

'PRECEDENTS'

Essay by Jess Lyons, For Your Pleasure (FYP), (October, 2025)

The group exhibition *Precedents*, explores and highlights the iterative and often unseen processes that underpin ceramic practice - prototypes, maquettes, sketches, material tests and final/ resolved forms. The show and subsequent artist interviews aim to build a written and visual dialogue around experimentation, community and how ceramic artists make. Our medium might be the same but we each use our own well-earned methodologies of thinking and making, with each work forging the path forward for what comes next, via looking at the before.

The artists featured in *Precedents* have ceramic practices that ultimately revolve around identity - whether that be via place, (Laura Veloff) personal identity explored through material and form, (Jess Lyons, Lauren Cameron) unionism and arts-labour activism (Madeleine Thornton-Smith), personal design ethics (Sam Ward and Steve Konidaris) gender politics, (Franky Frankland) extensions of academia, passion and aesthetics (Lisa Banh), or embodied practice (Robyn Phelan).

We strive to articulate via our independent means of visual dialogue - discussions, trajectories, and a sense of belonging to our communities. Our art does not belong in a vacuum - each inspired by external forces that shape our personal politics and ethics.

It's how we approach our thinking and what this looks like that I have been fascinated with since I participated in a creative writing course ('Fresh Eyes', 2023), held by artist and creative mentor Amy Kennedy. How do artists bring their ideas into their studios? This question has unlocked an avenue into the source of artists' practices and making.

The interviews I conducted with each artist in the *Precedents* exhibition have revealed intimate revelations which illuminates how we are absorbed in our commonalities and differences. Some folks journal and research - via reading, writing, painting, photography or material exploration. Some of us use working maquettes/ or functional glaze tests that lead to larger ideas, or are put on the back burner. It is also through 'failures' that we find extensions to our work and a space to

exploit or reconcile mishaps. Thinking and changes occurring within the studio are often simultaneously enmeshed with external research, our life experiences and day to day thinking.

As Robyn Phelan revealed to me in her interview; an important element of her practice involves dialogue between other artists and thinkers. To place such value on something seemingly intangible or innocuous to an outsider, reveals a virtue in the importance of community and connections, and has since become an even larger part of my own work.

The community of makers who have contributed to *Precedents* speaks to the ethos of my ongoing project *For Your Pleasure* (FYP). Our work is also our labour, and by revisiting our personal artistic stockrooms (often boxed in our studios and homes) we are able to breath life and value into them as precedents and as signs of intuition and reflection to generate a larger narrative of practice as a whole, alongside current work and thinking of where we might next travel to creatively.

Ceramics practice is a wonderful and special privilege that none of us take for granted, especially in 2025 when we see such horrors across the globe and indeed in so-called Australia, on unceded Indigenous land, using materials that come from the earth and Country itself.

Each of us share a deeply resonant need to make art and be the stewards of our practices and sense of place - physically, metaphysically and geographically. We make art because we must (each of us for our own intimate reasons) we create for the sake of creativity and the universality of the experience of expression via visual, physical, written and oral dialogues. I hope this exhibition and the artist's interviews prove fruitful in further discussions on how, why and what we make - awakening a consciousness of our unique approaches and a continued dialogue that we will revisit. It has been my utmost pleasure to work alongside this group of astounding practitioners comprised of old and new friends.. the very essence of an artistic community and why I began FYP.

Each iteration of FYP and associated projects have been such precious means of connection and learning. Many thanks to all involved, especially Steve Konidaris (Wry Studio) for joining me on the trajectory and execution of this project. It's been an extreme comfort and value to have such a kind, intelligent and creative visionary and ally by my side in telling these stories.

Jess Lyons

Artist bio

Jess Lyons is a ceramic artist based in Naarm/ Melbourne. Her research and artistic practice weaves together material application and surface treatments on slab-built and extruded sculptural forms.

Searching for abyssal self-identity through internal reflection, Jess excavates a physical landscape of fragility, growth and resilience. She engages in a 'brinkmanship', pushing and testing both the boundaries and limits of materials whilst interrogating her own personal landscape. Using art as a tool and marker of time and progress, Jess explores the mutability and interchangeable readings of ceramic materials - creating a process that offers a parallel narrative that mirrors the self's journey. Via repetition, testing, journaling and research, Jess is motivated by the newness of contemporary approaches to traditional ways of making and crafting.

Jess is the creator/ director of 'For Your Pleasure'.

Background to making in ceramics - prior careers/ life/ and learning your current skill set -approach to ceramics

It feels like I have lived quite a few lives. I was a bit of a wild goose growing up, but in my 20's I studied an Advanced Diploma in jewellery making/ silversmithing 2003-2004. As with object based practices, the logistics of building a studio that requires expensive equipment wasn't an option - but I vehemently believe that all learning is good learning, and the skills I developed then still serve me now. I was also running around between Naarm and Meanjin having a hoot of a time without many responsibilities but always surrounded by creatives, musicians and being creative in whatever way I could.

I did the whole corporate shtick working in project management and asset management until 2014 - when I was able to break free of those shackles. I entered hospitality for the first time aged 33 ish - working at the local pub - so I could be povvo enough to get Austudy and I enrolled in the BFA at RMIT (2016-2019) My best friend from childhood, Jo Lawson's father Phil was a potter and I had always been drawn to his signature cobalt glazes. I felt so lucky to finally realise that ceramics was the medium for me and it was such a coup to be accepted into a course I had only seen as being for people I really admired and looked up to..like, real artists. Also being the first person in my family to get a degree, let alone my Honours degree (first class!) in my late 30's was a big thing for me.

What methods, tools and materials do you implement? How does your materiality and processes inform your making?

I love tools and I love sheds. I grew around my Dad and both of my Grandad's sheds. We also actually lived in a shed up in the Otways when I was growing up. I am lucky now to have my own home studio at present and I have over the years inherited some very special tools from my family. My favourite has to be an ancient, small planishing hammer from my Grandad Mick. I use

my foundation in silversmithing and this hammer to imbue clay slabs and forms with textures - which feels like a metaphysical transference of past to future.

