

Slow, Coast, Hand-built.

2014719.

Design Craft: Glass, Ceramics and jewellery (BA Hons).

2502.

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A study of the keywords Slow, Coast and Hand-built.

The purpose of this piece is to explore the three key words that have been selected to break down my practice and to explore both their relationship with each other and apart. The words chosen are Slow, Coast and Hand-built. It will include work from Adam Buick, Paul Wearing and Stephen Murfitt. In contrast it'll explore workings of Carl Horne and Carlo Petrini.

The first word is slow. "Moving or operating, or designed to do so, only at a low speed; not quick or fast" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012, p.685). I find that the dictionary description leaves room in its definition of the word. Yes, it is simply "not quick or fast" but there is a greater care on precision when something is slow. More directly the word slow was "first recorded before 900; *Middle English*; *Old English* *slāw* "sluggish, dull"; cognate with *Dutch* *sleeuw*; sloth" (dictionary.com, 2024). The more direct usage of this word is the focus into the process and ethos of slow craft.

There are two distinct strands of the word slow. Firstly, is a description resembling that of the dictionary. Then other side to it has far more depth. To approach something in a slow manner gives you time to think clearly, without being rushed. To measure twice and cut once. This displays that being slower and precise, will always beat working fast and rushed. The word slow feels as if it carries a negative impression resembling something that's old or slightly broken. Maybe this is just the difference of something that IS slow rather than something that choice-fully acts slow.

By putting the word "slow" in front of a verb, it suggests that whatever is being partaken in is well considered. This is shown in slow fashion (Pookulangara, Shepard, 2013), slow food (Waters, 2021), slow ethics (Gallagher, 2020), and the area this piece is exploring slow within craft (Newman, 2020, p.12). Despite its similarities to the Japanese philosophy Wabi-Sabi (Christopher Murakami, 2024), the spark of the slow movement was brought into the western world in 1986, when the people of Rome protested the opening of a fast food restaurant near the Spanish steps, "This symbolic arrival of homogenization in a place so rich in history and culture convinces Carlo Petrini and the other founders of the movement that it is time to act, and so the Slow Food movement is born" (Slowfood.com, 2024). Then in 2005, the Canadian author Carl Honore brought it to the masses when he released the soon to be bestselling book "In Praise of Slowness: How a Worldwide Movement Is Challenging the Cult of Speed". In this "He helpfully detailed the now well-established 'slow movement'. He writes of developments such as slow food, slow cities, slow medicine, slow sex, slow leisure and slow Introducing Slow Ethics and the Art of Care 7 child-rearing" (Gallagher, 2020, p.7,8). Under this movement slots slow craft. The notion of this slow practise comes from being "deliberate, attentive, meditative and sensorial" (Newman, 2020, p.12). The irony in slow making is pushing against capitalistic view, yet still trying to sell a product.

Within slow craft the attitude is that of consideration. Not products being churned out for the masses. But a slow eclectic process with an allowance of thought on every detail. It's interesting that there doesn't seem to be too much discussion on this in craft. The extremes of



(The Ash Project, 2018)

slow art become what feels almost a performance more than an individual outcome. This is displayed in David Nash's Ash dome. This ring of trees "was planted as saplings in 1977" (The Ash Project, 2018). the ideology for this piece was "When the artwork was planted it was conceived as an artwork for the future" (The Ash Project, 2018). The entire nature of this piece

was to be slow and respected for it. In reaction to this growing form, Nash created several works through the years showing the different stages of growth. Another project that both joins the focus of the slow passage of time, and the reaction to "slow craft" in being a thoroughly thought through process is Adam Buick's Earth to Earth project. "In this piece a raw, unfired Jar, made from a blend of local clays was placed at the top of Carn Treliwyd to weather away" (Adam Buick, 2019). This project was then recorded as a time laps as the fragile materials were worn away by the wind and rain, slowly breaking back down into where it came from.



