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Qian Peng

A Site for Hybrid Practice:

Between Traditional Culture and Contemporary Ceramic Art

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Declaration of Originality

I, [sign and date] hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

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Abstract

This research project examines the relationship between Chinese traditional culture and contemporary ceramic art to propose a hybrid practice across materials, concepts and disciplines within conventional as well as experimental ceramic practice. The studio research deals with intense personal expression and cultural background in the medium of fabric clay. This project has involved advanced experimentation in material and technique involved in the application of fabric in the ceramic making process. Thus, this project seeks to break the practical limitation of material in both physical and conceptual terms.

This exegesis situates the role of traditional concepts in contemporary ceramics through field observations of two important exhibitions in China, the *Ninth China Contemporary Young Ceramic Artists' Biennale* (CYCB, 2014) and the *2014 Hangzhou International Contemporary Ceramic Biennale* (HICB), and individual interviews with three Chinese ceramicists. A research triangle encompassing cultural context, formal considerations and ceramic practice is proposed as a theoretical model to accompany the studio research. The entire body of the research consists of this exegesis, studio practice and a detailed documentation of material experiments (available as an open-access online database).

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Introduction

It is not uncommon in contemporary art to see works that make references to cultural traditions. Along with the development of mainstream contemporary art, research about cultural elements has progressed in many forms but not with the same intensity in all contexts. *A Site for Hybrid Practice: Between Traditional Culture and Contemporary Art* investigates the role of traditional culture in contemporary ceramic art with a particular focus on the Chinese context. In addition to this focus, the research pays special attention to Chinese artists and academic events, to ask secondary questions about the current situation and future possibilities. This exegesis analyses the theoretical and studio research to propose the theoretical model of a triangle based on form, culture and ceramic art.

The word “hybrid” has been used in many research fields in addition to natural science. In the humanities and social sciences, hybridity has been theorized in postcolonial studies, cross-cultural and transnational studies, in sociology, anthropology, linguistics and development studies. “Hybrid” has been used to describe the process of two (or more) different elements (culture, language, concept, etc.) mixing with each other at practical and intellectual, internal and external levels, especially in contexts undergoing transformation.¹ Derived words such as “hybridity”, “hybridization”², and “hybridize” can be seen in these

¹ Silliman offers the following observations: “...hybridity would likely never be applicable in cases of cultural continuity and would instead be a lens applied only to cultural change...we might run the risk of seeing cultural stasis as the default condition, the one not to bother explaining.” Stephen W. Silliman, “What, Where, and When is Hybridity,” in Jeb J. Card, ed. *The Archaeology of Hybrid Material Culture*, vol. 39, Occasional Paper (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 489.

² “In general, hybridization seems to be a general term that most authors...apply to situations when a group (1) encounters or has sustained interaction with another group or its material culture, whether by force or by choice, and (2) adjusts to or incorporates new material, practical,

disciplines. Renato Rosaldo uses the word hybrid to describe a position to introduce Néstor García Canclini's writings on Latin American art.³In Flocel Sabaté's words, "...even the succession of cultures does not generate displacements but rather different degrees of mixing, that can be taken as hybridity..."⁴ Yvonne Spielmann has used the word "hybrid" in her book about Japanese media arts.⁵Silliman has even asked, "What is not a hybrid? What practice, material, or idea does not involve the influence of something or someone else? Can anything be truly invented anew that does not result, in some form or fashion, from other influences, materials, or inspirations? Are there really 'pure' antecedents that can be mixed?"⁶In my research, I use the word hybrid, in three distinct senses: at the practical level, it refers to material research with fabric clay – the hybridization of clay and fibre. At the intellectual level, it denotes the interaction between my cultural background and the external influences from other cultures. Lastly, I use the word to signal the crossovers between theory and practice in my work which I consider to be of great importance. The other key word is "culture", which according to Donal Carbaugh, "...is an expressive system"⁷, that is "historically transmitted"⁸, which are both important observations for my study.

genetic, and symbolic elements associated with the encountered group in experimental, creative, or seemingly imitative ways, again whether in coercive or equitable relations. The focus is usually on the materiality of these adjustments and incorporations." Ibid., 488.

³ Renato Rosaldo, "Forward," in Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Silvia L. López, Christopher L. Chiappari (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xi.

⁴ Flocel Sabaté, "Hybrid Identities," in Flocel Sabaté, ed. *Hybrid Identities*, vol. 2 (Bern: International Academic Publishers, 2014), 11.

⁵ "We could say, then, that internal and external hybridization decisively characterize the basic state of affairs overall. ... External hybridization extends to new, transcultural contact spaces by projects, artists, and developments making contacts through travel." From Yvonne Spielmann, *Hybrid Culture: Japanese Media Arts in Dialogue with the West*, trans. Stan Jones, Anja Welle (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), 4.

⁶ From Stephen W. Silliman, "What, Where, and When is Hybridity," in Jeb J. Card, ed. *The Archaeology of Hybrid Material Culture*, vol. 39, Occasional Paper (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 489.

⁷ Donal Carbaugh, "Situating Cultural Studies in Communication: Cultural Discourse Theory," in Andrea Borsari, Claudio Baraldi, Augusto Carli, ed. *Hybrids, Differences, Visions: On the Study of Culture* (USA: The Davies Group Publishers, 2011), 100.

⁸Ibid., 101.

The research aims at investigating how cultural factors can be hybridized with contemporary ceramic art, and proposing a methodology to study, analyze and understand contemporary ceramic art, especially Chinese contemporary ceramics. It also aims at expanding the possibility of modifying ceramic materials that could contribute to the field in practical aspects of making.

Several words need to be clearly defined due to this research taking place across two languages (English and Chinese). In this exegesis, the words “ceramic art” denote works that use clay as the primary material, and employ ceramic techniques as basic methods to produce objects, functional or otherwise. Industrial applications of ceramics and industrial products are excluded from this definition. The word “contemporary” in this exegesis has two meanings. First, contemporary is a temporal designation, signifying present-day. Second, it is a definition of style. The explanation is significant because in Chinese, contemporary is Dang Dai [当代], a term used interchangeably with Xian Dai [现代] sometimes in representation, which normally is translated as modern. In some research resources in Chinese, modern[现代]is used to mean contemporary[当代]. In this exegesis contemporary ceramic art denotes work made in recent years that uses conceptual strategies shared across contemporary art practice. Further, in discussing traditional ceramics, this exegesis does not differentiate between artists and makers. Since there is no tradition of leaving the maker’s name on the ceramic work in pre-modern times, my discussion of style, technique and aesthetics in traditional ceramics (concepts which are also useful in discussing the work of contemporary artists), does not consider personal factors. Thus, while historical ceramics are discussed based on a broad historical context, the discussion of contemporary ceramic art acknowledges the circumstances of individual creation.

The research is located within Chinese contemporary ceramic art; and explores the practice from two directions, which are the theoretical context of the field and the practical technique of modified clay. Different research methodology is applied according to these directions: literature research and case studies for the theoretical context; and experiments in practice and visual analysis for the practical technique.

For the theoretical context, the research is grounded in an understanding of Chinese traditional culture, and contemporary art China and elsewhere. The relationship between traditional culture and cultural identity in world art is a significant issue not only in ceramic art, but also in contemporary art more generally. However, this issue has not been systematically researched in the ceramic field, even though large numbers of ceramic artists are responding to it through their art practice from different directions and levels. Chinese contemporary art is influenced by international practices and concepts, but it is rooted in Chinese history at the same time. It is important to note that international contemporary art "...is not as uniform as it may appear because global cultural signs are translated, domesticated, indigenized, and repackaged."¹⁰ Increased access to information and ideas from different parts of the world have produced different responses within Chinese art circles. Even so, art scholars "came to realize that a true history of Chinese art could only be meaningful if situated in the context of world art."¹¹ The Chinese contemporary ceramic art community is experiencing similar questions about the location of their work in the context of world art.

¹⁰Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Globe Multiculture: Cultures, Transnational Culture, Deep Culture," in Andrea Borsari, Claudio Baraldi, Augusto Carli, ed. *Hybrids, Differences, Visions: On the Study of Culture* (USA: The Davies Group Publishers, 2011), 83.

¹¹ Kitty Zijlmans, Wilfried Van Damme, *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 119.

Another theoretical discussion involved in my project is the relationship between art and craft. The realization that ceramics can be an area of art practice beyond the production of craft objects is important to my practice, making meaningful the push into hybridity. Bruce Metcalf in his article “Replacing the Myth of Modernism” has stated very clearly said that craftspeople should stop trying to make modern art. He has also said that craft has two imposing neighbours: the technologies of mass-production and modern art.¹²In the early 20th century, Yanagi Sōetsu also agreed that craft and art are different disciplines.¹³ However, both Howard Risatti and Anne McPherson support the idea that craft and art can be discussed as one.¹⁴My understanding of these discussions has provided a pathway to think about the meaning and values of contemporary ceramic artworks.

The main case studies in my field research include two major exhibitions and three contemporary ceramic artists in China. The two exhibitions are *The Ninth Chinese Contemporary Young Ceramic Artists’ Biennale Exhibition*(CYCB, 2014) and the *2014 Hangzhou International Contemporary Ceramic Biennale Exhibition*(HICB). These exhibitions were chosen because they are recurring representative exhibitions in the field of Chinese contemporary ceramics. Initiated by the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou in 1998, the exhibitions have reflected the development of Chinese contemporary ceramic art over the past 18 years. My role as curatorial assistant for these exhibitions in 2014 gave me access to internal information for my research. The three artists are Lu Bin (1961 –), Jiang Yanze (1975 –) and Lu Weisun (1962 –). Lu Bin is professor of Nanjing University of the Arts. He is a prominent artist who is interested in using ceramic

¹²Bruce Metcalf, “Replacing the Myth of Modernism,” in Sandra Alfoldy, ed. *Neocraft: Modernity and the Crafts* (Halifax, N.S: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2007), 4-6.

¹³Yanagi Sōetsu. *Gong Yi Zhi Dao* [The Craft Theory]. Translated by Xu Yiyi. (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University, 2011).

¹⁴Howard Risatti. *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression*. (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

material in a contemporary way. Of the three, his work is closest in conceptual terms to contemporary art generally. Jiang Yanze also works in Nanjing University of the Arts. She represents a female voice in this research. Her work has more design elements involved. Compared to other two artists, she has more academic experience outside of China. Lu Weisun is a highly skillful master in traditional celadon from Longquan, a village that has a long history of celadon production. His work stands between tradition and contemporary celadon ceramics. Unlike other two artists, he does not hold an academic position, but operates a very successful commercial studio. Through interviewing these artists, I was able to encounter varying points of view. Together, the exhibitions and the interviews provided first hand research material, which is essential to this exegesis. The fieldwork played the role of turning point in my art practice. In addition to these exhibitions and artists, the work of other practitioners will also be discussed in this exegesis.

The technical part of the research focused on the materiality of ceramics and its possibilities to merge other materials and techniques. In my case the materials are clay and fibre. Ceramic art is closely associated with materiality. Clay and glaze are the two basic ingredients of ceramics. The development of ceramic art cannot be discussed without those two basic parts, which is why I think the history of ceramic art can also be seen as the history of ceramic material. From lower temperature earthenware to higher temperature porcelain, from unglazed pot to celadon glazed pot, from single colour decoration to colourful underglaze paints, ceramics are characterized by an extension of material possibilities, a process that continues today.

Referencing back to the earlier discussion about art and craft, I approach it with the key focus on material. The knowledge of particular materials and the ability

to use them, as well as the related history of material, are very important to the understanding of craft. At this point, the craft and art are in two separate conceptual categories. This is why I place the following section, “The Material Field” at the beginning of this exegesis. However, I have come to realize that the art/craft divide is not valid in the contemporary world. Many ceramicists are operating as independent artists in mainstream art society with their craft and contemporary art training background, which has shifted the boundaries of art and craft. Through such processes, both art and craft have gained many similar concepts and applied them in similar ways, which makes it possible to discuss them in a unified field of study. In Susan Lambert’s words, “The role of materials and techniques is not even limited to what in practical terms they have made possible.”¹⁵This implies that material experimentation can bear more meaning than we thought, thus providing the core reason for a unity of craft and expressional art. This realization is the power that pushes my hybrid practice forward, and is the key to open the door between craft based practice and culture related art in my case.

The Material Field

Clay builds the body in ceramics, and glaze gives it protection. This is the essential method regardless of whether the object is functional or not. Clay and glaze play different roles. But in contemporary ceramic art, the roles can be interchanged. Further, boundaries between clay body and glaze have become blurred. As Lambert states, “Clearly different materials have different characteristics in a variety of different combinations: they may, for example, be

¹⁵ Susan Lambert, *Form Follows Function? Design in the 20th Century* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1993), 41.

hard or soft, rigid or flexible, opaque or transparent, more or less absorbent, a conductor or not of heat; they are capable of bearing different kinds of stresses and accepting different kinds of finishes; they can also be worked in a multitude of different ways.”¹⁶This is what many contemporary artists – ceramicists included – are interested in. These artists are building an experimental trajectory in contemporary ceramic art. For example Todd Leech’s work *Hostile* [Fig 1], uses kiln elements as part of the clay body, and the glaze is no longer used for decoration or protection. Rather, the glaze is part of the body already. This can also be found in Kathleen Standen’s work [Fig 2].

It is hard to say whether the material matters more in traditional or contemporary ceramics. Material is at the dominant place in both kinds of practice but in a different way. The relationship between material and ceramics can be understood as material deciding function. On the other hand, it is also can be argued that ceramic’s function decides its material. “Decide” is a word that contains many meanings, including “guide”, “indicate” and “promote”. Especially in the case of functional ceramics, there is a long history of interweaving between material and function. In the case of functional objects, it is easy to identify the functions of materials, whereas in contemporary ceramic experimentation, the “function” of material elements and processes can be understood as carriers of meaning or ideas.

¹⁶ Susan Lambert, *Form Follows Function? Design in the 20th Century* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1993), 31.

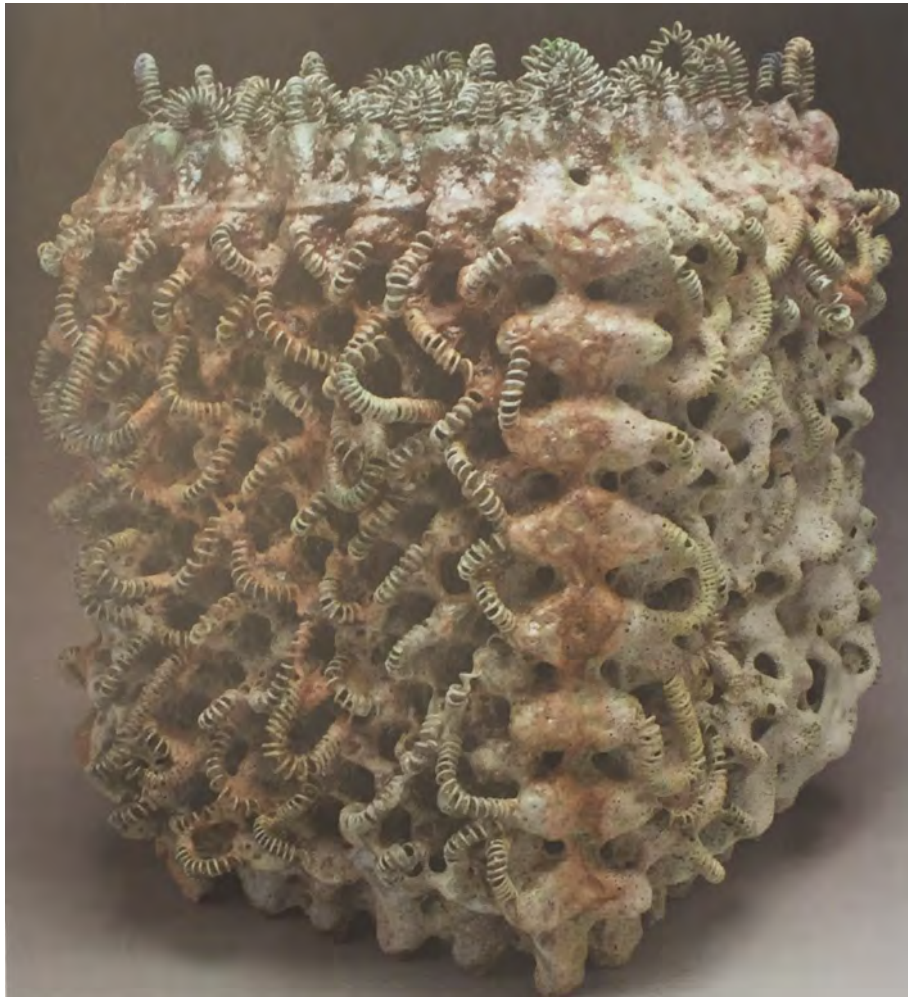


Fig. 1. Todd Leech, *Hostile*, 2009



Fig. 2. Kathleen Standen, *Haze I*, 2011

The argument of material deciding function can be easily understood through two examples – a porcelain teapot and Yixing Zisha teapot. What kind of clay is used, and whether it needs glaze are the two determining factors here.

In the case of porcelain teapots, normally, the better the porcelain, the better the quality of the teapot. White porcelain clay rather than a coloured earthenware clay is chosen. Then, the teapot needs a layer of glaze to protect it. Unglazed porcelain absorbs when used to hold liquids, and is easily stained by the colour of its contents. There are lots of minute pits on the surface, which makes it hard to clean. Proper glazing solves these problems. Yixing teapots are made with special clay called Zisha (Purple clay). Yixing teapots are normally not glazed and fired much lower than porcelain. The key reason for this is material. Zisha is a clay of the kaolin-quartz-mica type, with a high content of iron oxide (7.40 – 8.66 percent), which gives it better structure and surface. The fired Zisha clay is perfect for red tea because its surface has very fine texture (particularly after the highly refined finishing it receives), which helps keep the flavour of tea.¹⁷In this case, the clay of Zisha teapot has assumed the role of glaze in the porcelain teapot. The glazed porcelain teapot is different, which is why it has not been used for red tea traditionally. The different quality and function of teapot shows one key point – the material can dictate function (via an act of connoisseurship in this case). Material is the base of function, and the functions of different materials have potential to be interchanged and/or replaced.

In the area of material science many high-tech ceramic materials have been invented for special functions. From replacement teeth to temperature resistant

¹⁷ “When the ware is fired, these aggregates shrink and form around themselves a continuous layer of pores, which give zisha clay its unique and valuable ‘breathing’ quality – the attribute which renders it especially suitable for the making of teapots and flower pots.” Kuei-Hsian Lo, *The Stoneware of Yixing: From the Ming Period to the Present Day* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1986), 20.

tiles for spacecraft, these ceramics are invented to meet certain specialised needs. On the other hand, though, modification of material for functional needs has a long history and plays a particularly important role in ceramics. Since the first addition of grass to clay, to the use of different raw clays from different hills to make a suitable recipe for celadon in Longquan during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), and onwards to modern material technology, materials have been modified to suit needs of new functions.

Material decides what it can be and what it can do, while function leads the exploration of material. This applies to functional ceramics as well as to contemporary ceramic art. This discussion on material and function is crucial because ceramics as an art discipline is grounded in material, while its origins as a discipline are anchored in function. For functional ceramics, the process of working with material particular is directly related to satisfying functional requirements. In expressive ceramic art, the material function is a compound of emotion and feeling. Ceramic artists are using material as part of their art language.

Different materials have different degrees of suitability for use in ceramics, but this is not immutable. It is hard to create ceramic art without thinking about material and the process of working with material. While material plays a dominant role in ceramics, it is not limited to conventional functional characteristics but keeps changing the nature of material. Material in contemporary ceramic art has lots of possibilities for further research and exploration. Ceramic artists use material to connect hand, head and heart, making is way to express their ideas, thoughts, and concepts.

The following chapter will continue this discussion of materials and concepts

with reference to my particular interest in fabric clay. Fabric clay is the primary material that I use in the studio. After researching the field, I have come to the conclusion that, while several artists have made use of fabric clay, it hasn't been systematically researched in academic studies, and the following discussion aims to contribute new knowledge to this field.

Chapter One: First Touch of Fabric Clay

Introduction

The development of craft-based practices has been conditioned by two important variables: first, craft is emphatically influenced by the qualities of materials used; second, physical laws have governed the making process.¹ My research started with the questions and requirements that appeared in the making process. In this chapter, which includes three main parts, I will discuss the early stages of my research. My initial choice of material was conditioned by my interest in exploring unconventional applications of ceramic processes. I was interested not in being limited by the area of clay, but also the possibilities of incorporating uncommon materials. It was this interest that led me to research fabric clay. The first section examines my practices before I commenced the current research candidature. It includes the origins of fabric clay came from, how it has been developed, what the application possibilities are, and several experiments in my first year of research. The second and third sections are about two series of works, considering the contextual questions and the thinking that has arisen from that analysis during the process of making those works. An account of the problems that I encountered forms part of the discussion. Some of these problems caused me to rethink the essence of the material and the central questions that I should answer as an artist, or more precisely, as a ceramic artist. The outcomes of that thinking are directly linked with the discussion in the following chapter, which discusses what tradition is, and what role it can play contemporary ceramic art. With these questions in mind, I interviewed three artists, which also has been discussed in the next chapter. During the process, my

¹ Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 98-99.

understanding and attitude to ceramic art shifted, which can be seen in the works that are analysed in Chapter Four. Therefore this chapter is the starting point of my research and practice, it explains where my research originated from, and provides a background for further discussion.

Section 1: Before Fabric Clay

When considering which material to use, I focused my interest on fibre clay. This is a technique that uses fibre in the process of ceramic making as a means of enhancing structure. My interest in using different materials in ceramics is not new to this PhD program—I had previously tried incorporating plaster into my work during my Master degree research.

My works at that time were a series of thrown works with decoration using plaster. It is not usual to use plaster in ceramic work except in mould making. During the making process, it is vital to avoid accidentally mixing plaster shards into the clay because the plaster will cause ceramic cracks in the firing. However I thought the combination of these two materials could make for a fresh visual experience. This is demonstrated in the work *White Spot No.2* (2012) [Fig. 3], where the very white plaster made a stark contrast to the ceramic surface. This contrast has been created by the difference of materials used. I used high quality plaster in the work to make it more suitable for the glazed surface. Initially I was inspired by the knot decoration pattern from a bronze bell in ancient China, and laid out all the white spots regularly; my second inspiration was because the orderly white spots created a strong pattern, which enhanced the visual power of the finished piece. This series was the first where I applied mixed-material in practice. After that initial use, I further considered how to apply an uncommon ceramic material into the clay, and the use of fabric came to mind.



Fig. 3. *White Spot No.2*, 2012

Fabric, as a type of fibre, has the possibility to be used in clay as part of the making process. Fibre already has a history of being used in the ceramic-making process. Dry grasses, strings, or hemp have been used in clay for constructing mud into certain forms from the very early stages of ceramic-making. Several contemporary practitioners have added paper pulp to the clay slip to make paper clay. This history encouraged me to use fabric in my research on modifying ceramic materials.

There are several artists in the field who have used fabric in ceramic art, including Helen Martin, Annette Bugansky and Melanie Blood. Despite its active use, the method has many problems. Using fabric in clay is different to the normal process. It offers many qualities that clay does not have, but it also introduces technical problems that need to be solved. Using paper pulp in clay has a longer history than using fabric, yet its use is still relatively new compared to other ceramic-making processes. This is why few ceramic artists are devoted to this method. Adding paper pulp to clay or other similar techniques is categorised as “clay recipe” or “add materials” in most technical books. The paper clay method can be found in a few technical books as an independent technique in recent years.² It is this “new” and unknown that inspires my interest.

A further reason why I persisted in using fabric, aside from its potential in clay, was its intrinsic relationship with women. In Chinese history, the stories relating to fabric are predominantly about women, for example in tailoring, sewing and embroidery. They were very few men involved, as these jobs were deemed to be women’s work. There is a special Chinese word for this work – *Nv Hong* [女红], which translates as “women’s work”. The bond between the fabric and the woman, as well as the actual labour, have been reflected in my work by the use of fabric clay.

² Rosette Gault, *Paper Clay*. (Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), and Rosette Gault, *Paperclay Art and Practice*. (Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

Fabric clay is a description for the material I use which has not been described in this way in other academic writing to date. It means a technique using fabric dipped in clay slip as the main material used to build ceramic forms. The fabric chosen is generally factory-made sheeting. This material can be cotton, wool, polyester, etc.; its use is not limited by whether it is an artificial or a natural fibre. I have proposed the description fabric clay based on its similarity to paper clay. Both of these terms describe a special technique of ceramic-making, and are also a description of the material at the same time. All the work I have produced during this PhD candidature is made with fabric clay. This has included research on the material to get a deeper understanding, and the building of works using the material properties of fabric clay as the primary motive. It was later in my candidature that I was able to use conceptual linkages from other sources, as seen in Chapter Four.

The first works that I made in fabric clay were constructed before my current PhD program research. There are two series of works: the *Square Light Series*, and the *Diary Series*. For these, I chose baby wipe tissue and dipped it into the clay slip, then placed it on a flat board and waited until it dried. This resulted in a much stronger fabric clay slab. I cut the slabs with scissors and combined them with clay slip to build the forms. The clay that I used was Dehua porcelain³. Dehua clay is a super white porcelain, which was found in Fujian Province in China. It has been called *Blanc de Chine* in French. It presents as a beautiful natural white colour. In the two early series of work, I decided to retain its original colour and texture, and also kept the unique detailed pattern that fabric clay produces when in its natural state. But this does not say that fabric clay

³ "Dehua Porcelain began to be exported abroad in large quantities in the Song Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) and Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368 A.D.) to Southeast Asia and the Middle East along the Marine Silk Road. Dehua white porcelain production reached its climax in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.), when large varieties of Dehua white wares were exported to Europe, called *blanc de chine* by the French. *Blanc de chine* is the masterpiece of Dehua white ware with an ivory white tone, a translucent body and superb shaping and sculpture workmanship, thus often called 'lard white' or 'ivory white.'" From Weidong Li, HongjieLuo, Jianan Li, Xiaoke, Lu, JingkunGuo, "The White Porcelains from Dehua Kiln Site of China: Part I. Chemical Compositions and the Evolution Regularity," *Ceramics International* 37, no. 1 (2011): 355-361.

cannot be glazed; in my later works I conducted a certain amount of glaze tests to prove that hypothesis. *Square Light No.2* (2013)[Fig. 4]reflects the beauty of the material by simple geometric forms and an interaction with light as well. In the *Diary Series*(2013)[Fig. 5], the works were transferring personal feelings via familiar objects, which have similarity with fabric clay visually. The fragility of the fabric clay was the key quality in those works; allowing the works to send a message to the viewer about how fragile, valuable and precious those memories are. This quality was promoted even though that flimsiness was partly because of technical difficulties in the making that cannot be avoided

These two works were my first attempt at using fabric in clay, while the knowledge of the technique still has many gaps. Both works were at the beginning of this adventure in fabric clay. But in both works, the relationship between material and the artist's emotion was not entirely clear. As was mentioned before, the material is at the dominant place in ceramic art expression. Here, the attempt at using this unproven material has signified a new direction for my art, and my willingness to find a suitable art language as an artist encouraged the revamped use of this material. This discussion of my earlier works provides a history of my research and practice and so was important to be considered here. The works that followed during the first year of my PhD program were developed based on this background and went further along this road.



Fig. 4. *Square Light No.2*, 2013



Fig. 5. *Diary Series, 2013*

Section 2: *Knots Series*

Knots Series and *Travelling Series* were the first two works that I completed during my first year in the PhD program, while continuing to research material at the same time. I like to think of these works as a “project”, because I think each work represents a different theme and topic; although the works can be classified under the same motif, they are still relatively independent artworks.

Knots Series and *Travelling Series*, both aim to explore the possibilities of fabric clay. Different than the *Square Light Series* and the *Diary Series*, these two were created based on a certain understanding of fabric clay: it has clear aspect and direction both in the artwork and materials. The material itself has also hinted at the function of the artworks – to fulfil the emotional need of the artist and to convey that to the audience. The *Knots Series* includes two major works – *Netting* and *Words*, both based on knot-making. It is not only about the knot itself, but also about the activity of making knots. The knot is thought to be a way of recording that which has been found in early human history. According to current understanding, there were several peoples who had their own knot-recording system in the Yunnan Province of China, for example, the Li Su [傣] ⁴ people. Similarly in the Andean culture, the registration of numbers in the Khipu concerns the types of knots used.⁵ The context of knots can be representative of words, culture and history, which is part of the initial meaning of the *Knots Series*.

To look at my initial work from another perspective, the activity of making knots is the second meaning of this series. Making a knot is a simple, repetitive activity,

⁴ Hanzhang Chen, “The End of Knotting Recording System,” in Cao Shule, Li Bing, ed. *XueZai Qing Hua: Xin Wen Chuan Bo Pian* (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press), 2006.

⁵ Alberto Saez-Rodriguez, “KnotNumbersUsed as LabelsforIdentifyingSubjectMatter of a Khipu/Identificación Del Tema Del Contenido De Un Quipu Considerando a Los Valores Numéricos De Los Nudos Como Etiquetas,” *Revista Latinoamericana De Etnomatemática* 1, no. 6 (2013): 4-19.

and it is a basic ability of humans. However, making a knot can be a complicated activity too because there are many different types of knots which have been used in different areas of life. In addition to recording systems, knots have other functions such as tying. These knots show the wisdom of humans who can make something simple into something much more difficult or beautiful. This is consistent with the Zen philosophy – seeing great in small. There is a repetitive movement in making knots, so the knot requires visible labour no matter what the end result and why – for number registration or art. Another embedded meaning here is the different results from same activity, since no matter how carefully they are made, it is not possible get the exactly same knot each time. While, Bruce Metcalf said that “the marks of hand fabrication symbolize the uniqueness of an individual life”,⁶so did the *Knots Series*. The reason for the activity and labour that sits behind the making of the knot can be very different. *Netting* and *Words* have different focuses: *Netting* is about labour and activity, while *Words* is based on cultural considerations.

Chinese characters are believed to have a certain relationship with knots, which forms the very interesting background for *Words on the Wall*(2014)[Fig. 6].In the work, each knot looks like a word and all of them together become a sentence. Chinese and English look different not only in the individual characters, but also in size. If one letter is seen as one knot, and one Chinese character is seen as one knot, the same sentence will look different. The example below demonstrates the difference in size/length when using a black dot as one knot (It can be seen that the difference between languages remains even if black blocks are used to replace letters and characters) [Fig. 7].

The *Words* relates to language, as language can be a major topic in art, with many artists using it as their motif. For example, the Chinese artist GuWenda considers

⁶ Sandra Alfoldy, ed. *Neocraft: Modernity and the Crafts* (Halifax, N.S: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2007), 21.

that language represents culture, and Chinese calligraphy, words and language are very important for the creation of his art.⁷ Language has transformed into a visible cultural object in his art, as depicted in his work *Forest of Stone – retranslation and rewriting of Tang Poetry* [Fig. 8], which reflects how the meaning changes during the translation into different languages. The work also portrays the many misunderstandings and mistranslations created when moving between different languages, which highlights the difference between cultures through rewriting and retranslating.

It is reasonable to treat languages as a form or a symbol of culture. This is because the people who speak different languages may think differently when they are using their own language, and Slobin posits that it affects the way they perceive things.⁸ People who speak different languages may however respond in similar, or even identical ways which partly explains why people from different cultures still respond to art from a culture other than their own.⁹ Injecting language or words into artwork still attracts a worldwide response.¹⁰ I examined some related work by Xu Bing [Fig. 9], Wu Shanzhuan [Fig. 10] and Qiu Zhenzhong [Fig. 11]. Their work reflects their understanding of language, society, culture and history from different aspects via Chinese characters. My work, the *Words*, also tends to use language as a background and relating it to calligraphy.

⁷<http://artradarjournal.com/2011/06/15/words-in-arts-wenda-gu-on-rewriting-and-retranslation-traditional-culture/> (accessed October 29, 2015).

⁸ Slobin thinks that people are “thinking of speaking”, their languages are structured differently. From Vyvyan Evans, Paul Chilton, eds. *Advances in Cognitive Linguistics: Language, Cognition and Space: The State of the Art and New Directions* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2010), 459-460.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 460.

¹⁰ According to Zhang Zhaohui, “Approaching Chinese characters in a destructive way was a very popular strategy among young Chinese artists in the 1980s, such as Gu Wenda, Wu Shanzhuan and Huang Yongping”. From Zhang Zhaohui, *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Xu Bing & Cai Guo-Qiang* (Hongkong: Timezone 8 Limited, 2005), 9.



Fig. 8. Gu Wenda, *Forest of Stone Steles – retranslation and rewriting of Tang Poetry*, 1993 – 2005

It



Fig. 9. Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, 1987–1991



Fig. 10. Wu Shanzhuan, *Character Image of Black Character Font*, 1989

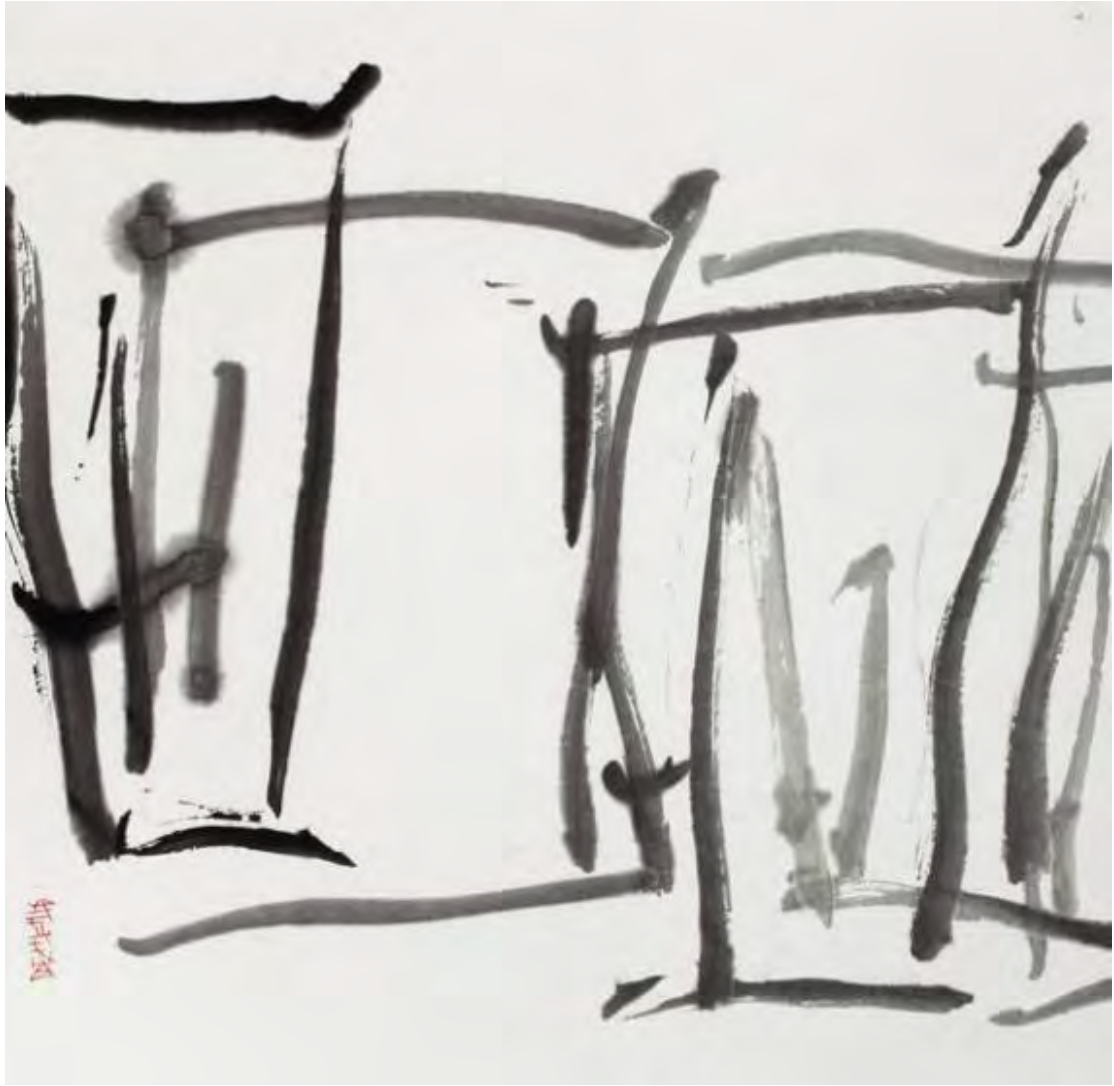


Fig. 11. Qiu Zhenzhong, *Characters to be Deciphered No.32*, 2003

Calligraphy is considered to be one of the three most important Chinese traditional art categories.¹¹ Some calligraphy artworks are hard to read if the viewer has not been through professional training. Cursive script [Fig. 12] is a good example. The audience can feel strong personality and power in the calligraphy, whether they understand its meaning or not. The other key part of calligraphy, as well as that of the Chinese characters, is the connection between strokes. Emphasis is also placed on the inner linkage between strokes and characters; a link which is sometimes invisible. In the *Words*, the knots indicate the linkage points between strokes and characters, and the extending part of the knot is the symbol of the strokes. I think this is also why the work has the flavour of calligraphy. The quality of material has made the work lively, which attempts to match what calligraphy represents. Yet while the work is illegible, the audience is able to “read” it via their own imagination. Calligraphy has inspired many contemporary artists to work on the basis of the concept of calligraphy. The video work *Excerpts from the Taoist Protective Talisman* [Fig. 13] by Peng Hung-Chih, contains the elements of calligraphy, which are performed by a dog throughout the video.¹² Wang Dongling is a Chinese calligrapher who is famous for large-scale work [Fig. 14]; his works are oversized, and sometimes the writing process forms part of his art as well. These artistic expressions of calligraphy are different to the traditional conception of a calligrapher.