I throw slabs and work with extruded shapes, to make pretty simplistic forms.. I am drawn to voids and holes in 3D geometric bodies. I rely heavily on a strong slip for handbuilding and joining large slabs. My most useful tool is a weird jagged kitchen tool I pinched from a sharehouse kitchen drawer. I like to make my own tools for different projects. The joys of having a shed! I have tools and materials I can use to improve my practice.. and it makes me feel clever.

What material experiments do you like to play around with?

I like to make working maquettes in clay - usually because I work with stretching materials to their outer limits. I play around a lot with glazes as this was the major part of my research during my BFA. I then upscale and reconcile. I have finally been recycling my loads of offcut clay recently, and adding groggy clays like BRT to white stoneware, which has allowed me to create my own blend that's perfect for slabs, extruding and the visual aesthetics I love with more iron rich clay bodies. I play around with different firing techniques (oxidation and reduction) to push my glazes and clay bodies.

Do you research / journal/ read/ write..How do you bring an idea into the studio Do you research materials/ philosophy/ theory/ politics etc? How does your research/ thinking become a physical object?

Wooooooh.. This is the biggie. This is why I wanted to hold the 'Precedents' exhibition. I have been obsessed with this concept of how artists think and then make physical things. I think my whole life is my art practice - which is such a joy and privilege. Everything I experience, whether that be music, politics, conversations, taking pictures on my phone of my neighbourhood in naarm, or in nature. I used to have about five journals that were filled with pretty heavy trauma dumps as since 2020 I have been going through the recovery process of regaining my sanity from CPTSD. So in the past few years I have read heavily on how traumas affect the body and psychology. I suppose I use art as an incidental means of holistic therapy. I can't draw to save myself but I get ideas out onto pages with lots of notes on intentions, resolutions to potential builds and glaze limits etc. I have discarded paper patterns everywhere that I use to cut certain flat forms. I have a good library of theoretical, esoteric and art books in my studio and a big bookshelf inside my home.

Excavating my internal narratives alongside geological and ecological phenomena has been the way my practice has naturally evolved. I am also very engaged in politics/ care for the environment, community and humanity. Recently, I have been really free in my studio - celebrating the 'Sanctity of Place' a term coined by Naomi Klein in a recent interview where she spoke of all hope not being lost, and what we can do as resistance to fascism. That we see the genocide of Palestinians and other oppressed/colonised people on our phones in our hands- the ongoing harm and colonisation of First Nations folks here. I feel it's important to celebrate and be a steward of living right where I am - as a form of resistance. This is reflected in the more monumental-esque sculptural forms I have been making. Making art is part of my protest and

resistance even when all feels hopeless. I think my work shows strength, fragility, growth and decay. I am always reflecting via the lens of my mental health and what I am absorbed with too.

Do you find that there are different parts to your practice? Functional/ sculptural, personal, public, fun, academic?

Academia taught me about praxis and this is integral to my current overall practice. I now have 5 or 6 creative journals floating around the house and studio and refreshingly zero journals about life/ mental health stuff, but I still feel my journalling is personal and private. Especially my creative writing ones about my art. I have participated in a few writing courses with the amazing Amy Kennedy and they are my special journals - the ones I go back to repeatedly for answers or prompts. I love writing, as a very introspective person which I think is by nature being an only child, with access to the great outdoors, the privilege of a good education. I need a lot of time to myself.

Fun is an integral part of my practice - art is rad!! I listen to a lot of music - always have. I started going to gigs when I was about 14 and have always been drawn to I guess what is happening on the fringes (saying underground sounds pretentious). I love holding shows as a reason to have an art party, or just getting my creative mates together forms a big part of my practice. This is why I started 'For your Pleasure', to get the gang back together and do cool stuff.

Is there a lineal method to making? Play? Repetition? Is there a continuation through your practice/ evolution

I am so inspired by how music is made, the craft of comedy and cinematographic language. Repetition leads to your own personal riffs that become your own style and help you find shifts. I repeat motifs, methods of forming, glaze application and I really don't have to say it - but there's an obvious affliction for Brutalism very evident in my forms - which does make repetition easy, although it makes breaking apart forms and being more playful is quite difficult. This is where playing around with glazes helps earth my forms.

How do you find the ceramic process overall - being a staggered material process - drying, firing etc. Do you often have different elements working simultaneously?

I always have a bunch of stuff on the go - especially when waiting for smaller tests to get fired. The staggered nature also gives me the time to reflect and consider the next steps. I actually really hate the glazing process - I dread it. I love making when I have a flow and I am in my zone in my shed. It's such a personal space of discovery - kind of like all the good parts of my brain in a room of creativity. So yeah - I am pretty obsessed with clay 'nerdery'. I love so many makers and I find contemporary approaches to craft and mixed media super inspiring. I will have periods away from the studio working on other projects/ research/ exhibitions but I always come back to making.

Hard but short answer - what motivates you to work with ceramic materiality/ process and what would you like to see develop in your practice for the future?

When I get into tasks like making my work - I am cheerfully reminded that I know my shit. I've now dedicated years to learning and experiencing and making. It's the bees knees. I am obsessed with art and to be part of any bit of art communities is so motivational. My future making.. I bought an electroplating kit a few years ago and I just haven't gotten around to using it - but my current forms are yelling for some acid baths and metallic application. I hope to realise my visual language further whilst always staying in my lane and being humble and true to myself.

Lauren Cameron

Artist bio

Lauren Cameron (she/they) is a ceramic-based artist living and working on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation (Naarm/Melbourne). Lauren has a BFA in Fine Arts from RMIT. Their practice is rooted in the visceral and the vulnerable; navigating the terrains of trauma, assault, and “petty emotions”—those small, sharp feelings so often dismissed or suppressed.

Using clay as both medium and metaphor, Lauren creates works that function as tactile records of the body's memory—fractured, glazed, stitched, and scarred. Her forms oscillate between tenderness and tension, revealing the intricate architecture of feeling through hand-built and wheel-thrown processes. The surface of her work—often textured, layered, and broken—is where emotional residue is made visible.

