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ISSN 2412-5199



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9



37

CONTENTS

Ceramics Southern Africa Magazine
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EXPOSURE

7 Latest work by various Artists/Ceramists

FEATURES – Profiles and Exhibitions

9 Madoda Fani – From Guguletu to Christies -Ann Marais

13 Cont{r}act Earth - Katherine Glenday

19 Sounding Ground - Katherine Glenday

FEATURE – Traditional Potters

23 Dreaming of Clay – Kate Shand

NEW GROUP

27 Oliewenhuis – Yolanda de Kock

PERSONAL JOURNEY

31 Captured in Flight – Jonathan Downs

33 Wales, Walford, Windhoek - Genie Albrecht

INSPIRATION

37 An inspiration for daydreams - Amélie Wade

TEACHING STUDIOS

39 Information regarding teaching studios



13



19



23



33

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Back Cover: Clockwise from the top: Madoda Fani. Karen van der Riet
Robert Wagener. Lesley-Ann Hoets. Rika Herbst
Content page: 9 Madoda Fani, 13 InÈs Lavielle, 19 Katherine Glenday, 23
Nesive Nongebeza, 33 Genie Albrecht, 37 John Bauer.
Front Cover: Katherine Glenday.

CERAMICS

SOUTHERN AFRICA
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Please note the following due dates for all articles, reviews, book reviews, advertisements as well as exposure page photographs for 2017

15 July 2017

15 October 2017

15 January 2018

15 April 2018

OMISSION

ISSUE 7: The Curate's Egg, pg 11

Paragraph 3: **A curious paradox binds** the expression of this group..

Paragraph 4: The reference here is to Christo Giles' entry of three *sang de boeuf* bowls. It is this **honesty of his work that is recognised** perennially with awards.

Paragraph 6: **Throughout** humankind's recorded history, ...

A NOTE OF THANKS

A huge thank you to the Editor of CeramicsSA magazine, Lydia Holmes, for the inclusion of my work on the front cover of the autumn issue. A thank you to Ann Marais for the insightful review on the Cape Regional Exhibition and the enormous amount of time it takes to engage with everyone's work with such clear interpretation and to Basil Brady for taking the time out to visit my studio and take photographs. I would also like to add my grateful thanks to Ellalou O'Meara, not only for her friendship, but without her teaching skills (they are vast) I would certainly not be able to put forward any of my contemporary thoughts on ceramics without having worked with her over these past years. Thank you all with much appreciation.

Rae Goosen

CERAMICS SA

ceramics southern africa 

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FROM THE EDITOR



EDITORIAL

I hope you will enjoy this issue of our magazine. Ann Marias has written an informative article on Madoda Fani, winner of the top award at the 2016 Corobrik National Ceramics Biennale. This enthusiastic and persistently striving creative ceramist has the world stage ahead of him and one can only wish him well in the future. A future which now lies open to him with the kind assistance of other ceramists who have helped him on his way. We will keenly watch your work in the future Madoda!

Our South African flag was held high with representation at the first Central China Ceramic Biennale in Zhengzhou, China. Wendy Gers curated this exhibition and Katherine Glenday gives us an interesting overview of the work of exhibitors as well as insight into her meticulous preparations for her own entry. It is wonderful to see our South African talent being represented so far from home.

We also have another article by Kate Shand on one of our traditional potters and her methods. It is always encouraging to see how little a potter really needs to produce work and what one has to use when you have to make do. In this case, Nosiwe came to McGregor with a very tiny baby and a toddler in tow! Persistence and dedication indeed.

One of our personal journey articles comes all the way from Namibia and looks back at the interesting life of Genie Albrecht... I will be in Namibia in May and am hoping to inspire more ceramists from our neighbouring country to contribute to future magazines.

As I write this it is over 37 degrees in the south while our members in Gauteng are already in warmer clothes. As the cooler weather descends upon us, the days getting shorter and the air cooler, it is always more difficult to go to our studios and work with cold clay. A warm cup of tea in a handmade mug might just inspire the working process. Please keep us informed of your latest endeavours, be they individual, workshop inspired or visiting an interesting exhibition.

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Contributions to the Ceramics Magazine

Editorial requirements

This information is intended as a guide for contributors. Please do not hesitate to contact the editor should you require any further information.

Articles may include profiles on ceramists (self or others), reviews of ceramic exhibitions and books, upcoming events, critical reports and commentary, research papers and technical innovations. In fact, we welcome any subject of interest to ceramists, potters and sculptors, galleries and collectors, educational institutions and their students.

The average length of articles is 500-2200 words. Longer articles are welcome, they might be broken up over two issues if space is not available, or stand over to the next issue.

Please submit by email to ceramicssa.magazine@gmail.com or lydia@rgholmes.co.za in an attached Word document, NOT Pdf format, nor within the body of an email.

Your own writing style is a preference and minimal editing will take place, mostly in cases of spelling and grammar. At times, articles may be edited to meet layout requirements. Where possible, the author will be contacted prior to going to print should the Editor deem it necessary.

A two or three sentence statement about the writer must be included. Please include the name of the photographer/s.

Guidelines for Images

The files must be high resolution JPG (300dpi) or in the region of 600kb to 3 mgb.

Digital files may be sent in small batches (under 3 meg) to ceramicssa.magazine@gmail.com, lydia@rgholmes.co.za or via [Dropbox.com](https://www.dropbox.com) (invite: lydia@rgholmes.co.za) or a similar transfer method.

All images must be accompanied by a text document which lists the following for each image: name of the artist, title of the piece, date, materials and techniques, dimensions and the photographer's name. All images must also be labelled with the name of the article or person concerned, i.e. Peter Black.jpeg.

Please note: The quality of your images is of high importance and may determine whether or not your article is published.

If possible, seek the help of a professional photographer.

Guidelines (if taking your own images):

A good image is in focus, with proper exposure, a full depth of field and a full range of contrast (light to dark tones). Do not set work against a busy background.

Earth tones, white, grey or black make a good neutral background.

Do not use lighting which will result in hard shadows or will reflect off the vessel.

Do leave a generous space around the object if at all possible.

Tight cropping is not recommended. Make sure the WHOLE subject is in the photograph.

Choose your images carefully. At the most ten images per article. We will ask for more if required.

Please do not send Tiff images.

If you are contributing to the CSA Exposure page, 2 images would suffice. Some of these images will be deep etched (cut out) and need to be against a contrasting background with little or no shadows. Please supply a name, and details regarding the work (new work) or where it is on display. No images without these descriptive details will be published.

The editor retains the right to include or postpone the publication of any contribution.

Opinions expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the opinion of the editorial staff of Ceramics Southern Africa.



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EXPOSURE

Send your images for the Exposure page to ceramicssa.magazine@gmail.com. Add a short description of your work, size and where it is on display or whether it is simply new work.



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5. Nic Sithole
6. Paul Graylin
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9.



10.



11.



12.



13.



14.

- 9. Matilda Angus
- 10. Wiebke von Bismarck
- 11. Maria Ziessler
- 12. & 13 Annabelle Venter
- 14. Helena de Waal

MADODA FANI

– FROM GUGULETU TO CHRISTIES



Article by Ann Marais
Photographs by Nkuthazo Alexis Dyalvane and David Bugaye.

Madoda Fani – a man from Gugs (as Guguletu is affectionately known in the Cape) who is set to become a ceramic super star: who has set his sights on rivalling Magdalene Odundo's fame as being the potter with the most expensive pots in the world ever to be auctioned. He is deadly serious in achieving his goals.

His oeuvre so far is as impressive as his capacity for hard work and his insatiable curiosity about the world around him. He is also someone who gives back constantly in teaching, mentoring and helping others less fortunate than himself. However, his journey through life, through clay, has not been a smooth ride.

From childhood it would seem that the world of art, of creating art, was destined to be his career because of his natural ability to draw and paint, which was identified formally when he was ten years old. In the 1980's when the country was in turmoil and, as he says, there were dead bodies in the streets of the townships and burning tyres everywhere, a programme was initiated to clean up with the "Keep the Cape in Shape" campaign through the placing of rubbish bins – the famous Zibi Cans – around the Peninsula. Madoda was one of those chosen to paint a mural on a wall in this campaign in Gugs. The mural was close to his home where it stayed for about twenty years and he grew up dreaming about art because he was constantly reminded that he created this public mural at the tender age of ten.

Informal teaching about art came for him from Tom Magwa who had no professional qualifications but had a passion for art. Madoda remembers they painted mostly landscape scenes around Guguletu. Another mentor, a neighbour called Noni Mngomezulu, gave him a seminal experience when she took a bunch of local children on a bus tour around the Peninsula visiting art galleries and museums. He saw a painting priced at R700 – an astonishing price in those days. This opened his eyes to the possibility of making a good career out of art.

In 1998 one of the milestones in his life occurred. A friend at the

Sivuyile College, Sonwabo Mdingi who had a studio on the college grounds had been booked for a solo ceramics exhibition in Washington DC in the USA. Sonwabo realised that he wasn't going to be ready in time so he enlisted Madoda's help – his job was to paint designs on the pots, mostly teapots. He took them home and painted designs on the pots, mostly teapots. He took them home and painted on them at night. However, he soon got bored with the designs and gained Sonwabo's permission to paint his own designs on the pots. When the exhibition took place in 1998 Madoda had his painted pots exhibited in Washington DC, USA. He was still at school. It was a proud and meaningful moment for him.

After school, he attended Sivuyile College where he had enrolled for a 3-year Fine Arts course covering drawing, painting, computer graphics and some advertising and ceramics, though his main passion was for graphics. However, through lack of funds he was not able to complete the course.