Words was relatively successful in capturing the quality of material, and applying it in artistic expression, which was an important stage to reach in the first year. *Words* attempted a similar approach to the work described above.

One concept is using a broken piece from another artwork (the *Netting*) is worth

¹¹ It involves emotion, culture, function and movement. Similar to writing, it is an art of the hand, and is directly connected to human emotion, which is why calligraphy has been considered as highly emotional art.

¹² This video uses an unexpected way to transform the activity of doing calligraphy and points to the artist’s concept of religion, spirituality and ideology. It has also shown the use of calligraphy in contemporary art.

to be mentioned. While recycling and reconstruction are common strategies in contemporary art, I reuse my own works instead of other objects. This is not a new concept, but it is quite hard to accomplish for ceramics, especially if using shards of other ceramics. The material used in the *Words* is sourced from the *Netting*, and it works very well in this case because the broken and frayed edges of knots are exactly what the works needed; they made the works appear to be more natural. Another reason to reuse and incorporate other broken works in my art is the very nature of fabric clay: the material is very fragile and has a much higher chance of becoming damaged. This limitation of the material also allows me to embark on making work based on fragility. I call this reuse of broken and damaged material “natural destruction”.

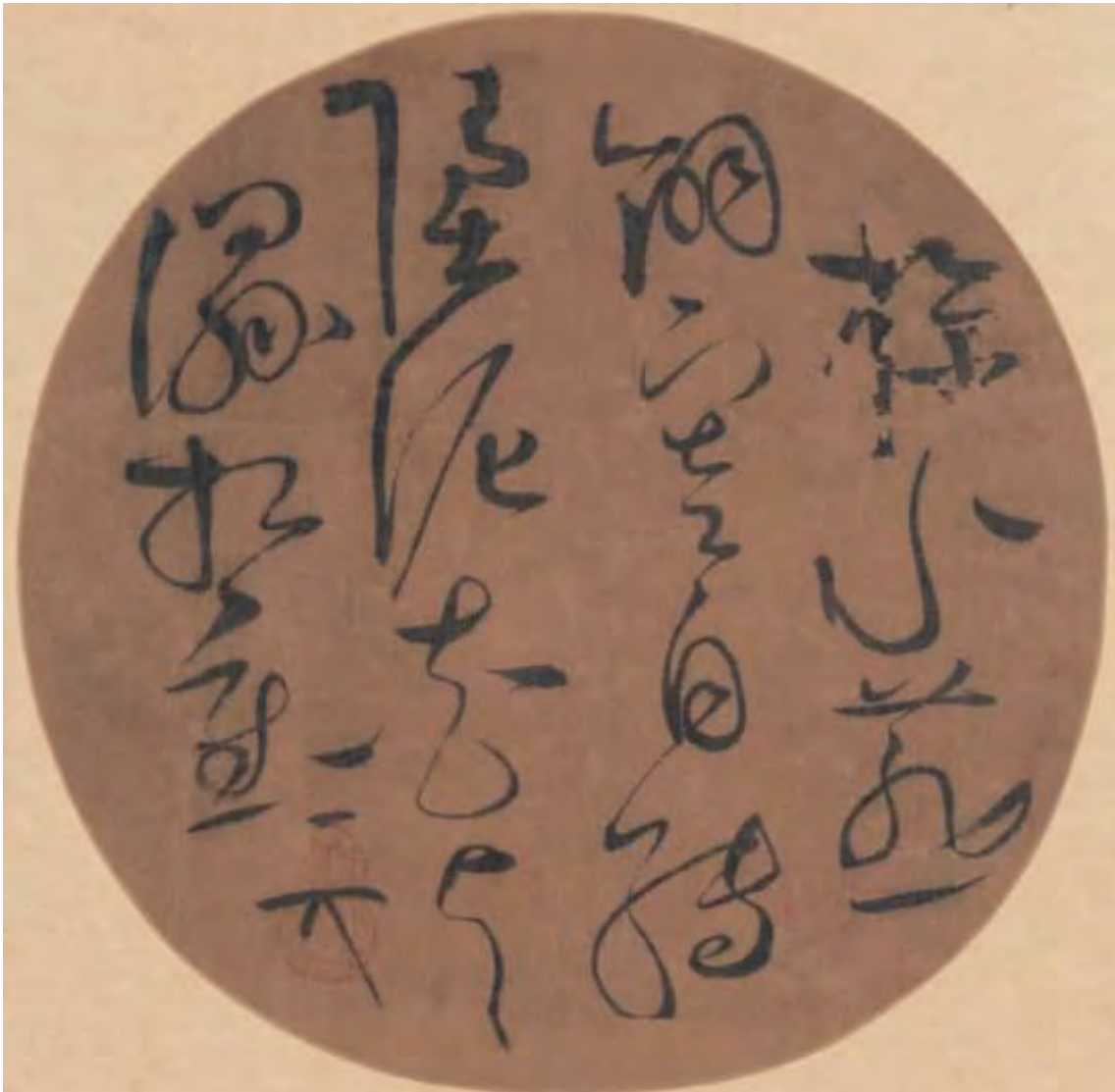


Fig. 12. Zhao Ji, *The Round Fan of Qiyao Jueju in Cursive Script*, Northern Song Dynasty (960 – 1127)

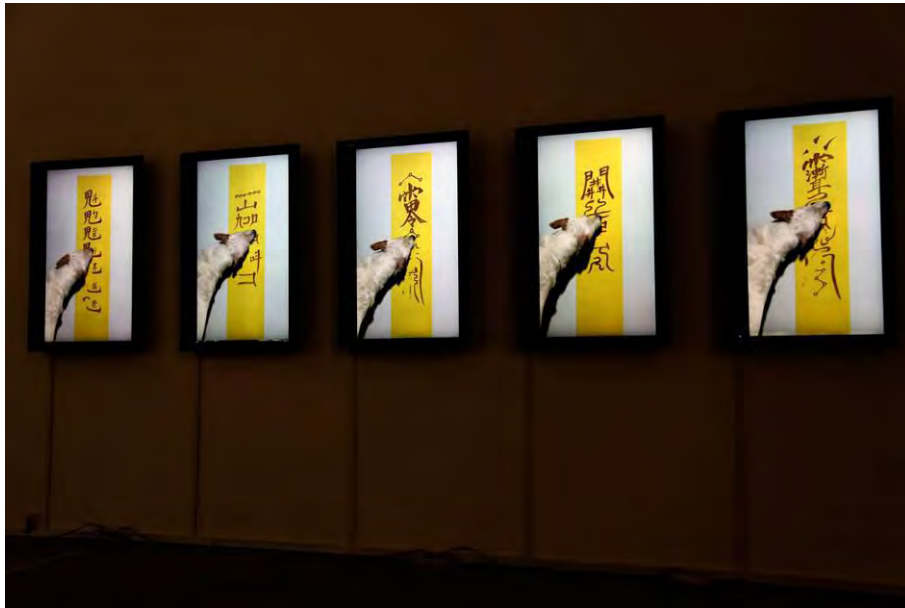


Fig. 13. Peng Hung-Chih,
Excerpts from the Taoist Protective Talisman (from Canine Monk series), 2006



Fig. 14. Wang Dongling, *Untitled, 2006*

“Natural destruction” means destroying something and keeping it in its broken state. This acceptance of destruction is an attitude that I bring to my work. The broken ceramic shards are representative of the fragility of ceramics; that is the inherent risk. I have created a new artwork which is already allowed to be broken. How the artwork will look after it has broken is an outcome that I cannot control. Hence the name “natural destruction”¹³. This method recurs and has affected other works, for example *Rock Boat*(2015)[Fig. 15] and the *Conical Hat Series: Grey*(2015)[Fig. 16]. “Natural destruction” highlights the uncontrollability that ceramics have, such as glaze colour or slumping in the firing, producing unexpected results. This is especially so for the glaze. Despite artists or producers making relatively stable glazes that can be relied on to behave almost the same from different firings, it is still very hard to guarantee the glaze will behave the same all of the time.

Compared to *Words, Netting*(2014)[Fig. 17] contains less visible context. *Netting* has been developed from a different viewpoint, with a focus on the repetitive activity of making knots and the meaning behind that activity. *Netting* was made before *Words*, and does not imply the same intensity of cultural or linguistic considerations. I was still at an early stage of using fabric clay, and so was focused more on how this material could be used, rather than making a specific shape that had a cultural pattern or significance.

¹³ Despite seemingly easy, the reuse of broken ceramic shards to create another artwork is quite difficult. Ceramic is a material that is very hard to recycle. Unlike metal which can be remelted and then reused to create another work, once the clay becomes ceramic, it is very difficult to return the ceramic to clay. China has a tradition of repairing ceramics, which requires great skill. Similarly in Japan, repaired ceramics were common, and these repaired items have even turned into a kind of aesthetic in ceramic art. So the valuing of broken ceramics has existed in some cultures for a long time, reflecting an attitude to the materials, which differs from culture to culture, as well as over different times. In contemporary society, it has become more convenient and cheaper to obtain new materials and products, which has reduced the community’s respect for the material and the item itself. There has been much discussion and thought based around this mainly modern issue which has persuaded many artists to work using recycled material. Some artists show their concern for the loss of value and skill in their work; some use recycled material almost as their protest on the issue.



Fig. 15. *Rock Boat*, 2015



Fig. 16. *Conical Hat Series: Grey*, 2015

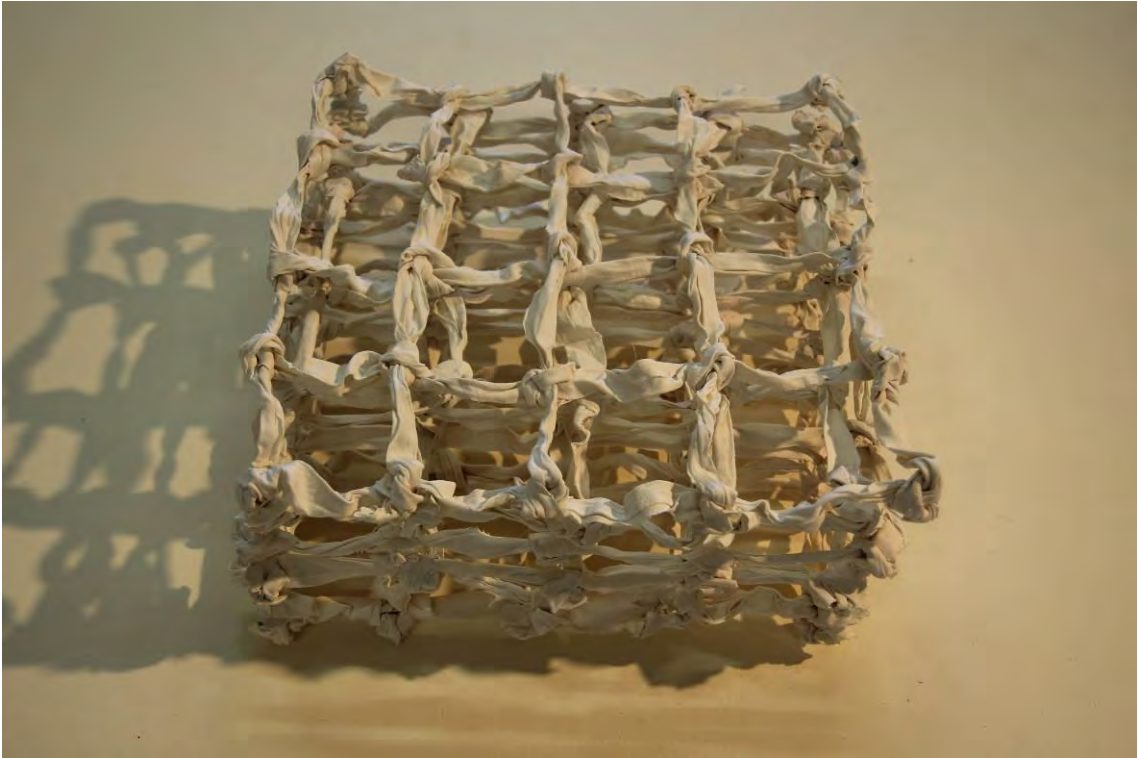


Fig. 17. *Netting No.1*, 2014

However, although repetitive activity did not require a high level of this conscious thought; each repetitive step is moving towards the final work. The activity was a means to an end. The important aspect was the time it took to perform this activity, and that the time was transformed into physical objects through the activity. The distance is the time spent on a walk; the sweater is the time spent on knitting; therefore my work *Netting* is the time spent on making knots.

I consider the work that was made by repetitive activity as solidified time – this is the most direct way to portray my concept of time. I get a similar experience of time looking at Chinese calligraphy: if the stroke goes quickly, it will portray freedom and being alive; the opposite is the stroke that goes slowly which will look more firm and stable. Time is transformed into a visible object by the calligraphy's movement. The title *Netting* deliberately suggests attention being focused on the activity instead of on its outcome.

Netting does not only convey an impression of time, but is also built on an interesting construction, which is simple and powerful. In each work, every twenty-five knots makes a unit. The unit has many different possibilities for assemblage, for example as a stack, as a linear work, as a cube or in certain construction. The knots do not exist independently; all of them are inextricably linked with each other. These units can also be seen as a further repetition which reinforces the idea of repetitive activity.

Henri Lefebvre has discussed in his book *The Critique of Everyday Life* how truth exists in everyday life, and the experiences in life area repetitive and endless circle.¹⁴ His statement gives weight to the importance of simple repetitive

¹⁴ "Repetition plays a considerable role on every level ... We know that a large part of everyday life is made up of stereotyped and repeated actions. This repetitive praxis keeps the human world going, and helps to produce it over and over again ... However, we should not separate repetitive praxis from creative praxis. There are several types of repetition, and we will have cause to examine their differences at a later stage ... Therefore we can expect to find transitions and mediations between the repetitive and the creative." From Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday*

activities. Repetitive activity and the result of it, is how many artists create their work. For example, the minimalist artist Donald Judd [Fig. 18], used simple geometric forms and repeated them to make sculptures. Yayoi Kusama is another artist who works in a repetitive manner [Fig. 19]. Ceramic artist Bean Finneran [Fig. 20] uses repetitive elements in her work. The object she creates generate a powerful visual memory through repetition. But repetitive elements have a broad existence in art, not only in contemporary art. Pattern has been used over the centuries by artists from many cultures and exemplifies repetition. The use of pattern in Chinese art has numerical aspect. For instance, two motifs in a pattern signify good wishes for marriage; four repetitions relates to the four seasons. However, once repetitive elements reach a critical number, the individual object tends to disappear and the elements lose their individual meaning. This transformation is also reflected in my work.

The materials used in both *Words* and *Netting* are exactly the same; the fabric texture has been kept in both works. But the project following those two, *Travelling Series*, used a different approach to texture. This series of works attempts to give fabric clay a new look – in this series I tried to extend the possibilities of fabric clay to find a unique texture that other ceramic materials and techniques cannot duplicate.

Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday, vol. II. (London, New York: Verso, 2002), 239.



Fig. 18. Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1971

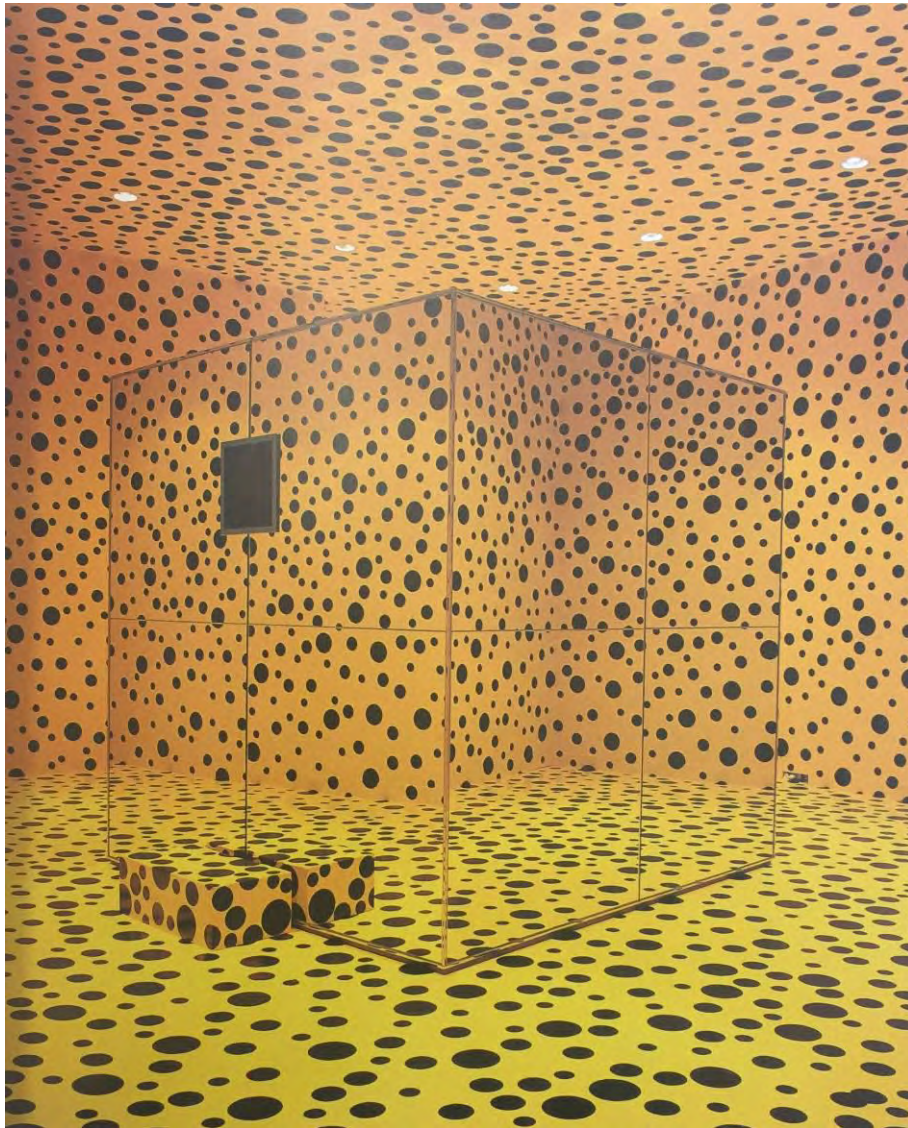


Fig. 19. Yayoi Kusama, *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)*, 1991

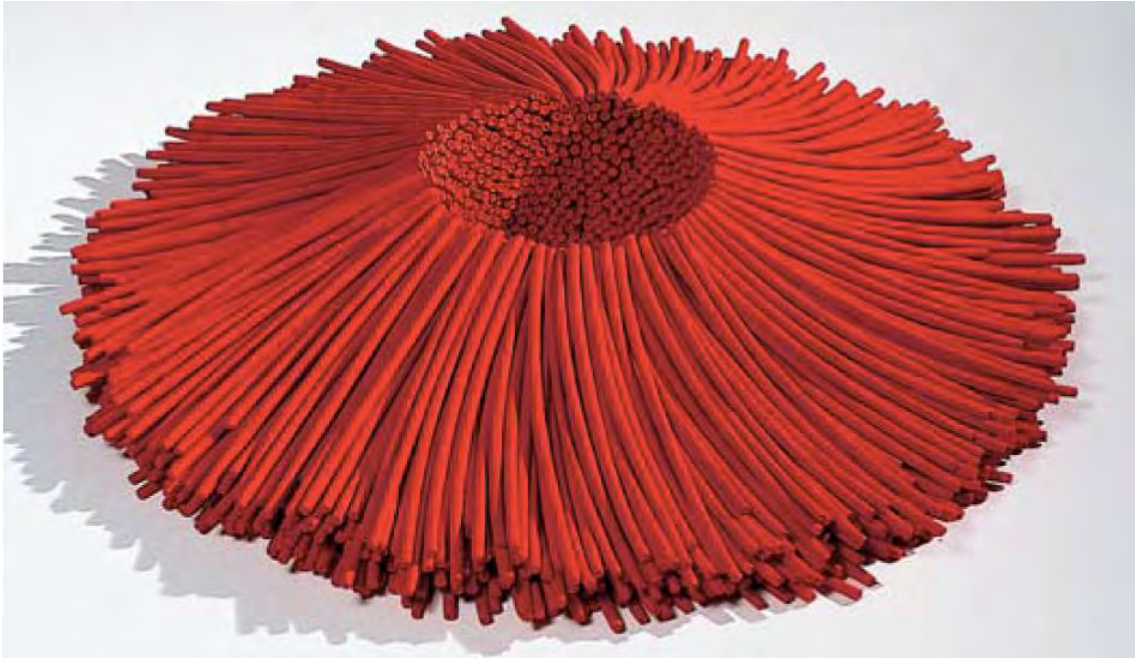


Fig. 20. Bean Finneran, *Red Core*, 2004

Section 3: *Travelling Series*

Travelling Series(2014)[Fig. 21] uses fabric to construct a sleeve-like shape with interior made spaces obvious. The form of the work is simple, and the marks of the supporting framework have been left on the work. The interior space can be seen. The works represent the emptiness I felt when I was in a different cultural environment. The slumping and draping of the sleeve shape shows the struggle it has to maintain its original form. The works were created in white porcelain, a colour which enhances through the play of light and shade, the fold and the texture of the fabric clay.

The initial concept for *Travelling Series* was that of a container; trying to create ceramic vessels using fabric clay. The subsequent sleeve shape was chosen because it was how the fabric naturally reacted when wet with clay. The supporting framework made the fabric stand, drape and hold its shape even in the firing, and gave tension to the exterior. *Travelling Series* was the first time I had sewing in the making process. I faced many technical problems – what kind of fabric would be strong enough? How to preserve the shape during the firing? These challenges will be discussed in Chapter Three, which focuses on material research and the techniques of fabric clay.

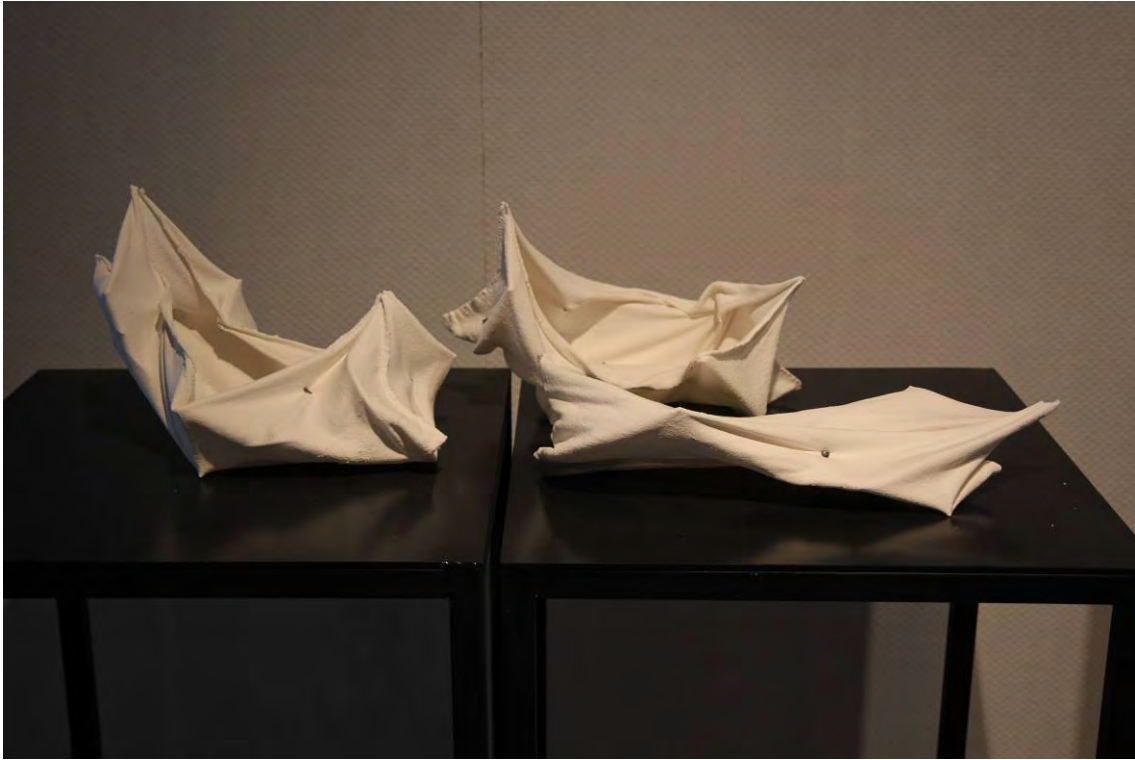


Fig. 21. *Travelling*, 2014



Fig. 22. *Space In and Out*, 2014

Prior to *Travelling Series*, I experimented with several other shapes and models, some of which became the foundation of the series, one of these was *Space In and Out* (2014) [Fig. 22]. The initial concept of this work was about space – how space is formed, how it occupied and enclosed, and dialogue between interior and exterior space.¹⁵ In this dialogue, an inter media suggestion emerges the space between. Suggested space becomes the proposition in the later work *The Scholar Rocks Series*.

The discussion on space is as important as the material aspects of the work. Space can provide an indication of function. Traditionally, the basic function of ceramic is to hold things, which requires that the ceramic item cannot be a solid object. This has similarities to architecture; the basic function of architecture comes from its inside space.

Space In and Out and earlier similar works formed the basis of the *Travelling Series* as they were made using the same method, material and technique, which enabling me to gain experience and solve technical problems.

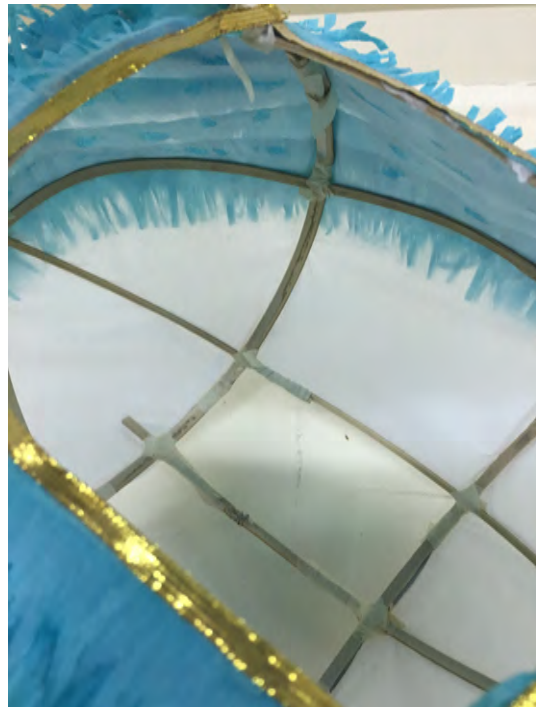
For all of the works in all of the series, there was a need to cut and sew the fabric to form the basic shape before dipping it into the clay slip. I then exploited the stretch characteristic of the fabric to create an inner space by supporting the fabric with bamboo sticks inside the sewn form. A powerful hollow shape was created, changing the appearance of the fabric. This was possibly because of the strength of the bamboo frame work. The *Travelling Series* combines techniques from two different media, creating a unique way of incorporating structured fabric and clay.

Using this method, the works are made in flat forms before being turned into

¹⁵ As Albert's words, "The shape can have a shape between shapes," thus, the space should could has similar conception. Albert W. Porter, *Elements of Design, Shape and Form* (USA: Davis Publications Inc., 1974).

dimensional work. The process is similar to clothes-making, which requires the maker to have the ability to imagine the three-dimensional work from two-dimensional plans. The first step is cutting the fabric and sewing it to a half-closed form. This step decides the final work's shape even though there are many opportunities to modify it during the following steps; the initial shape and form is still very important. The half-closed form now has the potential to become a hollow form with spaces within it.

This method of using fabric clay was inspired by Chinese lanterns. Traditionally Chinese lanterns are made of paper or silk, with bamboo sticks forming the framework of the shape. The paper or silk needs to be cut into the shape that matches the framework. The technique of Chinese lantern-making is now considered to be a traditional skill. The Chinese lantern originally had many functions, including symbolic ones. However, what interested me about the Chinese lanterns is the way they are made. Their shape creates an inside space that enables the lighting of a candle by using flat paper, silk and a bamboo stick, and the handmade framework inside shows a special beauty. The lantern can be made in many complicated shapes, even realistic figures. My inspiration to turn flat fabric clay into dimensional forms that encompass space inside came from a Chinese rabbit-shaped lantern I made [Fig. 23, Fig. 24].



Left: **Fig. 23.** *Rabbit Lantern, 2013*

Right: **Fig. 24.** *Rabbit Lantern (Detail), 2013*



Left: **Fig. 25.** *Bamboo Sticks*

Right: **Fig. 26.** *Fabric Shapes*

The bamboo stick inside the lantern is flexible but cannot be directly used in my work as the fabric clay is very heavy when wet. As a stronger alternative, I have used a bamboo barbecue stick [Fig. 25], which is strong, inexpensive and pre-cut into the one length. The sticks support the form from the inside, forming the outside shape in the stretched fabric. The bamboo sticks build a framework inside, relying on the fabric to give the form limited space, trapping the sticks inside the fabric. The sticks inside are pointing in different directions, giving the impression that something is trying to get out through the fabric. The jutting points and the twisting fabric create organic forms that cannot be made using other techniques and materials so easily and naturally. I think this is one reason that has made these organic, almost “living” works so interesting to create and to view.

During the earlier stages of my work using this method, the shapes were necessarily very simple, such as a square or triangle [Fig. 26], as I lacked experience with complicated forms. This situation changed in my later works, where I tended to employ polygons instead, with more interaction between forms. During this more complicated stage, the works were combined with each other to create bigger forms, which had the intention of introducing more internal spaces resembling a double-walled container. The concept of being a container or vessel, strongly influenced the *Travelling Series*. Even though the works are not trying to be a functional vessel, the notion of the vessel is still intrinsic in the work.

Travelling Series exhibits different attempts at presentation compared to previous works. This series was created in the form of single works, but exhibited in groups, while the previous works combined units together before firing. It is set up at the exhibition venue in a rhythm, which is the first difference. The second difference is that *Travelling Series* has softer lines than the works before it; it has been given more freedom in the firing. Previous works were given

stronger internal support making them appear very full, more rigid. The third difference is that earlier works had only been supported from one direction – from inside to outside. However the *Travelling Series* has strength from several different directions. The conflicting strength [Fig. 27, Fig. 28] between the supporting bamboo sticks and the gravity of wet fabric clay is not the only variance; this series also exhibits pulling strength from iron wire, and weight that hung on the bottom of the work also gave it a sense of tension. All these different forces are in play, effecting the *Travelling Series*, making its form complicated and interesting. These three differences created a distance between previous works along similar lines, and the *Travelling Series*, which became visually strong as well as emotionally touching.



Fig. 27. Different forces on work – type 1



Fig. 28. Different forces on work – type 2

Summary

The *Knots Series* and the *Travelling Series* encompass the two major works that I have completed in my first year, and are mainly focused on how to work with the chosen material and creative technique – fabric clay. The two projects were attempted from two aspects. The first project, the *Knots Series*, developed works based on a common attitude to fabric, which followed the natural texture that fabric has; the second project, the *Travelling Series*, further explored the possibilities of the material and technique, researching the area that fabric cannot effect and realising it via the ceramic process.

The main focus of completing these two projects was the gathering of experience. Throughout the first year, I had a basic but essential understanding of fabric clay, as a technique and as a material. I had an understanding of what would happen when I worked with it, and could foresee what would happen when I used this material in my artwork. Also, I was able to indicate what would not work if there was a new type of fabric or clay used. These understandings were very important for further research and future work, because the experience and the knowledge of the material and technique can actually influence the artistic creation, as well as the direction of material research. Knowing the importance, this is what led me to set aside an independent chapter on material research. Based on the many as yet unknown issues or opportunities for the uses of fabric clay, and given the importance of this material for my practice, Chapter Three details the material research method, process, recording system and results.

There is another key part of this stage, which is the question of form, meaning and ceramic art. The reason for stating these three key words is that I realise the artworks, including both projects, reflect my considerations on those three parts. It has become the basis of my art under the material background of fabric clay.

For instance, *Netting* is about repetitive activities and labour, which is partly related to meaning and ceramic art, but the inner cultural factor has not been shown very clearly. *Travelling Series* talks about personal emotions, yet the form and the original inspiration are not obvious. These omissions show that my work still has potential for development and enrichment. However, I also realise that those three parts – form, meaning and ceramic art – point to the same ends in my work, which is the consideration of tradition or cultural background. In the *Words*, there are links to language; while for the *Travelling Series*, it starts from a Chinese lantern. In my latest studies, the research on tradition and ceramic art has turned out to be the main area that my studio practice and research has focused on.

These thoughts and questions guided me to look at two important Chinese contemporary ceramic exhibitions, which led me to take a field research trip back to China. This trip can be considered to be the turning point of my art, as it narrowed my research down to one question after having previously looked at board aspects. Additionally it made perfect sense as the main case studies are almost all located in China. Chapter Three discusses my research.

Chapter Two: Motivation and Transition

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with my questions about form and meaning. These questions are addressed through a research triangle of form, culture and ceramic art [Fig. 29]. These were the main subjects that emerged after completing the first half of my research period on material and practice in as described in the previous chapter. I then write about my investigation of the *2014 Hangzhou International Contemporary Ceramic Biennale* (HICB) and the *Ninth Chinese Contemporary Young Ceramic Artists' Biennale* (CYCB), which are two important exhibitions in the area of contemporary ceramics in China. These two exhibitions and selected works from them are case studies, from which I developed further research directions. As well as the exhibitions, I researched three representative ceramic artists: Lu Bin, Jiang Yanze and Lu Weisun. These artists are from different backgrounds and have varying experience, as reflected in the discussion of their work.

The first section of this chapter addresses questions located between form, culture and ceramic art. By culture I want to denote Chinese traditional culture based on my own background. I proposed a research triangle, based on which I sought to analyse the current situation of Chinese contemporary ceramic art that I have observed. It points out how ceramic art and tradition interact with each other, and why it's worth bearing in mind cultural considerations in contemporary Chinese ceramic art. The second section of this chapter focuses on the two exhibitions, HICB and CYCB, highlighting three noticeable changes in the process. These changes provide evidence to support the discussion, which made me rethink my current art creation and concept. The discussion also clarifies that

there is an embedded influence from society in the exhibition, which relates to the cultural discussion of the research. As Victoria D. Alexander said, “art objects can tell us something about the society that produces them, although the picture is much more complex than a single, straight line running directly between art and society”.¹ As curatorial assistant of the two exhibitions, I collected valuable firsthand resources about Chinese contemporary ceramic art. The third section of this chapter is about the three ceramists, with discussion based on their work and interviews that I conducted with them. They each represent different voices, and through that process, I had the opportunity to gain views from mature artists which informed my work.

The discussion in this chapter points to a turning point in my PhD program because the experience of studying the exhibitions and listening to the discourse of the different artists which revealed their differences, allowed my work to find a clearer direction. Howard Risatti has argued that we must “re-know” craft objects in a twofold cognitive operation.² The exhibitions and artists that I investigated had many linkages with contemporary ceramics and the wider area of contemporary art, which helped me to understand ceramic artworks deeper. These insights still play a key role giving my work deeper meaning, enabling me to have a boarder understanding of culture and ceramic art.

¹ Victoria D. Alexander, *Sociology of the Arts: Exploring Fine and Popular Forms* (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 33.

