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My three keywords are coast, transformation and exploring. The focus for the keyword coast is my own interpretation of the barrier between land and sea and how the coast impacts how we behave and act as a result. Transformation suggests the changing of one material into another, therefore changing the purpose and reflecting the relationship with the artist. Exploring is a personal passion that I aim to further investigate. For this keyword I will be reflecting on my own explorations in nature and looking at Cassy McArthur's explorations and how this has impacted her work.

My interpretation of the coast is as the noun "land next to or near the sea" (Soanes & Hawker, 2008, p.183). In essence, the coast is the separation between land and sea, a middle interjectory of land between where you are and where you can see. Looking away from land toward the sea you can see an unachievable distance somewhere distant so far it reaches a horizon. Looking away from the sea you can see land, a sort of home, something familiar somewhere safe. An interruption between the present being and the future being, planted there in the physical form and looking away to a metaphysical form. The coast separates two very different worlds, the world of water and deep darkness from the world of land and light. It is what separates us and connects us to other lands.

There is also the temporary spot in which when the tide goes in and out, neither land nor sea can claim it to be its own. "Here the spatial configurations of surface and depth are in constant flux, which one becoming the other in a continual intensity of motion" (Ryan, 2016, p.1). The ocean is never once the same with the constant fluidity of the moving water. "The sea, a dynamic and fluid space, may afford similar blurring of boundaries and reconfigurations" (Brown & Peters, 2018, p.2001). The coast is never just one place. It is constantly changing. In the first stanza of 'The Sea' by Pablo Neruda (2004), lines 1-3 (cited in Dewdrop, 2021) it reads:

*I need the sea because it teaches me.
I don't know if I learn music or awareness,
if it's a single wave or its vast existence,.*

Neruda's poem suggests that the sea's immensity holds more than what is visible, alluding to a horizon that continually retreats beyond our gaze.

The ocean holds a lot of mystery and uncertainty comparative to the land where everything is visually mapped out. Whatever the ocean may hold is hidden under a shroud of secrecy, only being aware of what might be there when it shows itself and breaks through the surface. The human body being designed for land perceives a certain sense of danger when it comes to the ocean with the power of the water. However, this has not attributed poorly to the relationship between people and the coast. Brown & Peters (2018) state that "... people developed a recreational relationship with the sea that saw increasing numbers visiting beaches" (p.1979). The coastline nowadays is associated with leisure, relaxing and health, comparative to previously where it has been "a source of significant cultural and historical value, as well as a resource" (Haward & Vince, 2008, p.139).

People are now breaking the separation between land and sea with such activities as water sports. Surfing is an important sport that holds a lot of history and cultural significance within coastal communities. Brown & Peters (2018) deduce that "Dominant surfing culture defines the beach as a free and fun-orientated space and constructs it as a place of transcendence and freedom" (p.2003). They suggest "we also need to recognise the beach as an important site where bodies and

subjectivities are created and are policed” (p.2003). No matter how the coastline may differ from forests, sandy to arctic, people have adapted it in their own way, for example, the extreme sport of arctic surfing.

As a result of a more modern view of the coast being more sedentary and slow living - the art of living a simpler and slower life - the coast can positively impact the wellbeing of people having “proximity to the coast ... positively associated with good health” (Wheeler, White & Depledge, 2012). The positive attributes linked to the coast are more than just the physical place.



Figure 1: Drawn to the Sea – mixed media Helen L. Robertson (Robertson, n.d.)



Figure 2: Helen painting at Gardenstown on the Moray Coast (Tolquhon Gallery, 2024)

The landscape artist Helen L. Robertson has a great appreciation of the coast and the sea. She describes herself to be a “self-confessed thalassophile ! That is, I’m drawn to, and have a great love for the sea” (Robertson, 2024). In her work she captures the ever moving and changing scene of the coast. Painting in situ she can easily capture the movements and reflections accurately. Her use of blur in her mixed media pieces captures the ever-changing environment. The further use of wet materials in her practice allows the fluid motion to reflect onto the work.

My interpretation of the word transformation is the differing the nature of something not necessarily with a positive or a negative outcome. Transformation is “a marked change in nature, form or appearance” (Soanes & Hawker, 2008, p.1101). In conjunction with craft, the word transformation implies that “Craft practices transform raw materials into objects that serve a purpose, whether

aesthetic, functional, or both” (Leone, 2020, p.1988). Craft uses transformation to repurpose something for utility purposes or aesthetic.