Drawing on the personal as political, Lauren's ceramics resist catharsis. Instead, they hold discomfort, shame, fury, and vulnerability in fragile balance—inviting viewers to confront, rather than escape, the weight of human experience.

Driven by material experimentation, Lauren continually pushes against the conventions of traditional ceramics. By integrating unconventional forms, hybrid techniques, and an intuitive approach to construction, she builds a language of clay that is both deeply subjective and radically open.

Through her practice, Lauren creates a space for emotional honesty—a quiet resistance against erasure, and an offering for those who carry untold stories in their bodies.

What methods, tools and materials do you implement? How does your materiality and processes inform your making?

Right now I'm working with coloured porcelains and black midfire clays. For a long time, I only worked with stoneware, but recently I've been pushing myself outside that comfort zone, especially as I've begun exploring 'nightmares' as a conceptual focus. My practice is very hand-driven—I rarely use many tools beyond the pottery wheel, a crappy sponge and a good scoring tool. I think of the wheel less as the centrepiece and more as a starting point, a way of creating a form or canvas that I can then extend, manipulate, and build on with my hands.

What material experiments do you like to play around with?

I always set out with the intention of making prototypes or maquettes, but I rarely have the patience—I usually just dive straight in and hope for the best. Sometimes that approach pays off and the piece turns out as I imagined, and other times I can't stand the result. Either way, it's always a learning process. A lecturer once told me that 'every piece should be treated as a final work,' and that's stayed with me. Since then, I've avoided doing 'tests' in the traditional sense, both to challenge myself and to limit unnecessary ceramic waste.

**Do you research / journal/ read/ write.. How do you bring an idea into the studio
Do you research materials/ philosophy/ theory/ politics etc? How does your research/
thinking become a physical object?**

My process is grounded in research and journaling. I spend a lot of time sketching and gathering narratives and ideas from artists I connect with. Because my practice is so emotionally driven, my research rarely strays far from artists, colour theory, or symbolism. When developing new work, I often need long stretches of time alone to sit with my own thoughts, feelings, and memories. Sometimes I arrive at the studio with a clear plan, but more often the making is guided in the moment by my emotional responses to those ideas and recollections.

**Do you find that there are different parts to your practice? Functional/ sculptural,
personal, public, fun, academic?**

I see my work as personal and sculptural, leaning toward a fine art audience—which I think is very much a product of my art school experience, and I'm comfortable with that. I used to focus on making functional work as a way to earn a living, but after completing my BFA I let go of that mindset. With the limited time I have in the studio, I want to dedicate it to making the work I truly need to make as an artist. I support myself in other ways, and that separation has allowed me to enjoy my practice so much more.

**Is there a linear method to making? Play? Repetition? Is there a continuation through
your practice/ evolution**

Repetition is central to my practice. While I never make the same piece twice, my methods are deeply methodical and repetitive. This process has become a way for me to grieve and to work through different parts of myself and my life. Lately, I've been pushing to move beyond my more binary ways of making and into other materials. I'm especially drawn to soft sculpture and textiles, which also rely on repetition through weaving, knitting, or binding—processes that echo the rhythms I've always worked within.

**How do you find the ceramic process overall - being a staggered material process -
drying, firing etc. Do you often have different elements working simultaneously?**

I actually find the limitations of my process useful. They force me to work at a slower pace, but also within strict timeframes. I can't rush, or mistakes happen, but I also can't linger too long, or the work will dry out. The part I struggle with most is glazing; I procrastinate like, it's the worst task. I love glaze and the surfaces it creates, but the process itself feels like a personal nightmare.

**Hard but short answer - what motivates you to work with ceramic materiality/ process,
and what would you like to see develop in your practice for the future?**

Working with clay is addictive and endlessly challenging—it constantly throws up new problems, and I feel like I'll never be bored or finished learning. That's what keeps me coming back. As my practice evolves, I push myself toward more technically ambitious ideas, and while plenty of them have failed, those setbacks only drive me to keep going. Of course, there are moments of frustration; just the other day, I broke a large piece that had taken me days, and I swore I was done with making it all together. But really, that's just the drama inside an artist's mind.

Franky Frankland

Artist bio

Franky Frankland (they/them) completed a Bachelor of Fine Art (Drawing/Painting) and Masters of Fine Art from RMIT University. In 2019 they transitioned to clay as their primary medium. They currently work as a studio technician and teach wheel throwing at various studios in Naarm/Melbourne.

What is your background to making in ceramics - prior careers/ life/ and learning/ your current skill set and approach to ceramics

I took a term class of pottery in 2019 and then self taught from there. I was originally interested in tableware and functional ceramics and spent many years focused solely on developing my throwing technique. I took several roles in ceramics studios including; teacher, technician, slip casting, production potter all these roles have improved my ceramic practice. Most recently I have turned to hand building and it is here I have been able to incorporate elements from my training at university in painting and drawing. Particularly aspects of collage and working with line. The torn clay strips of my most recent works definitely remind me of torn paper and working with slips has felt much like painting.

What methods, tools and materials do you implement? How does your materiality and processes inform your making?

The feet of these vessels are thrown on the wheel and then hand built in layers of torn slabs of clay that I pinch together at the overlap. To ensure they don't collapse I simultaneously wrap the outside of the vessels and fill the inside with fabric as I build them. Various slabs are painted with slip in a range of colours and where I have pinched the overlapping layers the surface becomes imbued with finger prints.

These works push the boundaries of how clay can be used and are the culmination of years of exploring technique and materiality in clay. I have learnt from throwing large forms on the wheel how to manage and distribute weight so that just enough of a collapse can take place without the clay cracking. Furthermore, I draw upon my painting and drawing background both in the painterly aspects of the surface and attention to line

What material experiments do you like to play around with? E.g. glazes, maquettes, prototypes

I spend a lot of time playing around with how much tension the clay can be placed under before it cracks or collapses.

Recently I have been interested in using a range of slips and exploring how to incorporate painterly texture to my ceramics.

Do you journal/ read/ write.. How do you bring an idea into the studio?