(Adam Buick, 2019)

The second word is coast. "the part of the land adjoining or near the sea" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012, p. 131). The coast is the ever-changing bridge between land and ocean, and represents a diverse landscape of geology, ecology and wildlife. "Middle English *coste*, < Old French *coste* (in modern French *côte*) = Provençal *costa*, Italian *costa* side, border, coast < Latin *costa* rib, flank or side (of certain things). Some of the senses are expressed in modern French by *côté*, Old French *costet* < Latin *costātum* lit. the ribbed (part). The spelling *coast* is rare before 1600, and not found at all in some obsolete senses. As the development of the senses had taken place already in French, these do not appear in any linear order in English; thus 9 is not merely related to 8, but also closely to 1, as inside" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). For the word coming from the translation of edge, it does not do this diverse habitat justice.

As the dictionary definition is plainly "land adjoins or near the sea" There is a feeling of unsureness. At what point does the coast end? Is it to the waters edge, or where you still get the faintest sent of the salt in the breeze. This environment has shaped and hardened people of its surroundings, and in these, the artists who're inspired by it.

For craft, there are so many reasons that draws makers to the coast. The simplest is purely the aesthetic appeal. The coast provides a range of dramatic and diverse landscapes, which delivers a huge range of visual elements to inspire. It is truly an ever-changing scene with something for everyone. Many artists find solace within the costal environment. The smell on the wind, the sound of breaking waves and the expanse of the distant horizon. This all evokes a

meditative and grounding sensation. In this stimulus, it is easier to create work as a reflection of your inner self and of a sense of piece.



(Paul Wearing Ceramics, 2021).

When looking for makers that're drawn to or take inspiration from the coast, there is no shortage. Perhaps it comes from being from a place of such expanse, that instils an attitude of freedom in what you wish to do. The first makers work here is Paul Wearing. The Cardiff based artist who mastered his distinct style when he spent some time on the coast at Aberystwyth (Paul Wearing Ceramics, 2021). You only have to

take a glance at Wearing's work to see the coastal inspiration, as he beautifully shows them in his use off mixed glazes and other material. In contrast to Wearing's contemporary approach, we have the elegantly made EOT Ceramics made by Emily Tapp. Tapp's inspiration comes from the Cornish landscape where she was raised, with its colouring linking through into her work. From her smooth wheel thrown vessels, she has named the selection of glazes Cornish world. "Mor is a deep, variegated blue. Indigo toned, with a silky texture and beautiful movement. Inspired by, and named after, the sea." (eot ceramics, 2023).



(eot ceramics, 2023).

The third word is hand-built. Despite this term being used throughout the ceramic's world, it has never found its way into the Oxford dictionary. The closest terms are Handmade "made by a person using their hands rather than by machines" (Oxford English Dictionary, p.328). or Handcrafted "skilfully made by hand, not by machine" (Oxford English Dictionary, p.327). The terms widely known definition within the ceramic's world differs from these in way of it more so stating what it doesn't use "make without a potter's wheel" (Vocabulary.com).

To make without throwing. It feels as if people forget there was a time where clay wasn't thrown on a wheel, despite that being a very long time ago. "It can be traced back to the ancient Sumerians as early as 3,250 B.C.E" (university of Colorado Boulder, 2018). A mechanical technique used for nearly five thousand years is quite remarkable. But hiding in its success, is the older, slightly more primitive form of creating called coiling. "African coil pots were among the first forms of hand-built pottery, dating back to around 7000 or 6000 BC." (Malik, 2024). The use and evolution of ceramic vessels has signified the development of human civilization, and although the use of throwing means a batch of identical looking pieces can be made in a short period of time, this left space for makers to create incredible pieces that would be impossible to throw.

Through my experience of coiling, it has given me a different perspective on clay and making. When you work on one piece for a few days, you build an attachment with it. Even when you are not making, it is there in your thoughts. Layer by layer it grows up, as if it is a living entity. "Just as the relationship between mother and baby needs a facilitating environment to foster development, so too does the relationship between artist and artwork. The artist herself must provide this by setting up a space protected from impingements that might disturb the process and by making decisions about what is best for the development of the artwork. In this respect, the artist acts as 'environment mother'" (University of Leeds) In regard to this, I feel as if when

coiling my last piece, the rest of my space seemed truly unnoticeable as my focus was constantly directed at the piece.



