

Object



HYPERCLAY
CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS

Education Kit



HYPERCLAY: Contemporary Ceramics

Welcome to HYPERCLAY!

How to use this resource

The *HYPERCLAY: Contemporary Ceramics* education kit can be used for primary, secondary and tertiary students or other interest groups. It is intended as a resource that can be used to enhance the visitor experience in the gallery or as a teaching resource for classroom learning utilising the digital content of the exhibition.

This resource focuses on four artists, with an additional focus on the exhibition as a whole. Each section is considered through the frames or the conceptual framework taken from the Stage 4 - 6 Visual Arts syllabus:

Jacqueline Clayton – subjective and cultural frame

Paul Wood – cultural and postmodern frame

Stephen Bird - cultural and postmodern frame

Walter Auer – the conceptual framework

HYPERCLAY: Contemporary Ceramics the exhibition – structural and postmodern frame and the conceptual framework.

Although this resource aims to view the artist's practice through the Visual Art syllabus it can be adapted for use by Design and Technology students, ESL, NECB and CALD students and the diversity of questions allows for all age groups to be catered for.

HYPERCLAY redefines the gallery experience with the inclusion of integrated digital content available on iPads throughout the exhibition venue. This incredible resource is useful in interpreting and extending the audience's comprehension of the works on display, while the videos will be an invaluable resource in classroom. All the video's referenced in this resource are available on the Object website.

www.object.com.au.

Throughout the kit you will find references to symbols, they refer to:



Enquire
Investigate/research
before you visit



Experience
The exhibition through
questions and activities



Extend
Your knowledge by further
research, making, creating
and designing.



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Visual Arts and Craft Strategy
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HYPERCLAY: Contemporary Ceramics

HYPERCLAY: Contemporary Ceramics investigates the field of ceramics, focusing on new attitudes, techniques and technologies that are being embraced by artists in the 21st century. As the prefix 'hyper' suggests, *HYPERCLAY* presents clay based work where the medium has been amplified, extended and intensified.

Contemporary ceramics

When we think of ceramics we often think of beautifully formed vessels, hand crafted for decoration around the home or special occasion use, or we could think of Etruscan and Greek pottery, again used for decoration or in this case practical everyday use. The vessel as form is intricately tied to ceramics, its use and its historical narrative.

Historically ceramics, or the greater umbrella term 'pottery' was a part of everyday life; to hold and carry liquids and foods, to cook with, to eat and drink from. The making of objects out of clay was a necessity and up until the industrial revolution pottery was handmade. During the industrial revolution factory lines and industry produced

large amounts of what was once, a one-off, one of a kind object. As wealth grew in some sectors of society, a market grew requesting finer, less robust objects, as finer ceramic materials were imported from China and making techniques were refined. Decorative figurative ceramics were also produced at this time, which hold their own narratives regarding society and representation.

'Craft' as a movement had not been named as such before this time. It was created as a reaction to industrial production and as a passtime for those that did not need to work as a necessity.

Skipping forward to our contemporary homes, the necessity of ceramics has been replaced by light, affordable,