At the time his friend, Andile Dyalvane, was working for Chris Silverstone at her Pottershop in Muizenberg. Through the introduction by Andile of Madoda to Chris, he started work there where he was employed in the studio for eight years. Six months after joining Chris, she insisted he take part in the CSA Regional Exhibition at the Artscape theatre complex in Cape Town. Madoda was very nervous, he was new and didn't feel he was good enough. But, he says, Chris was young and fired up then and wanted him to take part. Her insistence was well founded - nearly all his work was sold. In 2000, another big event took place in Madoda's life. Christ Silverstone had applied and been accepted to take part in an exhibition during the Siao D'Art Festival In Burkino Faso. So he travelled to the festival along with a group of people, amongst whom he remembers Simon Msilo and Ian Garrett. Much to his delight, Madoda's work was given 2nd prize. These two accolades were great inspiration for him in furthering his chosen path as a potter. He had been exposed to some smoke-firing during the course of his contact with clay but it was in Burkino Faso that he was first truly inspired by this clay process when he saw the smoked-fired pots of Ian Garrett there. The journey was a sobering experience for all of the South Africans, as a first trip into the northern part of Africa. Madoda says he has never had a problem with people coming from other countries to work in South Africa but after his trip to Burkino Faso he understood very well why people want to come to South Africa to find jobs, to have a better life. He says he saw terrible poverty there: there was no infrastructure, no jobs.

By 2007, he felt the need to move on and had the confidence to start his own business so he resigned from the Pottershop. But Chris, ever the kind mentor, wanted to help him and she suggested that he create his own work in his own time and when he was ready, they should have a collaborative exhibition. The exhibition went quite well though a few weeks before opening the country slid into a recession so they had to lower their prices to entice buyers.

He had no studio of his own so he worked in different places. He became involved in a programme called "Realistic" in Gugs which was created for the rehabilitation of prisoners. He taught them pottery for about eight months and found this a very rewarding experience. Some of the ex-prisoners were very enthusiastic and excited when he started to teach them how to make pots. The initiator of this programme is Mr. Dixie Madikane, who worked for Correctional Services. He saw the need for such a programme as prisoners had no jobs, nothing to do upon release from prison and they sat about playing cards, just as they had in prison. Upon retirement from Correctional Services Mr. Madikane started the programme which continues to this day. At times it was scary for Madoda as some of the men were hardened, prison gang bosses and not used to being told what to do by this soft spoken, young man. He would then call in the people in charge telling them he could not teach such men.

Unfortunately, the funds ran out so Madoda went back to the Potters' Shop for a few months as Chris had an order in which she needed help. Soon after Kim Sachs offered him a mentorship in Johannesburg. He was finding his own way but he was determined to find a new expression and new forms – completely different from what he had done before. Again, another important event in his career came through Kim Sachs. Although he had done a bit of coiling before, she taught him seriously how to coil and he credits her with this teaching that influenced him in the development of the major form of expression in his work, that of coiled forms. As added impetus, he was staying in the studio and every morning when he woke up he was greatly inspired by the huge, coiled, Zulu pots that he saw there.

2012 saw him take up a post with the 'Art in the Forest' Foundation in Cape Town where his job was to paint on bisque ware. However, the management soon opened a branch in Johannesburg and so he returned once more to work there. This period marks one of the worst, but ultimately most important, periods in his ceramic career when his mettle and mental strength were sorely tested. He was set up in a studio with Nic Sithole in Yeoville where they produced coiled, smoke-fired pots. For three, long years nearly every pot Madoda made broke. He tried everything – he used the same clay, the same kiln, the same smoke-firing as Nic and he observed and used the same methods and processes as Nic - but still his pots broke. He would make ten pots and pray for one to survive. He would open the kiln and not one was whole. He said he would clean out the kiln and just start wedging. He wanted to produce a lot of work but he couldn't. He worked (and works), incredibly hard: he is a



The soft curves of his forms echo the soft curves of the female form.

FEATURE Profile

man driven. He says that the house where he was staying was only about three minutes from the studio so he would work and work and then look at his watch to see it was 1.30 am. He would go home and sleep for a few hours and be back at the studio at 7am – coiling pots that were going to break! But every time they did he would do something different, something better than he had done before, so he kept improving and his skills developed enormously.

Eventually, relief came - some small flicker of light when he submitted one pot to the Gauteng CSA Regional Exhibition (the other two having broken as usual). He was given an award – he was vindicated. Things were moving on and the clouds began to clear. The centre where they were working was to be demolished so they had to find new studio space. Madoda moved to Kliptown in Soweto. With this move, the miracle happened – his pots stopped breaking. He says he has never had a cracked pot since the day he moved to Soweto. A friend asked why he was keeping all the broken pots to which Madoda replied that there was so much work there that he couldn't just destroy them all. His friend suggested that sometimes perhaps these are what is causing the cracks and they should be destroyed. So Madoda did. He cannot explain it but nothing has cracked since. Out of adversity often good comes. Because of the constant breakages, he learnt each time to do things differently, to improve his skills so that to-day he is an absolute master of his craft. He says he does not regret this hardship because he conquered in the end and it made him stronger and better than before. The conquering over such adversity has given him the security and confidence in his ability to produce beautiful pots.

In Kliptown he was approached to teach again by a ceramic collector, Dr. Mutare. He had an idea to develop a programme to rehabilitate prisoners, as well as to involve the whole community. A group of about 25 people from different backgrounds was formed at the Bocomo Art Centre where there is a gallery and studio on Walter Sisulu Square. Madoda taught all methods and processes for making pots. There was only one wheel which caused problems so he taught them pinch pots. Some people objected, saying pinch pots weren't going to put food on the table, so they left. This was OK for him because then he knew that he had serious students, and who, now, often give him great satisfaction when he sees them posting on Facebook about their successes in teaching and making a living from pottery.

In 2016, he returned yet again to Cape Town to work with his younger brother, Siyabonga, in their studio and gallery shop in the Palms Centre in Woodstock. When asked what his plans are now, his steely determination and absolute clarity with which he plots his future become evident. He says he has a plan, he always has a plan. His plan before he went to Johannesburg was to win the CSA Regional Exhibition – so he did in 2014. His next plan was to win the CSA top National Exhibition Award – which he did in 2016. He has set his sights for now on a process to turn their present studio into a world class production studio with a balance of bread and butter production work, along with his own, unique, coiled, burnished, carved, smoke-fired, one-off



vessels. He will continue to show on exhibitions and in galleries but he also wants to develop the commercial aspect with a good production of ware available on trade shows for overseas and local buyers. He ascertained at a SAGDA trade show in Johannesburg what buyers like and what they want – small, burnished, smoke-fired pots with simple designs. He feels the people in the studio will succeed with the design he has created for these whilst he continues with his more time-consuming one-off vessels. He wants to have a good quantity of ware for mid-year trade shows where the buyers are looking for product for the Christmas trade. Over the years he has sold far and wide – in Miami, Paris and Argentina and still intends to make good on a missed opportunity in Sante Fé in New Mexico. Other international exposure saw him on a 3-week residency in Vallauris, sponsored by the Department of Arts and Culture, where he went with Andile Dyalvane and Nic Sithole. It was a tight schedule – two weeks making and an exhibition followed in the third week. It was comfortable for Andile and Nic who could throw a good number of pots on the wheel, but not so fine for Madoda, the



Coiler, so Nic helped him out. This French residency contributed further to Madoda's growing body of knowledge and experience of the world around him, as well as in a broader ceramics milieu, through this exposure to a French ceramic environment.

Alongside the re-structuring and steam lining of their present studio and his determination to improve the quality and quantity of their production, he continues to share his knowledge and expertise with others. In 2017 he was contracted by Taung Bokone Bophirima Design Institute (BBCI) to conduct workshops in the North West Province, specifically in Mafekeng, Taung and Rustenberg where he tutors rural crafts people who have been identified in order to help them improve their skills and increase their output of ware. He teaches a one-week "Product Development" course which involves up-grading their skills and processes to make their products better quality and more economically viable. The participants are all adults with their own individual studios or small scale pottery enterprises. He teaches simply things such as finishing off

the bases of pots smoothly so they won't scratch surfaces. He also teaches them about mould making which increases their production rate. He says taking three days to coil a pot which they then sell for R60 is not as efficient as producing many more pots through press moulding in the same amount of time. In addition, if a client wants ten pots of exactly the same size, it is easier to do this with moulds than by coiling. The oldest person on the course was about 69 years so Madoda made the moulds for this person himself, because the potter's arm muscles were no longer strong enough.

When quizzed about what makes a Madoda Fani pot, he emphasized that from the beginning he wanted his work to be recognised as his. He says he looks at everything around him – particularly movies and Japanese samurai clothing. He loves the armour plate-like structure of them and it is this which led him to create his immaculate, over-lapping, carved designs. The inspiration for his forms comes from African women – the soft curves of his forms echo the soft curves of the female form. He grew up in the townships where the abuse of women is common but the armour they wear is the smile they present to the world as if nothing bad is happening to them yet at home things are terrible. Women are outwardly soft but inwards very strong.

The insect designs on his pots came about by exploring books bought for him by Chris Silverstone. He was heavily schooled in her dot designs so she suggested that he do something different. She gave him a lot of support. She bought him materials and books. It is here that his love for insect forms was born. He hates flies but is fascinated by their complex eyes, so tiny yet so complicated. He also uses beetle forms and wasps are another design possibility. As children growing up he and the others were told that wasps – unomeva - always sense who is afraid of them in a room so they will go and sting that person. Naturally the children grew up trying to be strong meanwhile they were very frightened inside!