² “My point is twofold. One is that we must find a way to go beyond simply looking at craft objects as things that have function or are made of certain materials (e.g., clay, glass, wood, fiber, or metal); and two, we must begin to see and recognize them in the sense of comprehending them by grasping their essence.” From Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 9.

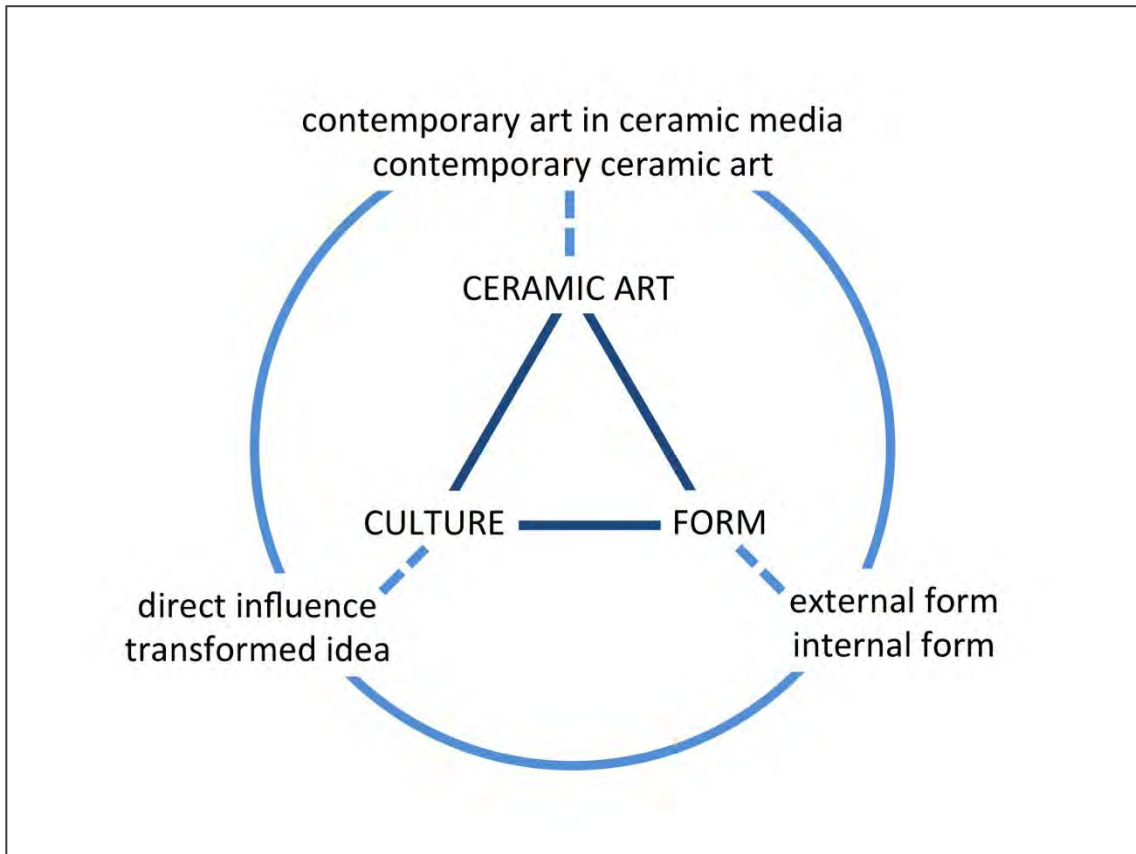


Fig. 29. Research Triangle

Section 1: Form, Culture and Ceramic Art

After finishing two series of works, the *Knots Series* and the *Travelling Series*, I realised that there was a question that had always existed when I made my art – the relationship between the form of work and the work’s concept. Reviewing these two series, I was able to see that cultural considerations are always involved in my work. For example, in *Words*, the influence from my mother language is obvious and can be seen in the layout of the work; while *Netting* uses a more subtle method to portray a feeling that has grown in my culture. But this relationship can be developed further. In my previous work, there was still room to find other ways to convey expression. In the *Travelling Series*, the work shows the power and unique texture that is brought to the piece by the material, which becomes the path to convey my emotion to the audience; but the form itself can be clearer and make use of many other possibilities. In pursuing a close relationship between form and concept, a question has arisen about them, which in a deeper way is about the method I use to express my own real emotion and understanding of life and the world around me.

The first question is about form. Albert W. Porter has written about the correlation between our perception of shape and form, and degrees of visual sensitivity and understanding.³ This implies that having a deep understanding the forms is key to our experience of artworks because they are closely related to own visual experience. For me, form is not only the shape of the work, but also the means of expression. Lois Fichner-Rathus thinks “the form of a work refers to its totality as a work of art. Form includes the elements, design principles, and composition of a work of art...A work’s form might include, for example, the colors that are used, the textures and shapes, the illusion of three dimensions,

³ “How well we perceive the shapes and forms of our environment depends largely on our visual sensitivity and understanding of how these elements, shape and form, affect us.” From Albert W. Porter, *Shape and Form* (Worcester, Mass: Davis Publications, 1974), 6.

the balance, rhythm, or unity of design”.⁴ Thus, form has two levels when we discuss it. The first level is the outside form, or the shape. The second level is the inside form, which is the work’s way of embodying meaning, more like a transformation of an idea or feeling.

For the first level of form – the shape – art as an object, has to have a shape, regardless of style. Shape leads to initial recognition since people usually share the same concept for common shapes such as square, cone, triangle, boat shape, leaf shape, crescent shape etc. The word “shape”, according to Fichner-Rathus, is the word “form” in a two-dimensional world. Then the word “form”, is “often used to speak about shape in sculpture or architecture – three-dimensional works of art”.⁵ These shapes build the first impression for an artwork in planar and three-dimensional view. The shapes can also play an important role in evoking a certain memory of something. This is especially true when it comes to cultural works; the shapes can be symbolic and meaningful instead of purely aesthetic. Shapes that can be directly perceivable make up the first level of understanding forms.

Some of my earlier works created during the research showed a certain amount of development in this area, for example, the layout of the *Words*, and the “cube” of the *Netting*. These works have a clearly recognisable form making it easy to engage and prick the memory of viewers. This is unlike the *Travelling Series*, which represents the second level of form.

The second level of form, which I have called “inside form”, not only represents an existing concept of shape, but also the process of forming – it contains transformation inside as well. The form goes beyond its original meaning and into a spiritual level, which is similar to the concept of abstraction, transforming

⁴ Lois Fichner-Rathus, *Understanding Art* (USA: Wadsworth, Thomson Learning, Inc., 2004), 105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

from something realistic to something symbolic. Susan Lambert's assertion, "Form also provides national identity",⁶ strengthens the point. Anthropologist James Clifford adds, "Culture, even without a capital c, strains toward aesthetic form and autonomy".⁷ The art's form becomes universal and unique at the same time. Universal in the sense of multiple possibilities for meaning, and unique in that it has the most reason to be used in that piece. Therefore, form is not just physical manifestation but also an inner part of the art(ist)'s expression. This inner level of form is more complicated than the first level because it relates to the process, in addition to the visible shape. More specifically, the process means the transformation of the original object conceptually and visually. The first level of form created through the multiple fabrications of the artist's mind, then turns into an objective entity that can be perceived by viewers and evokes certain feelings, which is the second level form. So, the second level of form has a boarder and deeper aspect than the first. However, both levels are worthy of investigation because they represent different focuses of art expression. This is especially true in contemporary times as some of them are closely tied with culture and tradition, which is my area of interest.

The long history of ceramics has resulted in the development of certain forms that have become part of a universal formal vocabulary, but are representative of specific cultural inheritance, for example, like the gourd shaped vase. But for traditional forms to be used and remain relevant, they require innovation. How to deal with those symbolic and memorable visual forms in a contemporary sense and aesthetic becomes a real concern. Two major attempts to address this exist, which are analogous to my understanding of form. The first is the "direct influence" version which involves applying traditional or representative forms in contemporary ceramics. The second approach is "transformed idea" focusing on

⁶ Susan Lambert, *Form Follows Function? Design in the 20th Century* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1993), 58.

⁷ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988), 232.

conceptually embedding tradition in ceramic art while the visible form is in a secondary position. There is no right or wrong with these two approaches, but they both have shortcomings. The first category can convey a clear idea to the viewer, but can easily become superficial; the second can show open-mindedness with new ideas but the danger is that traditional and cultural factors can be buried too deep, or can be twisted too much so as to become far fetched. These two possible problems are actually consistent with the two levels of forms – the external and internal. From the standpoint of my research, an engagement with both aspects of form is unavoidable. I have discussed this with examples in Chapter Four (Section One), which is based on the work *Conical Hat Series*.

As I have posited previously, forms can have their own cultural identity. Similarly, in contemporary ceramic art, cultural identity can also affect many artists. Ceramic artists working with this rich inheritance are often tempted to look back. This is even more so for Chinese ceramic artists. They are embracing their own culture and history, and both are part of their very own story which makes them different to other artists in the multi-cultural mainstream, not only in ceramics but also in the general art community. Like John P. O'Regan said, "In cultural studies when we speak of culture and of cultural identity we are most often referring to the investment made by social communities in the construction of common understandings."⁸ This feeling of embracing their own culture and history is not forced upon artists, but grows organically. Donal Carbaugh has concluded, "Culture has been also understood as a mental or cognitive concept. It is used to identify a kind of mental map used to perceive the world, a filtered way of sensing, believing, and feeling."⁹ Cultural underpinnings cannot be neglected, and I have concluded these to be key factors regarding form, as discussed below.

⁸ John P. O'Regan, "Death, identity, discourse: Cultural research at the margins of experience", in Andrea Borsari, Claudio Baraldi, Augusto Carli, ed. *Hybrids, Differences, Visions: On the Study of Culture* (USA: The Davies Group Publishers, 2011), 113.

⁹ Donal Carbaugh, "Situating Cultural Studies in Communication: Cultural Discourse Theory", in Andrea Borsari, Claudio Baraldi, Augusto Carli, ed. *Hybrids, Differences, Visions: On the Study of Culture* (USA: The Davies Group Publishers, 2011), 98.

What does form mean to art? More specifically, what does form mean to ceramic art? Further, what does form mean to contemporary ceramic art? These three are different but related questions, and it will be helpful for me to make the answers clear. Form has a broader meaning than that pertaining only to ceramic art. Form is symbolic; it is a sign of something. Through it, artists can embed their emotion, thoughts and concepts; it is an important way to communicate with the viewer something far beyond the ceramic's function. In my case, the form is a sign of culture; it is the body of culture.

The cultural aspect can be split into two connections – the connection with form, and the connection with art. Between form and culture, it has been previously clarified that the form can have an identity and the form can be cultural. This is a natural part of form because of its long development history in human society. Of course it is far more than that, but in this exegesis, its cultural part is the object of study. However, culture has a further connection – with art, which is another major branch studied in my research. Undeniably art is part of culture. But what I am interested in is how cultural factors affect, exist and behave in art practice. In previous paragraphs, I discussed the two types of cultural factors shown in artwork that match the two levels of form, which also indicates two possible problems. Excepting the overall relationship of culture and art, to me personally, the cultural consideration is almost like a feeling and an emotion, and something that I keep looking for in my art. This is closely related to my personal life and cannot be separated from me and from my practice. Therefore, the inclusion of culture with ceramic art and the consideration about form has become the research triangle, which supports my practice. Additionally, the analysis of my individual practice can be referenced back to this research triangle.

As seen in Figure 29, ceramic art has two possible inputs in my research triangle – contemporary ceramic art and contemporary art in ceramic media. The difference between them is similar to the difference between “Chinese

contemporary art” and “contemporary Chinese art”¹⁰, where the change in sequence changes the whole meaning. Similarly, there is a difference between “Chinese Contemporary Ceramic art” and “Contemporary Chinese ceramic art”. In this discussion, I will exclude the most visible area of ceramic production, factory ceramics. I am limiting the discussion to tendencies within studio ceramics made by individual makers. I understand these two areas as:

- *contemporary art in ceramic media*: contemporary art that involves the use of ceramic materials.
- *contemporary ceramic art*: ceramics made with contemporary concepts by artists trained in ceramics.

The origin of such definitions is rooted in the discipline of ceramic art, which relates to a long-standing debate between craft and (fine) art. Writing in the early 20th century, Yanagi Sōetsu (1889-1961) maintained, “there are at least two ways to art. One is called Fine Art, and the other one is called Craft.”¹¹ While quite different from Yanagi’s perspective, these two ways have much in common, many contemporary theorists suggest they are the same. Howard Risatti says, “there is no significant difference between them, and therefore that there is no justifiable reason to consider them separate categories or distinct activities.”¹² Anne Mcpherson in “on the dignity of craft” states, “art and craft are easily held under one umbrella.”¹³ As such, it is possible for me to propose a single field of ceramic

¹⁰ Wang Yang and Lv Peng have used these two concepts in their book, they said: “Of course, the direction of changes still is still facing to tradition. At the time that the traditional realistic oil painting is receding and the contemporary installation appears everywhere, Chinese contemporary art and contemporary Chinese art has an obvious gap.” From Wang Yang, Lv Peng, ed. *Passage to History: 20 Years of La Biennale Di Venezia and Chinese Contemporary Art* (Beijing: China Youth Publishing Group, 2013), 261.

¹¹ Yanagi Sōetsu, *Gong Yi Zhi Dao* [The Craft Theory], trans. Xu Yiyi (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University, 2011), 15.

¹² Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 67.

¹³ “even though that is the lowest common denominator by which they can be compared. ... In this view of the origins of art, it is clear there can be no division between art and craft, for both are intent on the same thing: capturing the fleeting moments of ritual.” From Anne Mcpherson, “On the Dignity of Craft,” in Paula Gustafson, *Craft Perception and Practice: A Canadian Discourse*

art which can support both possibilities.

As a maker, I think these two branches in the field have different intentions. The intention of *contemporary art in ceramic media* privileges concept, with materiality being of secondary importance. The intention of works in the *contemporary ceramic art* category is to transform ideas into ceramics, privileging neither materials nor concept.

Before further developing my own practice, I conducted several case studies to help me discover where my art practice sits in the area, and also to find possibilities for further development. One case study was the investigation of two important contemporary ceramic exhibitions, which provided me with knowledge on the scope of current practice in contemporary Chinese ceramic art. The other three case studies were the individual study of Chinese representative ceramic artists from different backgrounds but currently working in the same field.

Section 2:

Case Studies – Two Biennales of Contemporary Ceramics

The *Chinese Contemporary Young Ceramic Artists' Biennale Exhibition* (CYCB) [Fig. 30] and the *Hangzhou International Contemporary Ceramic Biennale* (HICB) [Fig. 31] are two influential exhibitions in China. These recurring exhibitions were started later than other exhibitions of contemporary art, and have come to be dissociated from mainstream art. Even though ceramics, like silk, have a long history both domestically and internationally in China, Chinese contemporary ceramics have not achieved the same international status as other forms of

(Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2002), 89.

Chinese contemporary art. This unevenness of development and visibility has long been a source of worry for me.

Nevertheless, the value of the HICB and CYCB exhibitions is that they displayed a comprehensive survey of Chinese contemporary ceramics based on new and well-researched information. As a response to this realisation, in the last thirty years, contemporary ceramic art in China has been developing rapidly, along with other rapid developments in society and the economy.¹⁴

During the 1980s, exhibitions of experimental art including '85 New Wave and The Stars (*Shin-Shin*) paved the way for important developments in Chinese contemporary art.¹⁵ These avant-garde movements challenged ideas and concepts of art held by the Chinese public artists.¹⁶ While most of the new developments were in the fields of painting, performance and experimental installation, it is undeniable that they played an important role in the transformation of the wider art environment, which also influenced the development of ceramic art.

¹⁴ "It is important to note that the treatment of craft-based practices as part of an industry able to raise material living standards for the people prevented their devastation during the Cultural Revolution." From Wang Yang, Lv Peng, ed. *Passage to History: 20 Years of La Biennale Di Venezia and Chinese Contemporary Art* (Beijing: China Youth Publishing Group, 2013), 21.

¹⁵ "Between 1985 and 1990, a group of over one thousand young Chinese artists living in an environment without galleries, museums, or any systematic support for art and with unprecedented enthusiasm and passion, led a fundamentally influential artistic movement". From Fei Dawei, trans. Yen-yu Liu, "'85 New Wave: A Moment of Derailing" in Hsueh Ping-hai, ed. *The 2007 Asian Art Biennale: The Forum Proceedings* (Taiwan: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, 2008), 86.

¹⁶ "In the span of twenty years from 1993 to 2013, it can be verified that Chinese art has undergone transformation and its research has liberalized as the political regime has grown increasingly flexible." From Achille Bonito Oliva, "China is Nearby." in Wang Yang, Lv Peng, ed. *Passage to History: 20 Years of La Biennale Di Venezia and Chinese Contemporary Art* (Beijing: China youth Publishing Group, 2013). n.p.



Fig. 30. *2014 Hangzhou International Contemporary Ceramic Biennale*



Fig. 31. *The Ninth Chinese Contemporary Young Ceramic Artists' Biennale Exhibition*

Reform and more open policies unlocked the gates of China to the world after 1979. Western mainstream and non-mainstream art spread into China, which challenged people's thinking and concept of art especially when compared to Chinese traditional art.¹⁷ Coupled with the popularisation of computers and the Internet in the 1990s, the information that people had access to was doubled and redoubled. The massive influx of information was a double-edged sword in the evolution of society and the economy, as well as in the arts. It made complicated art more complex. On the one hand, it helped Chinese contemporary art to keep up with global art movements, but on the other hand, it made many Chinese artists lose their direction easily under the sudden influence of Western contemporary art and knowledge, and lack of full understanding of the Western art environment and theory.

The history of this experimental and avant-garde art was a good reason to study these exhibitions as part of my research. CYCB was established in 1998, at a time of rapid developments in contemporary ceramics which paralleled those in contemporary art more generally. The exhibition involved several artists from an earlier generation, along with more contemporary artists from later generations meaning it was able to provide a full range of practices. During those changes, the culture-related works are the most significant examples, because they display the conceptual transformations. In 2014, CYCB the platform was enlarged to

¹⁷ Chinese art and Western art are different in the attitude to art and the expression of art essentially. For example, calligraphy is a significant category in Chinese art. It combines writing with emotional expression. Calligraphy is rarely if ever, treated at the same level as painting in traditional European art. Chinese calligraphy only uses ink, without any other colours. It is not dependent on the word's meaning to convey the artist's idea. It is a very abstract expression, which is not just a different type of writing or use of fonts. It exemplifies a traditional Chinese art concept, wherein the artist's focus on the expression of feeling and emotion needs to transform into an inner art spirit instead of a straight description. This is regarded as the highest level in Chinese traditional art, which continues to affect Chinese artists' creation until now. Michael Sullivan has stated that Chinese traditional artists synthesize art as a combination of poetry, calligraphy and painting. Chinese artists don't care about the accuracy of the object. Their personal feeling is represented in every word and stroke of the brush, which is quite different from traditional Western art. Michael Sullivan also wrote about the importance of harmony in Chinese traditional art. See Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

introduce HICB (which included now older practitioners who had once been represented in CYCB). Together, these exhibitions have charted almost the entire growth of contemporary ceramic art in China, and have come to be regarded as the representative exhibitions in this field.

2.1: The Context of HICB and CYCB

The HICB and CYCB are academic exhibitions rather than commercial exhibitions. The latest (ninth) CYCB was co-organised by the China Academy of Art and the Chinese Artists Association Ceramic Council in 2014; while it was also the time of the first HICB. HICB and CYCB shared organisers, funds and working teams, and were organised as parallel exhibitions.

The first CYCB (1998) [Fig. 32] had two organisers, Liu Zheng and Zhou Wu, who were lecturers at the China Academy of Art. At that time, there wasn't a national contemporary ceramic exhibition in China, even though there were many contemporary ceramic artists. These artists needed a place to show their works, causing Liu Zheng and Zhou Wu to organise a contemporary ceramic exhibition for younger generation ceramic artists. Initially they focused on including teachers from art academies, but after that the exhibition attracted more and more ceramic artists to participate. By 2012, 220 artists participated in the eighth CYCB [Fig. 33].



Fig. 32. *The First Chinese Contemporary Young Ceramic Artists' Biennale Exhibition*



Fig. 33. *The Eighth Chinese Contemporary Young Ceramic Artists' Biennale Exhibition*

The CYCB requires artists to exhibit works that were made during the previous two years, which means that the exhibition catches the newest movement of Chinese contemporary ceramic art. The CYCB accepts ceramic works from any region of China, and even provides more opportunities for the artists from remote regions to participate. By 2014, Chinese contemporary ceramic art had grown to become a large practice and had already built its own society, unlike its earlier stages when it consisted of a few independent ceramic artists. The practice gained more and more attention from the public, especially from the mainstream art field. The CYCB organisers started to consider what Chinese contemporary ceramic art needed at this moment. So in early 2013, the organisers introduced a proposal to upgrade the CYCB to international level.¹⁸ The HICB was a brave step for a contemporary ceramic exhibition held by an academy, and suited the public and education institution's appeal. The two exhibitions have built up a stage for professional ceramists and younger generation artists in China, and have also provided a chance to communicate with the international ceramic community.

As curatorial assistant at both HICB and CYCB in 2014, I obtained firsthand information and resources about these two exhibitions, which has given me a deeper understanding of what is happening in the field now.¹⁹ The research, working experience and rationale afforded me a path to explore the current ceramic ecology in China, allowing me to understand where my own work is located.

There were many changes to the CYCB and HICB in 2014, but the major one that I noticed is that both exhibitions had titles for the first time. To set titles for

¹⁸ After a series of discussions, they decided to retain the original title and level of CYCB as it had already become a mature exhibition with a consistent audience. They then set up an international exhibition as a parallel show that targeted a different direction. The CYCB had few international artists participating, but could not reach the required scale because of the limitation of funds and experience working internationally.

¹⁹ My work as assistant started in 2010 (seventh CYCB) while I was a student at the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou.

exhibitions was not a popular thing for a selected exhibition in China, which is usually more like a competition. Introducing a title for an exhibition meant placing limitations on it, which meant that as opposed to newer exhibitions in Beijing which sought to expand in scale, the CYCB chose to be more focused. The organisers were interested in signalling a definite direction, and the number of exhibited artists in 2014 dropped to 60 from 220 in 2012. The title of the ninth CYCB was "Clay Fete". The 2014 HICB's title was "Clay and Breath". These were culturally significant titles as the first one sought to honour and celebrate clay. The second also had an historical meaning, which could be interpreted as imbuing an old discipline with new life asking for it to be treated seriously in contemporary society. Both titles aimed at the materiality of ceramics, and looked back to the original and essential core of ceramic art.

The organisers required that the themes be culturally considerate and to contain an edgy aspect. They had to be related to the emerging and core questions in China. Particularly for the HICB, it was important that its theme should bridge Chinese culture and global society because the exhibition's focus was already international. Therefore, it needed to be comprehensible and accessible to artists and audiences both within China and internationally. The decision to have titles interested me as it clearly highlighted the current and urgent duty for Chinese contemporary ceramics to consider cultural factors in contemporary ceramic creation based on its own history. This requirement was not only the wish of organisers of the CYCB and the HICB, it is also a direction that an important and significant group of Chinese contemporary ceramic artists are currently working on.

2.2: Cultural Tendencies in These Exhibitions

Aside from the themes of these two exhibitions, there were many artists who were working with considerations of culture, identity and tradition. I sorted works in the exhibition into two groups: works related to Chinese culture and the works not related to it. The result showed that culturally-related works represented 70% of the total works. And within those culturally-related works, most motives focused on Chinese traditional representative objects, or concepts from philosophy or traditional literature. There are definite reasons for this to have happened.

Chinese contemporary ceramic art appeared to be in a chaotic state; the forms, styles, concepts, themes and techniques that appeared developed in many ways, and challenged what the public was used to and felt comfortable with. The edges of areas were becoming blurred, but there was one subject that continued to be emphasised – the role of culture, including cultural identity, cultural pattern, tradition, history and nationality. Rapid development and globalization are of course underlying reasons here. In the words of Feng Boyi, “It is more or less a genuine depiction of China in this particular era. The country’s modernization process is leading us to a destination unknown with everything changing rapidly and yet still confusing.”²⁰ But compared to most ceramic artists, Chinese contemporary artists pushed further. Some of them tried to record or remember when they felt they lost touch with traditions. Some of them tried to recreate their mother culture. And some even attempted to refuse to participate in the modern global movement, or criticised its invasion.

This phenomenon of culturally-centred works did not appear suddenly. Some

²⁰ Feng Boyi, trans. Liu Yen-yu, “Fragmentation – The New State of Art Practice of the Young Generation Chinese Artists”, in Hsueh Ping-hai, ed. *The 2007 Asian Art Biennale: The Forum Proceedings* (Taiwan: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, 2008), 63.

clues are already visible in earlier editions of CYCB. In 2000, the second CYCB, many works were focussed on abstract art language using ceramic materials, while cultural elements were not clearly visible. This was the case with Li Jianshen [Fig. 34], Liu Jianguo [Fig. 35], Lu Bin [Fig. 36], Bai Ming [Fig. 37], Lv Pinchang, Liu Qian, Pei Xueli [Fig. 38]. Their works between 1997 and 2000 were more focused on expression in clay and surface textures than on cultural messages. It is interesting that some of them have shown more and more consideration for culture during recent years, and the artworks seem less focussed on technical manipulations in clay.



Fig. 34. Li Jianshen, *The Piece of Memory*, 1997



Fig. 35. Liu Jianguo, *Xi Xi Xiang Tong*, 1998



Fig. 36. Lu Bin, *The Wood and Brick Structure No. 21*, 1999



Fig. 37. Bai Ming, *New Explanation of Porcelain - Da Cheng Ruo Que No. 1*, 2000



Fig. 38. Pei Xueli, *The Hot Clay No. 11*, 2000

Usually discussions of culture have to involve and engagement with tradition. As Otto and Pederson have argued, “It is meaningless to talk about cultural order without incorporating an understanding of historical change and the human capacity for conscious action.”²¹ In Yanagi Sōetsu’s words, “all beauty has to come from tradition.”²² Tradition could be used in describing culture; yet it is also a part of culture. But in ceramic art, tradition has more meaning than it has in contemporary art. And sometimes, tradition can even represent culture in ceramic. “Craft is defined by tradition, after all”,²³ Bruce Metcalf said. The reason is its history and techniques are indivisible from ceramic art and culture.²⁴ So in ceramic art, tradition and culture are combined and intertwined in art expression and the technical heritage process. Tradition-related works are also culture-related works for the purposes of my study.

The presence of cultural inspiration can basically be divided into two types, which match the two attempts of how culture is expressed in art – “direct influence” and “transformed idea”. I have chosen six artists from HICB and CYCB as examples to support my study.

²¹ Ton Otto, Poul Pedersen, *Tradition and Agency: Tracing Cultural Continuity and Invention*, vol. 1 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005), 21.

²² Yanagi Sōetsu, *Gong Yi Zhi Dao* [The Craft Theory], trans. Xu Yiyi (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University, 2011), 16.

²³ Sandra Alfoldy, ed. *Neocraft: Modernity and the Crafts* (Halifax, N.S: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2007), 19.

²⁴ Art practice in China, not only in ceramics, always involves one word—tradition. Especially in those disciplines that have strong tradition and a long history. For research questions, mostly it relates to how to break with tradition, how to create a heritage and how to revive tradition. So what is tradition? Tradition in art research is not only a style. It is a habit, a behaviour, a way of thinking, and also is a nationality. Tradition keeps changing itself. The advanced model and behaviour replace the earlier one. After a certain period, it becomes a new tradition. It is accepted by some of people as a tradition first, and then the remainder accept it, until it turns into a whole nation’s tradition at last. Tradition also can be considered as a representative of a nation. The changing process of tradition is slow because tradition is not a physical existence. Tradition is formed from people’s behaviour and thinking. It relates to human being’s mentality, desire, living habits, logic and understanding etc. This kind of close relationship with humans creates obstacles for its self-renovation. At the same time, it confirms that tradition cannot always stay at the same status. Tradition keeps changing because of human beings. For art at this level to understand tradition, it can represent a synthesis of a past cognition that most people have, which makes the creation, extension and even destruction based on tradition to be an important motif of art.

Li Yuhua (1973 –), a woman artist from Jiangsu is one representative of the “direct influence” approach. Her work, the *Small World Series*[Fig. 39, Fig. 40], used a vase shape combined with Chinese rocks and figures in white porcelain. The rock and vase shape are typically Chinese elements, and the way she has arranged the human figure in the vase, as well as the human figure’s body position, is influenced by Chinese painting. Wang Chengwu (1983–)[Fig. 41], has used a famous Chinese architectural site – the San Tan Ying Yue, as inspiration. He used the shape of San Tan Ying Yue on the top of his work, and has used celadon to represent West Lake, which sends a very clear message to his viewers. This kind of interest in landscape is very typical in Chinese traditional culture. Xiong Kaibo (1977 –)[Fig. 42, Fig. 43] also applied Chinese architectural elements in his work, but in a subtle way. The vessel form of his work comes from ancient Chinese rice storehouses, especially the roof edges and the decoration on the top, which are important elements that remind the viewer of rural Chinese buildings. With the use of grey and cool colours, the work looks like an object that is thousands of years old. These three artists’ works all display clearly visible cultural elements, so it can easily be understood where the inspiration for their works originated from.



Fig. 39. Li Yuhua, *GuZai: the Small World 2*, 2014



Fig. 40. Li Yuhua, *GuZai: the Small World 1*, 2014



Fig. 41. Wang Chengwu, *San Tan Ying Yue*, 2014



Fig. 42. Xiong Kaibo, *Impression of South China No.3*, 2014



Fig. 43. Xiong Kaibo, *Impression of South China No.5*, 2014

Cultural considerations are less obvious in the works of the next three artists – their works are more subtle in concept, which leads them in a different direction.

Xu Qun (1969 –) is a woman artist from Hangzhou. Her thrown vessels in celadon eschew complicated decorations. They are simple and quiet, only with an iron-coloured line to create a surprise that attracts you and draws you in. [Fig. 44] She gives a modern feeling to Chinese celadon and gives it a new life, which also displays the celadon culture in her eyes. Zhou Li (1987 –) has taken a different approach in vessel forms, with her works inspired by the Chinese food carrier. [Fig. 45, Fig. 46]. She conducted a study on the method of how to join a wooden handle to ceramic, and has also applied the form of the traditional Chinese wood and bamboo food carrier into her works. But she is not directly copying the food carrier; instead, she has turned it into her own particular shape, which are delicate and interesting ceramic works. Different again, Yao Yongkang (1942 –) [Fig. 47], who is a very important and experienced ceramist from Jingdezhen, has made a series of porcelain figures that were inspired by the baby pattern in Chinese culture. His porcelain figure is very lifelike and free formed, using a skillful hand building technique and covered by the light green glaze traditionally used in the Jingdezhen area. His figure has a baby face which is out of proportion to the body. He is not seeking a realistic baby sculpture, and for this reason his work contains some cracks and unexplainable parts. He has overturned the public's memory of the traditional porcelain figure sculpture, but smartly retained part of the impression.



Fig. 44. Xu Qun, *Xuan*, 2014



Fig. 45. Zhou Li, *Carrying Box No.2*, 2013



Fig. 46. Zhou Li, *Carrying Box No.4*, 2013



Fig. 47. Yao Yongkang, *Century Boy*, 2013

There are no bad or good examples discussed here; their inclusion simply shows the different directions that current ceramic artists are taking. Additionally, this is only representative of one kind of all different motifs employed in ceramic art. There are many other kinds of motifs, but I am focusing on the culture-related artworks. Even so, from the HICB and the CYCB, I realised that the focus on cultural concepts or elements is natural and spontaneous, although some of them use quite contrived methods.²⁵ Generally, however they are deeply affected by the art environment in China, which is also one of the reasons why my art is as it is, as I am also influenced by it.

Section 3:

Case Studies – Three Contemporary Chinese Ceramicists

The deeper I pursued my research, the more I realised that images and reviews, or artists statements are not enough to answer my research questions about form, culture and ceramic art, and contemporary art. Detailed investigations on representative ceramic artists were needed for the research. I chose three artists and conducted individual interviews with them. The interviews were designed based on my research, and included several questions. Each interview had basically the same structure with different focuses depending on the different artists. The main questions included: firstly, about professional experience;²⁶ secondly, about an understanding of ceramic art;²⁷ thirdly, about individual

²⁵ Traditional values are constantly being challenged in contemporary Chinese art. Especially for the newer generation of artists, who have grown up in a different environment and education system, their art and creative practice reflects more influence from Western art. But in fact, their understanding of Western art is not deep enough, and they don't have strong feelings for their own culture because of their growing up experience, and environment.

²⁶ (1) How many years have you been working with ceramic as your main material? (2) Why did you choose ceramic media? (3) When you were studying ceramics, was there more emphasis on the practice course or on paper design? (4) Do you have experience working or studying in any other art discipline?

²⁷ What does ceramic mean to you?

artworks;²⁸ and fourthly, about tradition, culture and contemporary ceramic art.²⁹ These questions were related to my research from different aspects. There were also several other questions about individual works, which were more specific to the artists.

My choice of interviewees was based on many factors. The main rule was that the artist should have already built his or her own style and have achieved a prominent position in the field in China. The other requirements were that the artists should have different backgrounds and there should be at least one female voice. According to those requirements, I chose Lu Bin, Jiang Yanze and Lu Weisun.

Their different backgrounds gave me the opportunity to gain broad and varied understandings and opinions about the same issue. Lu Bin and Jiang Yanze were educated under the modern education system, while Lu Weisun was educated in the traditional master-apprentice system. Lu Bin and Lu Weisun belong to the older generation, while Jiang Yanze is younger. Jiang Yanze has experience of study outside of China; Lu Bin has experience visiting America and Europe; Lu Weisun does not have experience outside of China at all. Lu Bin is interested in multi-materials, while Jiang Yanze has more interest in porcelain; Lu Weisun uses only celadon with local material in Longquan. Lu Bin and Lu Weisun are male; Jiang Yanze is female. And finally, Lu Bin and Jiang Yanze work in an art academy while Lu Weisun operates an independent studio.

The differences between the three artists are clear, and the resulting interviews which achieved my objective. What was interesting was no matter how different their backgrounds were, the consideration for mother culture and experiences

²⁸ What is your main concept that you insist on in your work?

²⁹ (1) What kind of ceramic art can be called Chinese contemporary ceramic art? (2) How did you understand the relationship between traditional and contemporary ceramic art? (3) What do you think about multi-material in contemporary ceramic art?

deeply affected their concept and art. At the earlier stages of their art experience, they were dealing with texture or technical issues in their work. But with those developments, considerations around technique or material became insufficient and so their works moved on to involve more cultural factors, which happened organically as their practices developed. The cultural factors worked in different ways, but in these three artists, they were not only manifested through a pattern or a cultural icon, but had been embedded in their work. There are still some visible cultural elements contained in their works, but they are not forced ceramic forms with obvious cultural patterns. As said in Section One, the two kinds of forms and two types of culture were inserted in different ways.

3.1: Lu Bin

Lu Bin has undertaken several projects with material experimentation and installation. The Chinese traditional culture and his understanding of the current situation in modern society are the central topic of his work. He has also made experiments modifying ceramic material. In the earlier stages of his art, his works were more sculptural forms in ceramic. In the latter part of his career, he changed the clay to enable it to decompose by itself, which follows his concept of “broken”. The concept of broken has gradually become the central word in his work in recent years; he called our current age “the age of the broken piece”, which is his feeling of how tradition and culture have been treated in today’s world.

Lu Bin considers that the current society contains many chaotic factors, and these factors operate relatively independently. He sees them as the pieces of broken society at a conceptual level. Also, there are certain parts of pieces coming from outside of society and mixing with originals, which influences, challenges and pushes the others. The broken pieces can be seen in culture,

beliefs, traditions and many other aspects of this society. The interview centred around this and insights were gleaned from his work as well. He has shown certain concern about culture in his earlier works, like *Chinese Characters* [Fig. 48, Fig. 49]. His interest in material also can be seen in the works at that time, such as *Brick and Wood Structure* [Fig. 50, Fig. 51]. More recently, his works show more elements that relates to culture and its meaning, like some particular forms including fishes [Fig. 52], fossils [Fig. 53], Buddhist relics [Fig. 54], political or religious symbols [Fig. 55], etc. Along with the development in concept, artwork has taken a further step, as seen in works like *Great Compassion Mantra* [Fig. 56, Fig. 57].