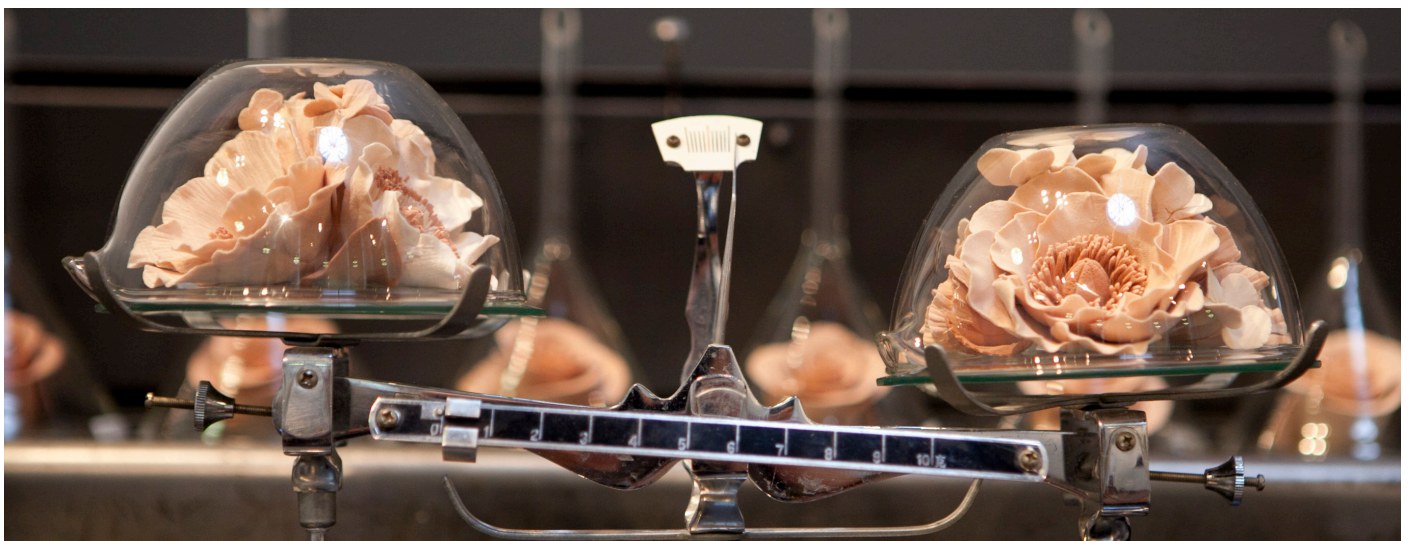
robust plastic. Ceramics and their manufacture are considered to be a highly skilled craft activity taught in universities. The vessel still dominates ceramic theory and discourse, as does the hand crafted object and the notion of the autonomous maker.

As the differences between art disciplines blur and the notion of the 'art/craft divide' fades into obscurity, the definitional boundaries of ceramics are moving. The exhibition *HYPERCLAY: Contemporary Ceramics* exemplifies these shifts, giving the audience an insight into the work of some Australian contemporary ceramic artists and the possibilities of ceramics as an artform in the early 21st century.

Jacqueline Clayton

Jacqueline Clayton is a renowned and respected Australian artist and ceramicist. She first started playing with clay as a child on her parent's property in NSW. She and her brother gathered the grey earth clay that they found in one of the dams on the property. From this they would make ugly grey ashtrays! During her university education she studied Japanese language and culture. On a return trip to Australia the Japanese Australian ceramicist Mitsuo Shoji advised her of a pottery school to study at in Japan. She returned to Japan and while there she met the Australian ceramicist Peter Rushforth who influenced her greatly. (See Jacqueline Clayton: Profile Interview)

"Face powder, generally, is used to obscure flaws: to render inadequacies less evident to observers...the association of face powder with the feminine is key in implying (the work's) underlying codes."



Rilke and the Autoclave, 2011

Jacqueline Clayton (Cont')

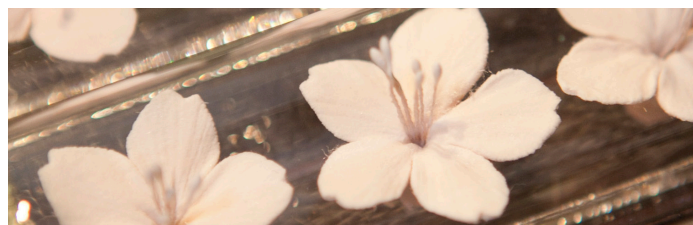
Rilke and the Autoclave

For HYPERCLAY Clayton has mixed face powder with porcelain to create a stronger material so that the work will withstand the three years of exhibition touring.

Clayton's technique is to hand mould the face powder ceramic, petal by petal, into life size flower replicas. For *Rilke and the Autoclave* Clayton has housed the flowers in scientific glassware on top of and inside an antique steriliser unit (autoclave), which the artist found at auction. The flowers in the drawers of the steriliser unit are bottled and numbered according to stanzas taken from the poem 'Requiem for a Friend' by a Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), which is about death and loss.

Cake decorator's technique

Clayton originally made her flowers through the traditional clay sculptural method of carving. Due to an accident, her works for an exhibition were destroyed and new ones had to be made in a short amount of time. Clayton drew on her mother's knowledge as a cake baker and decorator and learnt to construct flowers as a cake decorator does. This method involves the intricate construction of floral elements - petals, stems and stamen - piece by piece, which are then assembled to create the complete whole.