His firing methods remain the same. He bisque fires in electric kilns followed by smoke-firing with newspaper and sawdust in drums. Some pots will be smoked in saggars with sawdust as the reduction material. His pots are closed forms as he does not want people to put flowers in them as happened previously when someone complained to him that it leaked and cracked. Closed forms resolve this problem entirely.

Madoda's philosophy is directed towards continuing the traditional creative expressions of the past with his smoke-fired, coiled pots that reflect the insects and peoples of Africa in his designs and forms, but are created in a contemporary 21st century idiom. Alongside this, his ethical ideals of sharing his knowledge, skills and expertise so generously feed into the African spirit of Ubuntu, making him a man not just of great skill but one with a profound sense of humanity.

He is a workaholic with a burning ambition to fulfil his dream of creating the most amazing pots ever – one pot has not yet been created but it is still in his mind. He is on the road to develop further in order to create this amazing pot! Of this there can be no doubt. The stage is already set with a pot entitled "Metamorphosis" about to enter the world art market when it is auctioned in London at the famous Fine Art Auctioneers, Christies in 2017. This is just the beginning for this African super star in the wings – watch out Magdalene Odundo, you may yet be eclipsed as the creator of the most expensive pots in the world!

Ann Marais has been a full time ceramist, sculptor and artist since 1977. She has exhibited with much success, both locally and abroad. She is highly respected for her writings in local as well as overseas publications. Her work is held in private as well as public collections all over the world. She is a Fellow of Ceramics Southern Africa.

“Cont{r}act Earth”

The First (ever) Central China International Ceramics Biennale

Article by Katherine Glenday

Photographs by Katherine Glenday, various artists and by permission of the Henan Museum

“Cont{r}act Earth” was the first ceramics biennale to be held in Henan province, a region associated with 3 of the 5 most important ancient kilns in China. Having opened in December 2016, the Henan Museum saw 350,000 people cross its threshold over the three-month period.

South African born Wendy Gers was chosen via a rigorous tendering process as the curator of this prestigious event.* The exhibition showed works of forty two participants from twenty countries and included five international artists in residency.

Wendy’s thesis title for this biennale was “Cont{r}act Earth” which proposed clay as its own subject matter; *“The title Cont{r}act Earth suggests a dual focus for the exhibition. ‘Contact’ refers to the tactile and the haptic, as well as the materiality of clay. ‘Contract’ suggests a sense of legal obligation – as guardians of the planet”.*

Artists worked in many different ways with clay and with earth, some using classical methods of making and some exploring contemporary technology such as 3D printing. Some artists used found ceramic objects while others used clay as a medium for an ‘archival recording’ of contact made between people or of the earth’s tectonic processes. There were video and sound installations alongside some works while Dutch artist, Alexandra Engelfriet, presented a video showing her use of her entire body to work huge volumes of clay in an extremely visceral and athletic way.

In my opinion, some of the most impressive and thought provoking contributions were to do with our contractual engagement with the earth. The offerings were not always beautiful or visually alluring, but they were arresting through strength of concept. One such challenging work came from the British based collective: *Unknown Fields Division* whose stark black vessels were made from highly radioactive clay dug from a barely moving slag lake in Mongolia.

This lake resulted from mining for precious metals widely used in the manufacture of technology. The vessel sizes correspond to the weight of a smart phone, an electric car battery, and a tablet.

The correlation between pollution and environmental degradation as a result of production of high-end technological hardware was very precise and evocative and

encouraged viewers to think about their role as consumers.

The Nigerian artist Ngozi Ezema created a complex hanging installation of small, hand formed coils of clay. These collected on the ground and then appeared to eddy upwards on nylon threads towards what looked like a floating whale-like form. In reality this was composed of hundreds of brightly coloured bits and pieces which turned out to be eroded slivers of slippers, originally picked up on the beach.





Kim Juree from Korea made a perfectly scaled 1.5m long replica of an abandoned Xing dynasty residential compound found in the region. This unfired work was then exposed daily to a few inches of water at its base so that it slowly disintegrated. The meaning was immediate, clear, and full of pathos.

Madvhi Subrahmanyan from Singapore made 5 approximately 1,5 m high wavering building-like structures from terracotta which looked like the skeletons of high-rise buildings. This apocalyptic and shadowy cityscape seemed morose in its almost bruised colouration, yet it had a beauty and humanity to it which evoked a sense of anxiety and sadness. It was lit by intermittently moving lights and also accompanied by a wavering sound track of crickets and natural sounds of a forest, conjuring up the urgent questions of urbanisation and the frailty of a groaning earth.

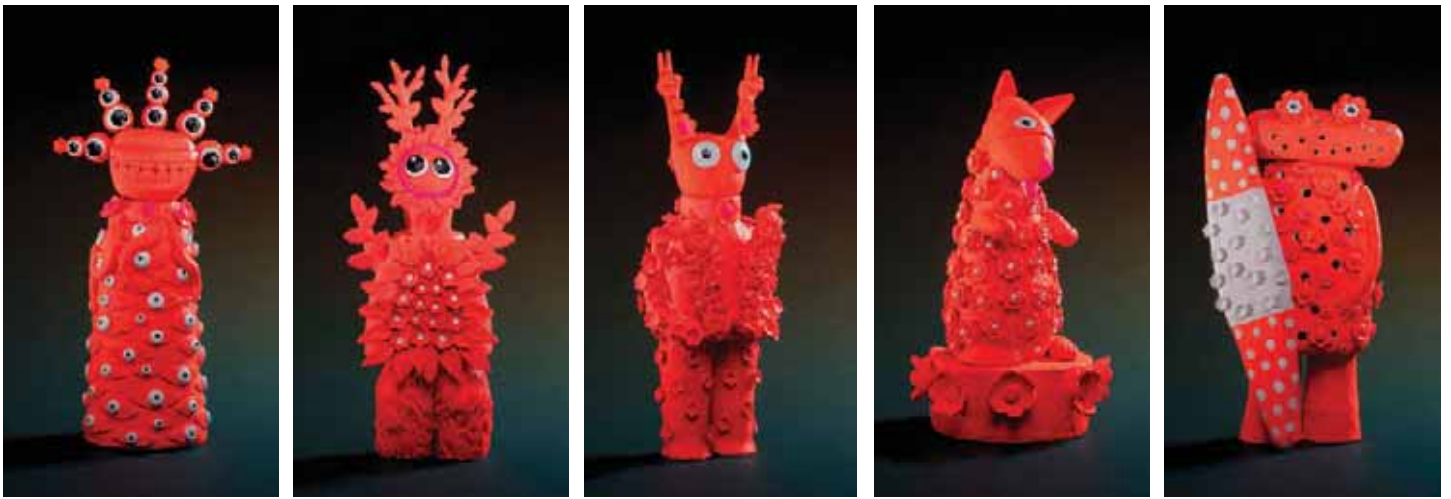
Wan Liya from China produced tall, elegant structures which were actually made from clay patties assembled one on top of the next, profiling tectonic surges on the Richter scale. The artist was drawing attention to severe earthquake activity in various places in the world. Though dictated by scientific measurement for their form, these works were both statuesque and subtly evocative of temples.

Other types of CONTACT came from artists doing month long residencies in ceramic studios and factories around the city of Zhengzhou.

Dutch designer Jólán Van Der Wiel did a residency in a ceramic factory working with classically shaped plaster moulds of vases. Van der Wiel grows his vases with magnets and a clay body containing a high iron content. The resulting filament form was fired and either left or glazed with distinctive local Jun ware glazes.



Other types of CONTACT came from artists doing month long residencies in ceramic studios and factories around the city of Zhengzhou.



Thai-Australian artist Vipoo Srivilasa * worked with children in a city junior school and got them to imagine superheroes who would save the world from ecological ruin. His six sculptures from these drawings were painted a fluorescent orange and in his inimitable style made a gleeful parade up the otherwise formal and imposing marble stairway into the museum.

The team of fantastic aliens formed a perfect and very disarming welcome to the many guests who were to visit the museum.

British artist, Jonathan Keep (a former Natal University graduate) made a series of subtly coloured 'anthills' with his expertise in computer generated forms and 3D printing. Exploring the relationship between natural processes and communal living as exemplified by ant colonies, he raises a greater question about humanity's relationships and the sustainability of their emergent forms on the earth.

