conveyed and ‘unconscious associations’ created.’ The term ‘barometer’ can be used to indicate an atmosphere or mood referring to public opinion or the artist’s point of view, which is reflected in the artworks.

Leavy (2009: 218) views visual art as a product of society appearing universally and serving as a significant source of information about the social world. The images depicted in the artworks reflect the artists' views on societal issues and serve as a record of community life. Generally the issues discussed in a visual format are those pertinent to the community / society at a specific period in time. They are issues which the artist wishes to draw attention to through their artwork. Evocative images are often used to focus the audience's attention on the artwork raising people's awareness of the situation in their community and encouraging open discussion of taboo subjects (Figure 37).



This ceramic piece is a prime example of how powerful imagery has been used by an artist to make a visual statement. The provocative imagery demands that the viewer take notice of the narrative outlined in the work.

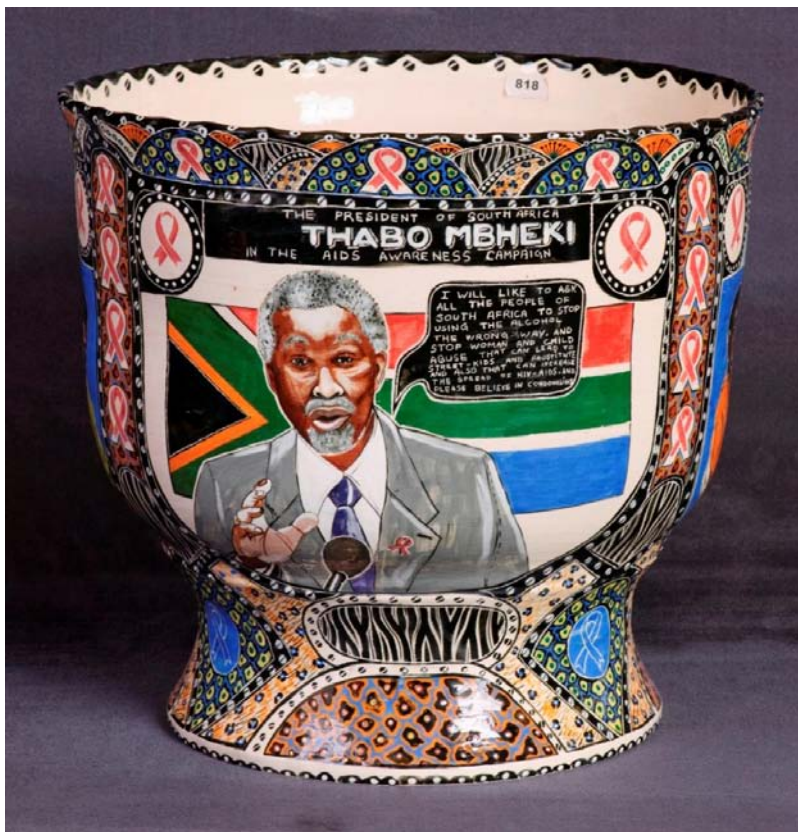
Figure 37: Detail: R. Gwala. *The Monster AIDS Pot*, 2005.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 56.5 x 22.5cm.

Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

Visual art has the capacity to provide significant information regarding the following (Leavy 2009: 218):

- Cultural aspects of social life.
- Economic and political structures.
- Identity issues at global, national, group and individual levels (Figures 38 and 39).



This vessel is an example of how ceramic narrative has the potential to document information regarding the society in which it was produced.