When placing materials in the kiln such as glass or ceramics, it causes an irreversible transformation. Heat can also be applied for shaping and forming metal. These processes of thermal transformation alter the components both chemically and form. By reapplying heat, it is possible to re-soften glass to make it malleable again, but it is not possible to reverse the heating process to return them to their original components. Leone (2020) describes that “transformation can take place through reworking, revising, reforming, adjusting, or altering” (p.1988). The process for ceramics is first firing for clay to turn into ceramic. This is called the bisque firing stage, during which the clay is transformed from the fragile greenware clay into hard ceramic. Greenware clay contains a lot of water and will return to its natural form and dissolve in water. The firing process turns it into a hard insoluble ceramic material which has undergone major physical and chemical changes (Lesley, 2021). Keith Brymer Jones (cited in Bell, 2017) explains “to be a potter or ceramic artist, is to be a true alchemist, literally changing the physicality of the clay one works with” (p.6). At around 573°C clay changes into a stone-like material, this process is called quartz inversion. At any time before this temperature is reached, clay can be reclaimed through soaking in water and drying. After this temperature it can also be reclaimed, but the process will take thousands of years (Quille, 2014). However, this clay will not be truly the same as how it was when dug from the ground.

Craft and clay can attribute to transformation of well-being of people’s physical and mental state. This creation explores how the alchemical transformation of clay into ceramic, alongside the iterative processes of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction inherent in clay art practice, can serve as a metaphor for the internal processes of psychological transformation experienced by participants in art therapy (Leone, 2020). The physical aspect of working with your hands and your body can ground the ceramicist separating themselves from the world and focusing purely on creating. By separating your mind from your body this can create an illusion of calm.

Anna Lerinder (quoted in Bell, 2016) supports the view that “Clay represents timelessness. It’s old and modern” (p.45). There has been a transformation of the use of clay over time, from being used for functional objects such as bowls and jugs, to be used creatively by bespoke artists as well as amateur potters, claiming considerable prices for pieces. Ceramics evolved into a platform for artistic experimentation and self-expression, with the studio pottery movement highlighting the value of personal craftsmanship.

Maja Quille is an artist who is working on a project called the London Clay project. Her role involves researching into and experimenting with 50-million-year-old clay obtained from a 20m deep archaeological excavation in Central London. As part of the project, she works with clay sourced from the river Thames specifically near Hammersmith. When viewing the clay under a microscope she noted that the clay was a “mixture of old and new, organic and manmade” (Quille, 2014). The clay itself has been transformed from a purely natural form to now a polluted and contaminated form.

Her work “shows a world in flux, a mixture of man-made plastic glitter, ancient fossils and new organic material” (Quille, 2014). However, the mixture between man-made and natural clay makes the end product very unstable much like nature itself. The non removal of these impurities can cause cracks, weak spots or explosions in the kiln while firing.



Figure 3: AMC Photo of Micro verse (Quille, 2020)

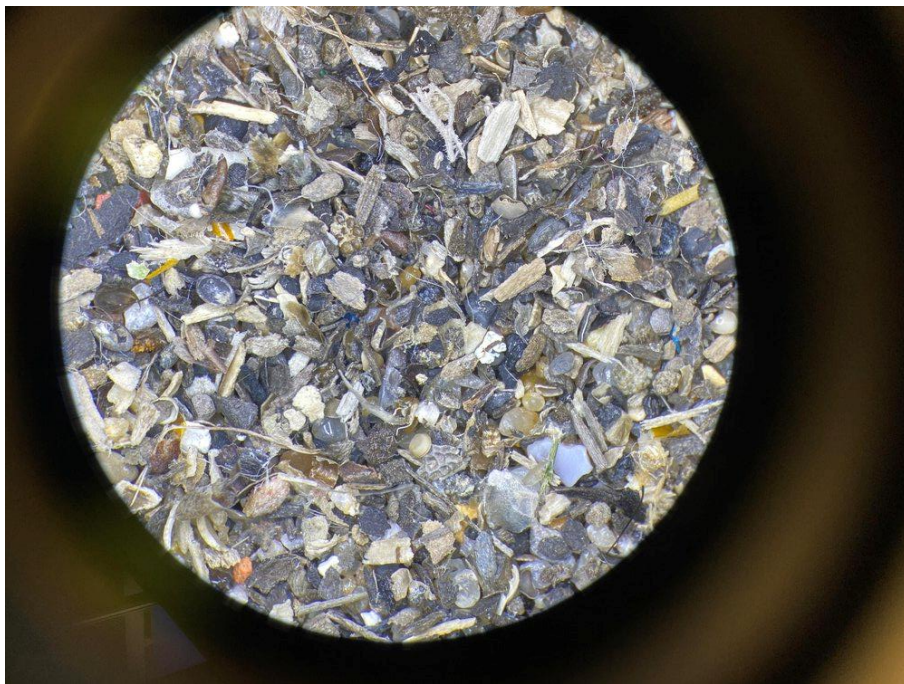


Figure 4: New Clay under a Microscope (Quille, 2020)