The works that he showed in the 2014 HICB are his representative works – the *Great Compassion Dharani series* [Fig. 58, Fig. 59]. This series talks about the loss of ambition and creativity in life because of the stagnant education system, particularly in China. The hope for life has been broken when they are faced with real life; the values and understandings have changed. This is what Lu Bin feels about current life in China. He also thinks that we are only one part of the world, and we have to find what we believe in and we belong to, otherwise we will lose our faith and position in society. As to the title, it is a word that comes from Buddhism, which is Lu Bin's belief. But he also mentioned that if you read the words in Mandarin, they are "Da [大]", "Bei [悲]", and "Zhou [咒]". "Da" means big; "Bei" means sad, and "Zhou" means scriptures. Lu Bin thinks this Chinese version is for the public, its sadness matches his concept of broken status.

Looking at this work from another aspect, it shows a special use of material. Lu Bin has modified the clay so that it can gradually break down. The work looks different every day when it is exhibited in the gallery until it is completely collapsed at the end. This process of collapse also responds to Lu's theme of fragmentation. Lu Bin's life and experience has affected his art a lot, especially for the audience that is from his generation.

“Art is a way of speech”³⁰ is shown completely in his work. Lu Bin’s work has an open mind to contemporary ceramic art and contemporary art. According to what he said, contemporary ceramic art and contemporary art are like two areas, and artists should walk back and forth between those two areas. The mind will be limited if the artist always stays on the same side. He also thinks there are not many artists who make that transition well; most remain in their original area. He agreed that there is a gap between ceramic art and contemporary art, and contemporary artists can use ceramic media but they have a different attitude to ceramic materiality and concept.

The discussion with Lu Bin confirmed my understanding of current Chinese contemporary ceramic art: there is a concentration on culturally-related themes and motifs, while there remains a gap between contemporary ceramic art and contemporary art. Lu Bin uses the forms of Buddhist stupas, ancient Chinese books, and Chinese words expressed in a modern way in his work. He utilises the raw clay texture on most of his works in a pale colour, which gives his works an aged look and feel. His concept of fragmentation has been embedded in the work, and it is not like a label of culture. As a conclusion, I think the most significant influences are his changes to ceramic material and the how his concept of culture and tradition has been transferred into ceramic art.

³⁰ Walter Biemel, *Philosophische Analysen Zur Kunst Der Gegenwart* [The philosophical analyzation of contemporary art], trans. Li Yuan, Sun Zhouxing (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2012), 277.



Fig. 48. Lu Bin, *Chinese Characters II*, 1997



Fig. 49. Lu Bin, *Chinese Characters VI*, 1998



Fig. 50. Lu Bin, *Brick and Wood Structure XII*, 1998



Fig. 51. Lu Bin, *Brick and Wood Structure XVII-XXI*, 1999



Fig. 52. Lu Bin, *Fish of Abundance*, 1999



Fig. 53. Lu Bin, *Fossil 2003*, 2003



Fig. 54. Lu Bin, *Fossil 2005*, 2005



Fig. 55. Lu Bin, *Fossil 2007*, 2007



Fig. 56. Lu Bin, *Great Compassion Mantra*, 2010



Fig. 57. Lu Bin, *Great Compassion Mantra* – 4, 2012



Fig. 58. Lu Bin, *Great Compassion Dharani*, 2013



Fig. 59. Lu Bin, *Great Compassion Dharani*, 2013

3.2: Jiang Yanze

Jiang Yanze's artworks are a similar type of art to Lu Bin's, but she is more conservative by comparison. Jiang Yanze entered the ceramic field later than Lu Bin, but she has more experience studying outside of China, which has influenced her work deeply, especially on her understanding of her mother culture. Receiving feedback on her work in a different cultural environment has brought her a fresh understanding.

Compared to Lu Bin's works, her works have obviously been seen as *contemporary ceramic art* instead of *contemporary art in ceramic media*. In her work, Jiang Yanze uses porcelain as the main material because of her working experience in a ceramic factory. And she uses Qinghua³¹ quite often, which has been partly influenced by her background in calligraphy. These elements are shown in her work in a fine and delicate way, which results in a feminine, gentle and exquisite quality. In her earlier work, the influence of functional ceramic ware is quite obvious, her works always relate to cup or vase, but in an artistic way instead of conventional functional wares, as seen in *Weathered Candleholder* [Fig. 60]. She also has some design works like *Beijing Cloth Series Teapot* [Fig. 61]. However, her concept is not limited by conventional thoughts, instead she understands material and knows how to transform it into an expressive medium. I have classified her as conservative is because her work is still located on table or plinth, and is not jumping away from the conventional conception of ceramics. Even though her work is done in a very contemporary way, it can still be easily deemed as ceramic art without any doubt. This has been reflected in her later works, which have more assembled elements and express her concept in an abstract sculptural works, as seen in *Assemblage – 14* [Fig. 62] and *Assemblage – 7* [Fig. 63].

³¹ "Qinghua" is Blue and White in English.

My interview with her was focused on her series of work involving mould and teapot forms: *Useful & Useless – 2* [Fig. 64], *You Yong Wu Li No.3* [Fig. 65] and *You Yong Wu Li No.4* [Fig. 66]. The work is built from a mould, but the external form of mould itself is also used as an element in the work, which has turned the process of making into part of the work. It is an interesting idea because the plaster mould has been commonly used before, however the mould was historically made of clay; while her ceramic mould reminds me of ceramic which people do not use anymore. Except that this series of work contains a concept from *Tao Te Ching*, which was written by Laozi, “people use the space of house, while the space of a house is because of its frame and wall instead of the house itself.”³² For the series work, this concept has compared the mould to the house, and the relationship between the house and the space is shown in the mould and its mould-making works, thereby presenting the old wisdom in modern ceramic art poetically.

Jiang Yanze’s work usually has soft edges, and its blue colour from Qinghua decoration is also very light and simple, which sends a warm feeling to the viewers. These components show her feminine quality and understanding of ceramic art, and the choice of porcelain is partly rooted in it as well. Except for the inner Chinese wisdom that she applies in her work, the form and colour are also the reflection of cultural elements in her work. The forms of teapots are based on the ancient Chinese bronze lady lamp, and the colour represents the decoration of Qinghua and Chinese calligraphy art. These movements give her work a special identity of having been made in China; she has successfully transformed her feeling of mother culture into her understanding of ceramic material and art. She mentioned in the interview that the style of putting a cultural label and a forced cultural pattern on the work is not her approach, and she has been really careful not to allow it to influence her work.

³² *Tao Te Ching*, in Chinese is “Dao[道]” “De[德]” “Jing[经]”, written by Laozi and published in the Sixth-century BC.

The conservative aspect about Jiang Yanze's work made me think about how to deliver the emotion and cultural consideration in a conservative way in ceramic art. Her work has encouraged me to explore other possibilities of creating within ceramics other than getting bogged down in the contemporary art expression and avant-garde artistic languages; there are still many unrefined aspects of studio ceramic art.



Fig. 60. Jiang Yanze, *Weathered Candleholder – 2*, 2002



Fig. 61. Jiang Yanze, *Beijing Cloth Series Teapot*, 2012



Fig. 62. Jiang Yanze, *Assemblage - 14*, 2012



Fig. 63. Jiang Yanze, *Assemblage - 7*, 2007



Fig. 64. Jiang Yanze, *Useful & Useless - 2*, 2012



Fig. 65. Jiang Yanze, *You Yong Wu Li No.3*, 2014



Fig. 66. Jiang Yanze, *You Yong Wu Li No.4*, 2014

3.3: Lu Weisun

Lu Weisun is a celadon porcelain master who was born and lives in Longquan, Zhejiang Province. He has been trained in the master-apprentice system, which is an old education system in the Chinese ceramic. He makes only celadon works with local material and traditional techniques. He is different to the other two artists in concept, education system and works. However, he still represents another important branch in Chinese contemporary ceramic art, which I call neo-traditional ceramic art. According to my divisions of contemporary ceramics, neo-traditional ceramic art means the ceramics made in contemporary days with traditional skills.

The neo-traditional ceramic art category includes artists who continue using and maintaining traditional ceramic skills to make new works today, in which some forms, decorations and concepts still follow traditional aesthetics [Fig. 67]. The heritage of traditional ceramic techniques has been treated as equally important as the art, which has also been seen to be where the spirits dwell. Meanwhile, the protection of traditional skills does not mean that genre hasn't been developed; the glaze, the form and decorations are trying to absorb new concepts and ideas. But the process of changing and developing is slow because the history is so strong, which creates problems during the blending period that take time to solve. Certain ceramicists insisted on following the traditional rules to protect that history, which is attached to their life and emotion. Their work doesn't display many new forms, decoration or concepts compared to the traditional ones. Nevertheless, this group should not be ignored or sidelined. There were some other ceramicists in this group who travelled a different road than their masters. They accepted modern art forms and conceptions; their works connected to current life and aesthetics closer than the traditional works did, but their work still has a much stronger traditional feeling than contemporary

ceramic art. Lu Weisun is one of that group.

His work, for example, *Fish Plate* [Fig. 68] and *Swimming Fish* [Fig. 69], have strong traditional influences. The fish as a decoration on ceramic ware indicates rich and satisfying life. *Yi Yi* [Fig. 70] and *Landscape* [Fig. 71] are in an abstract way related to the fish decoration.

Lu Weisun's art features highly traditional skills, and yet his work shows the modern beauty of neo-traditional ceramic art. As he said at the interview, he does not reject the possibility of taking on a contemporary art conception in his future work. Besides, he admitted that his work has been affected by the market, even though most works influenced exist in his ceramic factory. But in his personal artwork, the public acceptance for neo-traditional ceramic artwork still cannot be neglected. Compared to the other two artists, the difference is very obvious to see. There is no doubt that Lu Weisun is working in ceramic art with traditional skill, but his work also features many new elements that cannot be found in the traditional ceramic works, like the particular shape and surface textures. These small details that are hidden within the celadon coating are the reason to call his work neo-traditional ceramic art.

The one key point that I found in my interview with Lu Weisun was his attitude to culture. He had a different approach compared to the other two artists. First of all, he insisted on using local material from Longquan and only making celadon works. This was determined by the fact that he was trained in celadon, but also because the material is attached to his life, and exists everywhere in his life. It has a special bond with him, and there is not another material that can replace it. Because of these two reasons, the heritage of the traditional technique has been deeply buried in his mind, which is also shown in his work. Despite having read about contemporary art, its influence has been very limited. His mind still follows the rules of the classical, traditional aesthetic – appreciation of the beautiful glaze,

patterns from nature or those that contain good signs and wishes, which has not been seen as being so important in contemporary ceramic art. The insistence on this direction makes Lu Weisun differ from Lu Bin and Jiang Yanze; they have a boarder range of themes, and sometimes their work is even the opposite of traditional beauty,a characteristic hardly seen in Lu Weisun's work. But in Lu Weisun's work, there is an inner spirit that continues from Chinese traditional ceramics, and he treats culture as part of the technique and material, and so it is transformed in a very subtle way in ceramic forms. For example, the marks of a knife, and the trimmed line on the pot: such things can be seen as a metaphor for nature, beauty, feeling, emotions, etc.

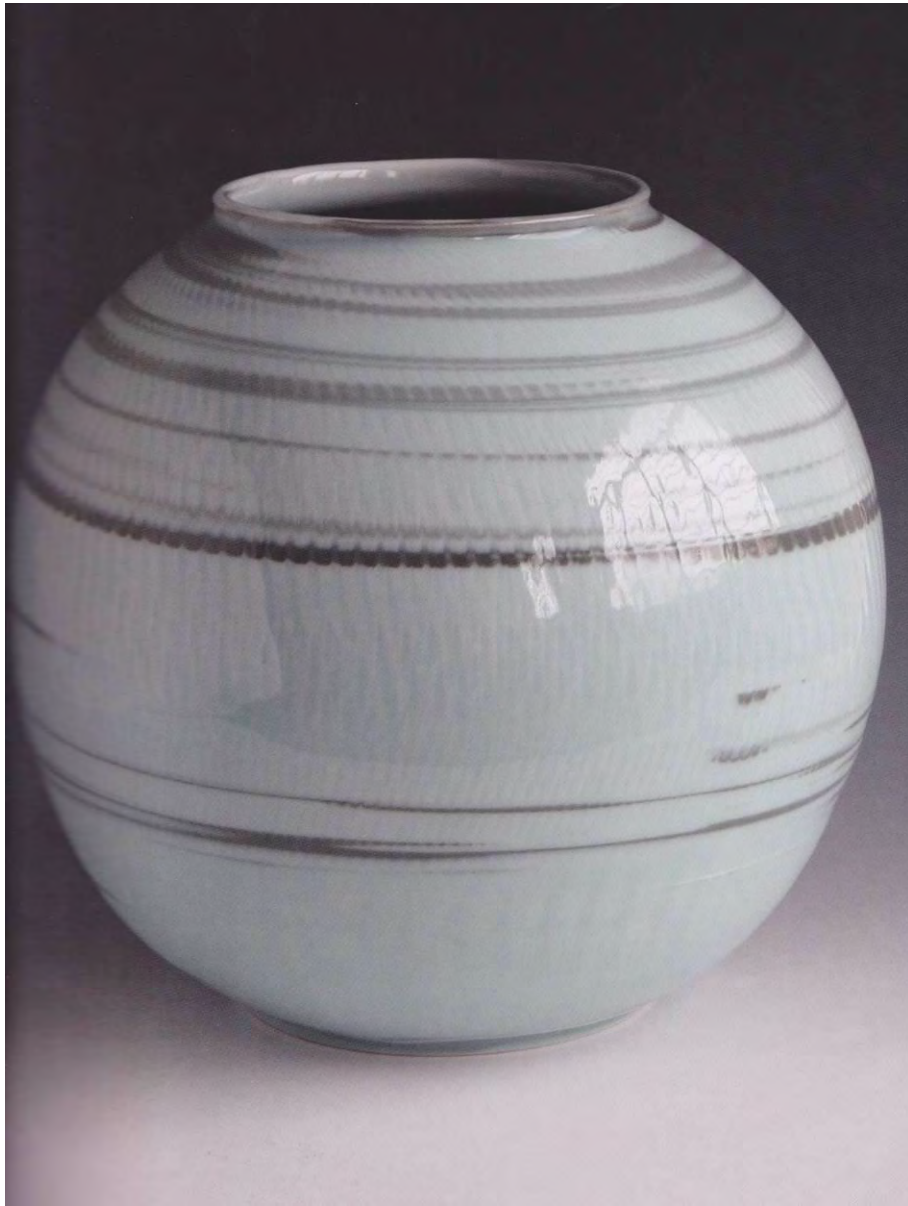


Fig. 67. Lu Weisun, *Mix Clay Vase*, 2004



Fig. 68. Lu Weisun, *Fish Plate*, 2004



Fig. 69. Lu Weisun, *Swimming Fish*, 2010



Fig. 70. Lu Weisun, *Yi Yi*, 2010



Fig. 71. Lu Weisun, *Landscape*, 2008

Summary

During the interviews, I investigated questions about culture, contemporary art and studio ceramic art with three artists; and I made observations of two key exhibitions, HICB and CYCB, which also focused on a group of culturally-related works. The differences between those three artists helped me to address my consideration of the current situation in the ceramic field; and also helped me build up a structure that identified my work's position. By talking directly to the artists and working on the exhibitions, I obtained first-hand research resources, which have contributed to my final conclusion about the relationship between culture, form and art in ceramic.

The three artists represent different directions in contemporary Chinese ceramic art, but commonly, the traditional culture has always been considered in their works. And their art did not just use culture as a label, instead it reflected the inside of the works via different methods to deliver feeling to the viewers, which related closely to their background and cultural environment.

I concluded the framework into a double-circle that connected culture, form and art within the ceramic area, and I realised that culture and tradition are not a dead thing of the past, they are alive and changeable conceptions that can be given different forms by different artists. The chosen three artists gave me a chance to ask questions and to question my previous works and to find out what other possibilities there are to develop in future. I have identified my own position and clarified my art language, which has also changed the direction of my latest works.

Through the case studies, I realised that the cultural factors are a natural accompaniment to ceramic artists, and they exist in all those types with different

expressions. This can be seen from the big picture data of HICB and CYCB, and can also be seen in these individual cases. Artists have very different understandings of culture and tradition, which has influenced me to find the deeper meaning of my works in form and material conceptually and culturally.

Chapter Three: Material and Transformation

Introduction

Material exploration and testing is a key part of this project, especially as there is little evidence of formal, documented research having been done in the field. Despite fabric and clay having had a history of practical use dating back to the Mayan culture and despite the expressive use of fabric clay by more contemporary artists, evidence of systematic and technical material research was not to be found. Although fabric clay is not as widely used as other common ceramic materials or techniques, its texture and quality is hard to duplicate with anything else. This chapter will introduce the materials research that I conducted during the program period and includes the research methodologies, the results, and recommendations on how to use this material.

The first section is the background to fabric clay, and discussion on where it comes from, why it has been called fabric clay and why this materials research has been necessary.

The second section is the main body of the materials research and contains the details of the tests. The tests are listed by fabrics, clays, colours, and firing processes, and covers major factors in fabric clay making. In order to undertake the very extensive testing program, a well-designed recording system was critical. For this reason, I prioritised the design of the recording system. This allowed the tests to form a strong base for my art practice, and also enriched my research program at a scientific level.

Section 1: The Context of Fabric Clay

Fabric clay is the main material that I have used in my practice-led research. I have been guided by Risatti's statement: "Making distinctions about how objects are made is important because the process of making is closely tied to an object's meaning."¹ Fabric clay is produced by dipping fabric into clay slip, forming it, letting it dry and then firing it. However, there are many technical factors involved, given that fabric clay involves two of five major media disciplines in studio craft.² Its unique making process changes the material, so that the result is a composite which exhibits many differences to conventional clay. In this aspect, it has similarities to paper clay.

Paper clay is made by mixing clay with papyrus, paper, and other fibres.³ Even though paper clay is still a relatively new material in contemporary ceramic art, it is possible to trace several research publications on its use⁴ Susan Peterson's book, *The Craft and Art of Clay*⁵ (first edition, 1992), did not mention paper clay. The fourth (2003) edition of this book does include a page introducing paper clay. Noting these dates, it is clear that the development of paper clay has happened fairly recently.⁶ There is now a number of artists (e.g. Antonella Cimatti [Fig. 72], Leo Neuhofer [Fig. 73], Liliane Tardio-Brise, Jerry Bennett,

¹ Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 14.

² "A taxonomic system based on material would be one corresponding to the five major media areas in craft. Such a material-type classification would yield sets of objects grouped around the traditional categories of ceramic, glass, wood, natural fibers, and metal." From Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 30.

³ Jan Peterson, Susan Peterson ed., *The Craft and Art of Clay: A Complete Potter's Hand*, the Fourth Edition (Great Britain: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2003), 146.

⁴ Carol Farrow published an article about paper clay in 1987, while Jean-Pierre Béranger, Debra Ellery and other artists were also write about and practice paper clay. <http://www.grahamhay.com.au/articles.html> (accessed January 6, 2016).

⁵ Susan Peterson, *The Craft and Art of Clay* (Englewood Cliffs N.J: Prentice-hall, 1992).

⁶ Jan Peterson, Susan Peterson ed., *The Craft and Art of Clay: A Complete Potter's Hand*, the Fourth Edition (Great Britain: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2003).

Paola Paronetto, Trudy Golley) who are using paper clay as their main material. Rosette Gaulthas published two specific books about paper clay: *Paperclay Art and Practice*,⁷ deals with the complete process of paper clay-making. And, Anna Lightwood has published major textbook includes images and technique process, *Working with Paperclay and Other Additives*.⁸ Western Australian ceramic artist Graham Hay has researched and written extensively on paper clay making, construction and use.⁹ There are several writings in academic area are about paper clay, and some mentioned using fibres (including cotton, flax, plants etc.) or similar material as extensive methods that related paper clay techniques. Such as Rosette Gault and Jeoung-Ah Kim.¹⁰

Adding fibrous material such as plant fibres or hair to clay in order to improve its green (unfired) strength is a common historical practice.¹¹ Fibre builds structures inside of clay, which is why the unconsolidated clay can be held together and is strong enough to be fired, which has been practiced in many culture (e.g. Pacific island pottery, African potter etc.). Paper clay uses the same process. The clay then gains the character of paper, which makes it different than a common clay body.

Following the same line of thought, use of fabric with clay can be seen as another development. Kathleen Standen's book, *Additions to Clay Bodies*¹², introduces

⁷ Rosette Gault, *Paperclay Art and Practice* (Great Britain Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013). See also, Rosette Gault, *Paper Clay* (Great Britain: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005).

⁸ Anna Lightwood, *Working with Paperclay and Other Additives* (Crowood Press, 2000).

⁹ He has established a website that contains sufficient information about paperclay. See http://www.grahamhay.com.au/paperclay.html#.VzhqQT_aBTY (accessed May 15, 2016).

¹⁰ Rosette Gault, *Innovation in Paperclay Ceramic Arts*; Jeoung-Ah Kim, *Paper-Composite Porcelain: Characterisation of material Properties and Wrok ability from a Ceramic Art and Design Perspective*. From <http://www.grahamhay.com.au/articles.html> (accessed October 4, 2016).

¹¹ "The concept of using particulate or fibrous material to reinforce a ceramic matrix is not a novel idea. Among the earliest applications of such systems are the use of natural fibres such as grass or animal hair to improve the strength of pottery." From D.C. Philips, eds. A. Kelly and S.T. Mileiko, *Fabrication of Composites* (Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1983) Chapter 7. Cited in G.C. Eckold, "5 Structural designs with advanced ceramic composites," in Richard Warren, ed. *Ceramic-Matrix Composites* (New York: Chapman and hall, Inc., 1992), 115.

¹² Kathleen Standen, *Additions to Clay Bodies* (London: A. & C. Black, 2013).

several ways of adding other material into clay to modify the body. It also contains a section that mentions using fabric and cites several artists who incorporate it in their clay work.¹³ Other artists who have worked with novel ways of introducing fibrous materials into clay are Jane Owen who uses fibre [Fig. 74], Tomoko Abe who mixes cotton, gauze, paper with clay¹⁴ and Mette Maya Gregersen who uses woven bamboo [Fig. 75].

Using fabric in conjunction with clay achieves some similar practical and handling effects to using fibrous materials, such as grass or paper pulp, but it can be clearly separated from them because of the way in which the aesthetic effect of fabric – with its unique texture and structure – remains in the finished work. But it is not only the finished effects that separates it from the others, it has a quite different making procedure as well. To clarify these differences, I have defined the subject of my research as “fabric clay”.

According to my knowledge, this is the first time that fabric clay, as described below, has been used in academic research. Fabric clay is produced by saturating factory-made fabrics with clay slip to construct ceramic forms. What distinguishes fabric clay is not just the unique texture derived from the use of fabric in the making process, but it also its own specific conditions of practice. The process appears to be very simple, but for successful outcomes there is much to consider.

¹³ Helen Gilmour, Rebecca Hutchinson and Paul Payne are the artists named.

¹⁴ Leigh Taylor Mickelson, “Tomoko Abe’s Weathering Scape,” *Ceramics: Art and Perception*, No.92 (2013): 8-11.

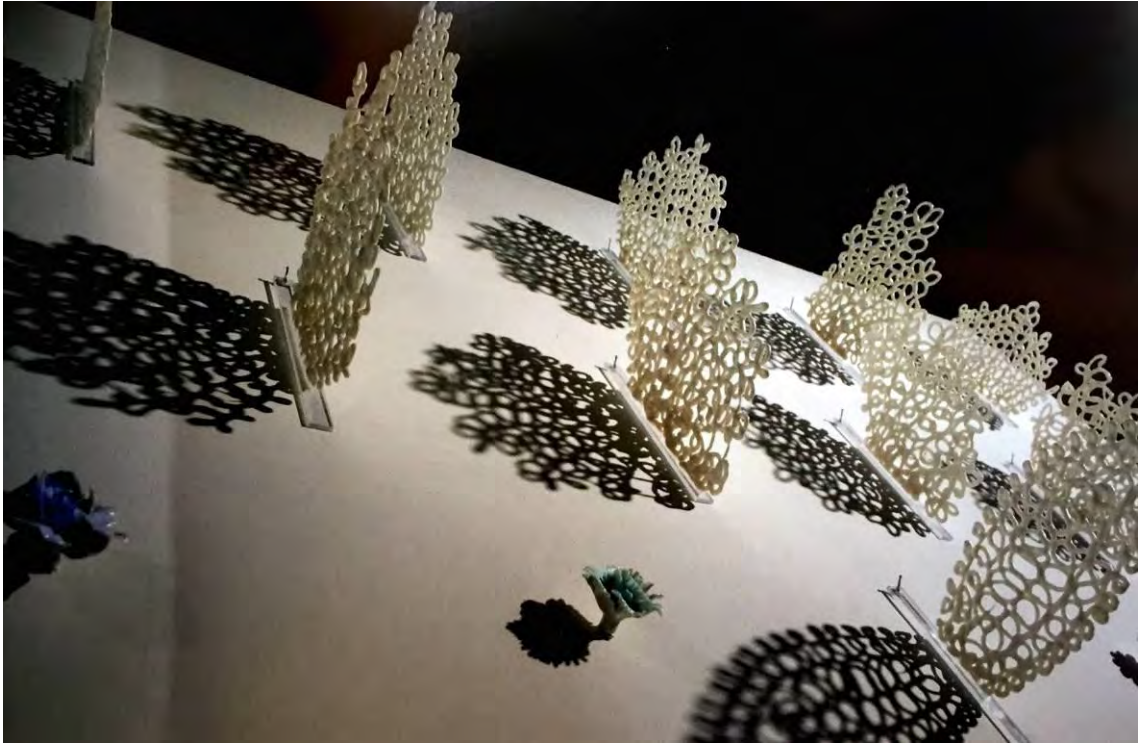


Fig. 72. Antonella Cimatti, *Butterflies*, 2010

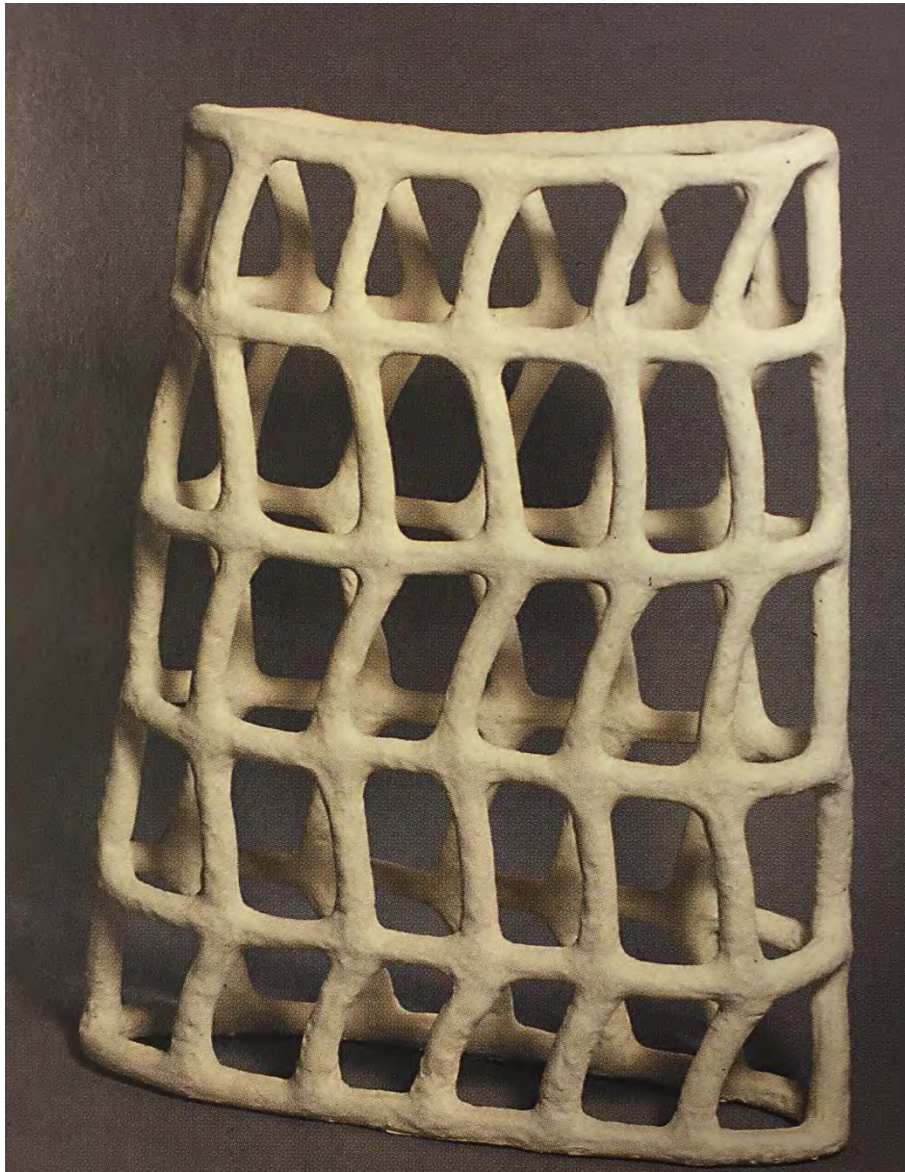


Fig. 73. Leo Neuhöfer, *Moire*, 2004.



Fig. 74. Jane Owen, *Evaluation* (Detail), 2006.



Fig. 75. Mette Maya Gregersen, *Mildwave*, 2011

There are several basic stages in the making of work from fabric clay [Fig. 76].

These can be summarised as:

<p>First Step</p>	<p>Cutting the shape of the fabric.</p> <p>This is an important step in the making of fabric clay as cutting the shapes decides the basis of the final forms. It can be cut into regular dressmaking pattern shapes, including simple geometries, or strips of various length.</p>
<p>Second Step</p>	<p>Preparing the clay slip.</p> <p>Most kinds of clay can be used, but it is different from casting slip (in that it is not deflocculated using sodium silicate). The clay can be made directly from plastic clay, or from powdered clay. Water is combined with clay or clay powder, and then stirred with a mixer until it reaches the desired thickness. In assessing the suitable density of the clay slip I used a simple method, which consisted of dipping a finger into the slip and checking the thickness of slip remaining on the finger when the finger is removed.¹⁵ I could work out more accurately the density of the clay slip after many months of testing. I found my eyes and touch became attuned to the correct thickness. This clay slip density is not fixed as the requirement may vary when using different fabrics. More details on slip density will be discussed in the following sections.</p>
<p>Third Step</p>	<p>Dipping the fabric into the slip and forming the shape.</p> <p>Normally there is no need to soak the fabric in the slip for any length of time if the clay slip is not too thick. While dipping, the fabric needs to be wrung several times to fully saturate the fabric with clay slip,</p>

¹⁵ Or if you prefer using data measurement, then the proper density of clay should be around 1.2 – 1.3 gram/ml. This number may differ based on the clay's type.

	<p>but it should not be wrung too hard after the final dipping as the result would see not enough clay slip left on the fabric and this will weaken the work There are several ways to form the fabric clay into shapes, and I have divided that process into two major categories: dry making and wet making. Dry making means constructing the form from simple elements after the fabric clay dries, and wet making means building the form while the fabric clay is still wet. These two different making processes lead to very different outcomes.</p>
<p>Fourth Step</p>	<p>Firing. Care needs to be taken with regard to the smoke that is released from burning the fabric away, as it may contain toxic hazards. Glazing can occur – but only after the work has been fired to the maximum temperatures as it will lack the body strength to cope with the glazing process if just conventionally bisque to a lower temperature.</p>

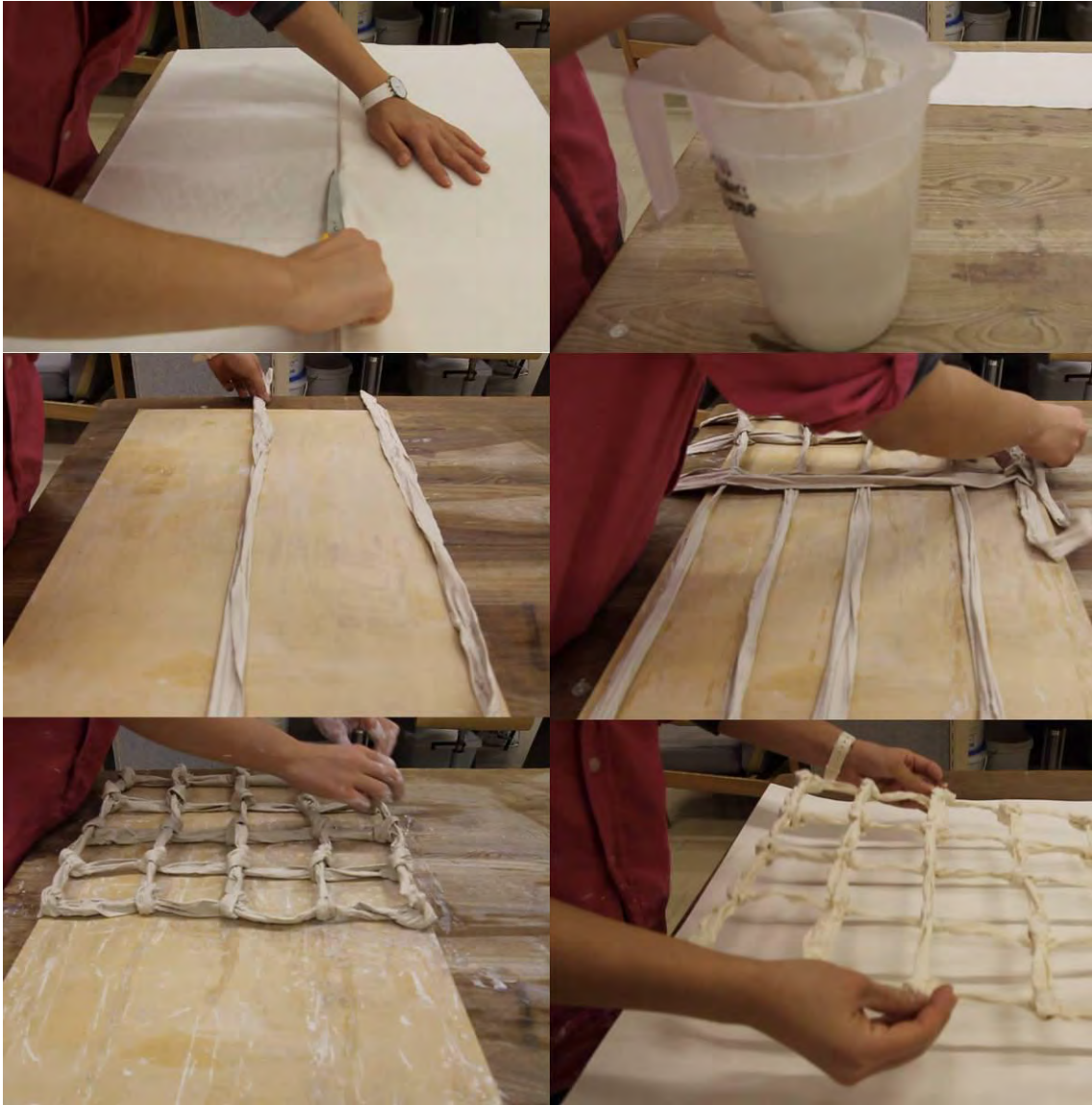


Fig. 76. Making process of fabric clay, example of *Netting*

The quite complex process of making fabric clay makes it worth studying as an independent research area in contemporary ceramic art. Fabric clay as a designated field in ceramic art is still relatively new. Although there are many artists who are using fabric in their work, few of them are using it as the dominant material. When compared to more common ceramic art, the technique is still unfamiliar, and has a lot of possibilities yet to be discovered. It lacks the availability of a systematic material and technical information archive like other materials have, and though it has some overlap with paper clay, it remains a singular material with respect to its technical and process demands.

In my art practice I have concentrated on the use of fabric clay as the main material, and it has required the development of a deep understanding derived through experience, to successfully work with the material. Systematic material research was essential for this project.

I have modelled the basic structure of this material research to follow the structure of a technical handbook.¹⁶ It includes the making method, decoration and glazing, clays and glazes, and firings. These various parts cover the general processes and requirements of making ceramics, but the material subject was determined by my specific practice requirements. More specialised technical books such as the *Clay and Glazes for the Potter*¹⁷, which provide further analysis and experimental design are included in the references cited for my testing program design. Test tiles, recordings and discussion of the results are the major part of the materials research, and this is complemented with trials of varying constructed forms.

¹⁶ See for instance, Louisa Taylor, *The Ceramics Bible: The Complete Guide to Materials and Techniques* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2011). And Jan Peterson and Susan Peterson, *The Craft and Art of Clay: A Complete Potter's Handbook*, The Fourth Edition ed. (Great Britain: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2003).