Figure 38: A. Sokhela. *Thabo Mbheki Vessel [thus]*, 2008.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 36 x 48cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

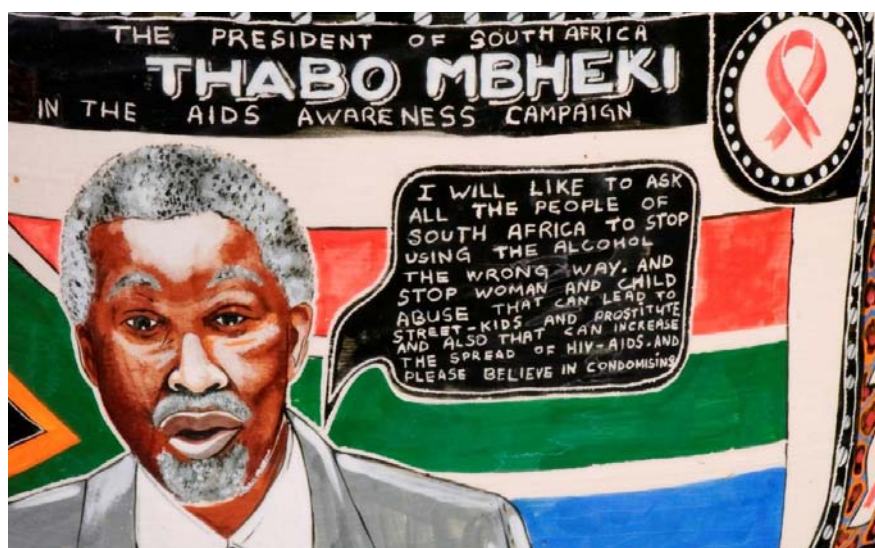


Figure 39: Detail: A. Sokhela. *Thabo Mbheki Vessel [thus]*, 2008.

Earthenware painted with underglaze, 36 x 48 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

According to Leavy (2009: 218-219) visual art enables individuals to access oppressed voices initially prevented from participating in communal historical representation. Leavy (2009: 219-220) comments that certain groups of people were under-represented in art forms and therefore unable to identify with the visual narratives of the time. There was very little opportunity for people to recognise the 'self' in art. Nowadays individuals are able to realistically document their 'lived experiences' and represent their community from an insider's point of view as opposed to having their experiences represented by others in a stereotypical, idealistic manner. In her writings Leavy (2009: 226) emphasises that human experiences cannot be understood separately from the environments in which they occur. This comment reiterates the importance of having an individual represent their 'lived experiences' to achieve an accurate representation of the environment in which these experiences occur. Images are used by formerly misrepresented people to illustrate the reality of their social experiences. Therefore visual art forms are useful in anthropological study as they provide information regarding human experiences of the time as well as the environments in which these experiences took place.

Leavy (2009: 216) writes that art is an effective medium used to convey political ideas, concepts, beliefs and other information about the culture in which it is produced (Figures 38 and 39). Visual art can be used as a vehicle for transmitting ideologies and is effective in challenging, dislodging and transforming outdated beliefs and stereotypes (Leavy 2009: 216). Visual art is capable of promoting a dialogue between the viewer and the visual narrative to cultivate an understanding of the comments made by the artist in their artwork. The ability of an artwork to facilitate conversation is important especially when the visual narrative deals with sensitive issues not readily discussed. Often emotional responses are evoked by the narratives initiating dialogue between the viewer, the artwork and amongst viewers. By connecting people on emotional and instinctual levels, artistic forms of representation facilitate empathy, a necessary precondition for challenging harmful stereotypes (Leavy 2009: 14).

Since artworks have the potential to generate dialogues amongst viewers, visual narratives are useful in encouraging individuals to discuss taboo subjects. This is evident in the ceramic narratives created by Ardmore artists for the *Ardmore Positive* exhibition, in an attempt to overcome the stigma and the stereotypical character types associated with the disease. The narratives provide methods useful for unsettling prevailing stereotypical ideas

of who is infected and why. The artists draw on their 'lived experiences' and those shared by members of their community to illustrate realistic scenes which viewers can identify with. Since the viewer can recognise familiar events in the narratives, they are able to initiate a dialogue between themselves and the artist's visual story. The aim of the dialogue is to encourage the viewer to understand the meaning behind the image and the story. The images induce the viewer to respond in a particular manner depending on the 'lived experiences' they recall from memory when interpreting various visual narratives. The artist does not direct meanings to the viewer via their artwork, but encourages the individual to question how the work makes them feel, what emotions the work evokes and what thoughts the work reveals to the viewer (Leavy 2009: 17).

