

Ways of Perceiving

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Tondo

Tondo explores cyclical approaches to making through contemporary craft practises that encourage ecological awareness, reflection, and experiential learning. Inspired by the Renaissance term '*Tondo*', meaning a circular work of art or sculpture, the exhibition uses circularity both visually and conceptually, to examine repetition, transformation, and the relationship between people and natural materials. Located within the Reading Room the exhibition combines traditional craft processes with contemporary ceramic practice to encourage slower forms of engagement with material, environment, and space.



Figure1: Reading Room.

The exhibition is informed by ideas surrounding experiential learning, sustainability, and praxis, Paulo Freire describes praxis as the relationship between reflection and action, arguing that understanding is developed not through observation, but through active participation and lived experience (Freire, 1970, pp. 72-73). This idea is central to tondo, the exhibition also references N. F. S. Grundtvig's theories of community-based learning, where knowledge is developed through lived experience and collective participation beyond institutional education (Borish, 1991, pp. 48-52). Through the work of Bruce Gardener and Adam Buick, alongside the traditional Japanese practice of Dorodango, tondo considers how material-based craft can reconnect audiences with sustainability, learning and environmental awareness.

The Reading Room was selected as the exhibition site due to its architectural relationship with the theme. Opened in 1887 and designed by Henry Holtham in a classic Italian style, the circular structure naturally supports the exhibition's conceptual focus upon cycles, reflection and learning. Historically associated with education and study, the space reinforces the exhibition's emphasis on learning through experience. The alcoves (Fig. 1) create individual viewing spaces for each artwork, allowing each piece to be viewed individually while still contributing to the overall circular movement of the exhibition. Natural light enters the room throughout the day, altering the appearance of the materials and heightening awareness of texture, surface, and atmosphere. Rather than functioning only as a gallery environment the Reading Room becomes an active learning space in which audiences are encouraged to reflect upon relationships between craft, environment, and material process. The

Reading Room holds acoustic qualities holding music, performing arts, television shows and lectures, creating a certain ambience and energy. The foundations of the room are influenced by education and learning new skills making this exhibition space unique and well suited to the themes carried throughout the exhibition.



Figure 2: *Hikaru dorodango* (Bruce Gardner, 2017)

At the centre of the exhibition's historical context is Dorodango, a traditional Japanese craft practice in which earth and water are carefully shaped, layered, dried, and polished into smooth spheres. Originally associated with children's play and traditional making practices,

dorodango reflects cultural values surrounding patience, attentiveness and respect for natural materials. Within tondo, dorodango functions both as historical reference and a conceptual foundation for the contemporary works displayed. The process highlights sustainability through its use of raw earth and minimal materials, encouraging direct engagement with the environment and slower forms of making. The repetitive process of polishing and refining transforms ordinary mud into reflective sculptural forms, shifting focus away from industrial production and towards process labour and care.



Figure 3: *Hikaru dorodango* (Bruce Gardner, 2017)

Bruce Gardener (Fig.2 and Fig.3) adapts the traditional dorodango process within a contemporary craft context, transforming the practice into a reflective and meditative activity. Gardner's series of dorodango are made of natural materials sourced from areas around New Mexico each one reflects the geological qualities of its environment through different

pigmentation, texture and mineral composition. Some works have volcanic ash, while others include sediment from dried lake beds or desert soils. By preserving the visual identity of these materials, Gardner creates objects that function as both sculptural and records of landscape. Gardner's work focuses on repetition, tactile ability and engagement with materials, encouraging viewers to consider the relationship between labour, mindfulness and environmental awareness. The polished surfaces of the dorodango contrast with the rawness of the earth creating tension between refinement and natural materiality. Gardner's work also connects closely to Freire's concept of praxis. The physical process of shaping and polishing earth requires prolonged engagement with the material, where understanding is created through this repetition. The relationship between making and learning reflects Freire's argument that knowledge appears through participation and lived experience rather than detached observation.