¹⁷ Daniel Rhodes and Robin Hopper, *Clay and Glazes for the Potter*, vol. 3rd (Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 2000).

Section 2: The Testing Process

The research of testing can be divided into two parts: the recording system itself, and the observations recorded. There were five factors considered - fabric, clay, colour and glaze, forming method, and firing in the recording system. To understand each of these factors is to gain a basic understanding of fabric clay, and together, they all affect the final artworks. The tests on those five factors form the body of the materials research, which in turn informed the direction of further research into the creation of the artworks.

The recording system.

A dependable system of keeping all the research data is crucial for the steps that will follow. I designed a research structure for a recording system before the actual testing started. The following were the considerations for each of the five factors mentioned above

- The first discusses other factors of the practice. In this part the aim is to find out what kind of fabric can be used.
- The second is about the clay – more specifically, clay slip. Several commonly available clay slips were tested to check their strength, colour, firing temperature etc., which aimed to offer a broad choice for the practice.
- The third is colour and glaze. There are many ways to colour the fabric clay. The research tested how glaze and colour have been reflected on fabric clay.
- The fourth is the forming method, which is the most different characteristic of fabric clay compared to other ceramic techniques. Fabric

clay uses a general ceramic forming method like very flexible hand-building or slab forming, and techniques from other disciplines can also be applied.

- The fifth is the firing. The research has tested different firing processes, firing types and packing possibilities for different forms of fabric clay and glaze.

The possibilities kept developing as the research got more detailed. The basic “unit” of the database is the firing: each firing (“unit”) generates an independent test result. Thus, it became possible to compare results across different firings. I used Test Recording 2015.04.21 [Fig. 77, Fig. 78, Fig. 79, Fig. 80, Fig. 81, Fig. 82] as the example to show the basic look of the recording system for each “unit” (each firing).

The following items listed as 5 sets covers general information that has been recorded.

Set 1	The basic firing information, including date, firing type, firing temperature, cones, kiln number, firing number, kiln information, firing chart and packing illustration. These are all listed on the first page.
Set 2	The clay recipes and glaze recipes. If the firing had tests, then the information of the test tiles would be added in this part.
Set 3	Images of the test tiles, which directly shows the results of firing.
Set 4	General material observations and measurements: water absorbency, clay density, glaze density, glaze viscosity, handling characteristics, surface quality, physical robustness, mechanical strength before and after firing, transparency/translucence/opacity,

	<p>degree of vitrification, shrinkage, weight loss after firing, and initial weight of fabric.</p> <p>Glaze observations: glaze viscosity, matt/glossiness, glaze fit (including crazing and crawling), macro crystallization (individual crystals visible to naked eye), maturity, pin holing and bloating/blistering.</p>
Set 5	<p>Brief summary of the outcomes; notes for adjustments to future firings; comments on results of note for each firing, indicating possible future directions.</p>

TEST RECORDING - 43.2015.04.21

DATE: 21st Apr, 2015

Basic Information of Firing 烧成基本信息				
Temp 1200	Cone 4 5 6 7	Cone Top	Cone Bottom	Other information of Firing Kiln is gas kiln, Large size. The shelf size is 50cm long and 100 cm wide. Location is Kiln 16 at ANU Ceramic Workshop.
Firing OX				
Total Firing Time	7 hrs 45 mins			

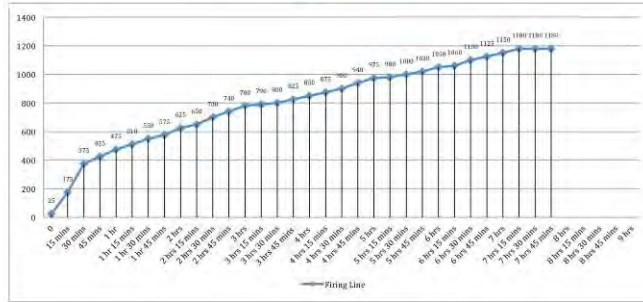


Fig. 77. Test Recording 2015.04.21, page 1

Information of Glaze Recipe 釉配方						
No. / Name	Detail					
43.1	Material 原料	Yarn 毛线		Imperial Clay Slip	Base	
	Wet. 重量	5g		100 ml 160 g	Paper board	
43.2	Material 原料	Yarn 毛线	Toilet Paper	Imperial Clay Slip	Base	
	Wet. 重量	5g	5g	100 ml 160 g	Paper board	
43.3	Material 原料		Toilet Paper	Imperial Clay Slip	Base	
	Wet. 重量		10g	100 ml 160 g	Paper board	
43.4	Material 原料	Yarn 毛线		Imperial Clay Slip	Base	
	Wet. 重量	5g		100 ml 160 g	Fleece dip	
43.5	Material 原料	Yarn 毛线	Toilet Paper	Imperial Clay Slip	Base	
	Wet. 重量	5g	5g	100 ml 160 g	Fleece dip	
43.6	Material 原料		Toilet Paper	Imperial Clay Slip	Base	
	Wet. 重量		10g	100 ml 160 g	Fleece dip	
43.7	Material 原料	Yarn 毛线		Imperial Clay Slip	Base	
	Wet. 重量	5g		100 ml 160 g	Flannelette	
43.8	Material 原料	Yarn 毛线	Toilet Paper	Imperial Clay Slip	Base	
	Wet. 重量	5g	5g	100 ml 160 g	Flannelette	
43.9	Material 原料		Toilet Paper	Imperial Clay Slip	Base	
	Wet. 重量		10g	100 ml 160 g	Flannelette	

2

Fig. 78. Test Recording 2015.04.21, page 2

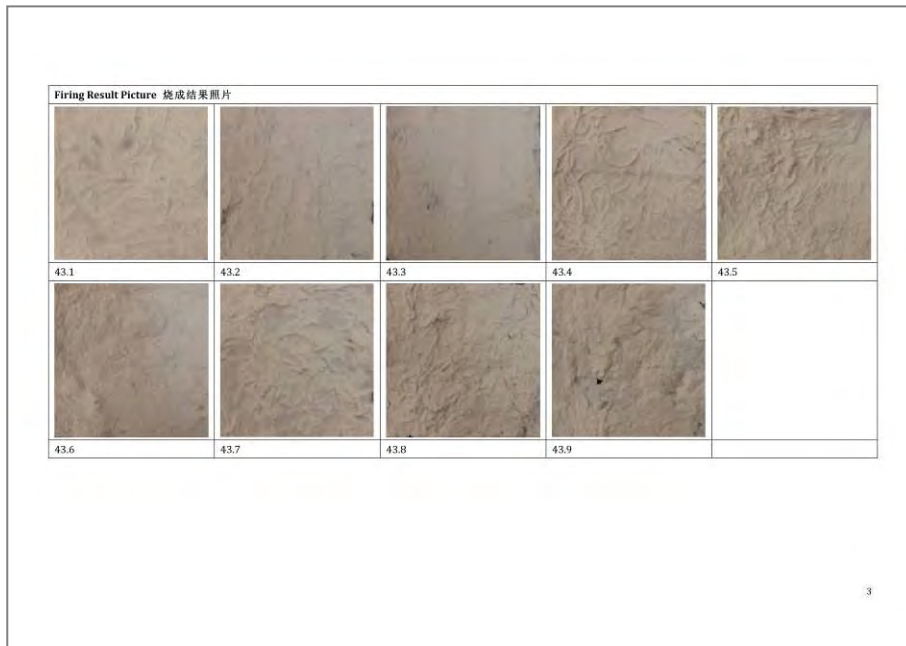


Fig. 79. Test Recording 2015.04.21, page 3

Firing Result Analysis - 1 Clay 烧成结果分

编号 No.	评判标准 Standard	43.1	43.2	43.3	43.4	43.5	43.6	43.7	43.8	43.9			
吸水性 bf. Absorb ab.	good+ normal+- bad-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+			
泥浆浓度 bf. Clay Dens.	good+ normal+- bad-	100ml 160g	100ml 160g	100ml 160g	100ml 160g	100ml 160g	100ml 160g	100ml 160g	100ml 160g	100ml 160g			
釉浓度 bf. Glaze Dens.	good+ normal+- bad-	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/			
分层散开 bf. Spread	Yes + Half +- No -	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			
涂抹难易 bf. Making ab.	easy + normal+- hard-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+			
平整度 bf. flatness	flat + normal+- wrinkle-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			
脱板难易 bf. pick up ab.	easy + normal+- hard-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-			
成型强度 bf. Form Strength	good+ normal+- bad-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+			

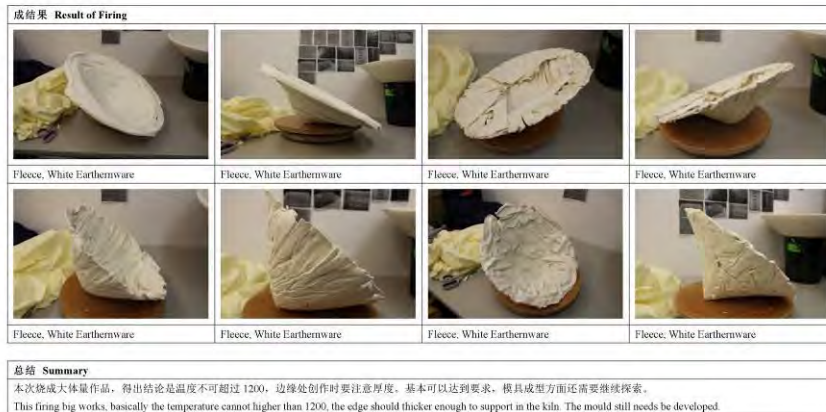
4

Fig. 80. Test Recording 2015.04.21, page 4

表现效果 af Surface ab.	Clear+ blurred+- no texture-	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	-				
透明度 af Trans. Ab.	clear+ blurred+- no trans-	+-	+-	+-	-	-	-	+	+-	+-				
强度 af Strength	good+ normal+- bad-	+-	+-	+-	+	+	+	+-	+-	+-				
是否熔融 bf Melting	Very + Little +- Not -	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-				
尺寸 bf Size cm		7.3×11.2	7.7×12.5	8×12	9×9.7	9×9.5	10×9	9.3×9.8	10.5×10	8.5×9.5				
尺寸 af Size cm		11×7	11×6.5	10.6×6.5	8.5×8.5	8.3×8	9×8	8.5×8.5	8.5×9	8×8				
重量 bf Weight g		26.41	29.67	29.13	68.37	63.84	63.34	26.69	35.39	27.59				
重量 af Weight g		16.78	18.95	18.85	59.26	54.11	57.95	21.50	17.98	20.23				
纤维重量 Weight Fabric		/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/				
备注 Others														

5

Fig. 81. Test Recording 2015.04.21, page 5



6

Fig. 82. Test Recording 2015.04.21, page 6

The recording system that I designed has become an essential foundation for the materials research, and contains a clear structure and is efficient and practical. It also considers the possibility of future analysis and the need to pick up segments from it to do individual research. More importantly, the system has flexibility to be adjusted, which enhances its practicability. During the research period, I conducted about seventy firings before the final work firing. There are several key tests that made the most important contribution to the research and practice. I have chosen two key tests as examples, see appendix.

2.1: Fabric

A key part of fabric clay is the fabric itself as it has different texture, inside structures and forms. In general, the reason for the use of certain fabric is its ability to be used in the structure; it is able to hold clay slip and enables it to stay in shape, then it burns away after firing and leaves the clay. It is possible to use most (but not all) kinds of fabric if we are not considering the other factors like the effect on the environment and health, or the strength of the result. For building the forms, the fabric should be able to absorb a certain amount of clay slip. Fabric of a certain thickness provides the basic strength; other fabric like lace or gauze are not strong enough to be independent works, but are able to work with other material.

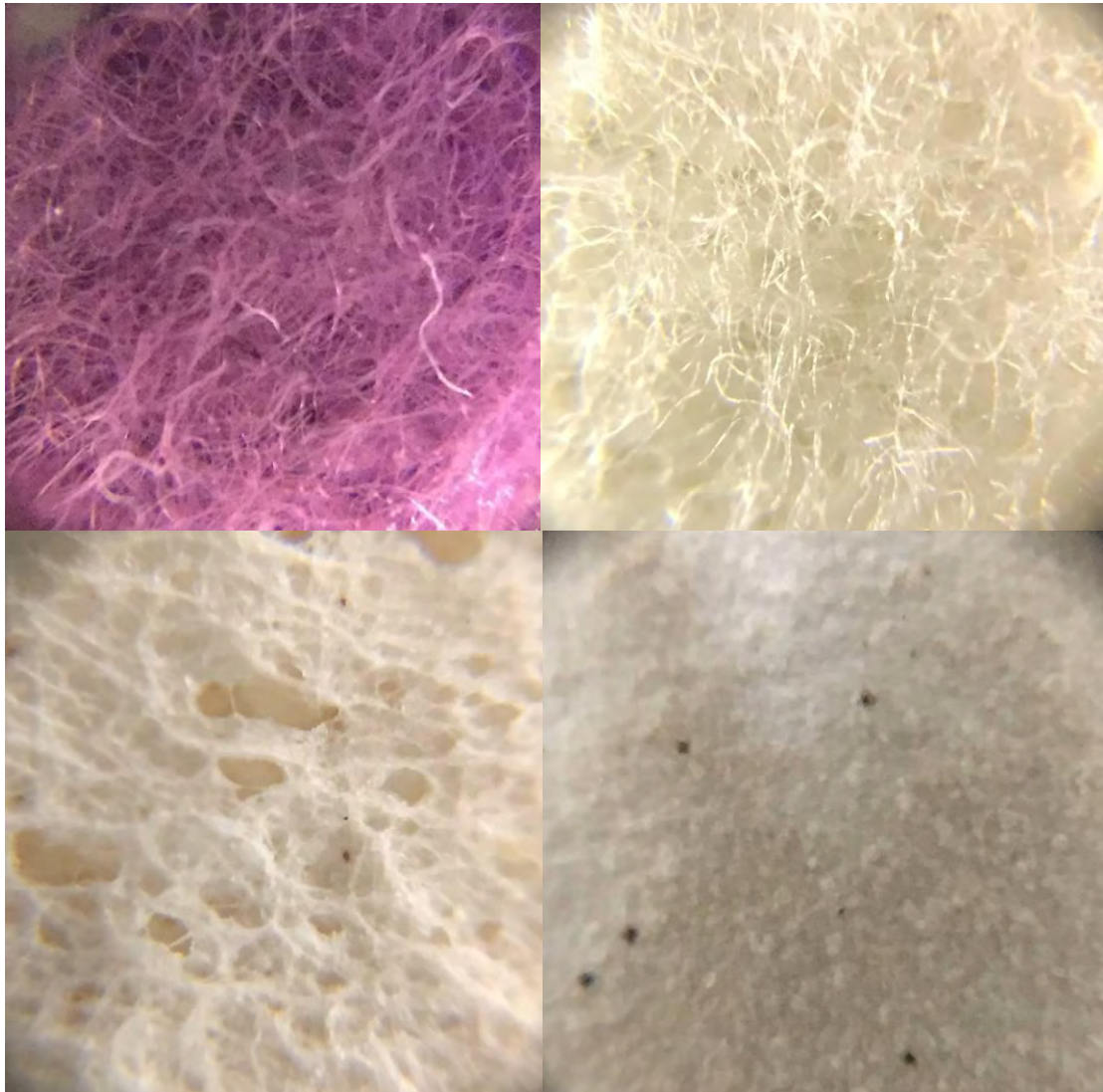
What the fabric is made from, whether it is an artificial fabric or a natural fabric, was only a consideration around the ability of building the form. Natural fibre is a better option and it has less requirements in the firing. Artificial fabrics require the kiln being placed in the open air due to the possibility of creating toxic smoke. In my use of artificial fabric, the first choice was fleece because of its capacity to absorb the clay slip and due to its thickness. The main raw material of fleece is a

type of polyester, polyethylene terephthalate (PET). Some researches that indicate this can be hazardous,¹⁸ which was partly proven in the smoke given off during firing temperatures of between 500°C to 800°C. The analysis of chemical release, it is however, beyond the scope of this exegesis to go into further detail on this issue. The use of natural fabrics is preferable because they produce less toxic chemicals and have a lower burning temperature as well. In my case, the 100% cotton flannelette¹⁹ I used.²⁰

¹⁸ In research on thermal decomposition and combustion products of disposable PET, it has been pointed out that the products of PET material were combusted in the furnace corresponding to the German Standard DIN 53 436 at temperatures of 500°C and 800°C, and uncontrolled burning in air, from which the carbon dioxide, methane, ethylene, acetylene, formaldehyde (methanal) and acetaldehyde (ethanol) were detected by Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR). Water, methane, acetaldehyde, ethylene, formaldehyde, methanol, acetone, benzene, terephthalic acid, styrene (ethenylbenzene), ethanol, toluene (methylbenzene), xylene (dimethylbenzene), ethylbenzene, naphthalene, biphenyl and phenol concentrations were all quantified by both SIFT-MS and GC-MS. Sovová, Kristina; Fergus, Martin; Matulková, Irena; Španil, Patrik; Dryahina, Kseniya; Dvořák, Otto; Civiš, Svatopluk; "A study of thermal decomposition and combustion products of disposable polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic using the High Resolution Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy, Selected Ion Flow Tube Mass Spectrometry and Gas Chromatography Mass Spectrometry." *Molecular Physics* 106, no. 9-10 (2008): 1205-1214. From <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00513199/document> (accessed April 30, 2016).

¹⁹Please note that due to the different factory of the material, thickness and tread count may vary of the fabric. The flannelette used in the author's test can only be treated as a reference.

²⁰According to the open burning research, will release chemicals including acrolein and formaldehyde during the firing process. See open Burning Chemical List, <https://denr.sd.gov/des/wm/sw/documents/OpenBurningChemicalList.pdf> (accessed December 9, 2015).



Left Up: **Fig. 83.** Micro view of fleece fabric, 60X

Right Up: **Fig. 84.** Micro view of flannelette fabric, 60X

Left Bottom: **Fig. 85.** Micro view of fired fleece fabric, 60X

Left Bottom: **Fig. 86.** Micro view of fired flannelette fabric, 60X


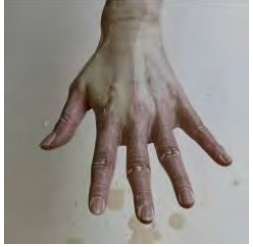
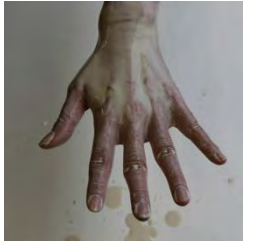
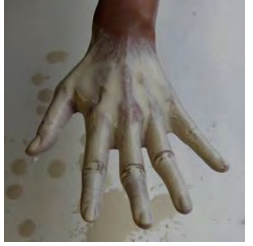
The structure of the artwork is the other major factor that affects the choice of fabric. Fleece [Fig. 83, Fig. 85] and flannelette [Fig. 84, Fig. 86], are different in their make-up but also in their structure. Flannelette is a woven fabric, while fleece is a knitted fabric. The fabrics' thickness and the way they hold clay slip is what makes a difference when looking at structure. This ability influences the final work's strength and texture. In fact, the artificial fabric exhibits a better quality in practice, because the artificial fabrics are able to have a loose and thick fabric structure, which much more easily absorbs clay slip than most natural fabric which has a tightened flat structure normally. In the fabric test, felt, sponge, fleece and wool showed the benefit of strength, while yarn and knitted wool have a strong texture. Cotton fabric, flannelette and baby wipes (non-woven fabric) have average qualities of strength and texture. Taking into consideration economic affordability, the flannelette and fleece were chosen in the first half period of my research and art practice. However, thinking over the environmental issues, the fleece has been used less in the latter period of research, with more natural fabric and fibre applied in the latest works.

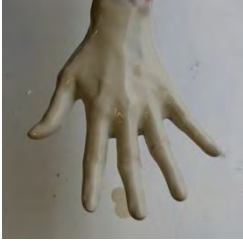
2.2:Clay

The second factor in the testing is the clay, or more exactly, the clay slip. If the fabric is the vehicle of structure in my work, then the clay is the body. The process of making fabric clay can be seen as using clay to fill in between the structure of the fibres, with only the clay left at the end. The firing temperature, texture and colour of the body are decided by the types of clay used. Basically, all kinds of clay could be used in fabric clay. I tested Southern Ice, Imperial Porcelain, PB103, White Midfire, White Earthenware, Super White Earthenware and recycled clay in my research.

The key part of clay slip, which applies for all kinds of clay, is its density which relates to the thickness of the fired work aside from the thickness of the fabric. It is not always better to use thick clay slip because the absorbency of the fabric is affected by water content in the clay slip as well. The fabric is absorbing water while it is also absorbing clay slip.

The test uses a simple check standard to measure by dipping fingers into the clay slip as follows:

	Description	Image
Extra Thin	Flows like water, small amount of clay left on fingers or hardly any remaining.	
Thin	Flows like water, a thin layer of clay left on fingers, able to see the skin of the fingers.	
General	Flows like milk, certain amount of clay left on fingers, not able to see the skin of the fingers, clay slip drips.	
Thick	Flows like yoghurt, clay slip covers fingers, no skin able to be seen, no clay slip drips.	

Extra Thick	Does not flow readily, clay slip covers fingers, no skin able to be seen, no clay slip drips.	
----------------	---	---

Considering the absorbency of fabric and the water in the slip, one can control the density of the clay slip based on the thickness of the fabric: if using thin fabric, the Thick and General clay slip will be the best choice; if applying in thick fabric, the General clay slip is the better choice; or if the fabric is too thick, then dip it into Thin clay slip before dipping it into General clay slip. Generally, the visual measurement system is often used in my practice, or according to the instructions of the commercial clay company guide.

The other factor that relates to clay is the firing temperature. The firing temperature is as crucial as the temperature when glazing. Before firing, the clay work is able to keep its shape because the fabric is holding its shape. In the firing, the fabric burns out, which normally happens between 300°C to 600°C; the shape has lost its support from the fabric structure. The shape will hold until the clay reaches its vitrification temperature.²¹When vitrification starts, the changes in shape start as well, and it is the temperature here that we should note.

Without support from fabric, the thickness of fabric clay and its loose structure inside results in less strength than ceramic made using more common methods.

Clay is the body of fabric clay just like other ceramics, but because of its special interaction with fabric, the clay and fabric has together changed how clay responds in making and firing process. This is also the aim of testing clay in the research.

²¹ "Vitrification is the hardening, tightening, and finally the partial glassification of clay." From Daniel Rhodes, *Clay and Glazes for the Potter*, vol. 2nd (revis) (London: Pitman, 1973), 17.

2.3: Colour and Glaze

In the area of ceramic, colour and glaze are two different methods that will be researched here. Other methods that go beyond the ceramic-making process, such as using spray paint, are not being included in this research. For the first method, the colour only indicates the ceramic colour stain and metal oxides in the clay slip. The second technique involves the use of colour stains and metal oxides in glaze, which may result in a different texture and colour variances than on a common clay surface.

Using colour stain in clay slip or making use of the natural colour difference between different types of clay does not affect the preparing process and other qualities of clay slip, but it is hard to get a rich texture and colour changes on that same surface. If using oxides in clay slip, then it may change the firing temperature of clay while also changing the colour. Another factor to consider when using coloured slip is that it might require the user to wear gloves for certain kinds of colour. I have tested about several kinds of colour stain and seven varieties of oxide in clay slip, which used clay slip in volume measure system with colour powder in gram measure system to test their resultant colours.

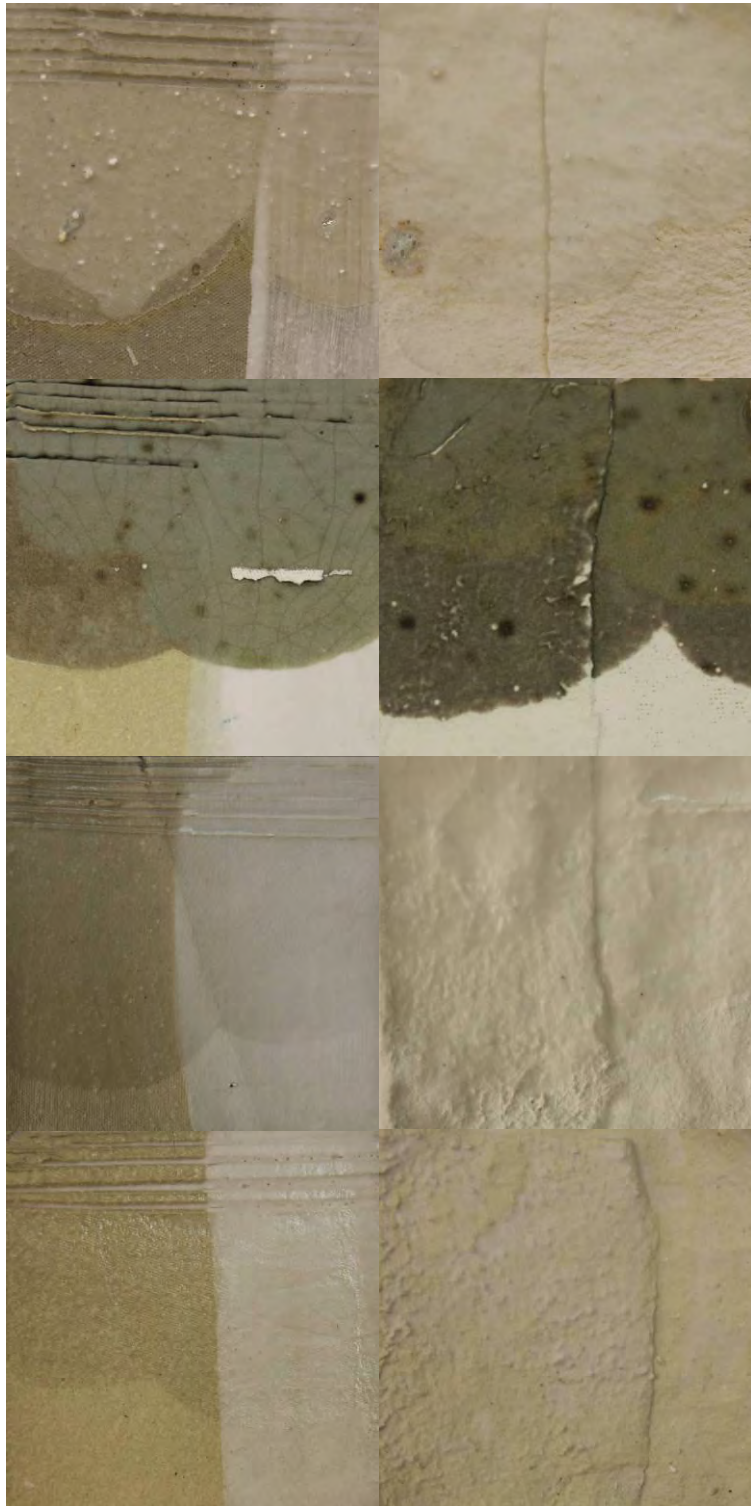
The glaze is the main focus of the research on colour. Unlike colour stain, the glaze can bring different textures to the surface, and produces more richness in colour as well. Using glaze can actually help the fabric clay to become stronger. The fabric clay body has a unique surface, so the glaze may result in a very different look than on normal clay. According to my observation, some crazings [Fig. 87 – Fig. 94] that happened on the normal clay surface may not be visible on the fabric clay surface. While from the aspect of colours, the glaze has a very different

look [Fig. 95 – Fig. 102] and is more likely to be found in the fabric that has a strong and rich texture, such as in fleece.

There is no bisque firing for fabric clay, so when applying glaze on fabric clay, it is not an issue as it still has absorbency after firing above to 1200°C – 1280°C. Based on this conception, the firing for the form can also be treated as a high temperature “bisque” firing if it needs to be glazed later. This is very important to remember, because the second glazed firing should always use a lower temperature to avoid possible form changes – 50°C or half cone lower is an appropriate temperature choice. Because of the temperature difference in the clay and glaze, most of my glaze tests are mid-fire glaze, which has the melting point at about 1200°C. However, if using colour stain, the firing temperature does not need to be modified. I used a different method to make and test the glaze recipe,²² the glaze preparation has referenced to ceramic technical books.²³

²² In this instance, a line test was used for a combination of two ingredients; a triangle test for three ingredients; and a square test for four ingredients. This could be expanded to test up to seven ingredients. A combination of these tests could be used together. For example, I could use the triangle test and the line test together to get more test results from the one experiment. The key was to choose one test system or a combination of them, depending on the goal of the research. For testing single elements, the simple line test can show a clearer result than the others; however to get more test results for greater choice and comparison, then a complicated test system such as the square test is preferred.

²³ See Susan Peterson, Jan Peterson, *The Craft and Art of Clay: A Complete Potter's Handbook*, vol. 5th (London: Laurence King, 2012). And Louisa Taylor, *The Ceramics Bible: The Complete Guide to Materials and Techniques* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2011).



Row 1 Left: **Fig. 87.** 36.G.1.1 on clay

Row 1 Right: **Fig. 88.** 36.G.1.1 on fabric clay

Row 2 Left: **Fig. 89.** 41.G.5.1 on clay

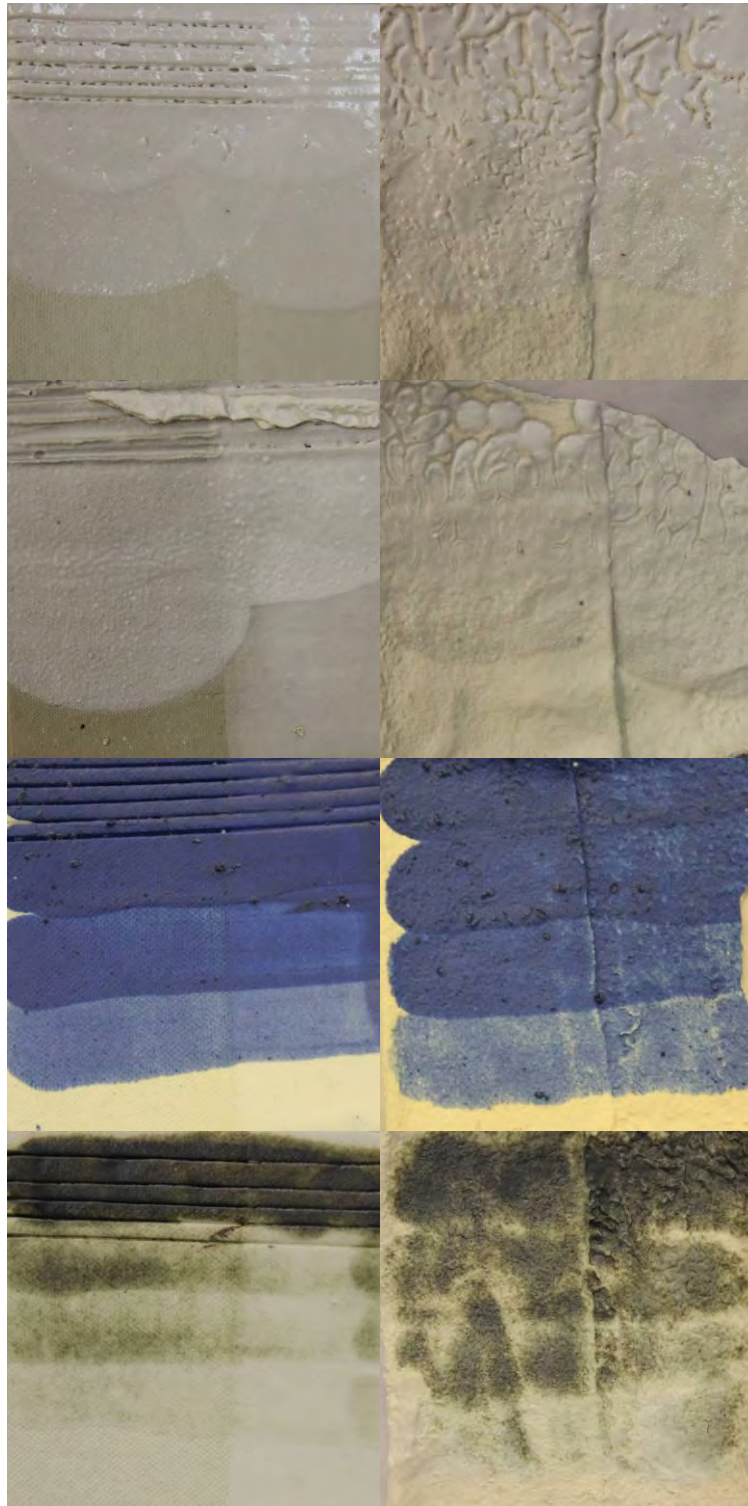
Row 2 Right: **Fig. 90.** 41.G.5.1 on fabric clay

Row 3 Left: **Fig. 91.** 45.G.6 on clay

Row 3 Right: **Fig. 92.** 45.G.6 on fabric clay

Row 4 Left: **Fig. 93.** 45.G.13 on clay

Row 4 Right: **Fig. 94.** 45.G.13 on fabric clay



Row 1 Left: **Fig. 95.** 46.G.3 on clay
 Row 2 Left: **Fig. 97.** 46.G.19 on clay
 Row 3 Left: **Fig. 99.** 54.G.18 on clay
 Row 4 Left: **Fig. 101.** 54.G.20 on clay

Row 1 Right: **Fig. 96.** 46.G.3 on fabric clay
 Row 2 Right: **Fig. 98.** 46.G.19 on fabric clay
 Row 3 Right: **Fig. 100.** 54.G.18 on fabric clay
 Row 4 Right: **Fig. 102.** 54.G.20 on fabric clay

2.4: Forming

The forming method for fabric clay can be very similar to common ceramic making – however, it can also be very different. Fabric clay can be casted in plaster moulds, and can also be built as a slab, similar to the general ceramic-making method. The character of fabric clay has been deeply affected by its fabric inside including its structure, texture and quality, which allows it to have other creative possibilities in the making process. Fabric clay can borrow techniques from other disciplines, for example from textile-making. Based on this, there are two ways to form fabric clay: dry making [Fig. 103] and wet making [Fig. 104].

For wet making, the key is support. This support is in building the shapes and forms, which is important for retaining the shape. Material such as fabric, cardboard, paper, wooden sticks and bamboo [Fig. 105] would be burned out during the firing. Using these materials has the benefit of not needing to remove them; they can support from inside or as part of the fabric. The other support during the making process is mould [Fig. 106]. Because the wet fabric has no ability to stand by itself, the support is essential for its shape. Both methods are providing many possibilities and potential. For example, in my practice, the *Conical Hat Series* used mould, while the *Travelling Series* used bamboo sticks. The tests on the forms and shapes are recorded in the material research system.



Fig. 103. Dry making process



Fig. 104. A fired trial work via dry making

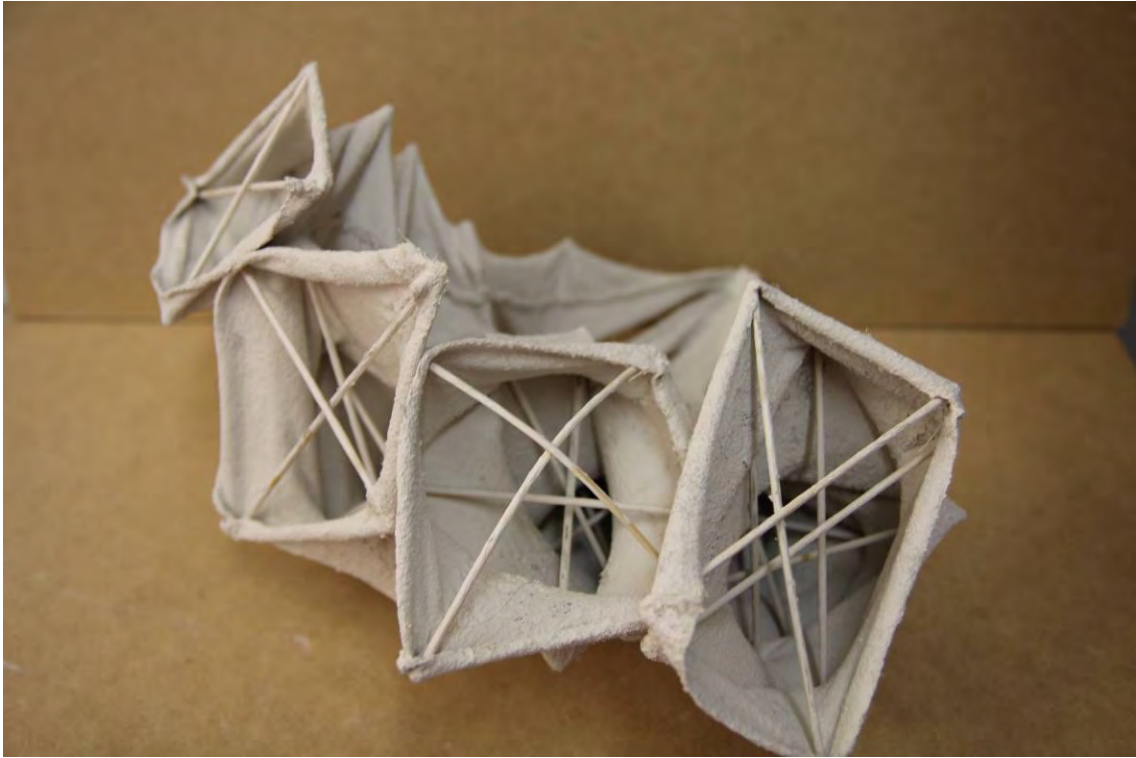


Fig. 105. A work waiting for dry via wet making process



Fig. 106. A work waiting for dry via wet making process in mould

Opposite to wet making, the dry making practice has a different key point – the combination. Dry making means building single units first and assembling them together after the units are dry or have been fired. For instance, the fabric clay can dry like a clay slab. Once it has dried, the fabric clay slab can be cut into shapes and jointed by clay slip without cracks. Another situation is already fired pieces, which can be reused to create new works, which has been jointed by wet fabric clay, clay slip, glaze or glue. This is slightly different to using unfired pieces because they have more limitations. But the fabric clay has better a capability with re-fired and other materials than ordinary clay has, which gives it the potential to be reused. In *Conical Hat Series*, they are several reused piece involved. These two methods represent two directions for using fabric clay, and also demonstrate the different approaches.