Leavy (2009: 219) believes that the transformative power of visual art is capable of resisting and dislodging stereotypical ways of thinking. Ardmore Studio has assumed this belief in the way that they use ceramic narratives to educate the community and initiate change. Visual arts are a powerful form of social and political resistance in that art has the capacity to represent oppositional ideologies in an unobtrusive manner (Leavy 2009: 216). I believe that Ardmore artists have successfully used the unobtrusive quality of visual art to create visual narratives discussing potentially confrontational taboo subjects. Ardmore Studio has effectively used ceramic narratives to increase the public's awareness of pertinent issues.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 of this dissertation served to discuss the term ‘narrative’ and provided the reader with a general understanding of the origins and purposes of narrative in art. The empowering capacity of narrative and the transformative potential of art were briefly examined. An outline of the research methodologies was given providing insight into what techniques I used in gathering my research.

Chapter 2 provided a historical overview of ceramic narrative and figurine production. A link was created between eighteenth century ware and contemporary Ardmore narrative ware. It was discovered that initially narrative function was utilised to record a way of life, personal experiences and significant events. Over the years artists continued to employ narrative in ceramics to make social statements and document history. This Chapter concluded that although narrative function has remained essentially the same, narrative content has changed according to contemporary needs. It was established in Chapter 2 that the function of contemporary ceramic narrative was a continuation of the purpose for which it was initially developed.

Chapter 3 gave an overview of Zulu storytelling based on Canonici’s texts. In so doing Ardmore narratives were situated within a historical context and the influential role of traditional folktales on contemporary narratives was determined. The communicative, educational and entertainment function of narrative was discussed with reference to specific Ardmore examples. In this Chapter purpose, meaning and the anthropological role of the image was examined.

Canonici’s texts continue to provide a relevant means of interpretation applicable to contemporary developments in storytelling, as is evident in the ceramic narratives of Ardmore Ceramic Studio.

Glossary

Term	Description
<i>Bisc, bisque</i>	Hard Biscuit. Unglazed fired pottery. (Hamer 1975: 24)
<i>Biscuit</i>	Unglazed fired ware. (Hamer 1975: 24)
<i>Body</i>	The clay part of a pot. A mixture of different clays or the addition of other materials to clay to produce a desired workability and end result. (Hamer 1975: 30)
<i>Creamware</i>	Cream-coloured earthenware. (Hamer 1975: 88)
<i>Earthenware</i>	Pottery made of a porous body, which is waterproofed if necessary by a covering glaze. The softer temperatures below 1100°C are associated with earthenware glazes. (Hamer 1975: 111)
<i>Enamels</i>	A soft-melting glass used to decorate pottery, metal and glass. (Hamer 1975: 112)
<i>Firing</i>	The process of conversion from clay to pot at temperatures of at least 600°C. Clay is changed by firing into a stone-like material which is unaffected by water. This change is referred to as the ceramic change. (Hamer 1975: 121)
<i>Glaze</i>	A layer of glass fused into place on a pottery body. It is applied to the pottery body as a layer of powder, which fuses upon firing forming a compact layer of molten material. (Hamer 1975: 145).
<i>Lambeth</i>	Area of London famous for delftware and salt-glazed ware. (Hamer 1975: 171)

- Lustres* Metallic surface on glaze. The pure metal is deposited on the glaze surface by many different methods but all involve reduction from an oxide or a resin to the pure metal. (Hamer 1975: 187)
- Porcelain* A vitrified, white and translucent ware. Usually fired to 1300°C plus. (Hamer 1975: 229)
- Reduction* The action of taking oxygen away from metal oxides. (Hamer 1975: 248)
- Slip* A homogenous mixture of clay and water used to coat clays giving colour, decoration and a smooth surface. (Hamer 1975: 274)
- Slip-casting* A pottery forming process using liquid clay (slip) and moulds to give the forms. (Hamer 1975: 275)
- Stoneware* A hard, strong and vitrified ware usually fired above 1200°C. (Hamer 1975: 285)
- Throwing* The action of making pots on a rapidly rotating wheel, using the hands and water as a lubricant. (Hamer 1975: 297)
- Turning* Removing unwanted clay to achieve a particular form, thin a pot wall or create a foot-ring. (Hamer 1975: 303)
- Underglaze* Ceramic colours usually applied on a biscuit surface and covered with a transparent glaze. (Hamer 1975: 305)
- Wheel* Potter's wheel. A rotating disc on which pots are formed. Powered either by electricity or by hand or foot (kick wheel). (Hamer 1975: 316)

