

Imagined Display Space (Exhibition, Festival, Performance etc.) 1,500 words

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Design Crafts

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The Earth in your hands

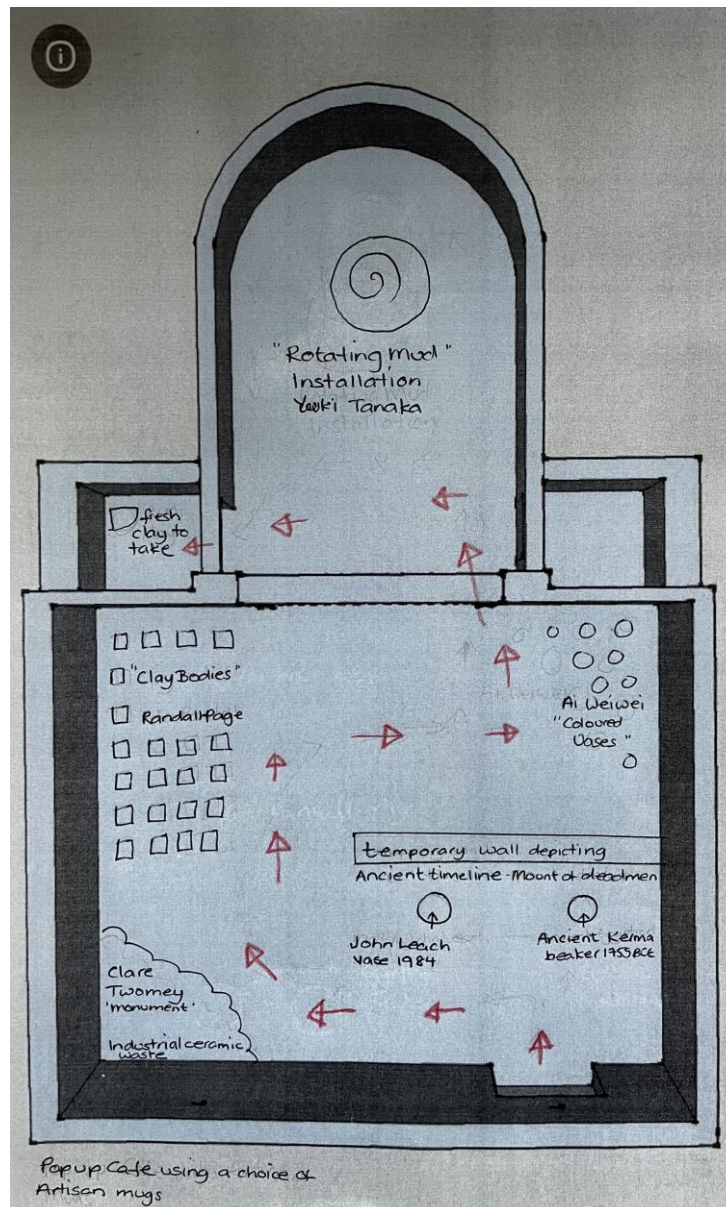
This exhibition is about the primacy of clay, our relationship to it and time. It questions what value we place on the objects around us and our visceral response to material. By placing contemporary ceramics and installations in the context of an ancient timeline, I will demonstrate that making and aesthetics is an inherent part of our DNA, linking us to time and place, as Carter says, (2004, p.10) "Material Thinking... the grand narratives of which it defines its sense of place and identity. " In the context of global markets, consumerist society, and geopolitics, it is not only the people who have

become displaced, but objects too, resulting in the loss of personal geography and identity. Srouji, (2023 p.83) a Palestinian artist, speaks about a maternal connection to the earth and believes that our stories are intertwined with our objects. In her case, often lost, buried, displaced, like people, Srouji too looks to the earth for connection.

To evoke responsibility, I will display the mark that we make, ask questions about what we value, and demonstrate the longevity of that left behind, in the hope that a greater regard will be fostered towards our objects, replacing the disposable with the fruits of our labour. Our possessions and the materials around us, reflect the times in which we live and shape our identity. This exhibition demonstrates the visceral connection that we have to pottery and to clay: how the act of making things connects us to our ancestors and place, as we lose touch with nature and natural things. In a human-created world where we control everything, artisan ceramics reminds us of the magic that comes from nature, making, firing, and clay.