2.5: Firing

Firing is the process of turning clay into ceramic. For firing fabric clay, there are two parts where care needs to be taken. The first is the possible toxicity of smoke during the firing. The second is kiln packing. As to the firing process itself, there isn't much difference except that fibre clay can be fired relatively quickly because it is thin and has good air permeability to avoid cracks. In addition, a short firing process can reduce the time of exposure to the smoke, which is good for both health and energy saving. Fabric clay can be fired in an electrical kiln or a gas kiln. A gas kiln is more suitable than the electrical version because it has better air flow which brings the ashes out, and it does not have an electronic element that may be damaged. As to the firing atmosphere, oxidation is better for burning fabric completely; however, a reduction in the high temperatures can be chosen if required by the type of glaze. I have listed a general possible firing chart [Fig. 107].

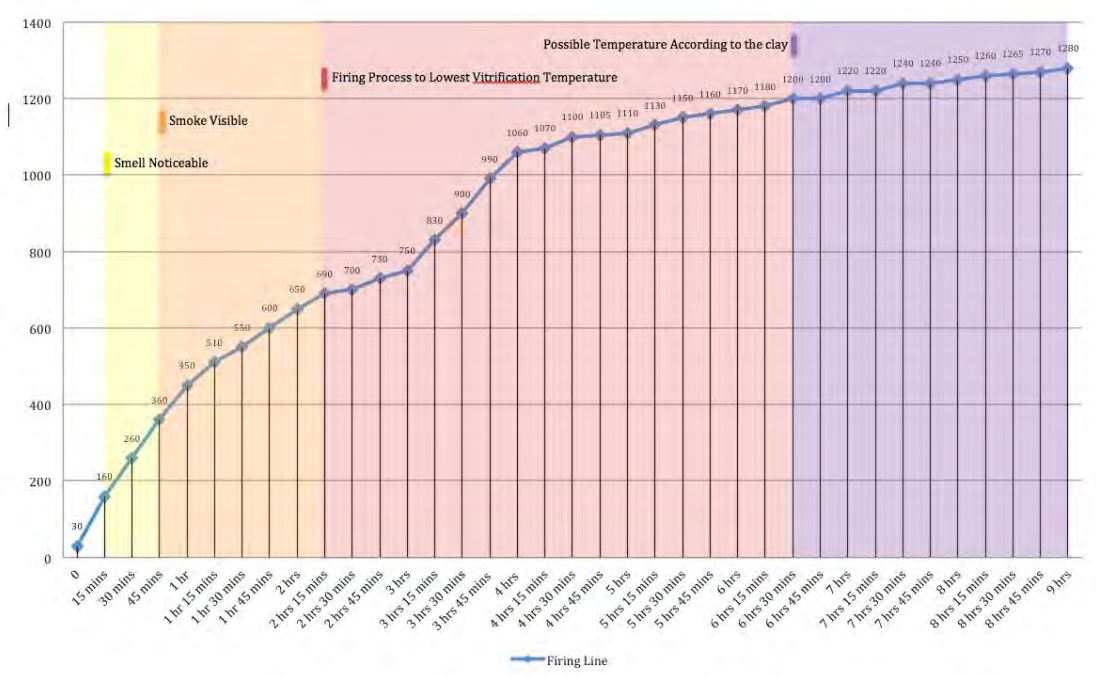


Fig. 107. General firing process

The most important factor to consider is the smoke. Smoke comes from burning fabric and usually starts from 300 °C, but the odour will start from 200 °C. The visible smoke generally ceases around 650 °C, and becomes totally clear at 800 °C. The length of the smoke discharge depends on the amount of fabric used and the firing rate. Considering health and safety issues, the operator should wear a mask, and ensure enough air flow and exchange at the firing place during the smoking period. The level of danger of the smoke is decided by its fabric, which has been previously discussed and where it was noted that natural fabrics release less toxicant than artificial fabric. Until further studies on burning fabric are carried out and there are improvements in kiln design, the safety precautions recommended in this exegesis should be followed.

From my observation, double-firing – bisque firing and vitrification firing – is not suitable for fabric clay. The fabric clay is extremely fragile when it does not reach vitrify temperature. The appropriate temperature for firing fabric clay is varied by the different types of clay used, and is the lowest mature temperature normally. For example, a porcelain clay is able to be fired from 1240 °C to 1310 °C, so if using this clay in fabric clay, the firing temperature would ideally be around 1240 °C to 1250 °C to avoid the major shape change. Minor shape changes are hardly avoidable in fabric clay, and full support during the firing is essential. Apart from the form change having a close relationship with the firing temperature, ceramic's strength is the other part that is linked, which has been affected by the inside structure of fabric.

The clay that I have tested can be sorted into two firing temperature ranges: the high temperature of 1260 °C and above such as Imperial Porcelain and Southern Ice Porcelain, and the middle temperature of 1200 °C to 1260 °C like PB103, White Midfire, White Earthenware and Superior White Porcelain.

Kiln packing is the other way of ensuring that fabric clay works' shape and form are kept. The fabric is too thin to hold its shape on its own, so it needs to have extra care taken regarding the firing temperature. While, a proper support (example of *Scholar Rocks Series* during firing [Fig. 108] and the *Conical Hat Series* [Fig. 109, Fig. 110] in the firing is an effective way to keep the outside shape, this makes the packing process extremely important.

The protective support, it means using the materials like kiln bricks, clay mould, kiln shelves, kiln fibre, sand silica, alumina to stop work moving and changing position in the kiln [Fig. 111]. Different material requires a different suitable way to use it [Fig. 112, Fig. 113],²⁴so choosing the right method and material to support the artwork becomes an important part helped by experience.

The placement of the support is also critical and success depends on the artist's skill [Fig. 114]. During the firing, the fired work shrinks. For some complicated shapes, the support can get stuck. So leaving certain space between the work and the supports is of primary importance. The support cannot be placed in the way that causes the work to move, otherwise it may create a pulling power to the work allowing cracks to appear [Fig. 115]. These issues apply to solid support materials, which before placing the support, it should have an idea about the possible strength that may force on the work [Fig. 116, Fig. 117]. Using materials like sand or silica powder avoids these problems but they have limitations when supporting shapes.

²⁴ For example, kiln bricks, clay mould and kiln shelves are better used for keeping the general shape of fabric clay work, which should be supported from the outside and the bottom to hold the shape so that it stands up and avoids slumping. Sand, alumina and silica can form a soft bed for keeping the bottom shape. Kiln fibre is suitable for supporting from the inside and is good to use with complicated forms. However the disadvantage of fibre is it is easily left on the fabric clay works and hard to remove.



Fig. 108. Kiln packing type 1



Fig. 109. Kiln packing type 2



Fig. 110. Kiln packing type 3



Fig. 111. Different support materials during firing



Fig. 112. Details of support method during firing type 1



Fig. 113. Details of support method during firing type 2

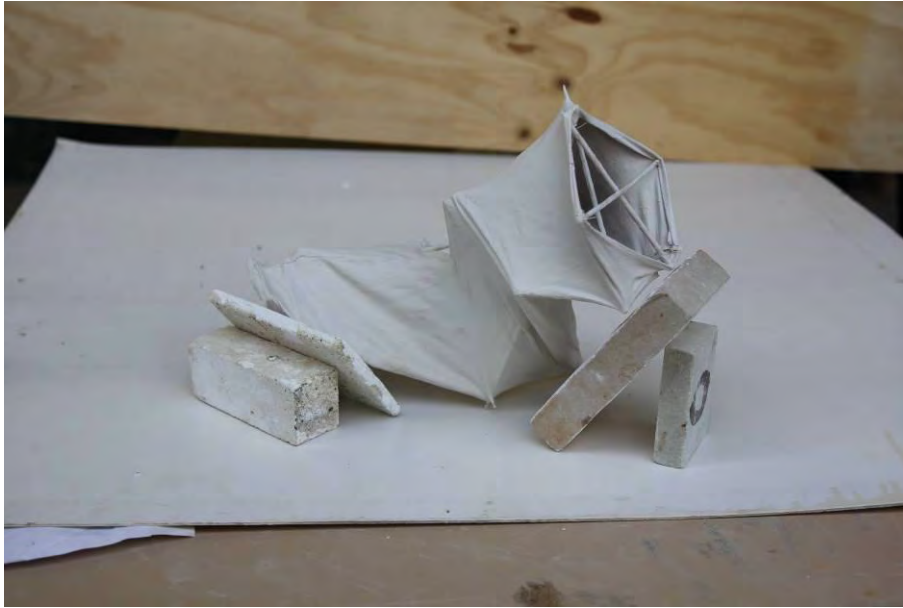


Fig. 114. Support for work example type 1



Fig. 115. Support for work example type 2



Fig. 116. Example work angle 1 and possible support place

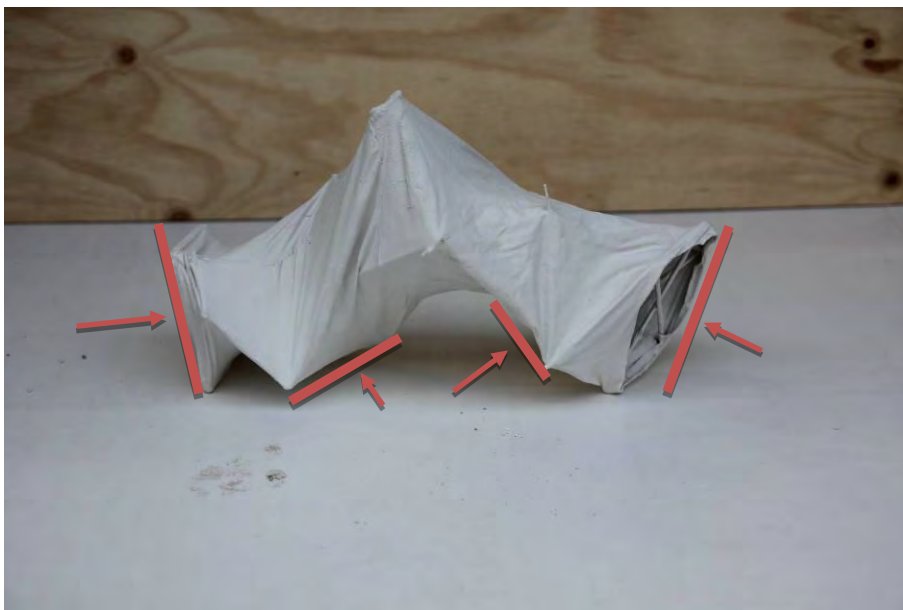


Fig. 117. Example work angle 2 and possible support place

Summary

This chapter has covered the basic process of using, making and exploring fabric clay, with the test system providing a foundation for understanding the material and to frame the research. With the new requirements of practice, the material research will shift again, back to exploration. This means that practice and material research are complementary parts and they are inseparable from each other.

There are many successful results that came from the testing, but many failures as well. No matter what the results are, it is the process of accumulating experience and knowledge that is important. At the later part of my research, I decided on the material and making process for my practice, which focuses on flannelette and lower temperature oxidation firing. However, the end result offers more than specific information on fabric clay. The materials research aimed at exploring the material's potential as much as possible, and provided a knowledge grounding for practice work, which is reflected in the form of technical reference.

The recording system that I designed gives the research a relatively stable structure and by the accumulation of data, has built up a database for further development and filled in many blanks in this area. The database has been uploaded online for other researchers to access via <http://fabricclay.wordpress.com> [Fig. 118].

fabricclay

70.TEST RECORDING 2015.12.01

This test belongs to my phd material research about fabric clay during 2013 to 2016 in Australia National University.

70.TEST RECORDING 2015.12.01

fleona 2016-01-28 Edit

69.TEST RECORDING 2015.11.29

This test belongs to my phd material research about fabric clay during 2013 to 2016 in Australia National University.

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- 70.TEST RECORDING 2015.12.01
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Online Open Access Database URL and QR Code

<https://fabricclay.wordpress.com>

Fig. 118. Online database screen shot and QR code

Fabric clay is a special technique and material in contemporary ceramic art, which is worth studying. My art practice mainly uses fabric clay, and not only treats it as a material, but also regards it as part of my representation. Through the materials research, I have understood the concept of fabric clay and have been able to use it freely, although its limitations have been revealed as well.

The first limitation is its fragility. The works that are made by fabric clay are light and fragile, which is because of its hollow inside structure and its thinness.²⁵ The glazed fabric clay is slightly stronger, but still not able to compare with normal ceramics. The fragility has limited the work's scale and use, and has also limited its installation method – all of which needs to be taken into consideration during creation. The second limitation is the texture of the fabric. This is a double-edged sword; it's the special fabric texture that makes this material unique, but can also be its constraint. However, "All man-made objects – simply because they are man-made – must have a purpose for someone to spend time and energy to make them,"²⁶ which I had insisted work on this material during the whole programme period. Until the *Conical Hat Series* and the *Scholar Rocks* series, I have finally able to understand how important that material as part of spirit exists in the ceramic artworks.

²⁵ The problem of fragility could be solved by using multiple layers of fabric clay, but it may loss the lightness of fabric clay and increase the cost of material. So in my practice and research, I choose not using multiple layers.

²⁶ Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 24.

Chapter Four: Fusion and Recreation

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss two series of work that I finished after my field trip research and artist's interviews. The first is the *Conical Hat Series*. This project can be seen as my first attempt to build on a traditional cultural form. The second project is the *Scholar Rocks Series*, which forms the final exhibition. The *Scholar Rocks Series* uses the same building method as the *Travelling Series*, but involves a more intense consideration of traditional culture.

The two series of works contain their own research background, cultural inspiration, referenced artists and theory base. Although they are two different projects, both of them focus on the concepts that have influenced me and are related to my cultural background.

The *Conical Hat Series* was started in the earlier part of the second year of my program, when I returned from field research. I was seeking a form that was visually powerful but also had a strong cultural grounding. The conical hat entered my exploration at that time. I realised it is not only a form that has existed in my life, but also a form that can be connected with many possibilities. In retrospect, this series of works is still limited in the idea of transforming cultural considerations by directly borrowing forms; a practice which does not offer enough enrichment. The transformation embedded in practice that I was seeking was perhaps reflected in the final project, the *Scholar Rocks Series*.

Section 1: *Conical Hat Series*

In the south of China, almost every farm has those two essential tools, the straw cape and conical hat [Fig. 119]. I am drawn by the shape of the conical hat, although it is a very common object. It has a pleasing simple shape and beautiful pattern. More fascinating is that there is a craft culture behind it, which reflects how humans view and utilise the natural materials around them.

It is hard to define when the conical hat was first made, but we know it has been mentioned in some early poetry. In *Shi Jing* [诗经]¹, there are three sentences mentioning the conical hat, “He Suo He Li [何蓑何笠]”² is one of them. The “Li [笠]” means conical hat. The hat can be made from a variety of materials including bamboo leaves, palm leaves, reed or straws, based on the types of plants found locally.

I continued to search for a form that represented my main research interest of tradition and culture in ceramic art, and which also suited my material of fabric clay. The *Conical Hat Series: Origin* (2015) [Fig. 120] is my first relatively successful work in this series. This series interprets my understanding of tradition through form and reconstruction by transforming daily objects into ceramic artworks. In the following discussion, I analyse the deeper meaning of the conical hat from three aspects. Then I investigate the relationship between the object and the ceramic form. I also investigated the concept of the container to see how it connected to the conical hat, as well as to my work. Finally I discuss the challenges that came along the way.

¹ Also known as *Classic of Poetry* in English. It is the earliest collection of Chinese poetry. The works date from 11th to 7th century BC.

² From *Shijing, Xiaoya, Wuyang*.

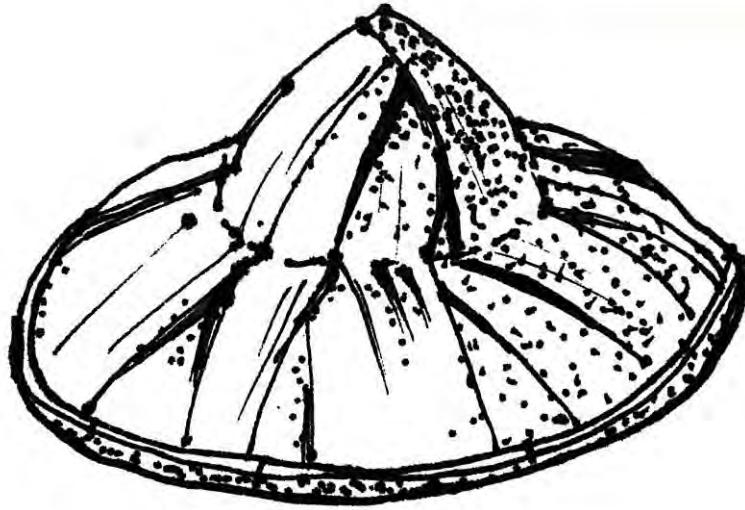
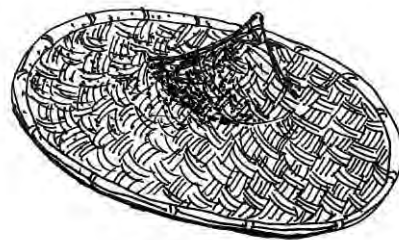
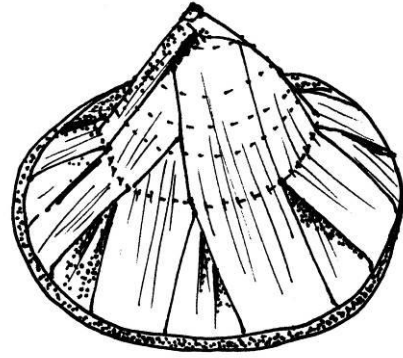
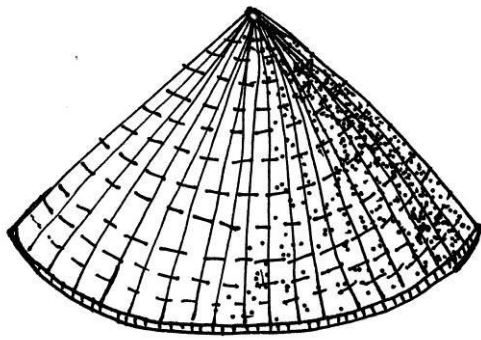


Fig. 119. Conical hat



Fig. 120. *Conical Hat Series: Origin*, 2015



Left Row: **Fig. 121.** Conical hat, "Straight Type"
Right Row: **Fig. 122.** Conical hat, "Turning Point Type"

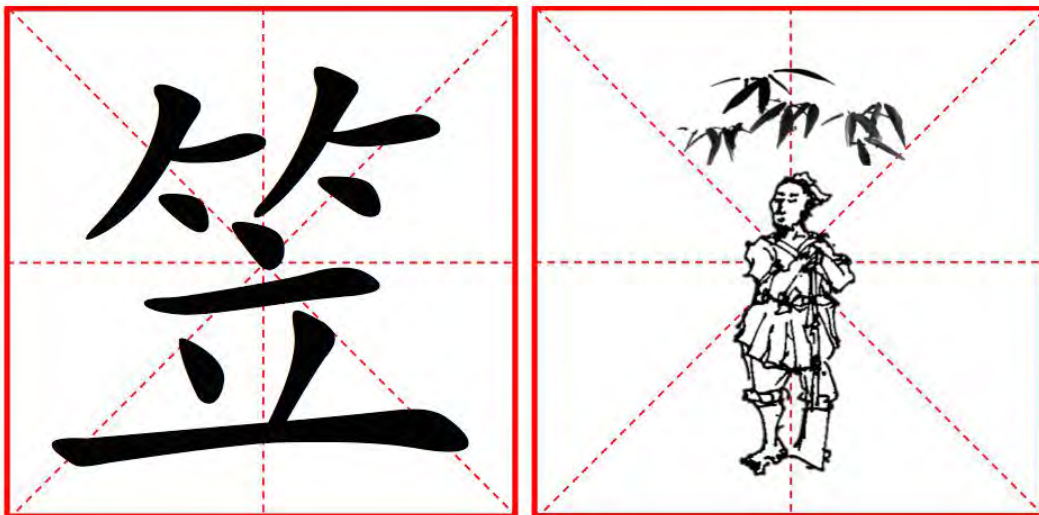


Fig. 123. Chinese character "Li" and its indicated image

1.1: Three Interests and Aspects

Why did such a simple and common object interest me? There are three interesting parts in the conical hat for me. The first is its shape. The second how the natural material has been used. And the third is extension into representation.

(1) Shape

Based on the basic cone shape, conical hats can be divided into two main types: Straight Cone [Fig. 121] and Turning Cone [Fig. 122]. There are many varieties within these two main types. The conical hat is generally used outside to protect the farmer in the rain or avoid exposure to sunshine. The cone shape is good for allowing water to flow down, and the large brim creates a shadow that shades the wearer from sunshine.

One interesting point of the conical hat is its Chinese name, as its shape is strongly and visually related to its Chinese name, “Dou [斗]” “Li [笠]”.

The Chinese characters originate from ancient hieroglyphics. Some Chinese radicals hold on to its function of representing meaning, and some keep the function of representing pronunciation. In this case, “Dou [斗]” “Li [笠]”, the “Li [笠]” [Fig. 123] means a hat that is made from bamboo leaves or palm tree leaves. While in “Li [笠]”, the top part “𦰇” is called “bamboo top”. The bottom part “立” means stand, then is extended to a standing man. “立” is also a radical that indicates pronunciation of the character. So the pronunciation of “Li [笠]” is the same as “Li [立]”. Considering all of this, “Li [笠]” is something made from bamboo and for men to wear. As for “Dou [斗]”, it has different meanings by different Chinese language tones. “Dou [斗]” in “Dou Li [斗笠]” is the third

Chinese tone.³ The common meaning is the Chinese measuring unit or its measuring container. One Chinese “Dou [斗]” equals ten litres. Another common meaning is as an adjective, “steep”. In “Dou Li [斗笠]”, “Dou [斗]” is used for describing “Li [笠]”’s size and shape. Putting the two characters together, it can be understood as an object that can be worn by a man, which is made from bamboo, while its size is similar to the measuring container.

What is interesting is how people can actually “see” the word’s meaning, which is distinctive in Chinese language. A Chinese character implies meaning by the construction of radicals, while it is more common to find older characters in this way. It shows how people understand the world and how to record them in different cultures. Those differences in language are sometimes used by artists in their work as a way of cultural consideration. There are several artists whose work is based on languages, such as Chinese contemporary artist Xu Bing. His earlier works are grounded on the Chinese characters and their cultural meaning. He interpreted it in a contemporary way in his work *ABC...* [Fig. 124] using the pronunciation linkage between Chinese characters and the English alphabet to achieve an effect of misunderstanding and weird illogical thinking in two different languages.

A different way to investigate the conical hat’s shape is with geometry. The conical hat can be seen as a different version of a cone [Fig. 125]. Usually, the conical hat is a shorter cone shape rather than a tall cone shape, which is in keeping with visual comfort and function. Tall cones draw more attention on the apex, which creates an intense feeling. Conversely, a short cone has a wider and larger side surface area, which draws less attention.

³ Chinese language has four main tones and a neutral tone. Same characters can have different tones sometimes, and different tones can have different meanings. “Dou [斗]” is a multiple tones character. It has two tones, the third tone “dǒu” and the fourth tone “dòu”. The fourth tone “dòu” means “fight”.



Fig. 124. Xu Bing, *ABC...*, 1991

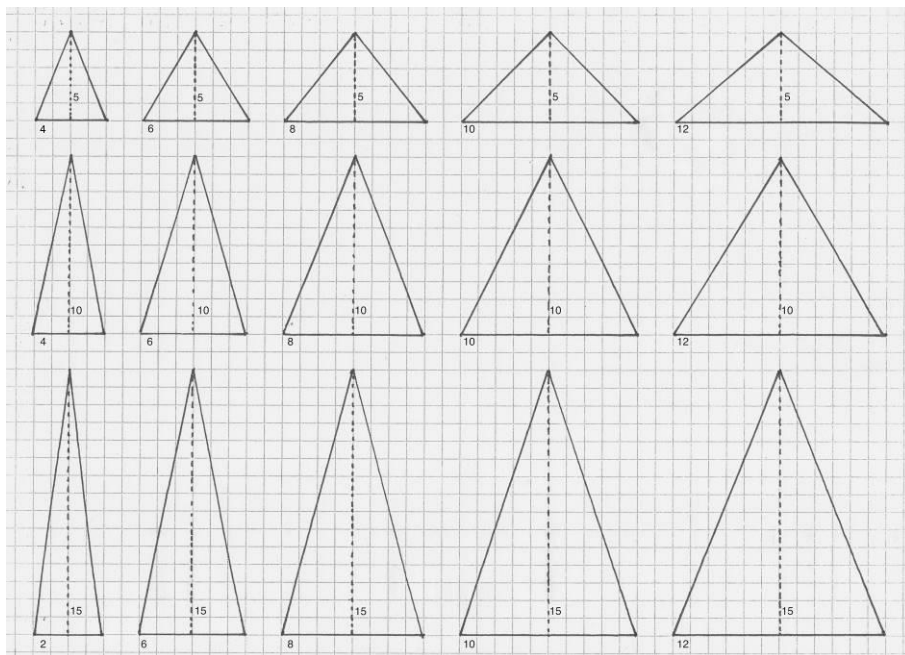
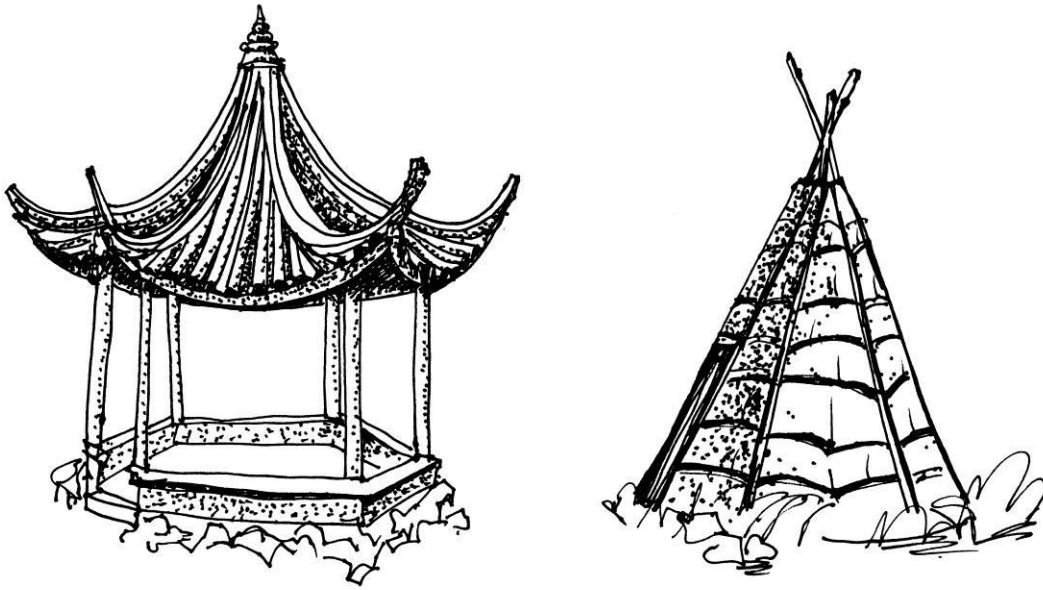


Fig. 125. The shape analysis from conical hat's lateral view

The cone shape can be found in many other things. For example, a Chinese pavilion [Fig. 126], a round tent [Fig. 127] or plant [Fig. 128] are all using a cone shape as their base form. The cone is a very stable geometric form when its base faces the ground. However, it has the opposite feeling when upside down. It is like there is a contradiction living in one closed shape, and the contradiction comes from the cone's apex and base. The apex and base give a direction inside of the cone, which create a force as well. Bert Flugelman's work *Cones* [Fig. 129] in the National Gallery of Australia is a good example of cone-shaped artwork. "For all its repetition and its immaculately tooled forms, the irregular angling of the upright cones lends the work a subtle undercurrent of casual informality."⁴ Jene Highstein's work *Black Elliptical Cone* [Fig. 130] displays a very different visual experience for the viewers even though it uses the same geometric shape.

The *Conical Hat Series* has not only grown on the concept of the original object, but is also grounded in a history of how ceramic art borrows forms from other areas. For example there is a historical type of bowl called "Conical Hat Bowl", like the *Bowl* from Northern Song Dynasty [Fig. 131]. This *Bowl* has a small ring foot and straight body outline. It looks like a conical hat that is upside down, hence its name.

⁴ Bert Flugelman, *Flugelman*, (Boorowa: N.S.W Watermark Press, 2008), 47.



Left: **Fig. 126.** Canglong Pavilion. Located Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, China. Built in 1044 CE by Su Shunqing

Right: **Fig. 127.** Nanai Fish skin tipi-like tent.

Nanai people are traditionally lived along Amur, Sunggari and Ussuri rivers



Fig. 128. *Serratula nudicaulis* (Sawwort)



Fig. 129. Bert Flugelman, *Cones*, 1982



Fig. 130. Jene Highstein, *Black Elliptical Cone*, 1976



Fig. 131. Unknown, *Bowl*, Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127)

The way that particular ceramic ware is named is actually close to how Chinese characters and their meanings link together. They are all suggesting something by their shape. The *Conical Hat Series* is supported by this concept. The process is like the inverse of language, where words point to certain things. Whereas, in my work, the thing points to words. I use shape to indicate the piece's origin, which is emphasised by the gap between the artwork and how it appears visually, and the image that the word means in the mind. The *Conical Hat Series* displays different cone shapes. By its shape, the work indicates a conical hat and so the thoughts about it. The thoughts are the work's root.

(2) Material

Artworks made using the soft material of fabric clay keep the appearance of softness too. In my materials research, I tried to explore the possibility of making fabric clay that does not exhibit a soft texture. To do this, I formed the fabric clay into a paper-thin slab, so it would not look soft like fabric. While doing this, a new inspiration came to me, causing me to work beyond those limitations and to construct the fabric clay into a mould. This was inspired by the conical hat. The traditional maker uses thin bamboo sticks or palm tree leaves as the main material, and then weaves them in certain structures. These soft and natural materials, when woven together, turn into a strong conical hat. By making the mould, fabric clay can be dried in different shapes and appears hard, which extends the possibilities of this material.

Another idea underlying this series is the interdependent nature of human life and natural resources. This interdependence can be traced back to the first acts of making that human beings performed using natural resources. This interdependence can still be seen in items like the conical hat, yet these hats are hard to find in modern society. Why? The conical hat can be used for many years; it is not an expensive thing to have and is made from cheap and easily obtainable

materials. The only extra value is the human labour in the making of it. Yet there is something more than the usefulness of the object to make people keep it and use it for so long time. It is clear that in the past, the reason was that the conical hat was an essential item for rural living. The value of the function is higher than the value of the material. This necessity shows how humans use material from nature to benefit their lives and how interdependent the two are. The conical hat is a representative object of the relationship. My *Conical Hat Series* contains this thought as an artwork.

Another implication of my work on the conical hat was the consideration of those materials that at first may seem valueless. In *Conical Hat Series: Grey*, I added broken pieces from my old works [Fig. 132], as though to bring new life to the broken pieces. By doing this I was trying to introduce the idea of “recycling” into my work. This reuse is valuable as I am not wasting broken items, but especially as it supports my theme. In this, I found a parallel with abstract expressionist sculptor John Chamberlain’s work [Fig. 133], which made use of motor vehicles that have been in accidents as the raw material, which makes a powerful statement.

(3) Representation

Despite the conical hat’s shape and material, it can stand as an object by itself. And this object means something. For me, the conical hat is not only a representation of the relationship between humans and nature, but also represents an “imaginary” memory: it is like a container that holds and protects lost memories.



Fig. 132. *Conical Hat Series: Grey (Detail)*, 2015



Fig. 133. John Chamberlain, *Untitled*, 1962

Writing about Anish Kapoor's work, Henri Lustiger-Thaler states: "Memory is proleptic: it is constructed in the present as it makes its case for the future."⁵ Then, what is the role of memory in this work? As an urban person I have not worked in fields, nor do I know much about rural life, apart from what I learned at school. When I left my country, and tried to find something that can represent my country, those "memories" came back. The conical hat represents farms and agricultural work for me. It is like a familiar stranger.

In his work *Infinite Landscape*, Yong Yongliang [Fig. 134] created a video installation based on a traditional Chinese landscape painting. At first sight, it may appear to be a Chinese painting representing nature. Upon closer inspection, it is in fact an animated image of the city instead of a peaceful landscape: the trees are actually scaffolds, and the grey wash is pollution. With the sound of urban noise, a quiet landscape painting becomes an ironic image. Yang has created an environment which invites viewers to think about what has actually happened in their real life, through an illusion of nature which has already been swallowed by the modern city. With the rapid expansion of cities, the past has become a memory for those people who were there, leaving "imaginary" memory to those people who have never been there. The conical hat can represent the process of the loss and the memories.

⁵ Henri Lustiger-Thaler, "When Empty is Full," in *Anish Kapoor: Memory* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2008), 17.



Fig. 134. Yang Yongliang, *Infinite Landscape*, 2011

The direct relationship between shapes in ceramic art and non-ceramic objects or nature has a very long history. There are many examples, such as the “Bird Shaped Bottle”, and the “Boat Shaped Jar”. The influences from nature or non-ceramic objects contributed to some particular ceramic ware shapes, as well as in decoration. For instance, the *Bird Shaped Bottle* [Fig. 135] is a functional piece of ceramic ware in the shape of a bird. Compared to other geometric shapes, the bird shape has a very strong decorative implication.

For my *Conical Hat Series*, I used the conical hat’s shape as the original model and developed several different versions. The size and proportions are similar to a real conical hat.

Ceramic ware in history has often “borrowed” shapes from other objects. The first method is to mimic forms directly. For example, the leather bag shaped ceramic water bottle [Fig. 136]. The second way is impression miming, in which the shape gives viewers an impression of other objects. “*Moon Jar*” [Fig. 137] from Korea is similar in so far as where its name comes from. Ceramic art has learnt from outside of the genre to enrich its variety of forms, and the same can be said with meanings. My *Conical Hat Series* also sits in this background of history and tradition.



Fig. 135. Unknown, *Bird Shape Bottle*, Neolithic



Fig. 136. Unknown, *Flask*, 907 – 1125



Fig. 137. Unknown, *Moon Jar*, Joseon Dynasty (1392 - 1910)

1.2: Conical Hat as Container

Thinking about the history of ceramic shapes gave me a grounding to create the *Conical Hat Series* of works, and the investigation of the conical hat itself provided depth in my work. However, there remains a lot of space for my personal concepts and understandings to be developed in this series of work. According to those studies on object and shapes, I concluded that the central idea of this work was one word – “container”. I view the *Conical Hat Series* as containers. So what is a container?