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Figure 13: N. Brownsword. *Drifting in Circles*, 2003. Combination of thrown, hand-built and cast components using varied clays and glazes. Height: 39cm. Collection: unknown. Photograph: Neil Brownsword, date unknown (Ostermann 2006: 146).

Figure 14: N. Brownsword. *Something So Pure Can't Function No More*, 2003. Combination of thrown, hand-built and cast components using varied clays and glazes. Height: 43cm. Collection: unknown. Photograph: Neil Brownsword, date unknown (Ostermann 2006: 146).

Figure 15: P. Mathieu. *'Disasters' Series, Shoah 1933-1945*, 1999. Slip cast porcelain salt and pepper shakers with enamels and lustres, 15 x 10 x 10cm. Collection: unknown. Photograph: Rory McDonald, date unknown (Ostermann 2006: 199).

Figure 16: P. Mathieu. *'Disasters' Series, W.T.C., 09-11-01*, 2002. Slip cast porcelain salt and pepper shakers with enamels and lustres, 25 x 10 x 10cm. Collection: unknown. Photograph: Rory McDonald, date unknown (Ostermann 2006: 199).

Figure 17: W. Nxumalo. *Can We Talk About It*, c2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

Figure 18: Detail: W. Nxumalo. *Can We Talk About It*, c2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

Figure 19: Detail: W. Nxumalo. *Days of Our Lives*, c2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

Figure 20: W. Nxumalo. *Days of Our Lives*, c2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

Figure 21: A. Sokhela. *Beware AIDS Kills Condomise*, c2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

Figure 22: Detail: R. Gwala. *The Monster AIDS Pot*, 2005. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 56.5 x 22.5cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

Figure 23: A. Sokhela. *Three Best Ways*, 2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

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Figure 25: Detail: W. Nxumalo. *Believe in Me*, c2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

Figure 26: Detail: A. Sokhela. *Three Best Ways*, 2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

Figure 27: Detail: A. Sokhela. *Three Best Ways*, 2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

Figure 28: Detail: A. Sokhela. *Three Best Ways*, 2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

Figure 29: P. Shabalala. *Monkey Candlesticks*, 2008. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 39 x 20cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

Figure 30: Detail: P. Shabalala. *Monkey Candlesticks*, 2008. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 39 x 20cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

Figure 31: Detail: R. Gwala. *The Monster AIDS Pot*, 2005. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 56.5 x 22.5cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

Figure 32: A. Sokhela. *Youths New Struggle*, 2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

Figure 33: A. Sokhela. *The Brutall Killer [thus]*, 2001. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 38 x 38cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

Figure 34: Detail: P. Gumbi. *Tribute to 6 Ardmore Artists*, c2006. Earthenware painted with underglaze. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

Figure 35: P. Gumbi. *Tribute to 6 Ardmore Artists*, c2006. Earthenware painted with underglaze. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2011.

Figure 36: A. Sokhela. *Wonderboy Nxumalo*, date uncertain: c2009. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 32 x 32cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

Figure 37: Detail: R. Gwala. *The Monster AIDS Pot*, 2005. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 56.5 x 22.5cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Sharon Weaving, 2009.

Figure 38: A. Sokhela. *Thabo Mbheki Vessel [thus]*, 2008. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 36 x 48cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

Figure 39: Detail: A. Sokhela. *Thabo Mbheki Vessel [thus]*, 2008. Earthenware painted with underglaze, 36 x 48 cm. Collection: Ardmore Ceramic Studio. Photograph: Roger de la Harpe / Ardmore Ceramic Art, 2009.

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