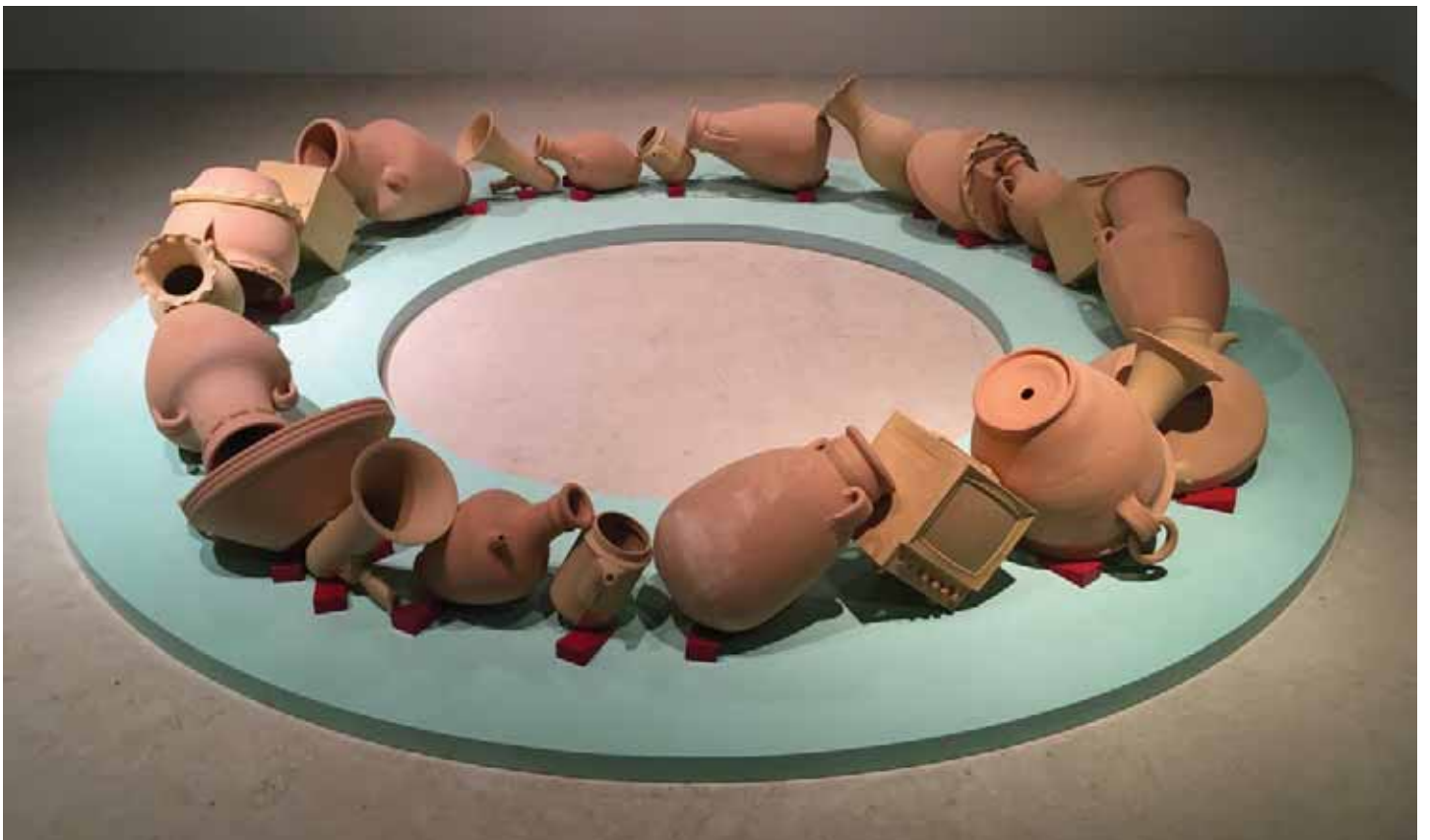
French artist, Inès Lavielle, contrasted delicately constructed and layered forms - some of which were 3D printed, while others were blown in glass or hand built. Her beautiful work was reminiscent of Victorian nature tables and simultaneously evoked a mystical contemporary alchemy. This work elucidated a subtle but central debate about the work of the hand contrasted with technical feats of design and engineering. Interestingly some of the digital work chosen for the display purposefully showed the flaws and lapses in the printing.





The work of the American artist, Cheryl Anne Thomas, raised a similar question during the artists' conference. Her very beautiful and labour intensive sculptures were constructed by slow and delicate coiling. The approximately metre and a half high cylinders with their subtly changing tonalities were consigned to the kiln as the final forming process. During the multiple firings the inherent fragile materiality of these fine forms resulted in slumping, tearing and warping. The results were some of the most imposing works on the show. Cheryl's presentation in the artist's forum indicated her creation process was deeply meditative and also a means of working with personal grief and its transformation.

Shlomit Bauman of Tel Aviv, Israel engaged Palestinian potter Abed El Ja 'Abari from the occupied Palestinian city of Hebron and together they made a collaborative work interspersing one iconic form by each artist in a circular sculptural form. In her presentation, she spoke about the legal, administrative and practical complexities of the collaboration with Abed. She showed a brief film taken on her mobile phone of a demonstration of Abed throwing traditional Palestinian vessels to a group of Israeli woman potters, that provoked a large, armed military intervention. She spoke of ceramics as a geological and cultural 'event' that knows no borders, and her humanitarian approach to working with clay was particularly poignant.



Another wonderful work about many levels of social engagement was 'The Artefact of Touch' by American academic and artist Holly Hannesian. This installation involved American and Chinese people shaking hands around a dab of unfired clay. The participants engaged in a four minute handshake, whilst maintaining eye contact whilst making 'living artefacts' between their palms. These transactional objects were then fired and arranged in a long line along one of the walls of the museum. Ancient, modern and contemporary clay artefacts from the museum's workshops and collections were interspersed amongst these objects, calling up the historical, social, psychological and economic aspects of the communicating hand. The work was not immediately visually arresting, yet its haptic quality was powerful.



Sound played a part in a few of the installations, including Lu Bin's series of nine giant turtle shells that refer to local archaeological history. These slowly decomposed to a sound track with a meditative Buddhist quality.

Apart from setting such a great thematic horizon, Wendy's selection of participants was stimulating and very broad in its reach. Many different thoughts about methods of production, mass production, the place of the handcrafted object in contemporary life, humanity's over population in the 21st century and the ever-present thoughts about the beleaguered ecology of the planet were raised.

In holding the reigns in the weeks running up to the exhibition, Wendy's ability to manage difficult logistical and cultural hurdles whilst maintaining a sense of humour and cheerfulness, proved to be impressive. Language and cultural barriers were often very challenging for all and the newly renovated museum was still heavily engaged in last minute construction.

In addition to "*Cont{r}act Earth*" the Henan Museum also presented three other parallel exhibitions "*Past and Present: Selected Ancient Porcelain from Five Famous Kilns and Contemporary Innovations*", "*The Legacies of 1000 years of Italian Ceramics*" which showed an incredible collection of Majolica works from the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza, and "*The Future of Vessels: Contemporary Pottery of Everyday Use*". All of these exhibitions also had attendant workshops, lectures and symposia.

* Currently a lecturer at the Ecole National Supérieure d'Arts in Limoges, France, and Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg, Wendy has also been the international curator for both the 2014 Taiwanese Ceramic Biennale and the exhibition *Post-colonialism? in Tel Aviv in 2016/2017*. She recently launched her book "*Scorched Earth, 100 years of South African Potteries*" at the end of last year.

** Sivilasa was featured in an article in a previous *Ceramics Southern Africa* magazine. Issue:06/2016 .



David Walters is getting old and tired!

Yes, I am! After all I turn 67 later this year, so I deserve to stop. I plan to retire to Cape Town, where I shall make pottery - but far less than I do now. So my beautiful home is for sale, including the galleries, studio and the gas kiln!

Right in the middle of Franschoek, this large property has a double storey house, dating from the early 1800's, with thick walls, old floors and Yellow Wood doors. The windows are all sash, some of them new, although we have preserved what we can. There is a four car garage, with a bedroom above, and a small river running through the garden.

We are set back one street from the main road, so it is a quiet, beautiful place to live and work - and of course we have many art galleries in the village now, so it is always a good place to sell ones pots.

The downstairs is all business, with four large galleries, a huge studio, and another big room at the back for the two kilns. Upstairs one enters the 'woonkamer', a large sunny room with sitting room area, a fire place, then a dining room and the kitchen at the other end. All the upstairs rooms have doors out onto covered verandahs, so from the kitchen one walks out onto an area overlooking the street, and the neighbours' homes, and up into the mountains behind. From the living room area, one walks out onto a large verandah, where the view is completely private and looks out towards the hills, and down into our large garden, with the stream and all the oak trees. There is also a large study, with doors leading to both verandahs, and a short passage leads to the two bedrooms, each with its own bathroom, and also doors onto the verandahs.

At the back of the home is another building, which has two lock-up garages, and two carports open to the garden. Above these garages is a large bedroom for guests, with an en suite shower room and a small kitchen. This room also has the most beautiful views.

The treed garden is large with oak trees along the river and a hedge along the road. It has space for growing veggies and room for parking cars. It is a private, wild garden, with many birds, a truly special place with its own well.