Container appears as a word under the explanation of the word *contain*. It is expounded as the action or fact of containing, holding, restraint. Contain means having within itself or to hold within fixed limits, and to be explained as equal to something. It can mean to keep under control, to take up, to enclose. These explanations of contain directly link with the container. A narrative way to understand container, it is a thing that has the ability to have something in it. The thing can be any physical object like a box, a vessel or a bag. In *The Macquarie Thesaurus*⁶, container has 23 items listed against it. Most of those items are physical objects that can contain something, and most of them are nouns.

In a broader sense, it can also be the thing that has the *concept* of containing, for example, like the body can be a container for cells, or a dictionary can be a container for words. To go further in the understanding of container based on containing, container can also be a purely conceptual object. For instance, words are the container of ideas, or the brain is the container of knowledge. This is a metaphorical way to use the word container, but it allows us to creatively use that word. For my work, I use “container” as the concept of the conical hat and also as a creative act.

⁶ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), 94.

Based on the meaning of containing in the word container, there are other directions can be taken from it, such as its hidden link to the word “act.” Beyond describing different kinds of containers, the act of being a container can mean taking the role of protection, storage or transportation. And importantly, after a container has been found, the act afterwards can also be assigned at that point. When you find a jar, what you put in it will give the jar its value and purpose. Each user can give different values and purpose to the same jar than other people did.

There are two levels of how my *Conical Hat Series* links to the concept of the container. Firstly, the conical hat is a kind of container. Secondly, the conical hat is a container of emotion. The conical hat as container is a direct connection. From a geometric sense, the conical hat is a hollow cone shape, which enables it could contain something within it. As a container of emotion, there is personal feeling in the work, and the container becomes a metaphor. The conical hat can be used as protection, while the container in a broader sense is related to protection, storage or transportation. Protection is the one common point, and is also what the *Conical Hat Series* is trying to say. Through the artwork, protection becomes the main thing that is actually on the artist’s mind. “Conical hat as container?” with a question mark is the artist asking herself, as well as asking the viewers about what we are losing.

1.3: In Practice

The practical part of the *Conical Hat Series* presented a challenge, but also delivered a breakthrough. For this series, I used mould making [Fig. 138] to build the form of the work, which was a slow process. I was using fabric clay as the main material as usual, not only because of its pliability (similar to the natural fibre material in the conical hat), but also because I was trying to extend the

possibilities of fabric clay by trying use it in different types of work.

The *Conical Hat Series* required a geometric form, but it is hard to make a geometric shape by free-hand building or sewing. Mould-making was necessary to achieve this result. Despite having used fabric clay in my research from the beginning, I hadn't tried mould-making to that point because there was no reason to do it. While mould-making was the best solution for this project, I found it very challenging. I had to find the means to make large moulds and find out how to release the fabric clay from the plaster mould easily [Fig. 139]. In addition, the texture that was made by the mould on the material created a new look for fabric clay. When the fabric clay is wet, the clay slip was pressed into the mould by its gravity, leaving a relatively flat surface [Fig. 140] on the work. It is the flatness of the surface that created the contrast with the softness of the fabric clay, which was seen as unfortunate marks in my previous work. Through the mould-making process, the fabric clay had become a ceramic material that not only looked like a fabric, but was able to make clear geometric forms just like other ceramic materials could.



Fig. 138. Plaster mould in the process



Fig. 139. Making process of the *Conical Hat Series*



Fig. 140. Detail of surface on the test piece



Fig. 141. Support process of the *Conical Hat Series*

The second challenge was firing. While firing fabric clay, changes in form are the most common situation that will happen. In this series of work, the conical shape was essential to convey my concept of the conical hat. Fabric clay generally won't thicken enough to stand freely by itself in the kiln during firing. It has to be supported by other strong materials. To avoid the cone slumping in the kiln, the work had to be fully supported [Fig. 141] all around it. For this purpose I used broken kiln shelves and props to build a "wall" against the shape, which worked well, leaving only small changes of shape which I considered acceptable.

The *Conical Hat Series* (2015) was my first attempt to work under the intersecting motifs of Chinese culture and contemporary ceramic art [Figs. 142, 143, 144]. The series shows that attention is focused on historic objects which are in danger of disappearing, by reconstructing daily objects to recall lost memories in a subtle way. As I faced an unfamiliar process of making, some unknown problems appeared. But this also led to freshness and innovation. This series of work is still limited in its concepts, creativity and techniques, but this also signals where it can be expanded.



Fig. 142. *Conical Hat Series: Grey, 2015*



Fig. 143. *Conical Hat Series: Dark Blue, 2015*



Fig. 144. *Conical Hat Series: Green Blue, 2015*

Section 2: *Scholar Rocks Series*

The *Scholar Rocks Series* is the major series of work that I undertook in the second and third year of my program, which developed into my installation work in the exhibition. It contains several independent works on plinths and an installation work titled *Rock Garden in Fantasy*.

The original idea came from the *Travelling Series*, in that they use the same building method (described in Chapter One). Looking at details of the *Travelling Series* reminded me of the rocks seen in Chinese painting. Looking further into the history of Chinese painting, I found more similarity between my work and the rocks, and specifically Chinese scholars' rocks. While may seem hard to connect soft fabric forms to sharp angled rocks, I found that the lines and points on the surface of the fabric clay that were created by the bamboo sticks inside jutted out in different directions, which reminded me of craggy rocks in traditional painting. In Chinese painting, the many brush strokes used in painting the rock creates a similar visual experience. Secondly, the bamboo sticks made a structure that supports the fabric clay and creates a hollow, which gave the work an interactive space that Chinese scholars' rocks also have. And I think there is a deeper reason, which is the way they define space and their attitude to natural objects. Not all Chinese scholars' rocks are entirely natural; some are artistic products. Some rocks are found, while others are made in a natural way that is controlled by craftsmen, and aim at the truest representation of nature. The other important aspect of scholars' rocks is their status in the space, and the way they occupy the space, which has a special place that cannot be replaced by any other object. In my work, the form that is created by fabric clay cannot be fully controlled either, as the drapes and folds naturally happen. Also, the work is a way of wrapping or trapping space, in a similar but different method as scholars' rocks do. The "rocks" made by fabric is an very interesting and unique idea, which reminds me of

Walter Biemel's assertion that the essence of art is to create something which has never existed in that way previously.⁷

Rocks are very important elements in Chinese culture, represented by their addition to Chinese gardens. The rocks can be seen in many Chinese gardens [Fig. 145], and not only as decorations, but also as an important part of the overall aesthetic and philosophical view. By thinking more deeply about scholars' rocks, I started to realise that the rock's cultural meaning has a much more spiritual relationship with my work, especially in its interaction with space and place.

While the initial impression of my work reminded me of rocks, this was based on the representation of rocks in Chinese painting [Fig. 146] rather than natural rocks. This implied to me a shared quality, like two different artistic versions of the same object. To see how the representation of rocks compared, I looked back to the original object – natural rocks, which had led to the exploration of the *Scholar Rocks Series*. The real rocks look solid and heavy. By comparison, Chinese scholars' rocks can look heavy even though the artist is seeking a hollow and light look. Using fabric clay to create rocks seems very farfetched when looking at real rocks. The “disconnect” between fabric clay and real rock was an obstacle in the development of this series works in my mind. However once I separated the thought of the actual hard rock as a material, and tried to explore its spiritual quality, the obstacle did not exist anymore. This was a very long process. A very important moment in this process was to look at its shadow under a spotlight [Fig. 147]. The two-dimensional shadow has picked up the outside shape, which makes the image of rock clearer. The *Scholar Rocks Series* is not only about the shape and body of rocks, it also focuses on the inside energy of moving, growing, floating and concreting that is carried and shaped by the “solid” fabric clay, which corresponds with my point of view of the Chinese scholars' rock.

⁷ Walter Biemel, *Philosophische Analysen Zur Unst Der Genenwart* [The philosophical analysis of contemporary art], trans. Li Yuan, Sun Zhouxing (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2012), 78. I have paraphrased from Li and Sun's translation into Chinese of Biemel's German text.

While based on the same building principle as earlier works, the *Scholar Rocks Series* developed more complicated shapes and forms. The forms have been sewn together to make angular composites, which was new for my work. The previous works were usually shown as independent works, while the *Scholar Rocks Series* is shown as an installation. In addition to these visual differences, the key point that *Scholar Rocks Series* (2016) made is a close linkage between culture and form. For me, this was a breakthrough in materials as well as concepts [Fig. 148].



Fig. 145. Whang Shih Yuan



Fig. 146. Yu Zhiding, *Xizhan Xing Le Tu*, Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1912)



Fig. 147. *Scholar Rocks Series*, test, exploration of shadow



Fig. 148. *Scholar Rock No.3*, 2016

2.1: The Rock in Chinese Culture and Art

Similar to themes like “Silk, silk thread and silkworms”, rocks “have special implications in Chinese discourse”.⁸ The culture of rocks, has a unique place in Chinese history.⁹ In Mandarin, the scholars’ rock is read as “Jia [假]”, “Shan [山]”, “Shi [石]”. “Jia [假]” means fake, “Shan [山]” means mountain, and “Shi [石]” means stone or rock. So literally, the scholars’ rock means the fake mountain that is made of stone. Interestingly, there is another Chinese character to describe rock, which is “Yan [岩]”. The stone that comprises the lithosphere can be called “Yan”. Most “Yan” are raw and unprocessed, which means they have usually sharp edges. This is another reason I prefer to use “rock” for my work and that is because it has visual similarities. The Chinese character “Yan [岩]” consists of two parts. The top part is “Shan [山]” and the bottom part is “Shi [石]”, which is exactly as same as in the “scholars’ rock.” To a certain extent, the “scholars’ rock”, the “Jia [假]” “Shan [山]” “Shi [石]” could be seen as “Jia [假]” “Yan [岩]”, which means “fake rock” in English [Fig. 149].

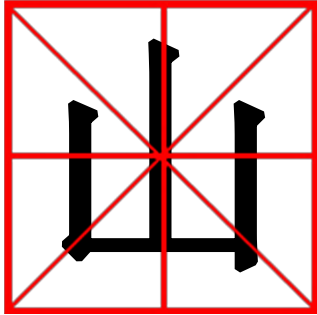
This discussion of Chinese characters and the differences and connections between rock and stone is significant because they both affected me during my concept-building process. The translation from English to Chinese and then back to English including its character transformation within Chinese, could actually indicate the circulation of both the artistic factor and natural power, which matches the scholars’ rock’s inner spirit. The scholars’ rock is an artistic product that comes from nature and has been modified using controlled erosion by wind and water. People place it in gardens to convey the idea of living in nature and to

⁸ Zhang Zhaohui, *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Xu Bing & Cai Guo-Qiang* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2005), 45.

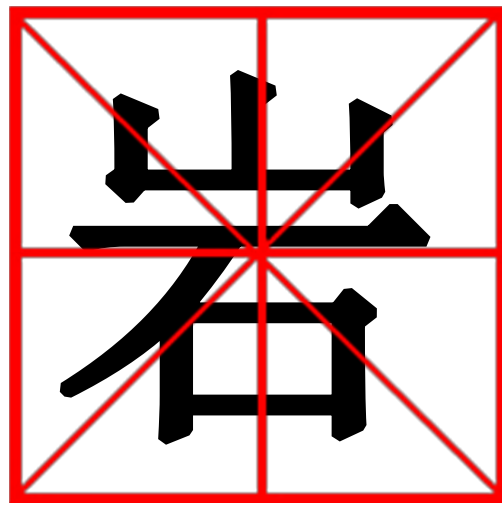
⁹ It is interesting to note that in Mandarin, rock and stone can be written using the same Chinese character “Shi [石]”. In this exegesis, I prefer to use the word rock to describe my work rather than the word stone because rock has much more of a raw and sharp meaning and is in the landscape, while stone is more of a small or precious stone that can be handled. But when I discuss culture, I will use the term “culture of stone” instead of “culture of rock” according to common preference.

create an interesting visual experience. It can also be used to represent symbolic meaning such as good fortune, or a worshipful attitude to nature. The process from nature to artistic product then back to nature is actually a reflection of Chinese traditional aesthetic and philosophy, not only in the rules of building gardens and architecture, but also in other aspects of culture. The key point is the method of making: a process of transforming nature to nature. Whereas most scholar's rocks in earlier times were discovered in the countryside, with the rise of public interest and demand, craftsmen started to produce it. They found out how natural factors, such as wind and water, work on rock and invented a method of eroding the stone so it became scholars' rock. This natural making method reduced human traces to a minimum, and also captured nature's power. The essence of the process can be explained in a Chinese phrase "Zi [自] Ran [然] Er [而] Ran [然]", which means let nature be nature. It can be said that scholars' rock is the objectification of a key Chinese philosophical concept.

Shan



Yan



Shi

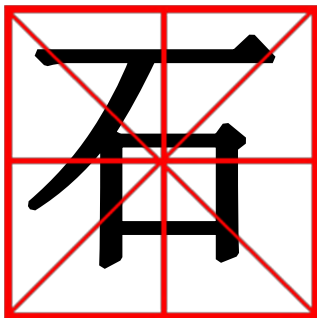


Fig. 149. Character Analysis



Fig. 150. Unknown, Jingdezhen Ware Vase (Detail), Qing Dynasty Kangxi Period (1662 – 1722)



Fig. 151. Unknown, *Emperor Ming Huang's Journey to Shu* (Detail), 8th century



Fig. 152. Unknown, Embroidered Hanging, Ch'ien Lung Period (1736 - 1795)



Fig. 153. Different types of rocks

Traditionally, the fondness for scholars' rock in Chinese culture is closely related to the worship of stone, which has existed for a very long time in Chinese history. Rather than valuing precious stones, cultured Chinese craved strange stones. Large rocks were used as decoration in gardens and palaces from as early as the Qin Dynasty (274 BC – 210 BC), and smaller stones were placed in homes or handled. During the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644), the appearance of books, articles and catalogues of stone pushed the culture of stone to a theoretical level. Images of rocks have appeared on many types of works, including ceramics [Fig. 150], paintings [Fig. 151], textiles [Fig. 152]. This culture has developed a philosophical base so that the appreciation of stone has changed from purely visual interest to be a carrier of emotion. There are many famous collectors of scholars' rocks in history.¹⁰ Chinese appreciate rocks, sort them into different kinds and name them according to their texture, colour, locations, shapes, etc. [Fig. 153]. The historical importance of the culture of stone also sparked the attention of contemporary artists.

Zhan Wang (1962 –) is a sculptor who focused on the scholars' rocks for many years [Fig. 154]. His works mainly use stainless steel as the material to mould the shape of scholars' rocks. He made his work by covering scholars' rocks with stainless steel to make a multi-part mould and joining the pieces back as the final work to create a hollow replica in stainless steel. His works send a very clear message to the audience that he is remaking scholars' rocks. In the past, scholars' rocks were used in the gardens in a harmonious arrangement with architecture, trees and water. The stainless steel rock can be seen as the representation of culture today, reflecting on environmental transformation due to urbanisation. Further, the stainless steel reflects its surroundings; and sometime it can seem to disappear. This is also the artist's comment reflecting the loss of original identity

¹⁰ Such as the Chinese painter Mi Fu, poet Bai Juyi, Song Dynasty emperor Zhao Ji, etc., and many influential books, such as *Yun Lin Shi Pu* (Yunlin Stone Catalogue, written by Du Wan, Song Dynasty) and *Su Yuan Shi Pu* (Su Yuan Stone Catalogue, written by Lin Youlin, Ming Dynasty) were written on the subject.

in a modern environment.

The work of Beijing-born Australian artist Ah Xian (1960 –) is another example. His works *Evolutionaura13: Taihu Rock – 1* [Fig. 155] and *Evolutionaura14: Taihu Rock – 2* [Fig. 156] contains two parts: the human body in coloured gold, and the scholars' rock in its natural state. According to his description, the scholars' rock represents China's long history and culture, and the human body means the Western figurative art history. When they are put together, something new has been created.¹¹ Ah Xian's use of the scholars' rock in this series creates a distinct impression of cultural contact and conflict, conceptually and visually.

¹¹ <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/234.2014/> (accessed 25 February, 2016).



Fig. 154. Zhan Wang, *Artificial Rock #10*, 2001



Fig. 155. Ah Xian, *Evolutionaura 13: Taihu Rock - 1*, 2011-2013



Fig. 156. Ah Xian, *Evolutionaura 14: Taihu Rock - 2*, 2011-2013

Zhao Meng (1967 –) has made ceramic sculptures in the form of scholars' rocks for many years [Fig. 157, Fig. 158, Fig. 159]. His works attempt to capture the interesting space that is created by the holes in stone, which makes his work easy to connect to the scholars' rocks. But his work has a softer and warmer feeling compare to real stone because of the glaze and the softened edges of his form. Another ceramic artist, Bai Ming (1965 –) has worked with the same motif [Fig. 160, Fig. 161]. His scholars' rocks have a more minimalist tendency, which makes his work look more contemporary than Zhao Meng's. Glass artist Wang Qing (1978 –) has approached scholars' rocks in a different way [Fig. 162]. He has simplified the Chinese garden retaining only a few symbolic objects, such as the bridge, scholars' rock and a pavilion. He put these elements together and built walls to enclose them. The interesting part of his work is the windows that he opened on the wall, which enable people to see through. It is mimicking the visual experience of real windows in a Chinese garden, and also showing a very typical way of looking in Chinese art. The scholars' rock in his work appears as a cultural symbol, which is similar to Ah Xian's work.

No matter how the scholars' rock itself is viewed, or how stone culture is considered, the original inspiration of the scholars' rocks has built a solid grounding for my own work from where it can grow. My final work has moved on from the visual image of scholars' rock and become the embodiment of its spirit, as well as my understanding of culture. This project does not directly copy the form or the shape of scholars' rocks, rather it transforms the movement that the scholars' rocks have, which is where the visual energy comes from, into artistic creation. The relationship between scholars' rocks and mother culture still provides guidance as to the direction of my research, in terms of visual power as well as conceptual energy. The following parts will explain how the cultural consideration and thought have been transformed into art language in material, form and conception.



Fig. 157. Zhao Meng, *Not a Stone*, 2014



Fig. 158. Zhao Meng, *Not a Stone*, 2014



Fig. 159. Zhao Meng, *Not a Stone*, 2014

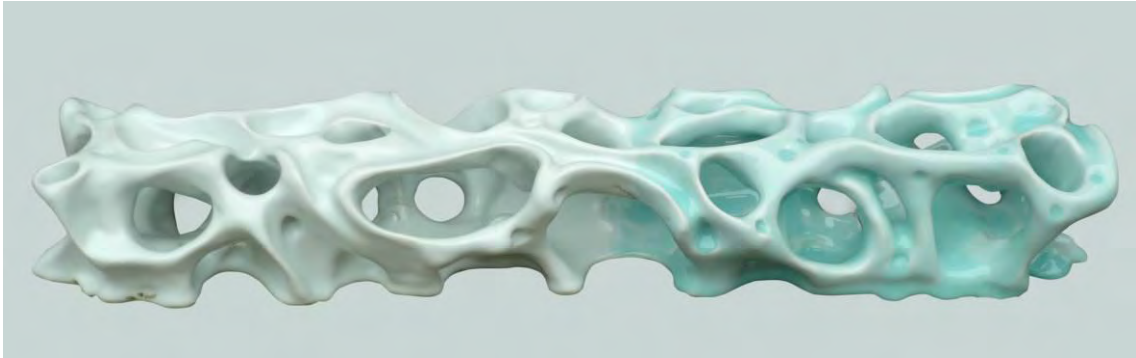


Fig. 160. Bai Ming, *Between Porcelain Stone White and Celadon*, 2014

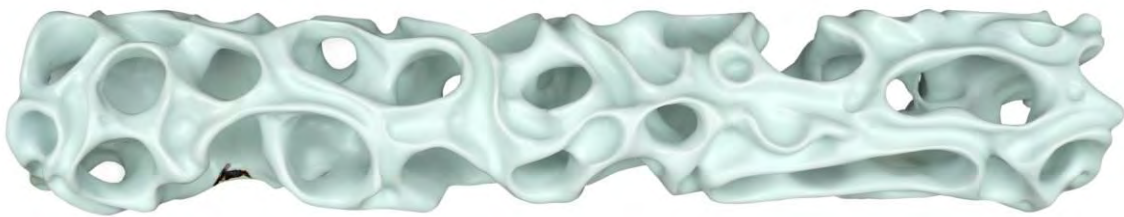


Fig. 161. Bai Ming, *Porcelain Stone River*, 2014



Fig. 162. Wang Qing, *Arcadia II* (Detail), 2013



Fig. 163. *Scholar Rocks: the Top*, 2016



Fig. 164. *Scholar Rocks No. 2, 2016*

2.2: An In-between Space – My Spiritual Rocks

The *Scholar Rocks Series* (2016) [Fig. 163, Fig. 164] was developed on two levels – visual power and conceptual energy. The visual power is based on the breakthrough that I made in the material I chose to use and the display, while the conceptual energy comes from the in-depth research of its meaning and cultural background. These two parts working together made a great contribution to my latest installation work, the *Rock Garden in Fantasy*. Two considerations were significant in developing this work. The first is the consideration of space, which is the core concept that derives from the scholars' rock and its cultural background. The second is the deliberation about material, which includes colour, form and other visible elements, as well as how nature can be involved in the making process.

(1) Space

Compared to my previous works, the *Scholar Rocks Series* comprises much more complicated forms, which have created more spatial interactions both inside and outside of the works. "Space" is the key word when thinking about what is important in scholars' rocks, which was also my impression of real scholars' rocks. As to the aesthetics of scholars' rocks, commentators have concluded there are four basic qualities: "Shou [瘦]", "Zhou [皱]", "Lou [漏]", "Tou [透]". These four qualities are the requirements of the rock's shape and form, which should look lively and vivid. Apart from "Zhou [皱]", which is about texture, three of the four qualities are about space. "Shou [瘦]" literally means skinny, but it also means the stone should look heavy and fat. "Lou [漏]" indicates the stone should not be entirely solid, it should have some open parts. "Tou [透]" is similar to "Lou [漏]", meaning the stone should have some parts you can see through. "Tou [透]" is more about interior space. These three qualities speak of how the scholars' rocks

occupy both inner and outer spaces. Following this, the discussion about “space” also can be extended to “place”, which is how the scholars’ rocks interact their environment, such as gardens or buildings. This is an important step in the progression and development of my work from plinth display into installation.

My previous work *Travelling Series* already shows signs of an interest in inner and outer spaces. Space in the *Scholar Rocks Series* is no longer only on an objective level, because there is an active factor in spaces – movement. This is an invisible movement, which is the description of energy that is created by the inner and outer spaces in the work and it emanates from the observation of real scholars’ rocks. The spaces in the stone have created a power that attracts people to explore it with their eyes, and this exploration is part of movement. The other involvement of movement comes from the connection between inside and outside. The view in the background, as seen through the scholars’ rocks, can be seen as part of the work. People have used rock to create a negative space, and yet treat rocks as positive space. The negative and positive spaces cannot be separated by a straight line; instead, the spaces are intertwined in multiple dimensions. The eyes of the audience keep moving back and forth between the two spaces. This points to a very important focus in Chinese art, which are Xu and Shi (positive and negative) space, understood in two – as well as three-dimensional works.

The process of transformation is very common in Chinese traditional art. For example, the difference between “Xie [写] Yi [意]” Chinese painting and “Gong [工] Bi [笔]” Chinese painting shows how different the transformation could be. “Xie Yi” means picturing the emotion, and so the paintings in this genre do not focus on the accuracy of the object. While “Gong Bi” is the opposite; the paintings carefully show the details of object in an exquisite and delicate way, trying to reflect the object exactly the same as people see it in real life. Both kinds of paintings were important in Chinese painting history, but it is worth noting that

they are representing different ways to recreate through art the same object or idea. For instance, the duck painted by Zhu Da [Fig. 165] is “Xie Yi”, and the bird painted by Emperor Huizong [Fig. 166] is “Gong Bi”. The *Scholar Rocks Series* is similar in spirit to “Xie Yi” painting; the art works have different colour, shape, texture and material to the original inspiration, but they have one thing in common, which is the movement and its energy. Importantly, choosing “Xie Yi” is also my personal way to continue learning about traditional culture.

The *Scholar Rocks Series* applies the previous geometric form based on the *Travelling Series*, but with a few changes. In the *Travelling Series*, the forms were connected to each other on the long side, while in the *Scholar Rocks Series*, they are connected on the short side. Secondly, angled forms were used instead of the previous straight forms. With these changes, the forms became more complicated even before the next step in fabric clay. Except for those differences, the *Scholar Rocks Series* used same the technique to build forms. The work is also able to signify an understanding of space from the real scholars’ rocks, thus finding a way for its spirit to be embodied. It does not matter that the works do not look like the rocks any longer, because the core of rock – the movement, the energy – has moved to the work. This is the transformation that I continued to seek during my research period.



Fig. 165. Zhu Da, *Painting of Duck and Fish* (Detail), Qing Dynasty, Kangxi Period (1689)



Fig. 166. Emperor Huizong, *Five-coloured Parakeet on a Blossoming Apricot Tree*, Northern Song Dynasty (960 – 1127)

(2) Material

Aside from the space created by the form of fabric clay, the material itself works towards the meaning too. How the material works has been mentioned before in this exegesis. In the *Knots Series*, the material holds the quality of fabric and represents brush strokes. In the *Conical Hat Series*, the material became the representation of fibre and agriculture. But in the *Scholar Rocks Series*, the material connected the visual feeling with the meaning of the artworks in a more intimate way. This can be discussed from three aspects – colour, texture and fragility. These three aspects are the natural quality of the material, and also contribute to the work conceptually.

Colour

The *Scholar Rocks Series* are white in varying tones [Fig. 167, Fig. 168], inspired by the original colour of clay. In the earlier stages of the work, I was planning to introduce some colour. But it became obvious that colour did not match the texture and shape of the work if it was to be an installation; the colour gave the works different meanings, which was not what I wished. To bring diversity to the work and to avoid the works looking bare visually, a clear glaze was applied to create slight differences.

There are three reasons why I made the decision to use white. The first reason is that white represents the very beginning of something before it becomes coloured by other elements, which also means it is clean and pure. This series of work is looking for its inner spirit, and so it is fitting to go back to the beginning, to the purest form. The second reason is that white contains less chaos than other colours, and because to humans, colour can have a very strong connection with meanings, for example green is reminiscent of spring, and yellow reminds us of the sun. However, while white also has links that remind us of something, it

is visually much quieter, and the quietness in the colour can help the delivery of meaning in forms. The third reason is that white has many tones within certain ranges, and along with the texture of this series, is able to portray a sense of ageing and the passage of time. This is also the echo of responding to the inside “movement” that the works contain, and the impression of the inner energy.

Texture

Texture is made up of two parts for this series of work. The first is the surface texture; the second is the texture that was created by the material. Technically, the form should not be classified into texture, but because the fabric clay is affected by its fabric speciality, this means that the folds and creases that are created by it actually become part of the texture.

The rough and dry surface texture is a direct result of the texture of the fabric without the covering of glaze [Fig. 169]. This kind of surface works with the white, showing the sense of time and energy. From another point of view, the texture comes from the fabric itself [Fig. 170], which is the most special part of fabric clay. The fabric texture tells people that the work does not purely mimic the shape of the scholars’ rocks; instead, another material has been used to concentrate the spirit. The unlikely texture of the fabric makes meaning of the scholars’ rocks change from heavy rock to something light and floating



Fig. 167. Detail of fired work's colour, type 1



Fig. 168. Detail of fired work's colour, type 2



Fig. 169. Detail of fired work's texture, type 1



Fig. 170. Detail of fired work's texture, type 2

The texture of form also indicates the creases and folds that are created by the fabric clay. The folds can be considered as part of the texture because they play an important role in the fabric's textural look. Aside from this, the other reason to take texture into consideration is its inner quality of nature and uncontrollability. The folds and other details that are in the surface texture are uncontrollable factors, and I chose to keep that look as it was in accord with the concept of nature in real scholars' rocks. This is not like transforming a pattern from one object to another; it is more like planting a concept during the making process, which affects the final result of the work. The Chinese phrase "Zi [自] Ran [然] Er [而] Ran [然]" – let nature be nature, reflects this.

Fragility

Fragility is a technical feature of the work along with the fabric clay. In this series, I chose to control the fragility to a certain extent and also to use fragility as part of the concept.

Several of the works have damaged parts, which is to be expected. The damaged parts and broken edges in the work are not irritating visually, instead, in some cases, the damaged parts help make the connection with natural processes. Indeed the fragility of the work makes perfect sense when the feeling is that the work should hover in the air, gaining a lightness and floating feeling.

At the conceptual level, fragility also responds to aspects of time and energy. Fragility is a word that has historically been linked to ceramics. In the case of fabric clay, the broken ceramic can be seen as an absolute result of fragility – it is the past status of the object being fragile. It is an interesting idea, because in this way, the fragility contains time.

From a political aspect, fragility also represents the current state of Chinese

traditional culture. Especially today, the cultural shock of China's opening to the world and globalization has deeply affected people's ideology, with many values and cultures near the edge of collapse. On the one hand, the *Scholar Rocks Series* is re-reading the culture and executing it in contemporary art forms; on the other hand however, its possibility of being damaged points to the current cultural situation by its materiality.

Through these three parts, colour, texture and fragility, the *Scholar Rocks Series* has been analysed from the material aspect, and how the material contributes to the concept of works has also been explained. The material will always be treated as having equal importance to the concept, which is also the practice based on the result of material research. During the making process [Fig. 171], I hand-made each single unit. Each one has a different look [Fig. 172], and with the various changes in colour and in texture, the work has obtained very interesting and subtle variations.



Fig. 171. Process of *Scholar Rocks Series*

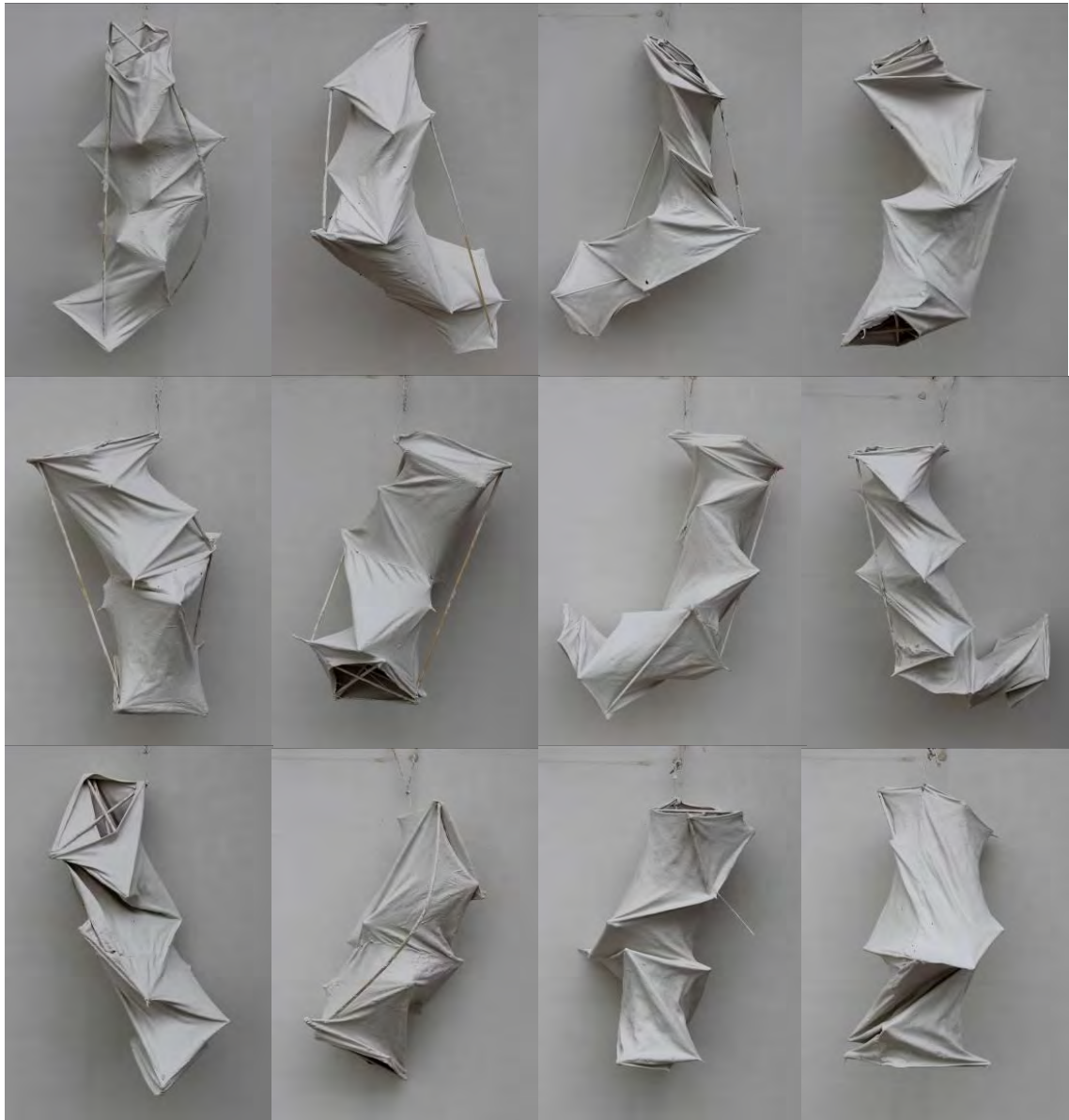


Fig. 172. Different side of element in *Scholar Rocks Series* (before firing)

2.3: *The Rock Garden in Fantasy*

This installation is based on the concept of the Chinese traditional garden, which is also the original location of scholars' rocks. The garden is the representation of hybrid culture that references my research title, because the garden's aesthetic has influenced and been influenced by other kinds of art in historic context.¹²

The breakthrough for my own studio practice is that the *Rock Garden in Fantasy* makes use of space and is shown as an installation. Fabric clay is able to work in space because of its lightness and efficiency in making, meaning the work can be assembled and made by one person, and can be installed in a complicated exhibition space. The second reason is the work's conception is grounded on the idea of a garden, which closely relates to the space and the environment.¹³ So the work chosen to display as an installation is suitable, and it is powerful visually. The last reason is that installation work in ceramic has always been my personal interest, and it also shows a move from on-plinth work to off-plinth work, which is on the edges of both contemporary ceramic art and contemporary art in ceramic media.¹⁴

The *Rock Garden in Fantasy* has been built on a core concept, the garden, which reflects the traditional Chinese garden being the comprehensive representation of culture. The design of traditional gardens has been considered "an important area to understand Chinese national aesthetic."¹⁵ The Chinese traditional garden embodies this aesthetic in its building design, garden structure, plants,

¹² Zong Baihua wrote, "each category of Chinese traditional art (literature, painting, play, music, calligraphy, architecture) has their own special system, and they influence...even contain each other (For example in literature and painting, one can find the influence of architecture, while Chinese gardens and architecture have been influenced by poetry and painting)." From Zong Baihua, *Mei Xue San Bu* [A Walk in Beauty] (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 1981), 31. My translation.

¹³ "The art in architecture and garden is the art that deals with space." Ibid., 63. My translation.

¹⁴ The differences between contemporary ceramic art and contemporary art in ceramic media have been discussed previously.

¹⁵ Ibid., 67. My translation.

decoration etc., which highlight the love and respect for nature that is deeply rooted in Chinese traditional art. The particular garden that the work has reference to is the Lion Grove Garden in Suzhou [Fig. 173].

The Lion Grove Garden is made up of nine scholars' rock mountain ranges, which are separated into the dry mountain view and the watery mountain view. Both types have specific buildings and plant designs. The interesting part is that the garden has several visiting routes designed in it, which aim at create an enjoyable and constant visual experience for the viewers.

The *Rock Garden in Fantasy* [Fig. 174] gives the audience a chance to get in amongst the work. I designed a possible route [Fig. 175] to entice people to walk through. The work becomes an interactive space so that people can communicate with the work. The ceramics are no longer sitting on the plinth; instead the ceramics occupy the space, redefine the space, and people accept them as part of the space that they are currently in.