Do you research materials/ philosophy/ theory/ politics etc? How does your research/ thinking become a physical object?

For this project I have researched materials, philosophy, politics and geology.

In particular I have focused on writing and theory relating to LGBTIQ history and geological formations.

This research has definitely informed the physical object

These vessels take their visual inspiration from the iron rich landscapes also known as banded-iron formations. BIF's are sedimentary rocks with alternating layers of iron rich material and silica, forming bands of light and dark. They are also the primary source of iron ore in Australia and around the world.

Psychologically, these works sit within a political landscape of weathering and enduring adversity until the right atmosphere emerges for change. As a queer gender-diverse person it's integral that I know my LGBTIQ history, that I pay my respect and deep gratitude to the many generations that came before me and fought for my human rights often with their bodies on the line. I wanted to show the resistance in these works, the impact that fighting and enduring can have on a body - but that over time it is these many acts of resistance that accumulate, leading to large scale political change.

I wanted to draw a parallel - between the slow geological shifts that take place within these ancient landscapes and the slow shifts that occur over time for LGBTQIA+ people in politics, society and culture.

Do you find that there are different parts to your practice? Functional/ sculptural, personal, public, fun, academic?

Yes I have both a functional ceramics practice and sculptural practices where I can explore more personal concepts

Is there a linear method to making? Play? Repetition? Is there a continuation through your practice/ evolution

I find a period of play is central to making new work, generating new ideas. I love this experimental time in the studio playing with the language of art, form, texture, line, etc

I then start to think deeply about what theoretical ideas are motivating me and how the visual and theory interact. I then try to formalise some of the ideas through writing
Writing doesn't come easily to me, the making comes easily.
I keep making and it is through the many iterations of the piece that it starts to slowly evolve and improve.

How do you find the ceramic process overall - being a staggered material process - drying, firing etc. Do you often have different elements working simultaneously?

I like that ceramics often forces me to slow down. The drying, firing and glazing allows time for reflection and space to consider where I will go next. Sometimes when I need a break from sculptural work I will return to functional work.

Hard but short answer - what motivates you to work with ceramic materiality/ process, and what would you like to see develop in your practice for the future?

I enjoy the endless options for material exploration in ceramics. Never reaching the ends of my curiosity motivates me. I feel like my ceramics project will last me decades.

Sam Ward

Artist bio

Sam (he/him) is a ceramic artist and designer based in Naarm/Melbourne. With a background in graphic design, Sam explores geometric ideas within his work, pushing the organic expectation of the ceramic medium to be more architectural and punctuating. Combining a range of wheelthrown and hand-built geometric elements, Sam's work often ruminates on ideas of collaboration, conversation, and connection; often sculptural, sometimes functional.

This interplay between structured form and creative spontaneity defines Sam's artistic vision, inviting viewers to explore the boundaries between form and function, and to experience the joy of creation through his eyes.

Background to making in ceramics - prior careers/ life/ and learning your current skill set -approach to ceramics

I first started working with clay and sculpture in high school, experimenting with coil-built figures and abstract forms made with scrap metal. I then studied Graphic Design at university and worked in the industry for about eight years across a few different studios.

In 2019, I stumbled upon clay again as a hobby, attending a beginners' class one night a week. Being messy and tactile with my hands was a refreshing contrast to staring at a computer screen all day designing brands and logos. From there, I began making work at home and looked for ways to advance my skills and knowledge of clay.

In 2023, I was accepted into and attended a three-month Intensive Professionalisation in Ceramics course at Corrie Bain's International School of Ceramics in Barcelona, Spain. This was an incredibly inspiring and propelling experience, deepening my love for the medium and opening my eyes to the breadth and depth of the ceramics world.

From there, I really began making work that felt important and self-expressive. I also started teaching and instantly loved clay's ability to connect people, as well as the chance to share my knowledge and passion with others.

I now make both functional and sculptural work, balancing this with regular teaching and freelance design work.

What methods, tools and materials do you implement? How does your materiality and processes inform your making?

I'm always drawn to the pottery wheel because of the precision and clean lines it allows. Throwing is a feeling like nothing else. That said, the focus and precision it demands can be overwhelming, and that's when I turn to the slower pace of hand-building. I often throw and trim the main body of a piece, then hand-build attachments and connecting elements.

I use a lot of 'wandering' and reflection to inform my pieces. I usually begin with rough ideas but allow the clay to take shape naturally. My process is quite iterative, which stems from my graphic design background—I test and refine shapes and forms over and over until I find the right one.

What material experiments do you like to play around with?

I often make miniatures, maquettes, and prototypes to quickly explore different forms and ideas. I'll push and pinch a small bit of clay into a shape, and sometimes I like these little experiments enough to keep and fire them, or I'll use them for glaze testing. They remind me that work doesn't always need to come from a long, conceptual process—sometimes five minutes of inspiration is enough to create something that you really connect with.

Sketching is important to me too, but I don't treat it as precious. I'll often draw directly on my studio tabletop, then wipe it away again, not needing to commit to ideas. If I really like a sketch, I'll clear away everything else and leave it visible for a few days.

**Do you research / journal/ read/ write..How do you bring an idea into the studio
Do you research materials/ philosophy/ theory/ politics etc? How does your research/
thinking become a physical object?**

I draw a lot of inspiration from architecture and design, and am interested deeply in how design brings value to our lives.

I also explore themes of collaboration and interaction with my work. I like to involve and introduce people to art and design through my work (ie. modular or interactive elements to the piece). There isn't permanence.

Physical manifestations of memories and moments in time, is something I often ponder as well, how do you visualise something so intangible.

I draw a lot of inspiration from architecture and design and am deeply interested in how design brings value to our lives. I also explore themes of collaboration and interaction in my work, often creating modular or interactive elements. I like involving people with art and design—sometimes the point is that there isn't permanence, that a curator, owner or passerby can change a piece of work to better connect with them. I'm also interested in physical manifestations of memories and fleeting moments; exploring how to visualise something intangible.

Do you find that there are different parts to your practice? Functional/ sculptural, personal, public, fun, academic?