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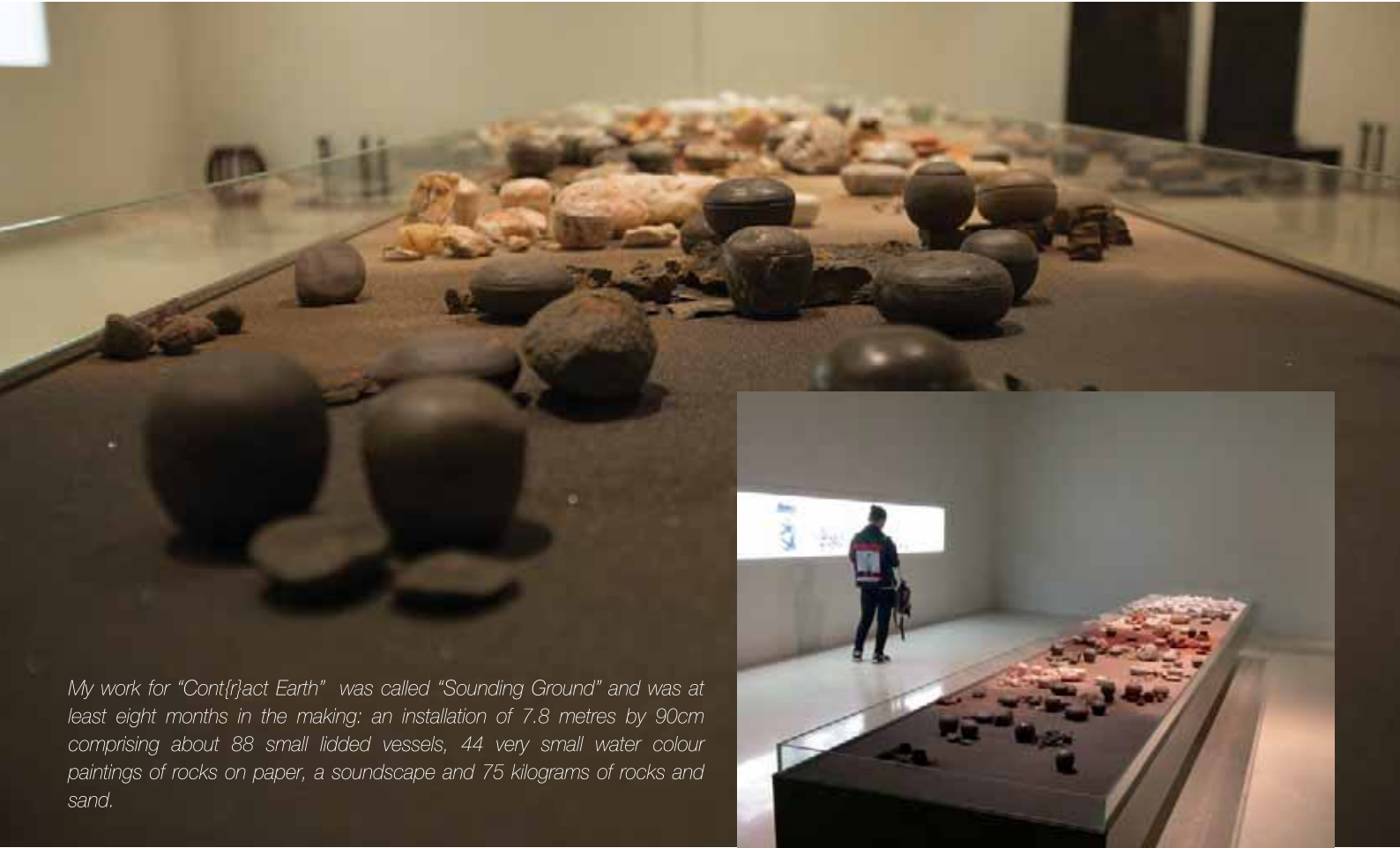
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SOUNDING GROUND

Article by Katherine Glenday

Photographs by Katherine Glenday, various artists and by permission of the Henan Museum



My work for "Cont(r)act Earth" was called "Sounding Ground" and was at least eight months in the making; an installation of 7.8 metres by 90cm comprising about 88 small lidded vessels, 44 very small water colour paintings of rocks on paper, a soundscape and 75 kilograms of rocks and sand.



The project gave me immense pleasure to conceive and to make. The first iteration of 'Singing Stones' was exhibited at the Irma Stern museum as part of the 'Sound Still' exhibition which I curated in 2006. I had always wanted to return to this work, and was also very happy to resume wheel work which I do little of these days. (Much of my current ceramic work is fairly large and slip cast.) Throwing the vessels involved 'painting with clay' as a complete and unified act as opposed to making a painting on or through the surface of white porcelain with which I usually work. Crafting very finely turned forms with well-fitting lids out of many sorts of clay was also very challenging and satisfying and it kept me interested for months.

Sounding Ground engaged many layers of thinking, taking the form of an undulating rocky landscape, interspersed with small round clay constructions which in my mind's eye still whirled amongst the gathering of stones. My small, painted replicas of selected stones, strewn amongst the vessels and rocks, were intended to pose a dialectical question about the physical nature of matter and what is real, what is illusion and what is an approximation of meaning. Often we confuse these things.

A soundscape of stone rubbing on stone, the clink of clay vessels and the human voice flowed from five microphones placed under the plinth of the installation. In the rather austere museum environment, where there was a language barrier, I was hoping to involve the viewer's emotions and vibratory body so that the installation as a whole achieved a quiet and intense contact.

Stones have always been markers of journey, of memory, of intent and of territory even in urban contexts. They ask to be picked up; they lure us with their beauty and because we have responded, they travel. We engage them as road markers, pathfinders or to carry thoughts, messages and secrets and we hold onto our chosen stones as we hold onto our thoughts and personal covenants.



Potters are alchemists and earth people and we engage the physicality of our own beings as we make contact with the soils and minerals and the composition of the earth. These materials in turn have been made from the firings and sedimentations of geological time; we reorganize and recompose them to our own ends often with unexpected and enlivening results from the kiln.

Some of the thrown 'stone' vessels for my installation arrived effortlessly with the first firing and others had to be wrestled

of practice helped.)

Many friends and family offered particular types or shades of sand or lent me specially loved stones and spoke about their associated meanings. The musicians* too entered a sort of contractual engagement - collaborating on the soundscape and spending many hours playing, singing and making recordings with stones, metal gongs, and my small clay vessels. (This latter quality of almost domesticated sound was very evocative, suggesting eons of domestic engagements with clay objects.)

With this installation I offered the proposal that the great leap for humankind needs to be an integrated, sensate, and hyper aware walk on the material ground of our being. It requires an attitude of listening and appreciation whilst we ask crucial questions regarding our contractual interdependence as humans whilst keeping close contact with the sustaining ground.

It was an immense privilege to work amongst an international group of artists engaged with clay and some of the important and pressing issues facing humanity at this time. Exposure to the ancient Chinese ceramic heritage was also inspiring and thought provoking and I was very grateful to have been invited and very lucky to have been able to travel there.

Katherine Glenday works from a studio in Kalk Bay. She studied ceramics in the 1980's at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Katherine has been the recipient of many national and regional awards in South Africa and her work is represented in most of the public collections in the country. She has also been ceramicist in residence at the National Arts festival in Grahamstown and at the KKKN festival in Oudtshoorn. Exhibiting regularly in New York, she has a work in the collection of the Museum of Art and Design in the city.

*musicians: Christina and Richard Goodall and composer and sound engineer Stuart Zeneka.



and co-erced into having a stone like quality and could on occasion be subjected to as many as 6 or 7 firings.

The many hours of making entailed moments of fluidity and mastery as well as moments of inattention, carelessness, and impatience. Some vessels are fine and light whilst purporting to be stones; and some feel heavy and grave - each having very different qualities. Hand thrown vessels bear the thumb whorls and wheel spins so that the process in some ways synthesizes the marks of human mimicry. I have always found that in the most focused yet fluid moments, mimicry gives way to sheer osmosis. This is when the very special vessels arrive with an almost effortless grace.

The arrangement of soils which the paintings and vessels lay on was another important part of the work. Composed as it was from a tonal range of elements sieved from ash and salt; from ochre and carbon; from magnetic particles of iron, mica, and silica sands, it became its own painting. The contact, gathering, sorting, and refining were an important aspect and took much effort and many journeys. By the end of the process I had laid the work out enough times to know every stone and each tonal relationship and corresponding vessel very well. (I had only 7 hours to install it as there was a hold up with the delivery of the work to the museum, so finally installing the work in the museum was a bit like playing an exacting piece of music under pressure in a concert hall. Lots





A Farewell to Susan Sellschop

1941- 2017

I first met Sue when she assisted in the running of a small craft shop in Senate House, Witwatersrand University. At that time she was a weaver and I invited her to join our craft group which was a group of craftspeople in various disciplines who exhibited as a group once a year.

However, soon after this Sue decided to study ceramics full time at the Johannesburg Technicon. It was a few years later after qualifying, that she came to join me at the Craft Council. At first we had no premises and met at her house to discuss the way forward for the Craft Council. We were both passionate about the need to establish something for craftspeople in South Africa and were fortunate to obtain funding from Germany, which enabled us to move into the Bus Factory, establish an office, employ staff and open a shop and a space for the Beautiful Things Exhibition. Sue worked tirelessly, both in the office and organising training workshops, assisting with the First National Bank sponsored National Craft Exhibitions which we presented every two years.

She came with me to Greece for a World Craft Council Meeting in Metsovo, Northern Greece where we discussed the position of craft worldwide, how South Africa could work alongside other African and world countries and what we could learn from them.

She was dedicated to putting South African craft on the map, to training our craftspeople to stand up alongside those from other countries and to recognise that what they were doing was very important. She assisted several craft groups to become self-sufficient and eventually self-supporting.

We will all miss her input, her dedication and her selflessness and, above all, her friendship.

Wendy Goldblatt



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image: Ann Marais, WS1 s/w casting slip

Dreaming of Clay

Article by Kate Shand
Photographs by Kate Shand and Nina Joubert

Millstone Pottery hosted a three-day traditional pottery workshop from 15 to 17 April 2016 with various rural potters in attendance and facilitated by ceramicist Michelle Legg. This is the second in a series of three articles, and features Pondoland potter, Nesiwe Nongbeza. Nesiwe hardly speaks any English and I speak even less isiXhosa so our interview was challenging. I asked John Steele, a lecturer in the Fine Art Department at Walter Sisulu University in East London and a friend of Nesiwe's, to corroborate and expand on what she shared with me.

A month or so before Nesiwe Nongbeza was due to arrive in McGregor for Millstone Pottery's low-fired workshop, she contacted the pottery to let them know she was about to give birth and she needed an extra bus ticket so she could bring along her child minder. A newborn baby was no obstacle for Nesiwe who made the one thousand two hundred kilometer journey by bus from Port St Johns to Grahamstown, and then transferred to a new bus heading for Robertson. Not only did she have a newborn baby to care for, but she also had to transport the large completed pot she brought - on her lap! Her heavy bucket of clay was in the hold of the bus. A very special clay that wouldn't have found the light of day if it hadn't been for a dream.