Rilke and the Autoclave, 2011



Rilke and the Autoclave, 2011

Face powder & the feminine

The properties of clay and face powder are very similar. Both use kaolin as a base, however clay is mixed with water and face powder with oils. Face powder can be used as a ceramic material but it is obviously much more expensive! Clayton uses face powder for its symbolic properties, as a statement on female beauty regimes and the pressures women are under to conform to society's expectations.

Jacqueline Clayton (Cont')

IN THE KNOW!

Victorian England and the language of flowers

17th and 18th century England, was known as the Victorian era after the reigning Queen Victoria. It was also the period of the industrial revolution when cities were growing quickly and class structure, morality and the rational sciences structured society. Flowers were no exception to the systems of classification that sought to impose order and structure to the fast changing world. Flowers were studied and given a position amongst their species, and they also allotted a symbolic meaning, which created a wordless communication tool of instruction and morality. Although largely lost, some of these symbolic floral messages are still used today, for example red roses for passion and yellow for friendship.



Choose a flower in Clayton's work and attempt to sketch it, taking care to record the details and maker's marks on the petals. How many separate elements has Clayton made before constructing the entire piece?

Rilke and the Autoclave is a subjective work for Clayton, yet a lot of the personal clues are hard to decipher for an audience member. Why would Clayton do this?

What is your interpretation of the work? What personal associations can you make?

What feelings or moods are expressed in the artwork?



Research the language of flowers. Combine various flowers to create a message you want to send to a friend. What emotions and messages would you like to convey? Swap the flower messages with your friend, can you understand the messages he/she has sent? Can you understand their message?



Watch the video "Jacqueline Clayton: Process Interview". Describe Clayton's studio.

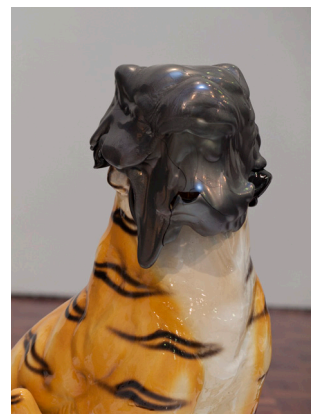
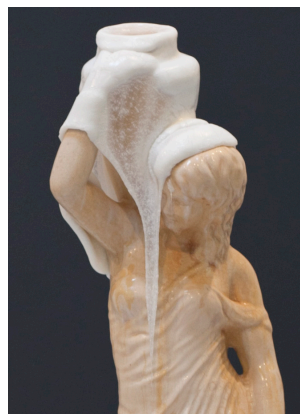
Watch the video "Walter Auer: Process Interview". Compare the two studios. Could Clayton's work be made in Auer's or vice versa? Why or why not?

Paul Wood

Paul Wood is an Australian artist with an Egyptian/English heritage. He came from a family of artists; his brothers and sister all went to art school, and his father studied Art at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. He grew up in a house filled with art and his father would often spend his nights in the studio. He chose art as one of his Year 11 subjects, and finding that he enjoyed ceramics, pursued it in year 12 and then continued doing ceramics at the Victorian College of the Arts. He graduated in 1998 with a Bachelor of Fine Art and again in 2002 with a Graduate Diploma of Visual Art.



"The slumped glass over their heads creates a kind of mask concealing their identity and revealing a sense of it being frozen in time."



Guardians of a Goddess, 2011

Paul Wood (Cont')

Guardians of a Goddess

For *HYPERCLAY* Wood has sourced two ceramic glazed lions which guard a ceramic female figure pouring fictitious water. Each figure has coloured, melted glass covering their eyes or in the case of the female figure, her raised arm. They stand on the calm centre of a warped tile sea. Each tile has been placed in the kiln, resting on different objects, to create the desired extent of manipulation. Wood has taken advantage of the different melting temperatures between the ceramic figures and the glass objects, causing the glass to melt over the stoic ceramic.