(tetriflat.ru, n.d.)

In its slow nature, the process of hand building a pot is still far less strenuous than other methods. Artists like Katya Tetriflat can create her pieces incredibly quick. These vessels which are usually of a large size, get created in her beautiful studio in Sochi. I first came across Katya as she regularly posts process videos on Instagram, and despite not having the largest following, I have found her work inspiring me on more than one occasion. This next piece which is also hand-built is the work of Stephen Murfitt. The forms he creates always have the most perfect finish in the curve. Paired

well with what he refers to as an “addiction to Raku” (Murfitt, 2024).



(Murfitt, 2024)

Throughout breaking these three words down, it has been difficult to not overlap and mention one word in another’s section. This is truly down to how instrumental all of these words are to me. Each of my main pieces in the last year have had these three things in common. They’ve been slowly approached, hand-built, and that the primary inspiration has been the coast. It’s as if they have become a formula, in which I am happy to keep too.

From Slow, the main part to take note of is consideration. A word that resembles both a verb and adjective. In both respects, the making and formulating of ideas is slow, then the ideas on consumerism and breaking our capitalistic chain puts the word into a different light.

Then Coast. From its literal meaning of edge, is the source of what feels to be all my inspiration. It has moulded so many, and release others from unnecessary worries. Its reach makes you feel small, and yet a far larger part in the world.

Finally, Hand-built. This ancient technique giving makers the ability to craft far more unique, expressive forms, with the space of far greater reflection as you go. It is centred in the middle of functionality and sculpture.

At face value, despite my personal links through these words, they do come from very different areas. Hand-built purely refers to the technique, slow describes an action of low velocity movement, and Coast referring to the intersection of two very different landscapes. On paper, they’re not the clearest of links, yet they seem to constantly work in unison. This is greater contextualise within the work of some of the artist I have previously mentioned. Looking at Adam Buick, his practice also involves all these points. His appreciation of slow is captured in his project ethos of land to land, but on a deeper level it’s more ingrained in his practice than you may think. Adam only fires his wood kiln very sparingly, a couple times a year (Adam Buick, 2019). Building an ethos of not constantly producing work and being wasteful with fuel but being conscious of this and only producing what’s needed. He’s frequently discussing how is work is inspired by the coastal landscape around home in St Davids, and you find him frequently using found costal material withing his work. Then for hand built. Despite Buick’s work being thrown on a wheel, his technique involves letting two bowls of the same diameter slightly harden up, then flipping one and placing rim to rim on top. This next step is the hand-build side. He then trims off the top base and works the join as if it’d been coiled.

Despite the work looking very different to Buick's, Paul wearing also ticks all these key words. From the vessels he makes being coiled. The colours and textures he tries to capture in the glazed mimics that of the rock structures of west Wales, and the slow processes of layering glazes both freely yet carefully.

It seems that the three-word link for several artists. It is no wonder that a maker whose mediums in hand building would have ideologies that align with slow, due to their process, and time of personal reflection. Then for anyone who adopts a slow mindset and a keenness for observation, it is no surprise that you'd be drawn to the rugged yet peaceful coast. Then to take inspiration of the forms and wild nature of the coast, you want to be able to represent that in a far less linear way and turn to hand building. The process of each of these words linking to each other comes from a longing to the sea, and a desire to keep it at your side as if it is a companion.

From this piece, the question I will be researching will be: How does the coastal environment influence the techniques, materials and artists expressions within hand-built ceramics, and how do these connections contribute to the concept of slow craft? In this question I explore how coastal based makers integrate found resources and its ties to slow craft. I will also explore what the impacts of a slow craft approach will have on the sustainability and longevity of ceramics practiced in coastal communities.

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