The exhibition will be held in the Mission Gallery, the once sacred space elevating the material and being a place traditionally used to contemplate ethics and consequences. We are placed at the heart of community, in a public space, like Banksy (2006), says in his foreword “There is no elitism or hype, it exhibits on the best walls a town has to offer and nobody is put off by the price of admission.” By placing “Revolving Mud” at what would have been the altar, it becomes most sacred with the contours of the semi-circular walls embracing the work and becoming a part of it. It is the heart of the exhibition, symbolising time itself, demonstrating our unique identity through the marks that we make and our place in the circular rhythm of life. I will curate an experience, as quoted by Obrist (2014, excerpt cover), Alighiero Boetti says, “One should not give an artist a room and ask him to fill it, rather the task should be to have a conversation with the artist and find the means to realise their unfinished

project." These are not passive objects that fill a space, but together they resonate, tell a story, and further the artwork.



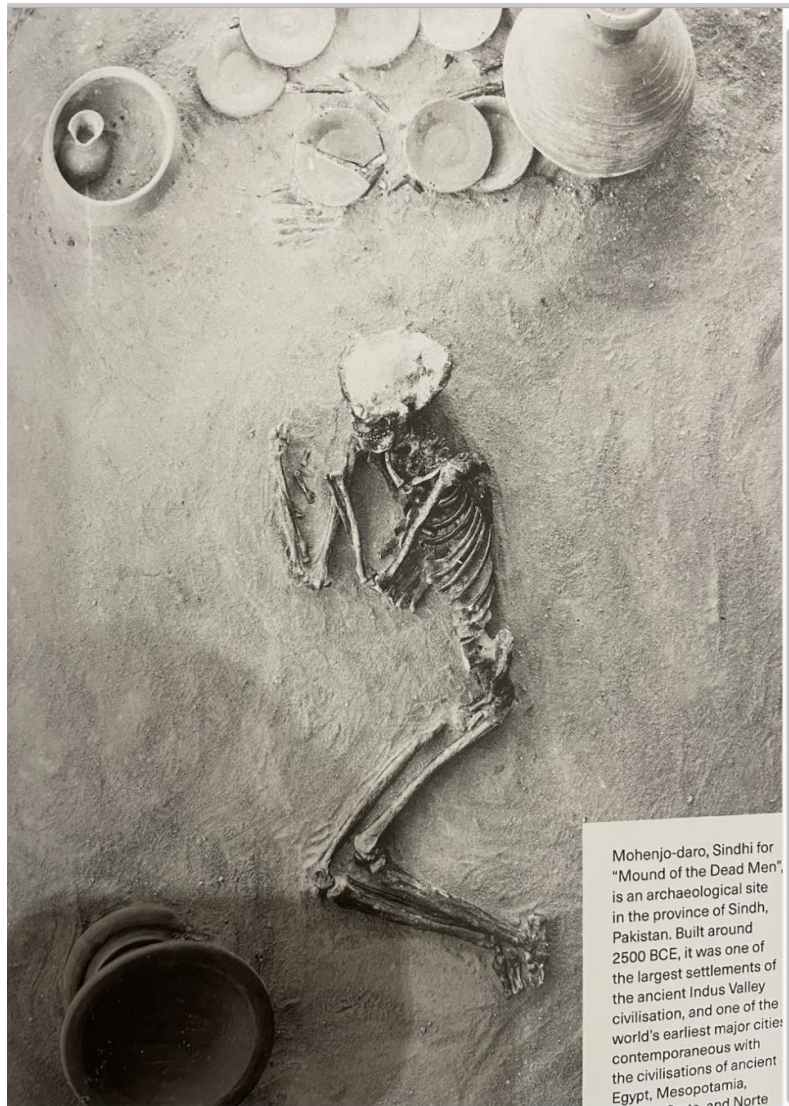


Fig 1. *Mound of the dead men*

This photograph will be used on the wall behind the two pieces below, evoking a feeling of the intimacy that man has always shared with the objects around him and demonstrating our relationship with the earth, our inheritance from ancestors, and the remains we leave behind. Fired clay has such longevity, that when ancient settlements are excavated, vessels are found that may be thousands of years old.