Nesiwe was born in 1988 in Nkonxeni near Port St Johns in the Eastern Cape, one of the poorest parts of the country. She started making pots when she was about eleven years old, following in the footsteps of her recently deceased grandmother – famous Pondoland potter, Alice Nongbeza. Nesiwe remembers a day when her grandmother left for church and while she was away, the young Nesiwe had an urge to start making pots and other figures with her grandmother's clay. She says when her grandmother returned from church she found their dwelling full of the creations of the eleven year old. Alice was delighted with her granddaughter and from that moment on started teaching her how to create pots which could survive the direct flames of the firings.

Nesiwe spent the weekend quietly in the Millstone Pottery's kiln room, rolling out her clay on a piece of woven fabric, into even-sized sausages and then peacefully and rhythmically, from a round base of clay, pinched her coils into pots. This activity was only punctuated when her baby required breast-feeding. She turned her pots upside down once she was pleased with their shape, secured the base, and then signed the pots, including her cellphone number! Once her pots were completed and sufficiently dried she carved simple geometric patterns into the clay to decorate the pots. After this, they were burnished with a stone she had brought with her. Her only tools were the grass mat, an old knife, and a burnishing stone. Unfortunately she had been unable to bring leather hard pots with her and so her pots had to be force-dried in an electric kiln to be ready for firing. This put Nesiwe under tremendous pressure – to build, decorate, burnish, and dry before Sunday's firing two days hence. It was inevitable that one of her pots cracked but one of the workshop participants helped her and using spit, clay and determination, fixed the crack. Nesiwe was also shown how to burnish with oil as the kiln-dried pots were too dry for her usual way of dry burnishing. Initially suspicious of all this intervention and suggestion, Nesiwe relaxed into the process and managed to get enough pots ready for the firing.

The story of where Nesiwe gets her clay from is metaphysical, mythical, and magical. At the age of twenty two years, Alice Nongbeza, Nesiwe's grandmother, in deep grief having lost two sons in quick





succession, turned to the healing power of clay and with the help of neighbouring potters she learnt to make pots using clay from nearby sources. Unfortunately, many of her pots did not survive the intense heat of the firings. Alice had a dream during which her maternal grandmother (who was not a potter) told her where she could find clay that would survive the flames. Alice followed the path to the site as guided by her grandmother in her dream, and found the exact physical elements present there that she had dreamed of the night before.

John Steele interviewed Alice in 2006 and in his article 'Finding the best clay' describes what happened:

In this dream Nongebeza knelt down next to the tree and watched as her grandmother moved the soil aside, then dug deeper and removed some clay, which was made into two balls and left there as a marker. Nongebeza was instructed to return the following day with three white beads to place at that spot in order to say thank you to the earth and ancestors. On the following day she asked someone to accompany her and followed the pathways traversed in the dream and found the site, identifiable by the imprints of her knees, as well as the two balls of clay. She related that she then actively engaged with a mystic process of acknowledging and thanking her ancestors for "showing" that place, and thereby also made herself known and acceptable to the site and surroundings by placing the three white beads, of the type usually worn by Mpondo women around the neck, in the manner prescribed in her dream.

According to Steele, the clay from this seam is made from two components, "the lower being known as sabhunge, which is a slightly stonier component that gets added in at about a 50/50 ratio to give the final clay body tooth and good workability characteris-

tics". Large pots can be made from this coarse and robust clay in one sitting and it can also withstand the thermal shock of the bonfire without cracking.

Although Alice is now dead, Nesiwe continues to make pots and to collect her clay from the exact site shown to her grandmother all those years ago in a dream. In 'Finding the best clay', Steele describes how inaccessible the extraction site actually is "located in the next valley towards the sea, about halfway down a steep incline reached by a pathway in dense subtropical bush, approximately two hours from the homestead by foot". Nesiwe works very much on her own, she collects her own clay, initially carrying it up the steep incline bit by bit, and then carrying it all back home without the help of a husband or collective of other woman potters.

With the same quiet, focused and rhythmic quality with which she made her pots, so Nesiwe set about preparing her firing. She built a pyre with large branches and logs and some kindling and once the fire was roaring she carefully and most unusually placed her pots directly into the flames. It seemed impossible that her pots would survive the intense and direct flames, but whoever visited her grandmother in her dreams all those decades ago must have passed on magical instructions, because all the pots survived the firing. Once they had cooled enough to handle, Nesiwe polished them with Cobra wax and they were ready to display. Her pots have an elemental and timeless quality to them, as if they have emerged directly from the earth thousands of years ago.

Nesiwe has limited markets for her pots. She says she sells mainly to tourists in Port St Johns, Mthatha and Grahamstown – as well as further afield to a woman with a shop in Pretoria who comes and buys twenty pots at a time directly from Nesiwe. She told me that she once had an opportunity to visit Germany with the Department of Arts and Culture but was only there for two days. She took twenty pots with her on the airplane and sold them all. However, selling pots at home isn't so easy and Nesiwe sells only about ten to fifteen pots a month, earning her a meager R4000 – barely enough on which to subsist. Her pots sell for between R180 and R450 and a very big one can sometimes bring in as much as R700 – but that's rare. Local isiXhosa people also buy her pots for traditional purposes such as for storage, as well as for brewing beer.



Steele is a major supporter of her work. Not only does he buy her pots, which he has done for many years for his own treasured collection, but he is also taught by Nesiwe. Steele comes to Port St Johns to learn Nesiwe's craft "to learn the traditional way", she says. Steele describes the lessons as "a highlight of our friendship". He really enjoys the opportunity of learning to work with her clay with its "peculiarities of texture and immense workability". He loves the beautifully rounded forms of Nesiwe's pots and "I have a huge respect for the skill she has to achieve them" he adds. "My interactions with Nesiwe and other potters in Pondoland have been wonderful, with unprecedented kindness, warmth, and hospitality, all round, lots of laughter and always many children - sealed by mutual pleasure in the medium of clay and love of the transformative power of fire!"

Nesiwe says people in her village are not interested in learning to make pots – "it's very hard to be a potter" she says, "it's hard work and nobody likes hard work, especially young people", she adds. Steele elaborates on this "there are

many potential potters who could easily become interested if there was sufficient markets for the works to warrant the effort". Unfortunately, Nkonxeni is just off the tourist route and the outlets at Port St John's are unreliable in terms of turnover.

The sceptics among us may wonder about the source of dreams but those of us who watched Nesiwe's pots enter the unforgiving yet transformative flames and exit an hour later properly fired and undamaged, know that some things are beyond explanation – certainly the dream as reported, feels like a direct and mystical intervention. As Alice says in her interview with Steele (2006), this is "the clay that God has mixed for me".

For further information, the following articles by John Steele can be accessed via the internet:

Anatomy of a pottery bonfiring in the Port St Johns region, Eastern Cape, South Africa (<http://www.sahumanities.org/ojs/index.php/SAH/article/view/48>)

Rural potters in the Eastern Cape, South Africa: what next? ([http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/10388/Steele_Rural\(2007\).pdf](http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/10388/Steele_Rural(2007).pdf))

Cultural Heritage in the Work of Two Xhosa-speaking Ceramic Artists

(<http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/a-far.2007.40.3.64?journalCode=afar#.V88L35N96CQ>)

Finding the best clay (South African Journal of Art History, Volume 28, Number 2, 2013)

Kate Shand is a published author, artist and community arts counsellor. She has a Master's Degree in Heritage from Wits University. Kate has three daughters and lives in Johannesburg.



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An exciting array of Southern African potters and ceramic artists, both rural and urban, including Lisa Liebermann, are showcased at Liebermann Gallery. The Gallery is located in the historic Gas Works, close to the trendy Melville shopping area.

Liebermann Pottery in Johannesburg has an extensive range of traditional handmade cottage tableware, dinnerware and ceramic picture tiles, brilliantly-coloured contemporary garden planters and vases, with their distinctive Liebermann ambience. For the Bonsai enthusiast, the Liebermann Gallery has the largest selection of planters on the continent.

Our Cape Town gallery is situated on an old Cape farm, on Kommetjie Main Road, near Kommetjie on the Cape Peninsula.





Oliewenhuis Art Museum, situated in Bloemfontein in the Free State, is renowned for its involvement with the local artist community ever since the Art Museum's official opening on 11 October 1989. This prestigious museum originated after a prolonged campaign by the art-loving citizens of Bloemfontein for an art museum. It has remained a beacon of interactive culture in the city.

2016 was no different; for months the Art Museum engaged actively with local ceramicists Helena de Waal, Toni Pretorius and Dina Grobler to inspire the community to work with clay. Local artists, art students and art enthusiasts were involved in two consecutive ceramics workshops, hosted by these three brilliant ceramicists at Oliewenhuis Art Museum during October and November 2016. The ceramicists merged their unique approaches towards clay, providing workshop participants the opportunity to create their own unique ceramic plates by learning how to mould, shape, apply texture on and carve clay. The first workshop focused on 'wet work' techniques used to create a ceramic plate. The second workshop covered the decoration of the fired pieces (both bisque ware and glazed ware) with oxides, under glazes, transfers and glazes.

This collaboration was taken a step further as all the finished ceramic plates were exhibited in the prestigious 'Liedjiesbos' eco-friendly guesthouse garden, accompanied by a candlelight dinner. This event had a dual purpose: firstly to unveil the ceramic plates to the workshop attendees and secondly to welcome the renowned European ceramicist, Sasha Wardell, to the City of Roses.