Yes, I make a lot of playful sculptural work that I love as it is expressive and with less expectation. Contrasting that, I also love the repetitive process of making functional ware, and like that it is much more accessible to a wide audience of people, and therefore sells more readily. While I enjoy both, the sculptural pieces feel more essential to my practice.

Recently, I've been producing ceramic lamps, which strike a nice balance between sculpture and functional design. They involve a lot of creative problem-solving which I love; it has really engaged my design brain.

Is there a lineal method to making? Play? Repetition? Is there a continuation through your practice/ evolution

I am a big believer in both the value of play and repetition. Play is a tricky one because it demands the right time, space and mood; but when I find that space, it's where I find I make my best work. Curiosity and playfulness run through much of my practice. As much as I am drawn to minimal, striking and geometric forms, I always include a playful or curious addition to bring a little morsel of joy to the work.

How do you find the ceramic process overall - being a staggered material process - drying, firing etc. Do you often have different elements working simultaneously?

I enjoy the staggered process, as it allows me to have many different pieces on the go at various times, which often feels more productive. On the other hand, it can make managing commissions or orders tricky. Glazes can vary slightly from firing to firing, weather can affect drying times, and kiln schedules aren't always predictable—all of which can push back completion timelines by weeks.

Hard but short answer - what motivates you to work with ceramic materiality/ process and what would you like to see develop in your practice for the future?

Freedom and limitless expression

ROBYN PHELAN

Artist bio

Robyn Phelan engages in a dialogue with materiality, process and time. Using 'hand-sense' and 'attuned-focus' at her site of making, she seeks to experience the world as embodied and connected. From this critical perspective her material practice responds to the potential of contemporary ceramics to correspond with the material world.

Phelan received her PhD (2024) in the field of contemporary craft and material research from RMIT University. She has exhibited widely in Australian museums and galleries, currently lecturing in ceramics and history and cultures in the School of Art, RMIT University. She mentors in ceramics at the Slow Clay Centre. Robyn has been writing, publishing and participating critically in contemporary art and craft since 1997.

Background to making in ceramics - prior careers/ life/ and learning your current skill set -approach to ceramics

Educator (RMIT Ceramics & Slow Clay Centre), collection keeper (registrar at NGV), curator (Craft Victoria), partner, mother and orphan (long relationship with a chemical engineer and lover of timber, raised two amazing young men, care of and grieving for deceased parents and sister), contemporary craft champion (writer and founding member of Bluestone Collection), artist (two decades of studio and exhibition practice including doctoral research into clay materiality and ceramic culture)

What methods, tools and materials do you implement? How does your materiality and processes inform your making?

My hands, fingertips and knuckles!

The responsive material qualities of clay are the foundation of my art practice.

My sculptural forms embody the making marks of my hands and I look to surface finishes that allow the making process to be clearly expressed. Lately, the skin-like fine finish of terra sigillata

What material experiments do you like to play around with?

I play on a range of sites encountered when walking, along rivers, through streets or whilst travelling. Material experimentation can include impressions from trees, rocks and sand inclusions.

Do you research / journal/ read/ write?

I read a lot and widely and find rich inspiration from poetry and philosophy.

How do you bring an idea into the studio.

Great question as my inspiration comes from elemental experiences when outside such as gentle rain, heat waves, dust storms, river flows, trees, and blossom). These experience are captured in reflective writing, digital images and clay impressions from objects experience on site.

Do you research materials...

I have recently researched terra sigillata techniques and investigated the historic objects that used this surface treatment. Sig is a low fired decorative technique that suits sculptural form finishing with the bonus of being a low energy and material consumption.

Does philosophy/ theory/ politics etc? How does your research/ thinking become a physical object?

Canadian philosopher and cultural theorist Brian Massumi's writing on affect theory has helped me make sense of how I pay attention or 'attune' to my sites of making which in turn, folds into making artwork to explain this sensing and connection. Here are cobbled together words from Massumi that adorn my studio wall:

- Attunement is ... like an atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves attunes us through and through.
- Atmospheres have the capacity to forcefully grip, engage and infuse the vital dynamic of the feeling body.
- Atmosphere corresponds to nothing other than itself and needs only itself as its own interpretation. When we find ourselves finally here-now-being-this-I, we are already swaddled in atmosphere

Do you find that there are different parts to your practice? Functional/ sculptural, personal, public, fun, academic?

No. Everything I attune to folds into engaging with the world as creative curious and questioning practice.

Is there a linear method to making? Play? Repetition? Is there a continuation through your practice/ evolution. An ecology of relationships, conversations and actions around contemporary art including teaching, board work, writing, deep research PhD. Peer support.

My art practice flows through periods of experiencing, thinking, teaching (the money earning bit) and making. My making is framed by the academic semester. I am passionate about teaching and inspired a rich ecology of relationships and conversations I have with my students and peers. This ecology also includes moving into my 3rd year as a board member of The Australian Ceramics Association and ongoing collaborative project with an academic/ceramicist from London.

Completing creative practice Doctor of Philosophy completed in 2024 is entitled *Compressing Atmosphere – ceramics encounters with clay, body and site* has deepened my understanding of creative material practice.

How do you find the ceramic process overall - being a staggered material process - drying, firing etc. Do you often have different elements working simultaneously?

Working sculpturing and conceptually, I am always working across many different forms and projects at any one time.

Hard but short answer - what motivates you to work with ceramic materiality/ process, and what would you like to see develop in your practice for the future?

I don't have any fixed expectations other than to remain curious and inspired to make with clay.

LISA BANH - (LISA BUNNY)

Artist bio

Lisa is an emerging ceramic artist based in Melbourne/ Naarm. Her sculptural practice is curious, often playful, and deeply rooted in her desire to understand her placement within the urban environment. She strives to capture the life force of forgotten objects, overlooked structures, and the in-between moments encountered on her daily walks. Her body of work to date seeks to honour the unseen beauty of the urban landscape, and to give a voice to the evoked emotions that have no name.

Lisa's ceramic practice often echoes the glimmers and shadows she encountered during her surgical training, and the instability that came with yearly displacement. The feeling of belonging everywhere and nowhere at the same time remains unresolved- and continues to be explored through the tactile expression of clay.