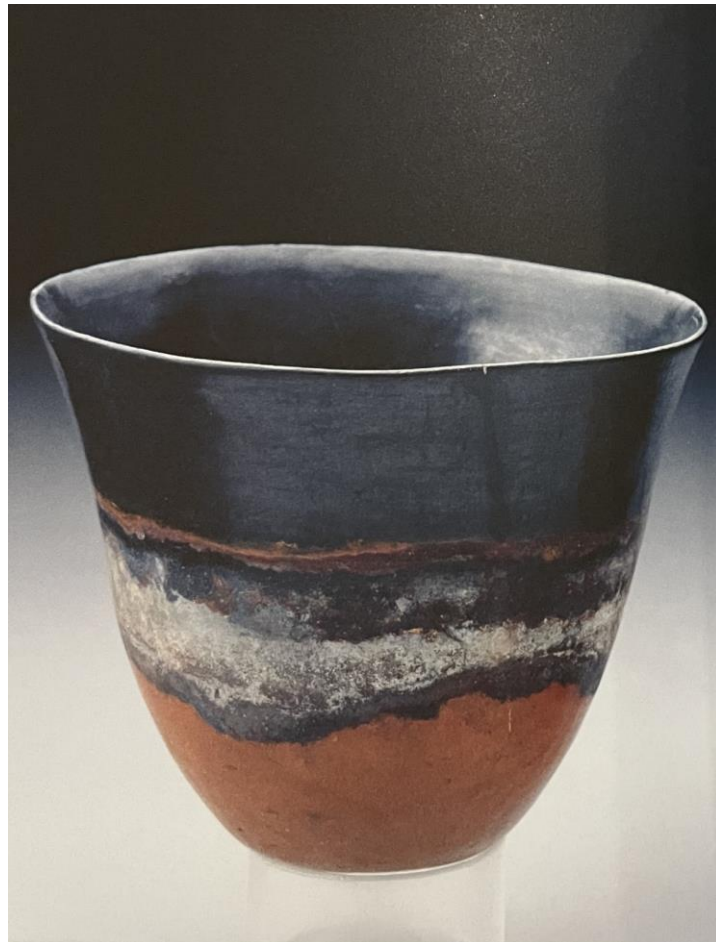


Fig 2. Egypt, c. 1755-1620 BCE *Kerma beaker*

This ancient, beautifully crafted beaker looks remarkably modern due to the makers' desire for the effects of pit firing. When I look at it, I am reminded of the words of potter Hans Coper talking about

another pre-dynastic Egyptian pot, in Graves (2023, p.9) who says, "It conveys no comment, no self-expression, but seems to contain and reflect its maker and the human world it inhabits."

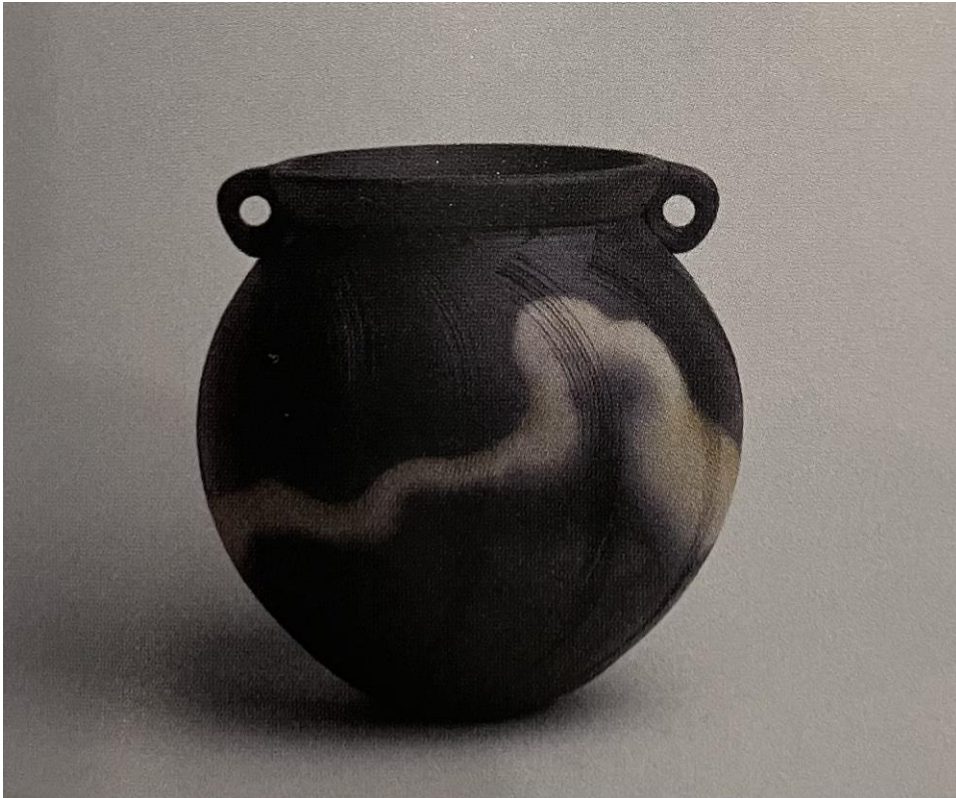


Fig 3. John Leach, 1984, *Fat vase, scratched*

These two pots, separated by thousands of years, look remarkably alike, and demonstrate how we share with our ancestors a fascination for the serendipity that comes with firing, and a shared primal desire to play with earth and fire, that has never gone away. It transcends the borders of time and place. John Leach, who was a grandson of Bernard Leach and son of David Leach, fired his pots in sawdust fired pits in the same way that our early ancestors would have done, its simple form reminiscent of pots throughout the ages.