Alongside Gardner's work, tondo presents Adam Buick who explores the relationship between landscapes, geology, and process through ceramics created from locally sourced clay and natural aggregates. The exhibition will present two vessels on loan: Land Jar and Abereiddi Jar both made from porcelain and powdered aggregate stone sourced from the Pembrokeshire coastline, the works preserve traces of their geological origins through visible textures, mineral variation and irregular surfaces. He often exposes vessels to outdoor weather conditions during production allowing rain, erosion, and atmospheric change to influence the final forms. This positions nature as an active collaborator within the making process. The resulting ceramics appear weathered and ancient, emphasising geological time and natural transformation. Within tondo,

these vessels reinforce themes of sustainability and cyclical transformation, showing how contemporary craft can communicate environmental awareness through process led making and sensitivity to place. Although they both work in different mediums both artists focus on locality and the process over industrial perfection and mass production and both preserve the natural transformation of materials.



Fig 4: *Land Jar* (Adam Buick, 2011).



Fig 5: *Abereiddi Jar* (Adam Buick, 2011)

A study visit to the Glynne Vivian art gallery significantly influenced the curatorial decisions within *Tondo*. The gallery's use of white walls, framed works, and a circular flow between rooms shows how layout can influence audience feeling and pacing. Observing how visitors naturally progressed through connected spaces informed the decision to create a circular exhibition layout within the Reading Room. This structure encourages audiences to move gradually between works while keeping a sense of continuity and reflection throughout the exhibition.

The exhibition map (fig 6) shows the circular movement through the gallery space, individual alcoves within the Reading Room frame each artist's work encouraging audiences to move gradually through the space to take time to reflect upon relationships between the objects displayed. Using a circular room, circular plinths where viable and circular inspired artifacts encapsulate the theme visually, conceptually, and interactively. Interactive tables will be positioned at both entry and exit of the exhibition, holding raw materials used within the dorodango process, including clay, soil, water and tools. Community engagement forms an important part of the exhibition; visitors are welcome to get involved with the interactive tables during the exhibition reflecting the learning through action theory-staff will be on hand to teach the ancient technique. Small material bags will also be provided so visitors can safely transport their finished dorodango home. Information on workshops, sustainability talks and community events is displayed at the entrance of the exhibition the inclusion of this further activity expands the exhibition beyond observation into education and social participation, and encourages ongoing dialogue surrounding environmental awareness, craft and material value. Rather than positioning audiences as spectators *tondo* encourages communal

interaction and experimental learning through making. Audiences gradually transition between works, reinforcing the exhibitions' cyclical themes and creating a reflective atmosphere rather than fast paced gallery experience.

The tactile engagement with raw materials persuades audiences to reconsider relationships between sustainability, labour, and material value whilst also supporting slower forms of observation and reflection within the gallery environment. In this way tondo transforms the exhibition space into both curatorial and educational environment centred upon material awareness, participation and ecological connection. In the context of increasing environmental concerns and growing disconnect from material processes, tondo highlights the value of slower forms of engagement with the natural world. Increasing industrialisation and digital culture have contributed to growing disconnection from material processes and natural environments that exhibitions like tondo are keeping relevant to today's needs highlighting contemporary society is dominated by images and surface level consumption.

Hans Ulrich's Obrist's' discussions surround curatorial practise are also relevant to the development of tondo. In ways of curating Obrist emphasise' the importance of exhibitions as spaces for dialogue and knowledge exchange rather than static displays of objects. Thus, creating interactive elements to the exhibition opens a line of communication with the public and the environmental responsibility of the slow craft movement and being connected to the raw materials often obscured by industrial manufacture. Tondo's aim is to maintain the link to connection through craft and materials.

Figure 2: Dorodango balls (Bruce Gardener) (www.dorodango.com) (green in map key)

Figure 3: Gardner, B. Dorodango. (www.dorodango.com)

Figure 4: Buick, A. (2011) *Land Jar*. (Adambuick.com) (black in map)

Figure 5: Buick, A. (2011) *Abereiddi Jar*. (Adambuick.com)

Figure 6: Lovering, S. (2026) Exhibition map. [Diagram] Private Collection.

Figure 7: Lovering, S. (2026) Map key. [Diagram] Private collection.

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