Her work has been exhibited in numerous group and prize exhibitions in Victoria, and she continues to extend and develop her practice at the School of Clay and Art (SOCA) in Brunswick.

Background to making in ceramics - prior careers/ life/ and learning your current skill set -approach to ceramics

My background has always been firmly rooted in science and mathematics- the extent of my formal arts education was one mandatory term in Visual Art in Year 8 (I think I made one terracotta pinch pot that looked so cursed that the teacher never fired it...). I had a strong focus on physics and chemistry throughout school, but also excelled in English and creative writing and played the flute. I completed my medical degree, playing jazz flute and doing ballet on the side. I started Neurosurgery training, and greatly enjoyed the challenges that came with being in the operating theatre every day.

In 2022 I went to a beginner wheel workshop on a whim and enjoyed it so much that I started going to regular ceramics classes. Later, I started studying at SOCA and set up my own studio the following year. Ceramics is an art medium that is deeply rooted in science, which I found very appealing. Ceramics is also very tactile and responsive, and throwing on the wheel introduces an element of continuous movement. My background in science and Neurosurgery certainly informs my ceramics practice- I work based on principles of research and testing, paired with a deep understanding of how to use my hands, body and tools to optimise subtle fine motor control on the wheel

What methods, tools and materials do you implement? How does your materiality and processes inform your making?

I work predominantly with recycled stoneware clay, which I often get for free from other makers and studios. I like that recycled clay holds a history and certain energy, and that it is like a time capsule of the clays that the studio preferred to use at that time. Using recycled clay can come with an unpredictability, which I accept and lean into. All the clay and water used in my studio is recycled, as well as scrap glaze- nothing goes to waste. I am continuously testing glazes and surfaces and have accumulated an infinite amount of test tiles from my time in the studio. I have access to reduction firing, however part of my self-discipline involves learning how to create interesting surfaces and reactions within an oxidation environment. My work is predominantly wheel thrown, which informs a functional aspect to my practice. My sculptural pieces are made to be both decorative and functional- only recently have I started to explore sculpture in the realm of a pure decorative object. I enjoy collecting waste materials to experiment with and use in glazes- such as wood ash and eggshells collected from bakeries and restaurants.

What material experiments do you like to play around with?

I enjoy making test tiles, and more recently I have started making smaller maquettes/ functional objects on which to test surfaces on- like egg cups and bud vases, little soba cups- I like to create with function in mind. I have an innate aversion to making dust collectors!

Do you research / journal/ read/ write.. Does music inform your making? How do you bring an idea into the studio

Do you research materials/ philosophy/ theory/ politics etc? How does your research/ thinking become a physical object?

I have started to journal, and sometimes I may write a small observation piece, or a series of thoughts at the start of a making cycle. I have previously made work in direct response to a certain piece of writing. Sometimes a phrase will come to mind, and I'll have to write it down immediately because it captures a certain feeling- months later that feeling may manifest itself in a form that needs to be explored and resolved. When I am walking around, I'll sometimes find a shape or surface that looks interesting and I'll take photos, to use as references later.

I research materials and glazes constantly- to the point that my reality will never match the volume of research my mind would like to achieve, and it is a hard truth that I have come to accept, despite often getting frustrated that I never seem to have enough time in the studio.

Being part of SOCA means that my ceramics practice is provided with some structure- with each term introducing a new re-direction and a series of prompts in skills, forms, and surfaces. I've often found that this regular change in focus has led to my own work becoming richer and more nuanced.

Do you find that there are different parts to your practice? Functional/ sculptural, personal, public, fun, academic?

I am well known for having an extremely diverse ceramics practice. I have a sculptural aspect which is what people see in galleries and at exhibitions, and then I have a functional practice which is mostly fun and playful objects which are available at markets. The past two years I have also been involved in the Utsuwa Project- a research group focussed on creating functional tableware strongly informed by Japanese materiality and philosophy. I am currently also involved in a Community Tile Project in collaboration with the Fitzroy Learning Network- which will culminate in a wall mural of tiles on a new building at the Atherton Gardens precinct created by members of the community.

Is there a lineal method to making? Play? Repetition? Is there a continuation through your practice/ evolution

My diverse practice means that I often dip in and out of functional work and sculpture depending on my mood at the time. When my energy and mood is low, I often lean into the repetitive nature of throwing sets of functional objects on the wheel. The days when my energy is high is often when I lean into more ambitious sculptural work- often my sculptural work can sit around covered for months at a time before I am in the right headspace to revisit it- truly a slow process!

How do you find the ceramic process overall - being a staggered material process - drying, firing etc. Do you often have different elements working simultaneously?

I've found that no matter how organised I try to be, there seems to be a lot of last-minute work involved to get pieces fired and out the door! I have systems in place to fast dry, slow dry, and rehydrate my work depending on where I am in my workflow. I also have multiple projects in various stages of make- which means I often cycle between them, and the focus in my studio will change from month to month.

Hard but short answer - what motivates you to work with ceramic materiality/ process and what would you like to see develop in your practice for the future?

Very weirdly it is like how I ended up in neurosurgical training- ceramics was a serendipitous accident, and I continued it because I seemed to have a natural aptitude for the wheel and the intellectual side of ceramics. I am attracted by the fact that there is so much to learn, and that I will not run off things to try or learn about ceramics within this lifetime. I would like to continue to develop my wheel throwing technique and throw bigger, but I also would like to continue my exploration into hand building. The making language of hand building is so different from the immediacy of wheel thrown work that I would love to make more time for it within my own practice. I am also keen to make more work with porcelain in the future, and eventually learn mould- making so that I can add slip casting to my repertoire.

MADELEINE THORNTON-SMITH

Artist bio

Madeleine Thornton-Smith is a formally trained painter and ceramic artist from Melbourne. Her practice examines the hierarchy that exists between fine art and craft in relation to class and gender.