Fig 4. Clare Twomey, 2009, *Monument*,

This causes me to reflect on how future archaeologists will perceive today's mass-produced objects, from a world where industrialisation and machines have taken over the making of our things and where man has been removed entirely from the process. Production lines once overseen by humans, are now managed by robots, which are themselves programmed by computer, delivering a product designed by AI. The human touch on the objects with which we surround ourselves has disappeared and with it our

identity; a part of us is empty. In Grayson Perry's words (2003 p.14), "Perfection is unlovable; the language and style of any artist are the mistakes they make."

Not only does this work evoke a feeling of an avalanche of waste that consumerism is engulfing us in, but it also makes me wonder whether the little value placed in the object is because the human touch has been so far removed from it. It begs the question whether we should discard this process in favour of more precious, crafted pieces that have human time, and touch invested in them.



Fig 5. Peter Randall-Page, 2009, Clay Bodies

In his work, Randall-Page, has manipulated the form in a way that emphasises its materiality. In a world where we are more technically connected than ever, we have become distanced and dislocated from our senses and physicality of the world. As Barthes (1977 p.145) says, “the author is diminished like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage.” I would argue that now he is not even in the room. I agree with Peter Randall-Page (2021 p.206) who says that “Sculpture comes into its own when words fail.” and in his piece above, not only does the materiality evoke a response, but also the forms; collapsed and manipulated tubes of clay that look like curled up human bodies.



Fig 6. Ai Weiwei, 2010, *Coloured vases*

Here we are asked to question what we value. The artist gained notoriety and attention by the supposed use of precious Han Dynasty (206 BC to AD 220) earthenware urns (he presents them as such) and questions the value we place on antiquities. In today's context of waste on an industrial scale, it points toward reinvention, that objects should not be made redundant, but can be reborn by the hand of today's craftsmen and artists. When Ai Weiwei added to these vases, he was collaborating with artists across time and bringing the vases into today's aesthetic; from their hands to his. I question whether artefacts should be distributed around the world away from their culture to be put on pedestals, or behind glass. I believe that like the man pictured on the gallery wall as we enter the exhibition, our objects gain intrinsic value, personal to us, as we live with them and mark them.



Fig 7. Yuuki Tanaka, 2023, *The Rotating Mud*

It is interesting that this work can only be seen online for most people, where it has become pure spectacle, as proposed by Debord (1967 p.3), but when we look past the noise of debate, it asks us to imagine the opposite. When seen in reality, it is experienced, all our senses come into play as it is reduced to materiality and our reaction to it. Not only is it made of earth, but by revolving, reminds us of time passing, the marks we leave behind, the planet itself and our presence on it.

In my exhibition, I will expand on this, by having a mound of clay and inviting people to take some. I will also have a pop-up cafe, using different artisan mugs, from which people can choose to drink. Many ceramics around us have the Modernist Bauhaus principle of “form follows function,” an axiom attributed by guggenheim.org (seen 5th May 2023) in their introduction of the exhibition “Form follows Function” to architect Louis Sullivan. Artisan ceramics can build on this and create “multiple little narratives” described as post-modernist in Buchanan (2018). The need for ceramics can drive social change, taking us into our post consumerist age.

In an age which is dissatisfied by the clinical, perfect nature of industrially made objects, as discussed by Heatherwick (2023, 10 minutes in) our brain can have the complexity it craves, using handmade things in natural materials. If culture cannot be dissociated from the economic and political situation in which it makes its way, our current geopolitical difficulties, plus our need to live more sustainably can be met by using local materials and help foster identity. It is paradoxically both global by its influence and local, due to the material. Local clays, creating personal geography and the beach under the paving stone, as talked about by the situationists. We may be questioning what human’s future role may be, but I agree with Tobias Revell who says in his piece, *Rise of the Robots*, “Artificial Intelligence has started to creep into craft, but fear not - humans still do it better.”

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Figures

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Figure 3. Graves Alun, John Leach, 1984, Fat vase, scratched, *Studio Ceramics*, Thames & Hudson 2023, p.287

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Fig 5. Cole Ina, Peter Randall-Page, 2009, Clay Bodies, *From the Sculptor's Studio*, Laurence King 2021, p. 207

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Fig.7 Yuuki Tanaka, 2023 The Rotating Mud (March 8th,2024)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=kG8W7aaCQGk&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fukc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com%2F&source_ve_path=Mjg2NjQsMzY4NDIsMTM5MTE3LDM2ODQyLDM2ODQyLDEzOTExNywyMzg1MQ&feature=emb_title

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