Sasha Wardell presented a demonstration and lecture at Oliewenhuis Art Museum on 17 November 2016. The demonstration show-

Oliewenhuis Art Museum: Support for Ceramics in the City of Roses

Article and Photographs by Yolanda de Kock



cased her mould-making process, during which she discussed some of the intricacies of working in bone china as well as the casting process she uses. Wardell furthermore demonstrated her decorating methods, including water erosion and how she uses layers of different coloured slips to create unique pieces. This was a remarkable experience for the Free State audience.

Fifty-five individuals attended the lecture and enjoyed it tremendously. Students from Motheo TVET College summarised the success of the demonstration: "as students we realise the importance of mould-making as a technique in ceramics. The mould-making process and respect with which Sasha handles and decorates each pot, inspires us to be better ceramicists. We also realise that through hard work and determination we can have successful careers as ceramicists".

Toni Pretorius was the first prizewinner of the inaugural Free State Phatsoane Henney New Breed Art Competition in 2016. She has participated in several group exhibitions and her artworks are included in several private and public collections.

In addition to the award as Best Sculptor (2007) and the Crafter's Award (2009) in the Free State Ceramics Exhibition, Helena de Waal recently received the acclaimed Highly Commended award at the Gauteng Regional Exhibition of Ceramics South Africa (2015). Helena has exhibited extensively in South Africa and has work in the William Humphreys Art Gallery's permanent collection.

Dina Grobler has participated in group exhibitions in Bloemfontein at Oliewenhuis Art Museum, the Johannes Stegmann Art



Gallery and at the Scaena Theatre during the Vryfees exhibition. Dina's artworks have been included in many public and private collections. She started her own Art Studio in 2014. Her students attend weekly classes in drawing, painting, sculpture and ceramics. Workshops in Raku firing, African pit firing, silkscreen, drawing and etching are also on her studio's annual calendar.

Yolanda de Kock is the Education Officer at the Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein. She holds Masters Degrees in Fine Arts as well as Heritage Management. Her research has evolved into a passion to examine specific art collections, their provenance and their roles within larger collections. Alongside administrating and managing the Education Department of Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Yolanda often curates exhibitions for the museum and independently for artists and tertiary institutions.



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Captured in Flight: The Ceramics of Hayley Ellis

Article by Jonathan Downs
Photographs by Marlowe Brett



In early October 2016, a new artist was launched on Cape Town, from a small private workspace in a quiet leafy road in Observatory. Unseen from the front, few passers-by would guess that at the rear was a fully-equipped workroom with easels, benches, slab-roller and kiln. Here, painter and ceramist Hayley Ellis works in oils on canvas, mixed media collage, and her unique style of abstract ceramic sculpture. This is the Outsider Studio – for ‘outsider’ is very much what Hayley is.

‘I’m that new weird thing: the emerging older artist, the outsider, not part of the regular system, and I need to make a living from it. Everyone asks if my place is a gallery, but grow more excited when they see the workroom, the clay and the paint, and realise it’s a genuine studio that just happens to have windows.’ As a show-case it has attracted several buyers, foreign and local, and regular passers-by stop and say hello, and she has become well-known to the community.

‘People are so curious. They ask how I started, particularly in ceramics, and I think it must have been my first experiments in slip-casting sculpture,’ she says, a reference to the serene dog-head sculptures in earthenware and porcelain on her shelves. These were first done before she had a proper studio, made in the dark corner of a converted garage. They have sold at auction in the United Kingdom, and she has been recently commissioned to make two more for a Cape Town client. Each one is different, its expression changing according to its treatment through carving and remodelling, and its glaze. ‘My aim was to portray something of the spirit in the bust. When I began my torn paperclay work they developed even further.’

Tearing slab clay is part of Hayley’s process – she lays small torn pieces of clay almost arbitrarily across the essential form of the bust. She then treats these with the same principles she applies to an abstract canvas: splashes of colour to express one emotion or another, one leading her to the next, elevating the subject to a feeling rather than an intellectual exercise in replication.

This has become something of a Hayley Ellis signature. Her large porcelain paperclay vessels are unique. ‘Once I found the ideal mix of

paperclay, I could tear the thinnest possible slabs and build my structure out of torn strips and individual pieces, like bandages.’ In this way, she has made vessels and bowls, some of these structures over 40cm high, formed of nothing more than overlaid strips. It is supremely painstaking work. She maintains a pliable, unstable web-like structure while the shape builds, until the web itself becomes the strength to support the whole. While she works, she takes no breaks, but stands at her bench sometimes for hours on end. But the results speak for themselves. The torn vessels on display at The Outsider Studio give an uneasy sense of fragility, despite the universal form of a functional container, expressing the dichotomy of all such forms: one cannot take the precious and life-giving vessel for granted. They were of such impact that she was asked to make one for presentation to Winnie Mandela on the occasion of her 80th birthday.

‘At first I thought I would do an object, such as a sculpture of some kind, but in the end preferred the idea of a vessel. Gender issues, the rights and causes of feminism, and simply being a woman, informs all of my work. To me, the vessel is symbolic of woman and Winnie Mandela had been considered for some time the spiritual mother of the nation, holding the South African protest movement in her hands. If you went to her birthday celebration you would have seen how much she means to the people of this country. It was awe-inspiring. That was where I started.’

The large vessel of torn paperclay was fired with splashes of silver and golden glaze. ‘I was supposed to present it after the concert at the Artscape Theatre, but so many people trooped into the VIP room after Winnie that she was utterly swamped. I’d brought it in a box, and it was sitting by the family on a table, but I just couldn’t get in to give it to her!’ In the end, Nelson Mandela’s grandson Zondwa and his wife Lindo intervened, and got Mama Winnie to open it the next morning, sending Hayley the photograph. ‘It was lovely! I was just pleased she got it at last!’

But making the vessel was touch and go. Like every other ceramicist, Hayley has had her disasters in the kiln: ‘So I pray to the kiln gods each time I switch the thing on. And I can’t use my hot water if it’s on either, or I’ll blow the whole fuse box!’

She prefers a preliminary bisque firing, to ensure the dryness and maintenance of shape before sending it up to 1300oC. At times it’s been hit and miss. ‘I once did a commission of a sculpture for a client but the clay was just too thick and it exploded in the kiln. Ever since then I’ve tried everything, even

putting objects into my Smeg stove at home at 50°C like a tray of rusks, just to squeeze those last little bits of moisture out.'

At her exhibition launch in October, she unveiled a new type of bowl. On display that night were sculptures and her torn vessels, but two objects were quite different. They were abstract ceramics in the truest sense, assuming the merest form of a bowl without the functionality, bearing the essence of the object yet conveying an ethereal otherworldliness – as if they could fly away into nothing. 'These were more difficult to make than I'd expected,' she admits, 'because the clay slab had to be so fine yet also strong enough to support itself without structure.'

These are not functional items, and Hayley makes no apologies: 'Flaws are part of the natural form. If the clay wants to pull or crack, then that's what it must do. If you let it, and use the natural quality of the medium, you can create things you never imagined originally. It's an expressive art form, rather than the false perfection of the smooth commercial coffee mug.' In one piece, a two-handed bowl, where the edges rise like wingtips there is a split in the porcelain which Hayley developed, creating two wings. The result is a captured moment, of something fluttering in the wind, or the hint of flight. It became part of the abstract expression itself. These featherweight pieces ring a clear tone when struck, leaving one with an impression of endless strength, despite their delicacy.

Another style she employs is folding clay. While forming a bowl structure from a single slab, she folds the excess created by the rounding action at intervals along the side, creating thick, plant-like ridges, giving the bowl a sense of solidity. The acid colours of the glazes are part of her regular palette, and part of the abstract series of oils launched in October.

These bright garish colours infuse her ceramic work, enlivening a bowl or bust, conveying the mood she intends. She does not hold with the constant neutral tones of regularised contemporary work, but prefers the energy and power of unexpected colour.

Hayley no longer works on the potter's wheel, finding it too restrictive for her working style – she still has a number of pieces done on the wheel from her earlier days, but for now is exploring the possibilities provided by the slab-roller and the tyranny of the torn structure. 'I'm still learning,' she says, 'and the moment I stand still without forcing myself to try something new, I won't feel like an artist. Art should challenge the beholder, but it should also challenge the artist.'

To visit the studio please contact Hayley direct on (+27) 0760 332 465, or email wishes.e@gmail.com or through #the_outsider_studio on Instagram.

Jonathan Downs is a journalist, editor and author of historical non-fiction in the UK and USA. He has lectured at the universities of the Western Cape and written numerous articles for periodicals such as the UK's History Today, and specialises in the repatriation of ancient heritage artefacts.



– A LONG WAY ROUND WITH GENIE ALBRECHT

Article by Genie Albrecht

Photographs by Izaan Pauw



One very misty, rainy, cold and windy Tuesday backpacking through Wales way back in the seventies I took refuge in a little pottery studio in a small village. I was kindly offered some soup served in a magnificent "huggable" soup bowl/mug. We had a lovely chat about being a potter, clays, pigments, firing, and generally being creative. Whilst sipping this soup I wandered around his studio cum gallery looking at all the Anglo-Oriental pieces he made, mainly with ash glazes. That was the day I fell in love with clay. I had to try it out. Of course I bought that very soup mug and knew that one day I would work with clay.