Employing a slow process of accumulation and repetition, she uses slipcasting to bring together commonplace studio material textures with archetypal forms from fine art and ceramics - such as vessels, plinths, frames and canvases. This mimetic process raises questions about the status and value of ceramics, art and craft. As well as regularly exhibiting, Madeleine is heavily involved in arts advocacy and community work, and various writing, educational and curatorial projects. Madeleine is currently studying a Masters of Fine Art by Research at RMIT investigating the politics of gender and labour in art and craft, with particular focus on the ceramics sector.

Background to making in ceramics - prior careers/ life/ and learning your current skill set -approach to ceramics

I loosely considered becoming an arts writer, so after I finished school I began a course in Media and Communications at Melbourne University with a major in Art History. I only lasted at Melbourne Uni five weeks before dropping out: the number of times other 18 year olds asked me what score I got or what school I went to with their noses turned up made me lose my mind! I also was really indecisive and just couldn't find myself committing to any one "job" at such a young age. I still to this day have never had a full-time job because I'm not sure I believe in it. I ended up moving to Monash University and doing a year and a half of a social work degree before I landed on art - my high school thought so little of visual art as a career they forgot to tell me you could study it at university. I moved through studies in painting, English literature, creative writing, Spanish and history - doing ceramics classes for fun on the side. In the end the ceramic bug bit me - and I decided post-art school to do a Diploma of Ceramics at Holmglen Institute. Best decision I ever made - it was a practical course that actually made me traditionally "employable" in the arts. I went on to study Honours in ceramics at RMIT, doing a bunch of teaching at a variety of dodgy ceramics studios (that lead me into arts activism), years of disability care work and finally to the Masters of Fine Art by Research that I'm studying today at RMIT - interrogating issues of gender and labour in the ceramics sector.

What methods, tools and materials do you implement? How does your materiality and processes inform your making? E.g. I am currently using recycled clay, my extruder, slabs, my grandfathers hammer for a patina effect, and reduction firing for glaze experimentation on sculptural objects with leftover glazes.

At the moment my practice is based around slipcasting, handbuilding and mosaic, however in the past I have explored painting, embroidery, papier-mâché, collage, video and installation. I have been developing a series of slipcast paintings that examine the hierarchy that exists between mediums and materials. These involve making "real" paintings with acrylic on canvas, making a plaster mould, then casting with liquid clay (slip). This is a repetitive process that makes objects that appear like Duchampian "ready-made" paintings. However, I have been

documenting not only the successful casts but the “failed” casts – with cracks, collapsed forms and imperfections in the clay or glaze. Each work is a different colour, shape and size. In industrial slipcasting, perfection and repetition is key: anything less is discarded. What do failed cast paintings mean in the painting factory? Are they anti-paintings? I would be considered an “unproductive potter” in the productive ceramics world as I work slowly and rarely in a linear fashion. Does the unproductive potter make *unproducts*?

What material experiments do you like to play around with? Eg glazes, maquettes, prototypes

Lately I have been testing a bunch of bought ceramic glazes on my slipcast paintings - using them as “test tiles” of sorts. I am a traditional TAFE and university-trained ceramic artist (and post-Catholic!) which means I feel guilty for using ready-made glazes. But are painters shamed for using paint out of the tube? I don’t care anymore. My focus is in the form, whatever brings colour and life to my pieces I value. I’m also experimenting with embracing “bad” slip casts - with cracks, the clay was too thick, or the form is collapsing. This is to challenge the idea of the “perfect” industrially made ceramic object in a production pottery practice - which as an artist I’ve always struggled with conceptually, despite my love of functional ceramics.

Do you research / journal/ read/ write.. Does music inform your making? How do you bring an idea into the studio

Do you research materials/ philosophy/ theory/ politics etc? How does your research/ thinking become a physical object?

I am currently undertaking a research degree in fine art at RMIT, which has forced me to do more reading. I am passionate about history and politics, as an advocate for better working conditions for artists in the sector and a massive nerd. In my undergraduate double degree I didn’t only study painting, I did subjects in literature, history, politics, sociology and creative writing. It was important to me not to limit myself to one major - plus I love learning. My mother was an English and French teacher and my father has a PhD in Australian history. They are big unionists, and my grandfather was a leftwing activist and academic. We have a lot of talks at the dinner table about politics. This background in the humanities inevitably works its way into my practice, which examines gender and labour in the art and craft worlds, and the socially-constructed hierarchies that exist in Western art history and in the contemporary art world.

Do you find that there are different parts to your practice? Functional/ sculptural, personal, public, fun, academic?

Yes, a lot of my more overtly political work can be quite serious and “academic”. However, I like to have fun experimenting with materials too. When I did Honours at RMIT in Object-Based Practice in 2017 I had fun experimenting with not only clay, but making materials that look like other materials. For example, making clay look like papier-mâché and papier-mâché like clay, using acrylic paint to cast a frame using a silicon mould, making plaster look like clay and clay

like plaster through adding a coloured stain, making clay look like paint through slipcasting a canvas - playing around with ideas of simulacra and mimicry. These experiments led into the more political feminist practice I have today - because materials inherently have value biases and hierarchies particularly in relation to the art vs. craft debate. I am now officially obsessed with challenging hierarchies - in the art world, in the workplace, in society.

Is there a lineal method to making? Play? Repetition? Is there a continuation through your practice/ evolution

At the moment I think the same archetypes keep coming up - the frame, the canvas, paint texture - in the past the vessel too. I think of painting as my first love but I don't paint much anymore unless it's to make a painting to slipcast - which means it ends up getting destroyed in the mouldmaking process, which is quite poetic really. Breaking down the concept of painting literally and metaphorically. Repetition is definitely part of the process - I feel slipcasting is a little similar to photography, or printmaking - it involves making an index of the original and it can be replicated over and over, but each cast is a little different. I also examine the frame as an archetype for underappreciated crafted labour - usually women's labour - in the art sector - and curated an exhibition of women and non-binary artists' frame works on this very topic called *Salon Hang* at Craft Victoria a few months ago.

How do you find the ceramic process overall - being a staggered material process - drying, firing etc. Do you often have different elements working simultaneously?