Multiculturalism

Paul Wood grew up in an Egyptian/Australian family in a multicultural suburb in Melbourne. As a form of creative expression, pride and nostalgia for their homeland, people in Wood's neighbourhood would decorate their front lawns with sculptures that reminded them of their country. Marble ladies in fountains, large ceramic lions guarding gates were all regular sites in Wood's neighbourhood.

"I grew up in the western suburbs of Melbourne. (St. Albans) A lot of different cultures migrated here ranging from European, Middle Eastern and Asian. It's like one big 'melting pot.'"

Wood began melting different ceramic objects together after eating a special meal prepared by his mother. He requested her to make an Egyptian/English meal reflecting his cultural heritage. It consisted of Maeshi Kromb, a typical

Egyptian dish of stuffed cabbage leaves, and potato mash, to resemble the traditional English meal of bangers and mash. At the end of the meal Paul put all the plates and dishes used to prepare and consume the meal in a dish rack and then put them in the kiln, melting them together.

Preloved and the ready-made

Wood uses found objects in his work. He sources pre-made sculptures from garden supply centres and eBay. He combines these larger pieces with used ceramic and glass kitchenware found in op-shops. By sourcing preloved ready-made objects, Wood is using the thrown away and unwanted objects that fill op shops and eventually land fill sites. He arranges these found objects in combinations that will utilise their warping and melting properties. The objects he collects and their arrangements create playful narratives referencing passing styles, perceptions and the passing of fashions.

"I find it really interesting using objects that have been discarded and that their previous humble existence in one's everyday domestic life to their rejection as non-fashionable 'clutter' were given a new life and resurrected into small monuments to their past efforts."



Maeshi kromb and mash, 2004

Paul Wood (Cont')

IN THE KNOW!

Appropriation

Appropriation in the visual arts means to borrow elements of manmade culture in the creation of new work. Since the early 1900s artists have consciously used appropriated objects in their work. Picasso and Braque appropriated found objects such as newspaper and labels in their abstract work. Duchamp instigated the idea of the 'readymade'; a common object recontextualised in the art gallery as art work. Appropriation is often used in postmodern art to create witty visual puns or to reinterpret our society.

"I think the objects collected from op shops definitely have a history to it. They talk about the era they were made, fashions and trends and also their daily use as an object. Some objects I find remind me of some of the things that my parents had or grandparents."

"I'm looking for objects that I think will warp or bend or will talk about a past era, 60s or 70s or country style. In this way I'm looking at collecting pieces and putting them together to create a narrative."



Identify and research different art historical periods that have used appropriation. Consider the difference in artists' practice between modernism and post modernism.

Consider the suburb you live in. How many different cultures live in your suburb? What different things signify different cultures? Make a list and count the number of different cultures. (Consider restaurants, writing on advertisements, garden decorations, languages overheard, clothing or gift stores)



What objects do you encounter in the work? Explain how Wood has used appropriation in his work.

How does the artist challenge traditional perceptions/ definitions of ceramics?



Consider the objects in Wood's work for *HYPERCLAY*. What places or contexts are you reminded of? What does Wood's choice of figures and objects reflect about Australian identity?

Watch the video "Paul Wood: Process Interview" and research other works by Wood. What is the artist's intention in using ready made objects from op shops? Do you think he is successful in his intentions?