The definition of explore is “To travel through an unfamiliar area in order to learn about it” (Soanes & Hawker, 2008, p.349-350). Exploring is part of human nature whether it be by physical exploration, researching or investigating personal strengths and attributes. Desire paths are an example of this, a concept originating from architecture and urban planning, trajectories that people prefer than those created for them, the natural responses to repeated human use (Borneman, 2021). A desire path embodies an innate sense of direction. It is an instinctive way of reaching the destination by the most direct and efficient route.

On a recent outdoor exploration with a friend, we were following a well walked path when I spotted a side path. Unsure whether it was a path, or a parting within a bush, I decided to further explore. It led down to a steep section of the dune and resulted in us scrambling down using our hands. We then went across a rocky section with lots of rock pools where the sea was almost beneath us. Again, we scrambled up the rock face both of us cutting our hands on the harsh rock. Once we reached the top the view was amazing. It was almost panoramic. The sea was fully around us. No one else in sight, it almost felt as though it was just us and nature. Watching the sun set over the sea and searching for the opportunity to steal a glance at seals is an experience that money cannot buy.

Getting outside and experiencing mother nature in the first person is what truly makes me happy. It is something I thoroughly enjoy and enthuse about. Reflecting on this experience within my personal practice is easier to undertake having lived the experience. As nature is so versatile there is much inspiration that can be taken such as the slight cracks and crevasses in rock to the stunning massive mountain landscapes. Noticing these natural patterns, shapes and colours often inspires my art practice.

Exploring is “the suspensive freedom that comes by walking, even a simple short stroll: throwing off the burden of cares, forgetting business for a time” (Gros, Howe & Harper, 2015, p.25). When exploring via walking it is easy to disconnect from the life we live in and focus on the primal life we were made for.

Exploring can be calm and peaceful or alternatively it can give you a sense of danger. This can be thrilling and get the adrenaline pumping. When snowboarding in the Alpes a group of us reached the Aiguille Percée also known as the eye of the needle. Being off piste we decided to board over to the point and then climb up, only two of us braving the climb. The ski and snowboard boots being unsuitable for the rocky and extremely icy terrain it got both of our hearts pumping. The sense of danger and mental battle to keep going is what made the climb to the top rewarding. Exploring such things as mountains is driven by what Riya (2023) describe as the unquenchable thirst of the human spirit to master in exploration. Without human desire for exploration, we would not have the knowledge and understanding that we do right now. For example, James Cook, who was an 18th-century explorer and navigator significantly reshaped Western understanding of global geography through his groundbreaking mapping of the Pacific, New Zealand, and Australia (BBC, 2014).

I enjoy exploring throughout my artwork; so much expression can be made and portrayed through a simple piece of clay or a few marks on a piece of glass. Having inspiration from nature makes my work more fluid and free. Nature to me is everchanging, raw and natural so I strive to make my work reflect this.

Cassy McArthur's practice involves her exploring and collecting from the natural environment through an "intimate journey of fossicking, collecting, investigating, processing and intuitive creation by hand, I gain a deep appreciation and respect for my surrounds" (McArthur, 2025). She discloses her experience of being "Compelled by an innate desire for discovery and the sense of wonder it brings, I have forged an artistic pathway that has exploration and discovery at its core" (McArthur, 2025). Time transforms the landscape; melting, erupting, compressing, and eroding leaving behind an intricate record of change and process. By drawing inspiration from geological terrain, her work pays tribute to the foundations upon which life is built, to transformation and evolution, and to the enduring presence of time. Her work to me is as natural as a clay form could be, through her exploration she accurately recreates nature in its purest form.



Figure 5: Cassy Collecting Material (McArthur, n.d.)



Figure 6: Echo, 2021, 24 X 37cm (McArthur, n.d.)

Overall, these three keywords have focused my attention about exploring deeper into nature and therefore how this can impact on the work I create. I would like to explore further the relationship between people and the coastline, and how this impacts their wellbeing and how art is influential in benefiting people's health and longevity. Furthermore, how exploring is innate within human beings and expand my knowledge on the theory of walking and embracing the surrounding environment.

A potential question could be to do with the connection between artists, nature and the impact this has on their work. Using the coastline and exploration as a backdrop for the research.

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