At the moment I am mostly working on making ceramic frames and slipcast paintings as part of my Master of Fine Art but I also have a mosaic practice - I attend a mosaic class once a week as a student at my workplace, which is a community arts centre. I work across two studios - my studio at work and a private studio I have been renting for several years with two other artists including my friend and artist Georgina Proud. It can be hard working across multiple locations but I find value in each space.

Hard but short answer - what motivates you to work with ceramic materiality/ process and what would you like to see develop in your practice for the future?

Primarily I am drawn to the materials. I was a painter originally, studying a major at Monash University. I took on a community clay class for fun and relaxation on the side and it ended up taking over my life because I was so obsessed with the possibilities. I remember I bought nearly every type of clay back when I started my TAFE course and some of these clays I still have today (albeit in a dried up form!) I think most ceramic artists are passionate about materials and process and the magic moment of opening up the kiln. I would like to push the experimentation in my practice - how far can I make these ceramic paintings collapse, how can I challenge my tendency towards perfectionism, etc.

STEVE KONIDARIS (WRY Studio)

Artist Bio

Steve (he/him) is a ceramic artist and designer based in Naarm/Melbourne, working under the name Wry Studio. With a background in architecture, Steve brings a spatial and structural sensibility to his ceramic practice, creating playful yet bold sculptural forms through slab-building techniques. His work is driven by an ongoing exploration of form, graphic pattern, and colour — drawing on architectural languages to shape pieces that often sit at the intersection of function and sculpture.

Through sharp lines, fractured surfaces, and intentional asymmetries, Steve investigates the tensions between balance and disruption, spontaneity and expression. The works shown form part of the development of the *Fractured* series — an evolving body of work focused on form-finding through distortion, repetition, and fragmentation.

What is your background to making in ceramics — prior careers/life/learning/current skill set and approach?

My background in architecture helped shape my views around space, structure, and form. I worked in both architecture and textile design, including a period as a production machine knitter in New Zealand and Melbourne. That experience with repetition in textile production still echoes in my slip-cast work today.

My ceramic process started with slab-built sculptural forms. I was drawn to ceramics because it allowed me to explore three-dimensional design in a tactile, hands-on way echoing the model making of architecture school which I always enjoyed the most. I also explore slip casting, and enjoy making functional work with a continued exploration of individuality and surface decoration — balancing sculptural expression with functional design. My practice now spans both handbuilt one-offs and repeatable forms, always anchored by a curiosity for form and composition.

What methods, tools, and materials do you implement? How does your materiality and process inform your making?

I work with stoneware clay bodies — using both slab-building techniques and plaster molds for slip casting. My studio is set up to support both modes of making. At times I am less interested in showcasing clay's 'natural' properties and more drawn to using it as a medium to construct objects that almost feel unnatural — sharp, angular, architectural but constantly conscious of clay's natural behaviour and prone to warping — and these qualities often become active participants in the final form and celebrated.

What material experiments do you like to play around with? (Glazes, maquettes, prototypes, etc.)

I experiment a lot with surface — layering slips, in my functional work or playing on surface patterns in my slab work. I also make maquettes — this supports my form finding methods and allows for freer exploration of ideas.

Do you journal, read, or write? How do you bring an idea into the studio?

Yes, but loosely. There are always ideas and visuals floating in my head — sometimes they land as line drawings or diagrammatic sketches, sometimes they emerge during making. The sketching process is often more about diagramming an idea than illustrating an end product.

Once I'm in the studio, I like to hold the sketch loosely — referencing it, but allowing the piece to evolve as I respond to what's unfolding materially. It's part improvisation and exploration— an ongoing form-finding exercise. There's often tension and discomfort in that space — not knowing exactly where the piece is going, but trusting intuition and visual judgement to guide it toward balance and resolution.

Do you research materials/philosophy/theory/politics etc.? How does your thinking become a physical object?

I'm particularly interested in how objects can hold tension — between function and abstraction, repetition and disruption, symmetry and imbalance. These ideas form the conceptual background, which is then translated through material choices, making processes, and the language of form.

Do you find that there are different parts to your practice? Functional/sculptural, personal/public, fun/academic?

Definitely. My practice is multifaceted. The slab-built sculptural work is more intuitive, expressive, and exploratory — driven by ideas and physical investigation. This is where I push forms, test composition, and explore abstraction.

On the other hand, my slip-cast forms are grounded in functionality and repetition. They're the more public-facing, commercial side of my practice — but still allowing for exploration and at times playing with small interventions or surface patterns that keep each piece unique.

While the two sides can feel disparate at times, they feed each other — structurally, visually, and conceptually. Both are underpinned by my design sensibility and a deep interest in process.

Is there a linear method to making? How do play, repetition, and continuation evolve through your practice?

There's rarely a strict linear method. Making is cyclical and responsive. Sometimes it starts with a sketch, other times with a fragment of a previous piece. Play is essential — especially in the sculptural work, where I often don't know where a piece is heading.

Repetition, especially through slip casting, gives me a framework to iterate within. This helps create a continuity across bodies of work. Over time, visual languages emerge — motifs, lines, distortions — that evolve from one series to the next.

How do you find the ceramic process overall — being a staggered, delayed process (drying, firing, etc.)? Do you work on multiple elements simultaneously?

The staggered nature of ceramics — drying times, firings, waiting — can be frustrating but also essential. It builds in space for reflection. I often have multiple pieces in different stages.

What motivates you to work with ceramic materiality and process? What would you like to see develop in your practice?

Ceramics has a duality I'm drawn to — it's structured yet unpredictable. I love that it requires both control and surrender. Working with ceramics challenges me to balance design intention with material responsiveness.

Looking ahead, I'd like to explore more spatial and installation-scale work — expanding my sculptural language and working with space more overtly.

For Your Pleasure and all contributing artists, would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people as the Traditional owners of the Kulin Nation on which we live, work and make. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge First Peoples as the first artists, the first storytellers, the first communities and the first creators of culture, whose stories and experiences are the heart of the lands on which our contributors live and work.
This creative space was planned and created on unceded land.

ALWAYS WAS ALWAYS WILL BE ABORIGINAL LAND