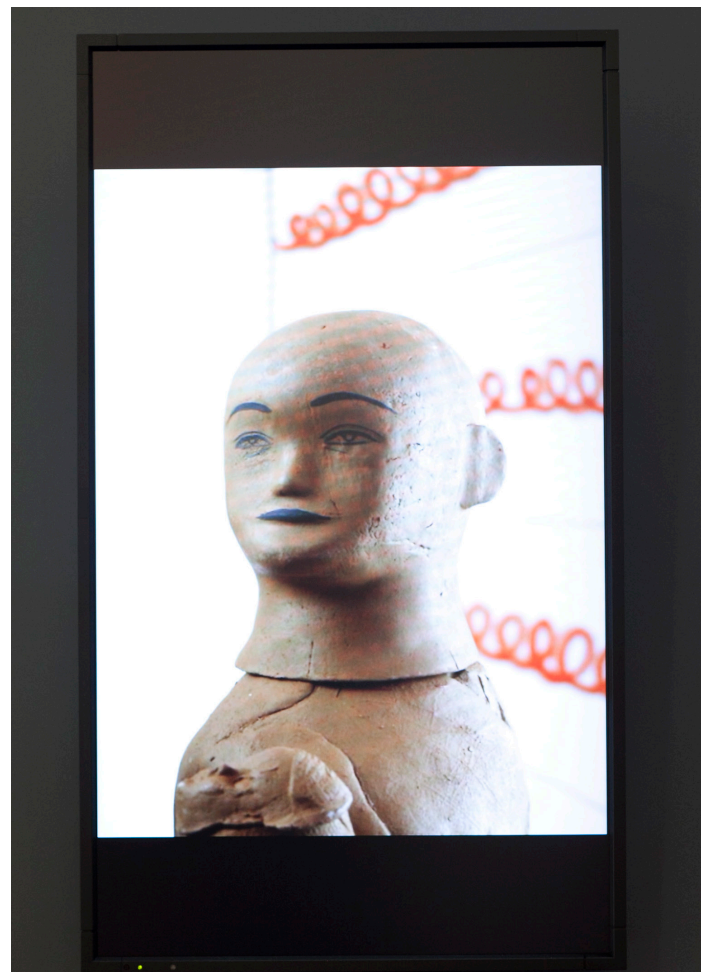
<http://www.wheretheycreate.com/index.php/projects/paul-wood-10607-kew/>

What does Wood's use of found, pre-loved objects tell us about our 'throw away' society?

Stephen Bird

"There is something mysterious about the leftovers from mass production. There is as much that gets thrown away as gets created, and the repetition of objects is a wonder to behold."

Stephen Bird originally trained as a painter, which features in some of his work, but ceramics were a constant presence since his childhood. When Bird was a child in Stoke-on-Trent the ceramics industry was in its heyday. Almost everyone was involved in the industry in some way. Potteries had employed families for generations and the people coveted and collected ceramics to decorate their homes. Bird's grandparents had a modest collection of Chinese and Staffordshire ceramics and these were an opening into another world for him. Instead of paintings on the walls, the houses Bird grew up in were decorated with pictorial plates. His grandparents' house backed on to Taylor Tunnicliff, a porcelain insulator factory, and he and his brother used to play on the slag heaps of broken plaster moulds and throwaways.



What are you laughing at?, 2010

Stephen Bird (Cont')

I just don't believe in ceramics and *What are you laughing at?*

Bird is exhibiting two works in *HYPERCLAY*. Both use digital technologies and reference the process and movement possible in a medium that is usually exhibited as finished static pieces. His work implies that creative ideas are never static; that all pieces are subject to reinterpretation according to their context.

I just don't believe in ceramics is a digital projection created by Bird onto four white platters and plates. The images Bird has used are from his own paintings and from experimenting with software. The projected images are constantly in motion, calling into question the static finished object of traditional ceramics.

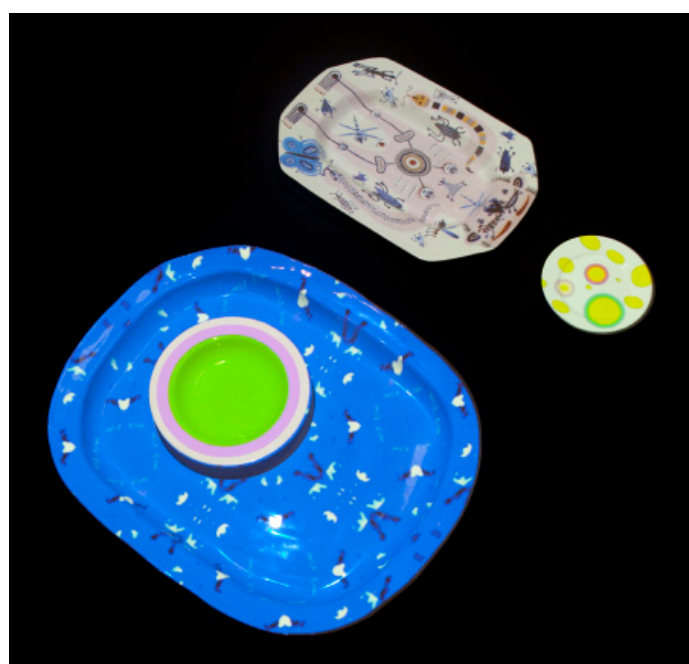
The title ironically confuses questions of belief with tangible objects. However for Bird the title questions the definition of the term 'ceramics', suggesting that rigid terminology separating and within art disciplines is debatable.