When I returned to live in Namibia in the early eighties I joined Doreen Hildenhagen, out at Avis, for weekly pottery classes and loved it. I liked the idea of tableware: pieces being handled, used and touched (all pottery pieces are used in one way or another). We talked about creating an association for potters. She felt we would learn from each other and resultantly I was one of the founding members of Potters Association of Namibia. I was on this committee for about ten years as Secretary, Press Release Officer, Vice-Chairperson and finally as Chairperson from 1987 – 1997.

Throwing clay on the wheel is my passion. I enjoy seeing how the form takes shape and what the clay wants and feels like. Sometimes when I have planned something, something entirely different emerges whilst the clay is travelling through my hands and another vessel is born. As an adult I still enjoy 'playing' with clay, shaping, forming, adding pieces, decorating, and finally using the pieces.

The roundness of my pots reminds me of a mandala. The centre part is the "negative" and is patiently waiting to be filled with the "positive" when in use. My pots are never finished because they need to hold something, giving it the final touch to these creations. Both the contents and the pot must be in synch and complement each other. Only then is the vessel finally complete during the social gathering of a meal. On the other hand the vessels that are decorative are complete by just being in the eye of the beholder. I want my pots to be held, touched, used, looked at, be a conversation piece and above all enjoyed: hence my pots are to be held and beholden. I am a tactile person; perhaps as I grew up, this sense of 'touch' didn't mature in me and I find myself, like children do, always wanting to "touch" and "feel" the ceramic object. The outcome of pots also depends on where they are placed in the reduction kiln; how high and next to which other objects and how long the firing reduction is. There are so many factors and each time it's like opening a Christmas present; one is never one hundred percent sure of what to expect.

My inspiration and mentor for Anglo-Oriental work came from the wonderful South African potter, Andrew Walford. On a workshop here in Windhoek, he introduced us to reduction firing and assisted in firing our first gas kiln. Together we mixed glazes and used various pigments for uninhibited brush strokes, especially emphasizing free wrist





movements. Of course reduction firing lends itself to this. Inspiration comes from my travels. Wherever I go, I find forms, shapes, textures and colours in buildings and their surroundings, but more so in the natural environment from which there is so much to draw. Attending workshops or visiting potteries are very rewarding and inspirational.

By profession I am the primary school art teacher at the Windhoek International School and also teach children from home about the wonderful feel of clay. I have also written and published two articles for the prestigious Ceramics Review Magazine in the UK: "Potters of Caprivi" and "Pottery in Nigeria".

I have taken part in various exhibitions for PAN and Ceramics Southern Africa, assorted group exhibitions and won some awards along

the way. My first solo exhibition of pottery and photography called "Cameos of Fire and Ice" was held at Studio 77 in November 2008 followed by another solo exhibition entailing firing pots in saggars filled with sea sand, called "Geoscapes" at the Omba Gallery in November 2010. My husband, Rolf and I have had several annual Home Studio Exhibitions in our studio in Pioneerspark. One never stops exploring and experimenting with forms and glazes. I am very lucky to have this passion in my life!

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This exhibition is organized by the High Museum of Art, Atlanta. **Images:** Magdalene Odundo (British, born Kenya, 1950), *Untitled*, 1995, burnished and reduced terracotta, Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation for Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI, *Untitled*, 1989, burnished and oxidized terracotta, private collection. *Vessel Series II, no. 7*, 2005–2006, burnished and carbonized terracotta, Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation for Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI. All works © Magdalene Odundo.



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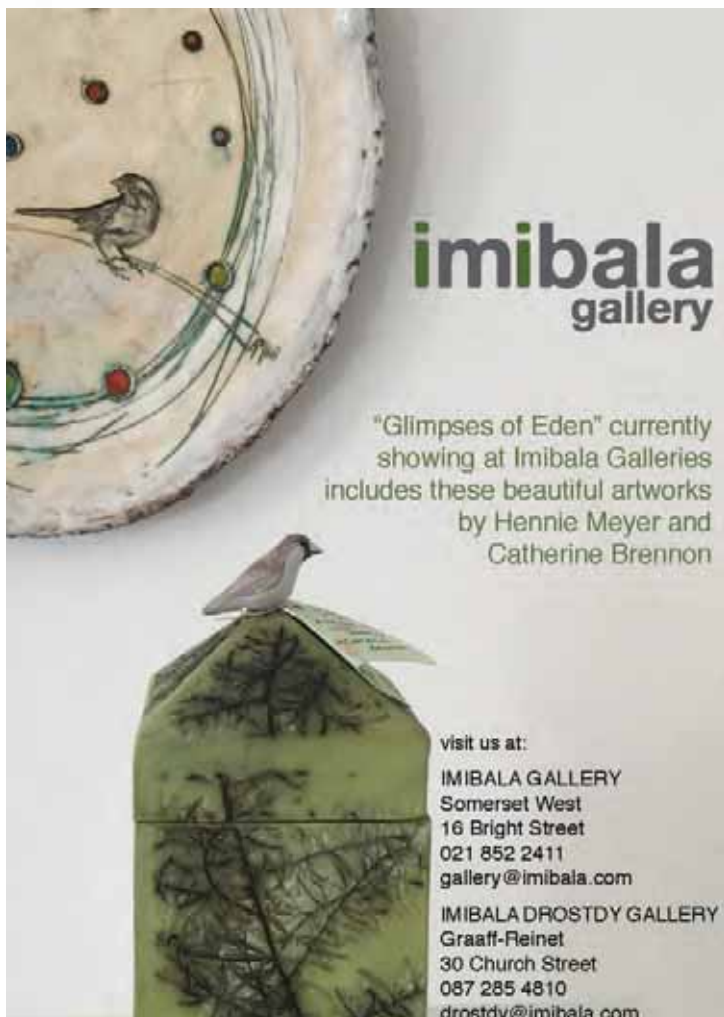
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An inspiration for daydreams

Article by Amélie Wade. Photographs by Leah Hawker

Stories are not always about words and paper: for John Bauer the white page is a handful of clay. However, if you let your imagination loose you'll find amazing tales on just a few square centimetres of porcelain.

His collection of references is quite impressive; some exotic (India, ancient Japan), some are more familiar (coins from modern days, plastic toy figurines) but all in all, none is ordinary.

I met John Bauer on a windy day at the harbour market in Hout Bay, south of Cape Town. He was sitting amongst a collection of bowls, but what caught my attention was a small group of tile images. It was like opening a door to the imagination. The elegance of the imagery and fine porcelain was unexpected.

Picking up a few tiles and assembling them, the result may remind you of a Victorian cabinet of curiosities. The eclectic influence of the artist is revealed by a diverse range of representations. Amongst other things you can admire some old Asian monks, a gold fish that appears to be caught in movement, parts of clock mechanisms, a tiger on guard, a bird which could belong to a manuscript decoration, and a Mexican skull inspired by Frieda Kahlo. Dream a little and you can imagine Homer's Odyssey or an oriental tale. There is no alphabet, you can read it in any direction and make your own code. It's like a mosaic except that there is no intended design.

I have organized my favourite ones according to colours and textures. Colours are mostly shades of blue but you can also find red, yellow, white and



violet. You can also play with textures. Some tiles are very smooth; others are rough like raw material. Both sides are used, there is no empty space. If you run your fingers over them they all feel different, it is a whole new story every time. A little blue portrait reminds me of an original cameo. When I was studying at the Louvre they used to display some carved gemstones which appear to be alike. Some techniques seem to be travelling through the ages.

Another one is showing part of a poppy. It could be from a herbarium. The details are so fine that the stem looks freshly cut. It's almost as accurate as a photograph. The image of the old monks appears to belong to a comic world. They could be drawn with pastel and it looks as if they are joking or perhaps laughing at you. On the other hand, the young Asians, crowded in the dark blue tile clearly copy the art of Netsuke - another of the artist's traditional influences.

There is one series which I especially favour. Although every single tile is unique, the ceramist has produced some images indefinitely until he finds a new source of inspiration. He especially uses the sea urchin, as well as the lizard and the butterfly. Although these are all images from the natural world, the sea



urchins in particular, sometimes resemble space ships or decorating shapes from the Seventies. The shift in patterns and expression is an invitation to daydream.

When you begin to look, you want to take in all the details, you want to own the whole collection, and you want to cover walls with it. They are like a riddle or a maze, you lose yourself in them, and you cannot get out. That is what is inspiring to me when I look at John Bauer's porcelain tiles.

Amélie Wade studied ceramics and porcelain in France. She has now settled in Cape Town and discovered the work of John Bauer at the Hout Bay Harbour Market. His work inspired her to write this article.




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PORT ELIZABETH

Pottery classes for beginners to advanced students. Hand-work as well as wheel work offered every Monday and Wednesday evening. For further information contact

Lisa @ 082 516 9220.

TEACHING STUDIOS

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WENDY GOLDBLATT CERAMIC TEACHING STUDIO



Wendy has been teaching for over 35 years. She gives lessons for both beginners and advanced students in hand building, wheelwork and glazing techniques in a well equipped studio.

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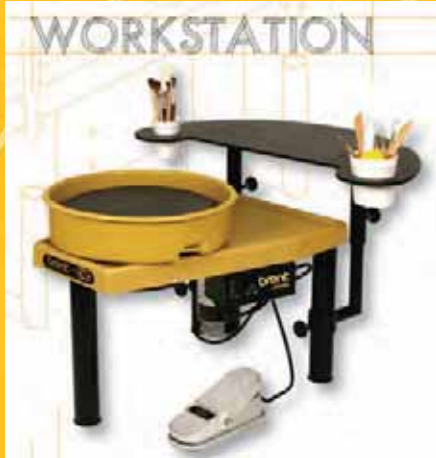
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