What are you laughing at? Is a stop-motion animation made by Bird in his studio over the course of a month. Frame by frame Bird has recorded the construction of the figures and their eventual demise in the fiery heat of the kiln. Referencing mythological stories of creation, where mankind is made from clay, Bird retells the story highlighting destructive forces inherent in construction as the two characters box their way to oblivion.

Process in ceramics

Traditionally ceramic pieces are presented to their audience as finished and fired, ready for functional use or decoration. Rarely is process highlighted except to explain a certain marking or finish on the work. Bird, as a ceramicist and artist, spends large portions of his time in the studio and is aware of the greater life of clay that precursors the vessels of function or pleasure.

"The process of making my ceramics is the result of a sequence of events which transform the works. They are constructed, cut up, manipulated and despoiled with pigments. I think sometimes this process of making can be unobserved in the completed frozen works. I would like to develop the performance part of my work and integrate the experience of making my work into the end result."



I just don't believe in ceramics, 2011

Stephen Bird (Cont')

IN THE KNOW!

The Potteries and the Toby Jug

Stoke-on-Trent, Bird's birthplace, is an English town that encompasses five smaller towns known as 'The Potteries'. It is renowned for its history of industrial pottery production. Originally Stoke-on-Trent was an industrial potting town due to abundant supplies of coal and local clay for earthenware pottery production. Later, the potting industries began to use the finer ceramic material imports from China, which led to an increase in the production of fine bone china pieces for delicate functional or decorative uses. Names such as Royal Doulton, Wedgwood and Minton founded their production in Bird's birthplace, making the town a centre of industrial pottery in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The Toby Jug is a popular style of tea or beer mug that originated in The Potteries. It is made in the form of a seated person or the head of a famous person with a handle attached. Traditionally the person would be dressed in 18th century attire holding a beer or smoking a pipe.



Watch "Stephen Bird: Profile Interview". Take note of the images and figurative references in Stephen Bird's work in his studio. Consider this and the elements that comprise Bird's figures in the work *What are you laughing at?* Do they have cultural and historical significance? Research some of these and consider how Bird is subverting their allegorical and metaphorical messages.

What is the role of the art world and audience in demarcating the value of the singular elements Bird uses?

What do you think Bird is trying to say by combining these elements?

Make your own stop motion animation using clay. Construct a clay figure or object taking photos with a camera or your phone at each stage of the process. Load them onto your computer animation software or have them printed and stapled into a flip book.

Create your own flip book! Take a book or notebook, on the first page in the bottom right hand corner draw a figure or a scene. On each following page draw the same figure or scene with a slight change. Keep drawing the figure or scene and continue the change page by page until the book is finished. Now flip the pages and watch your handiwork!

(You might want to try a figure jumping up and down or the sun rising and setting over an island.)



Research the history of Stoke-on-Trent and the work of Josiah Wedgwood. How do you think growing up in a town with such a history impacted Bird's work?

<http://www.thepotteries.org/pottery.htm>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/wedgwood_josiah.shtml



Watch the video *What are you laughing at?* Record the different elements that comprise the bodies of the figures.

How does the work challenge traditional perceptions of ceramics?

Walter Auer

Walter Auer was born in Faenza, Italy, where he studied ceramics. He continued his studies in Turkey and Japan and then set up a ceramic training centre in a leper colony in Eritrea, Africa and later a rehabilitation centre for ex guerrilla fighters, that used clay for therapeutic purposes. He eventually settled in Sydney, Australia in 1997.

The Anarchist and The Insider

Auer hunts out and buys discarded teddy bears from op-shops. He opens them up and removes any stuffing, batteries or other parts that might explode in the firing process. He then fills the bears with sawdust and sews them back up. They are soaked in 'terra sigillata' or 'slip' and then left to dry, which can take up to two months in winter, before they are resoaked again. Once the terra sigillata is built up to the thickness Auer is looking for, he submits them to a gruelling firing process that carbonizes the object and clay. When making the work, he often adds bandages, blindfolds and fresh eyes to the bears or keeps them inside out with their seams visible.

The result is a blackened ceramic toy that appears to be made from a mould but in fact holds the ashen remains of its original self in the shell casing.



The Anarchist, 2011



The Insider, 2011

Walter Auer (Cont')

Smoke firing

Smoke firing is a traditional ceramic firing technique that puts the ceramic object in contact with the flames of fire. Historically it was used in Etruscan and Greek pottery making as a simple firing method. A large metal drum is filled with wood, sawdust, other combustible materials and the object to be fired. The drum is sealed to ensure no oxygen enters or smoke escapes. When the fire is lit temperatures range from 900-1300 degrees celcius. Smoke firing leaves distinctive markings on the objects which cannot be replicated, such as beautiful blacks, soft greys, browns, and even flashes of red, yellows and fiery orange.

Why bears?

Teddy bears are soft lovable creatures that most of us have had as a special friend in our youth. Because they are so endearing, the viewer is drawn to them. However, for Auer, that is just the beginning of their meaning.

Auer once took part in a Navaho Indian ritualistic trance, where the participant's totemic animals were called.

"In one of these sessions a big black bear took possession of my body through my spinal cord, shook me up and elevated me to a new reality. This extraordinary experience was extremely intense and has stayed with me for all these years and is my only explanation why I'm drifting towards these animals."



The Insider, 2011

Transformation

Auer's process transforms everyday lovable, trusted objects into something quite confronting and menacing. It is important for him that a trace of the original object remains inside the fired ceramic shell in the form of ash. Auer says that in the last seven years of his practice he has reached the "end of making" as transforming, preserving and recreating has become more and more important in his art.

Walter Auer (Cont')

"I use the soft toys as a metaphor to involve my viewer to open up and begin a dialogue."

(artwork/audience) What common objects are used in the work? In what way do you think the audience would respond to these objects? How has Auer subverted the objects?

"I use the soft toys as a metaphor to involve my viewer to open up and begin a dialogue." What do you think Auer means by this?

(artist/world) Consider the possible cultural and political influences Auer has experienced in his travels. How could the work in HYPERCLAY

be interpreted through his experiences?

(artwork/audience) Watch the video "Walter Auer: Process Interview". Consider Auer's technique within the history of ceramics. How would a traditional ceramicist interpret his techniques?



The Anarchist, 2011



(artwork/audience) Did you have a favourite toy as a child? What was it? When you see Auer's work does it remind you of your toy? How do you feel when you look at Auer's work? List the emotions that you feel and consider how or why the work makes you respond the way it does.

(artist/artwork) Research other series of Auer's work and consider how this artwork relates to his other artworks. Consider his influences and technique.

www.walterauer.com.au

Watch the video "Walter Auer: Process Interview". Describe Auer's studio.

Watch the video "Jacqueline Clayton: Process Interview". Compare the two studios. Could Auer's work be made in Clayton's or vice versa? Why or why not?

HYPERCLAY: Contemporary Ceramics

What materials and processes have been used in the exhibition? How are these different or similar to traditional ceramic exhibitions?

Beyond the materials used, what forms and symbols are present in the artist's works that link this exhibition to an historical dialogue of ceramic practice? How are these traditional forms and symbols reconfigured or reinterpreted for *HYPERCLAY*?

Does this produce humour, irony, parody, wit or playfulness?

The videos available on iPads throughout the exhibition are an integral part of the exhibition, although no artist has made them. What is their purpose? How would an audience member use or respond to this exhibition element?

Do you think the video component is a successful addition to the exhibition? Why/why not?

HYPERCLAY is a touring exhibition that will be shown in different exhibition spaces across Australia for three years. The exhibition furniture and display design has been made with this in mind. What aspects of the design would be useful for a travelling exhibition?

What problems would an exhibition like *HYPERCLAY* face while touring?

All videos are available through Object on iTunes U or you can download the *HYPERCLAY* iPad digital catalogue for FREE from iTunes.



Photos by Jamie Williams