Fig. 173. Lion Grove Garden, view of Scholars' Rocks



Fig. 174. *Rock Garden in Fantasy* design draft

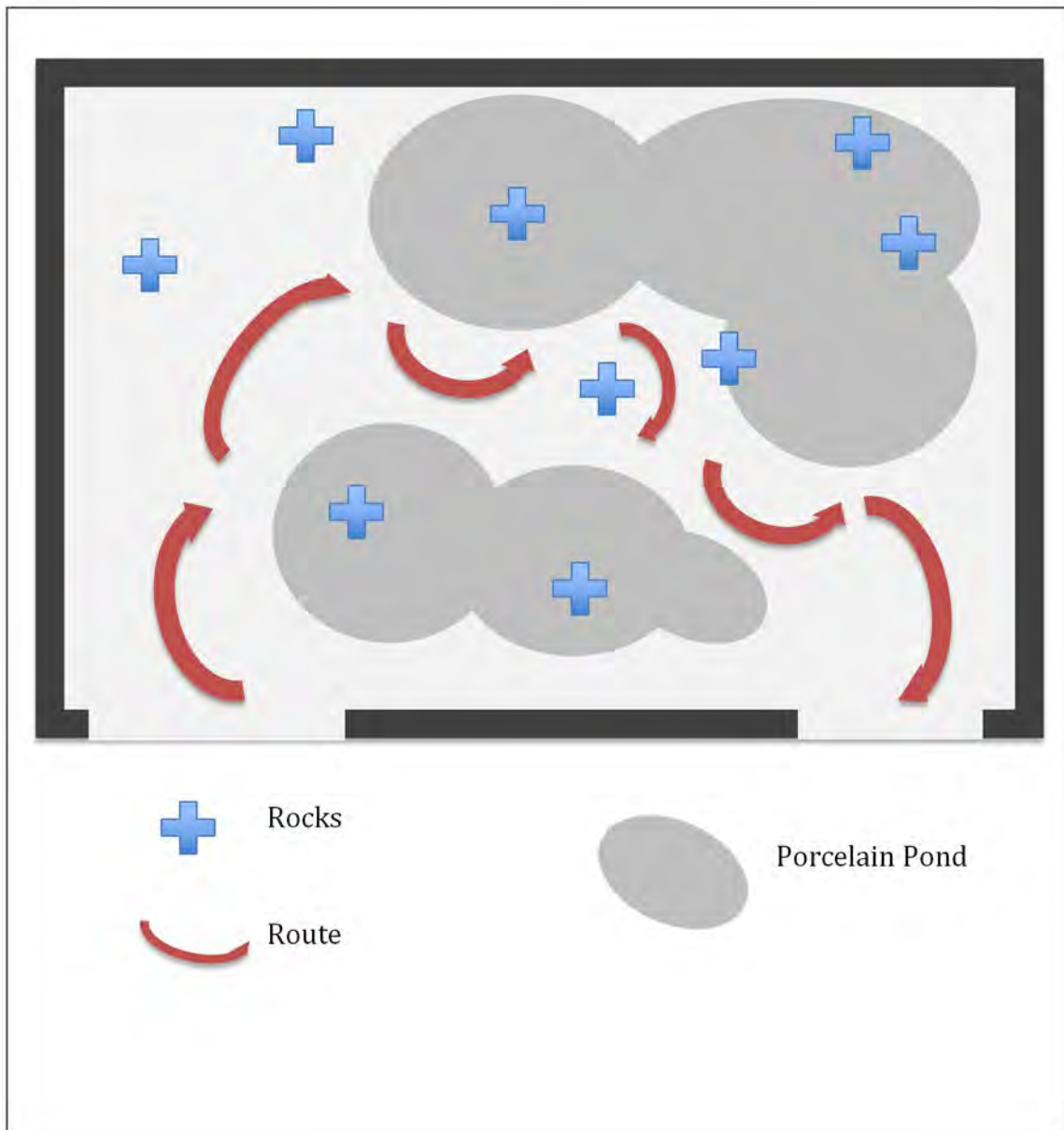


Fig. 175. *Rock Garden in Fantasy Route Design*

From a contemporary art aspect, the garden is not only built for plants, but also a space that contains the connection between the inside and outside of people's imaginations and realities. In the work of the *Rock Garden in Fantasy*, the "garden" is a definition of place and space at the primary level, based on the original meaning of garden. The second level meaning of garden is a place for growing. The garden is an artificial place where people are able to arrange the plants as they wish, and create entertainment through being in it. The view of the garden will change with the season as it is a place that is alive. In the ceramic work, the meaning of growing has been transferred into the ceramic sculpture, which can be seen as being "planted" and is "growing" in the space. The third level of the garden is its connection to a private person. Chinese traditional gardens are historically usually private gardens, and when the garden was sold, the new owner would make certain changes according to his own preference. The gardens have walls and doors to stop being affected by the outside world. They are linked with the person or family who owns the garden, and some of these linkages are designed into the details in the garden. Based on this, *The Rock Garden in Fantasy* is like my garden full of my feelings and thoughts. The word "fantasy" partly shows it as well because fantasy is a personal mental activity. Even though the garden is a defined and enclosed place that is closely connected with an individual person and nature, regardless of its consideration physically or intellectually, the garden itself actually plays the role of connection outside and inside. The garden exists in nature even though it is relatively independent. Being in a garden that is not your own is like being in a totally different but familiar world, yet it is also the inside world of the other person. *The Rock Garden in Fantasy* is based on this idea and seeks to create an accessible spiritual garden with a unique visual experience in contemporary ceramic art language. There are many artists working with ceramic installation under similar concepts, such as Adrián Villar Rojas [Fig. 176] and Neil Forrest [Fig. 177].

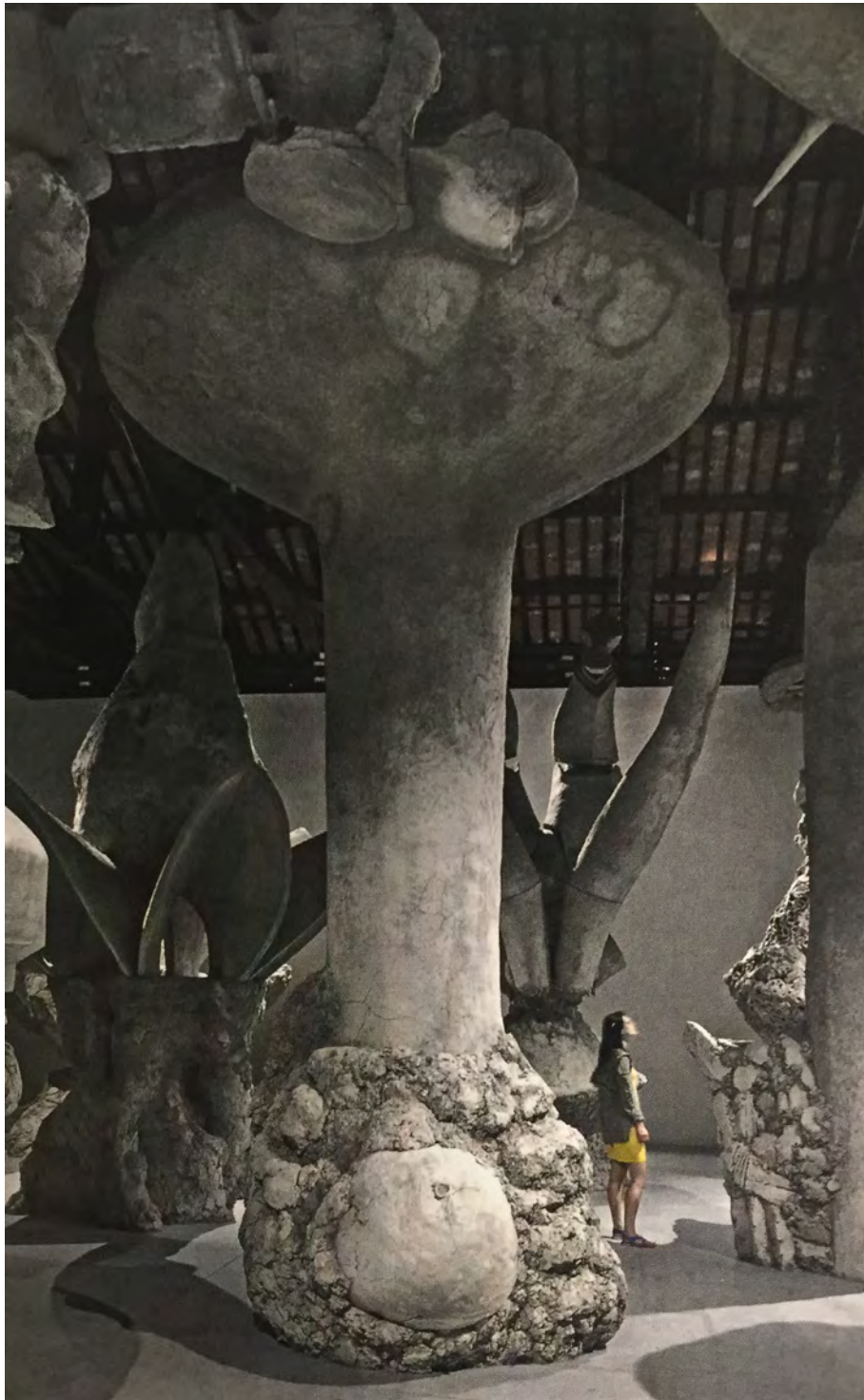


Fig. 176. Adrián Villar Rojas, *Now I will Be With My Son, The Murderer of your Heritage*, 2011



Fig. 177. Neil Forrest, *Scaff*, 2005-2006

The work contains many inside spaces [Fig. 178], which allows an interaction between spaces. It has many forms in the air with no link to the ground. These features make the work look like it is floating and occupying the space; with the seemingly non-ceramic material, the work creates a fantasy world that has been made by transformation and spiritualised rock.

In the work, the rocks' arrangement is inspired by the relationship between the rock mountains and water pools in the garden, which aims at making the garden able to be looked at, able to be walked in and able to be felt. The garden is a place of experience and as an artwork. The rocks in the garden are trying to avoid a rigid and independent impression; they should be linked as a whole with the garden, making the audience a part of it. "Chinese art values the real of imagination more than the real of feeling psychologically",¹⁶ and I hope the garden that I create could be a place that inspire a familiar feeling and also an un-familiar feeling at the same time. I tried several ways to enhance the feeling of works growing in the space, and also to build up a connection with the viewer. I experimented with work hung in the air at different heights [Fig. 179], and also slightly touching the floor [Fig. 180]. Before starting to design the final work, I did one relatively complete trail installation [Fig. 181, Fig. 182, Fig. 183], which gave me a general impression and imagination for the final works.

¹⁶ Li Zehou, *Hua Xia Mei Xue Mei Xue Si Jiang* [Huaxia Esthetic and Four Talks about Esthetic] (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2008), 161.

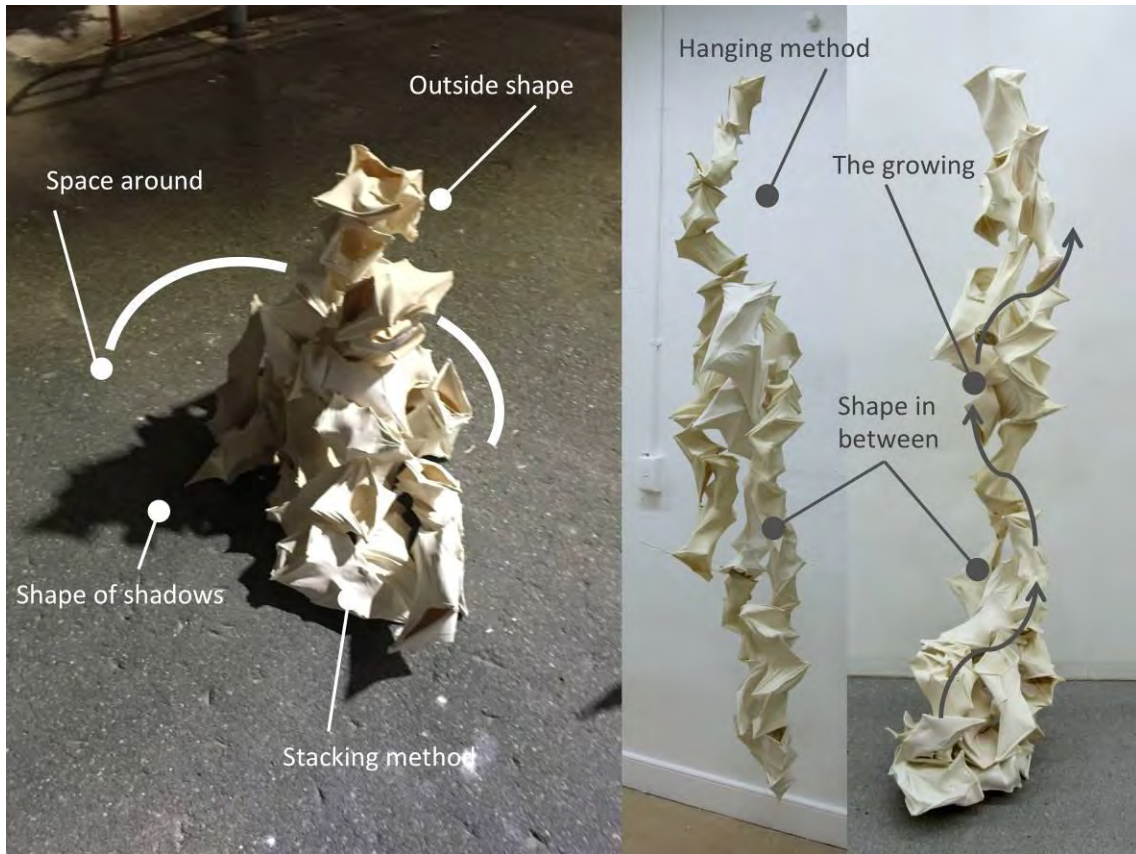


Fig. 178. *Rock Garden in Fantasy space analysis*



Left: **Fig. 179.** *Rock Garden in Fantasy* trial installation 1



Right: **Fig. 180.** *Rock Garden in Fantasy* trial installation 2



Fig. 181. *Rock Garden in Fantasy* trial installation 3



Fig. 182. *Rock Garden in Fantasy* trial installation 3 (Detail)



Fig. 183. *Rock Garden in Fantasy* trial installation 3 (Detail)

The *Scholar Rocks Series* was like a conclusion when I reached a certain period of my research on culture, form and ceramic art. The works, especially the final installation work, reached the point that I kept seeking in the research, which is the organic hybrid of conceptual feeling and visual objects. The effort and results are significant in my research, but also identified my work in the hybrid place between contemporary art and studio ceramic art. The work is also trying to reach a point, which is a concept of Chinese art – “Yi Jing”. As Li Zehou said, “Although it may be that emotion and imagination have always been limited in a certain closed and harmonious system of time and space in Chinese art, but it also may be the reason that natural objects have the possibility to lose their dissident quality, mysteriousness and threatening, which makes it possible to develop its relationship with human emotions. Thus, it has finally created a basic concept of Chinese art: the artistic ‘Yi Jing’ (artistic conception, noted by author).”¹⁷ The *Scholar Rocks Series* is my response to the culture that I belong to and transforms it in art via my art language. “Dividing appreciation of beauty into three aspects, the ‘entertainment visually’, the ‘entertainment mentally’ and the ‘entertainment spiritually’. These three aspects is the human (humankind and individual)’s expression of aesthetic ability in forms.”¹⁸ Once the work has “Yi Jing”, it could bring the audience “entertainment spiritually”, which why the work is meaningful as an artwork.¹⁹

¹⁷ Li Zehou, *Hua Xia Mei Xue Mei Xue Si Jiang* [Huaxia Esthetic and Four Talks about Esthetic] (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2008), 158. My translation.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 342. My Translation.

¹⁹ “So, the form of artworks has extended in two aspects based on the original accumulation. One aspect is the creator’s and appreciator’s nature body approach to, match to and isomorphic mapping to the nature (universe), which is what the “human’s nature-ing”. The other aspect is its time and societal quality.” *Ibid.*, 373.

Summary

The *Scholar Rocks Series*, especial the *Rock Garden in Fantasy* have made different attempts at having an effect on the forms of contemporary ceramic art and culture-related thoughts compared to the *Conical Hat Series*. The *Conical Hat Series* developed the visible cultural objects and replaced them with other materials, also using the texture of the material and colour as part of its meaning. The rock-related works started with a visual memory and searched back to the original object, and then transformed its spirit and soul into a totally different material and form. The thinking triangle can be applied here for both series of works. The most significant development is that the work has entered the installation form at the end of the research period, which can be seen as a move from *contemporary ceramic art* to *contemporary art in ceramic media* according to my statement about the difference between them, and also pushed the hybrid of culture and contemporary ceramic art towards contemporary art. Both works have fulfilled the original requirements that I set for myself, which was to embed the cultural elements in the work instead of forcing them on the art in a shallow way, and also to incorporate a hint of personal emotion. The work still has room to develop.²⁰

Hybridization in my work happens firstly between materials and techniques, and fabric clay is the result; secondly it happens at the intellectual level between traditional culture and external influences; the last is the hybrid between traditional culture and contemporary ceramic art, which is the major part of the research.

²⁰ Such as the *Conical Hat Series*, where the colour could be richer or simpler, and the mould-making is still worth pursuing. I feel that the rock-related works are more mature compared to the *Conical Hat Series*, but still present many opportunities to develop their form, and their status in space.

Conclusion

In retrospect, the *Scholar Rocks Series* had two points of origin: its cultural linkages are part of a process that started with my *Conical Hat Series*, while in terms of construction, it is an extension of the *Travelling Series*. The *Conical Hat Series* can be seen as the impetus for the *Scholar Rocks Series*, because I realized the limitation and inadequacy of the work at the last stage of the *Conical Hat Series*. The exploration of how to transform a cultural consideration into art practice, but not only through the use of superficial patterns or cultural icons, became the main impetus for the *Scholar Rocks Series*. Inspiration for the *Scholar Rocks Series* originally came from the memory of scholars' rocks mainly in Chinese painting, even though this was not clear to me at the beginning. The lines and angles that were created by the bamboo sticks pointing out from inside of the fabric's closed forms were reminiscent of visual experiences with scholars' rocks in painting. This similarity in visual experiences became the start of an exploration of scholars' rocks in Chinese culture, including in old documents such as the *Yun Lin Stone Dictionary*¹ and in Chinese classic gardens. The project developed scholars' rocks conceptually, and also expanded the potential of ceramic art technically. It transformed the technical focus from textile into the ceramic making-process, and constructed works not only in the process but also after firing. The works were taken off the plinths, and stand in the viewing space. The other development is that the *Scholar Rocks Series* stands for itself, but also stands for the theme "garden" in the final show. This has moved the final show from a purely ceramic exhibition into a large exhibited installation; each individual work is part of the final show's total component and works for the

¹ *Yun Lin Stone Dictionary* is the first book about stone in Chinese history. The author is Du Wan. The book was written in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127 – 1279). The *Yun Lin Stone Dictionary* has recorded 116 types of stone, and described stone's colour, shape, form, pattern etc. It also recorded the information about how to make scholars' rocks. See also footnote 11 in Chapter Four.

main motif, which also reflects my understanding of my own culture in a contemporary setting.

These two series of works give evidence of my journey of investigating the relationships within culture, form, contemporary art expression, ceramic art and personal understandings. What these two projects did is provide an answer for the research question – where is the hybrid place between Chinese traditional culture and contemporary ceramic art?

The key word “hybrid” ties together my theoretical research, material experimentation and studio practice. “Hybrid” means the organic process of merging two separate areas and the result of it. In this exegesis, the major manifestation of hybridity has been investigated through the relationships and overlaps between traditional culture and contemporary ceramic art. As I have deepened and refined my research, the triangle that I posited between culture, form and ceramic art has been modified. The three key words – culture, form and ceramic art, with their related levels have not changed, but the relationship between words has changed.

The theoretical research I undertook during fieldwork was the motivator for these changes. The resources collected mainly focused on the culture-related works, which brought a further understanding of the three points in the research triangle.

In the research triangle, “form” was split into two levels “external form”, and “internal form”, which is the spirit and cultural potential of the form and its forming process. “Culture” was studied in connection to art and form from different points of view, and detailed specifically in its role with regard to ceramic art. The role of culture was analysed in terms of “direct influence” and the “transformed idea” which do at times overlap. The exegesis also explored the

relationship between culture and tradition, which are tied with each other and were discussed in light of examples from other artists' practice and my own work. I placed "ceramic art" at the top of the research triangle because it is the start of the discussion and the end as well. It was considered across two areas – contemporary ceramic art and contemporary art in ceramic media, which indicates the discussion between craft and art on the one side; and on the other side, points to my concern with "hybrid" practice.

In the original research triangle², the three key words were located in the centre and their related levels were on the periphery, because I was using the research triangle was trying to expand my understanding; in other words, this is an outward research process. At the end of this process, I have modified the triangle [Fig. 184], so that the key words are located outside of their related levels, which had built a stable structure for the research frame. This indicates that the direction of thinking has shifted from outward to inward. The practice-led research has brought me to one key goal rooted in my own practice. This goal is to reach a place of hybrid practice between traditional culture and contemporary ceramic art. Thus, I feel that I have found a route to re-centre my direction.

While the research triangle can be seen as one outcome of my project, another result is the experiments that I did with fabric clay. My practice is grounded on the material base, which not only the material that I primarily use, but also part of the meaning and material's spirit that is embedded in ceramic art. Based on the discussion between craft and art, the research has brought me to realise that the material is both the body of artwork and the carrier of its meaning. This realization leads the material research from a casual experience to a thoughtful scientific process. Simultaneously, it helps build up the material level of my explanation of "hybrid" practice. I conducted systematic exploration on fabric clay, including fabrics, clays, forming methods, colours, glazes and firing process.

² See Chapter Two, figure 29.

It has been recorded in a well-designed recording system, and uploaded to an open access online database for sharing with other researchers. Using handbooks of ceramic technique as a model, this database aims to address the inadequate knowledge of “fabric clay” as an academic term.

There are four completed practice projects in the research period. *Knots Series* and *Travelling Series*, which were at the stage of exploring the ability of material. *Conical Hat Series* and *Scholar Rocks Series* are focused more on the relationship of form and culture.

My *Scholar Rocks Series* is premised on seeing the reinterpretation of traditional culture in contemporary art as the major subject. More importantly, this body of work has expanded the possibility of fabric clay in my studio practice. This may be meaningful to other artists who work with similar material, on edge of contemporary art in ceramic media and contemporary ceramic art.

The research started from a simple wish – to create ceramic artworks that relate to myself in contemporary ceramic art language. Along the way, it developed to a broad investigation of the field of Chinese contemporary ceramic art via the fieldtrip and case studies, with the support of theoretical resources and scientific material research. The research constructed a core research model based on the research triangle of form, culture and ceramic art, and has resulted in four series of completed works as my answer of the question of what is hybrid practice for me, which is the organic hybridization of understanding to surround environment that keeps affecting me, the particular interest in fabric clay and my personal expressive way in ceramic art.

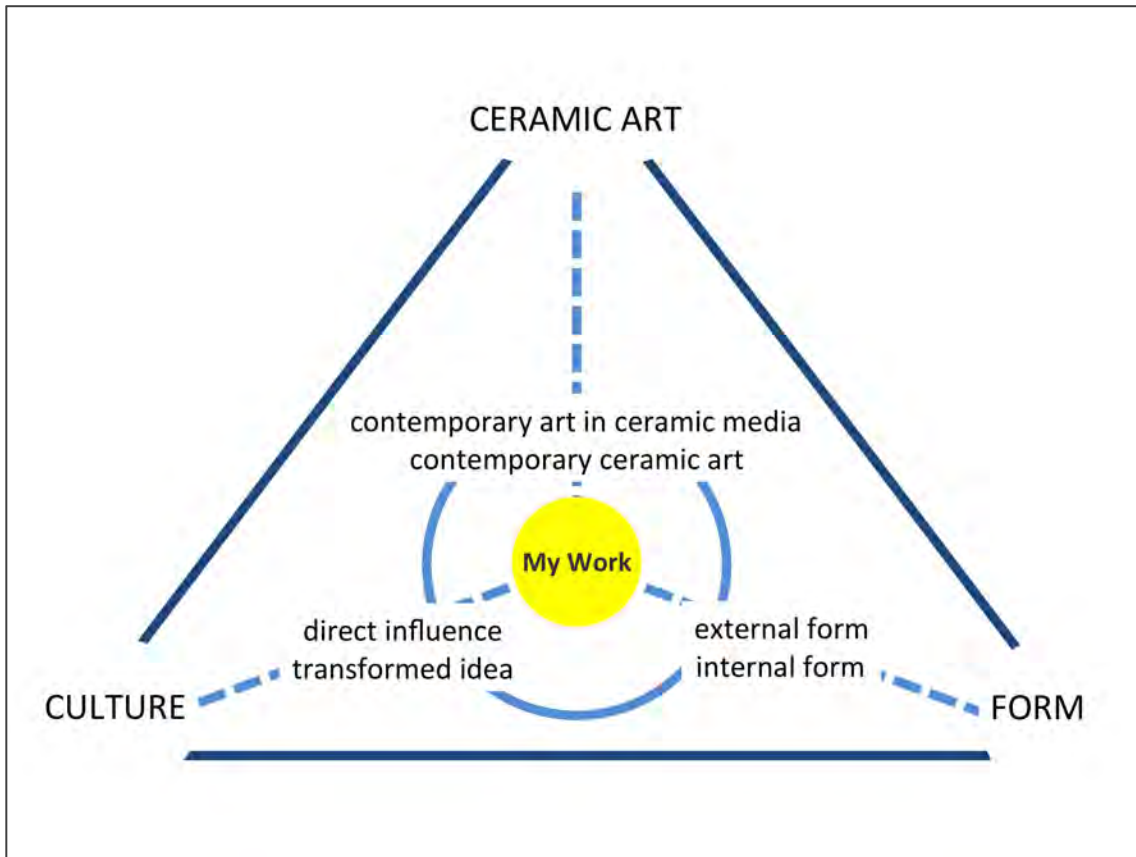


Fig. 184. Modified Research Triangle

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Appendix: Analysis of Key Tests

During the research period, several key tests were conducted which decided the main direction of the research and practice that followed. Among those tests, I have chosen two tests as examples: one is a materials test, and the other one is a glaze test. The detailed technical analysis with images and material and firing specifications can be accessed at the following website:

<http://www.fabricclay.wordpress.com>

Below I offer a brief account of two of my test firings as an example.




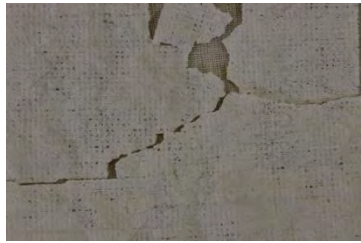






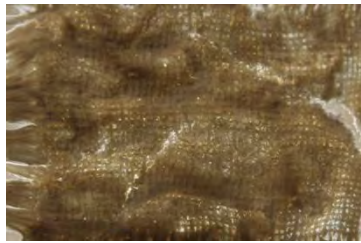

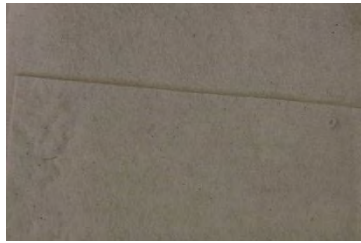


TEST RECORDING 2014.02.17




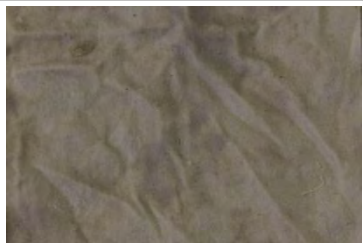
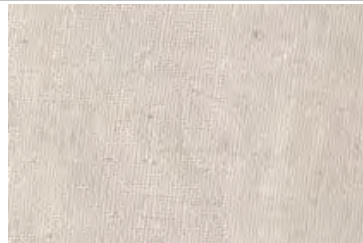
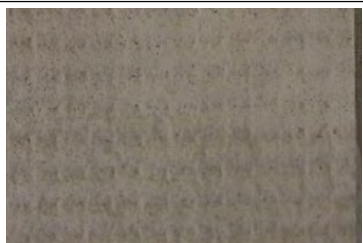
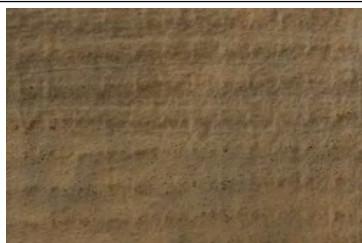

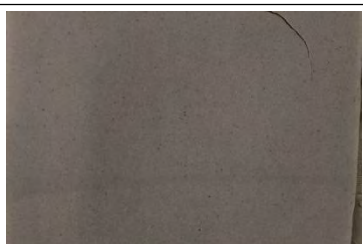


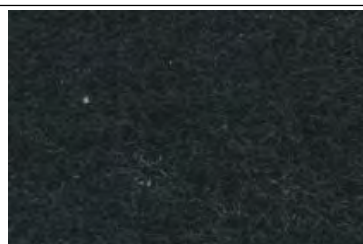
The first test was 7.TEST RECORDING 2014.02.17. This test examined different kinds of fabric and their physical qualities, and also started several glaze tests with the aim of increasing the strength of fabric clay.








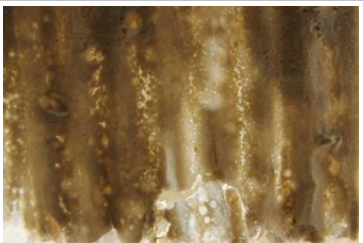
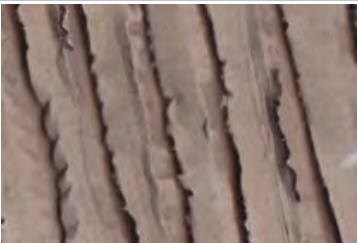

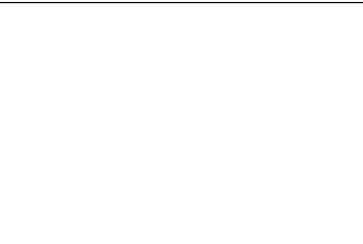
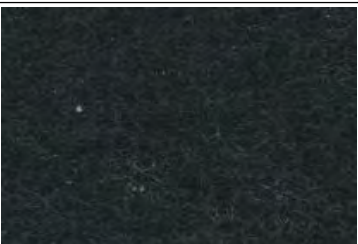
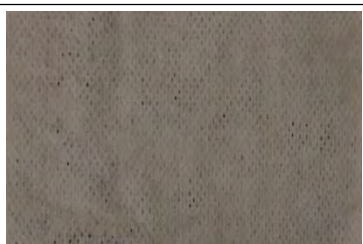

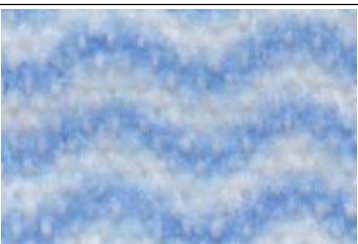
This firing temperature was 1260°C in oxidation firing in a gas kiln which took six hours to finish. This was high temperature firing, and the clay was PB103. Ten kinds of material were tested and their behaviours were recorded in the experiment, which was the main goal of this firing. As to the glaze test, it was the combination of kaolin, feldspar, alumina, whiting and talc in different proportions, aimed at finding a suitable base glaze for further development.

The material included sponge cloth (M14), flax (M15), cotton cloth (M16), yarn (M17), non-woven (M18), paperboard (M19), paperboard (M20), sponge (M21), felt (M21) and wipes (M10). Among these material tests, assessment of the M15, M17, M18 and M22 used two methods of applying the clay slip—dipping and

brushing; the others were only dipped in slip. The photos of the test results are below:

Test Result from 7.TEST RECORDING 2014.02.17		
After Firing	After Firing (photo against light)	Fabric Material
		
7.1.1 M18+7.C brush	7.1.1 M18+7.C brush	M18 Non-woven
		
7.1.2 M18+7.C dip	7.1.2 M18+7.C dip	M18 Non-woven
		
7.2.1 M15+7.C brush	7.2.1 M15+7.C brush	M15 Flax
		
7.2.2 M15+7.C dip	7.2.2 M15+7.C dip	M15 Flax
		
7.3.1 M22+7.C brush	7.3.1 M22+7.C brush	M22 Felt

		
7.3.2 M22+7.C dip	7.3.2 M22+7.C dip	M22 Felt
		
7.4.1 M16+7.C brush	7.4.1 M16+7.C brush	M16 Cotton Cloth
		
7.4.2 M16+7.C dip	7.4.2 M16+7.C dip	M16 Cotton Cloth
		
7.5 M14+7.C dip	7.5 M14+7.C dip	M14 Sponge Cloth
		
7.6 M19+7.C dip	7.6 M19+7.C dip	M19 Paperboard
		
7.7 M21(soft)+7.C dip	7.7 M21(soft)+7.C dip	M21 Sponge (soft side)

		
7.8.1 M17+7.C brush	7.8.1 M17+7.C brush	M17 Yarn
		
7.8.2 M17+7.C dip	7.8.2 M17+7.C dip	M17 Yarn
		
7.9 M20+7.C dip	7.9 M20+7.C dip	M20 Paperboard
		
7.10 M21(hard side)+7.C dip		M21 Sponge (hard side)
		
7.11 M10+7.C dip	7.11 M10+7.C dip	M10 Wipe

The test recorded physical qualities including absorbency of the clay slip, the clay slip's density, split possibility, difficulty of making, flatness of surface, pick-up ability from board, strength before and after firing, surface texture, transparent level, size before and after firing, and weight changes. Some of them relate to practical experience, and some are physical test data. The test results are listed below:

Sponge Cloth (M14)	Test recording number is 7.5. It has high absorbency of slip, no split, hard to get off a flat surface, has strong strength before and after firing, has texture on surface, and has low light transmittance.
Flax (M15)	Test recording number is 7.2.1 (brush on) and 7.2.2 (dip in). Both have strong absorbency, no split after firing, easy to apply slip, easy to pick up from board, translucency after firing, have strong texture on surface. The 7.2.1 had low strength before and after firing. The 7.2.2 had medium strength before firing and became lower strength after firing.
Cotton Cloth (M16)	Test recording number is 7.4.1 (brush on) and 7.4.2 (dip in). Both have strong absorbency, no split after firing, easy to apply slip, easy to pick up from board, and have medium light transmittance after firing. The 7.4.1 has low strength before and after firing, and it was easy to make it flat. The 7.4.2 has medium strength before and after firing, became wrinkled after dip in slip, and has texture on surface.
Yarn (M17)	Test recording number is 7.8.1 (brush on) and 7.8.2 (dip in). Both have strong absorbency, no split after firing, easy to apply slip, slightly hard to pick up from board, have low light transmittance, and have texture on the surface. The 7.8.1 has low strength before firing and gains high strength after firing. The 7.8.2 has medium strength before firing and gains high strength after firing
Non-woven (M18)	Test recording number is 7.1.1 (brush on) and 7.1.2 (dip in). Both

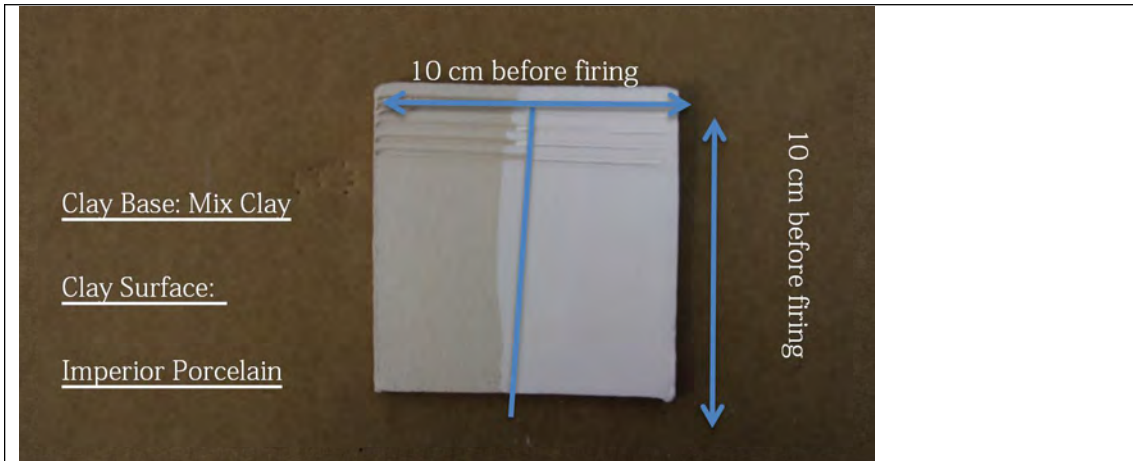
	<p>have strong absorbency, no split after firing, easy to apply slip, easy to pick up from board, have high light transmittance, have texture on surface, and both have low strength before and after firing. The 7.8.1 and the 7.8.2 have basically the same quality.</p>
Paper Board (M19)	<p>Test recording number is 7.6. It has low absorbency of slip, half part becomes split, has strong strength before firing and gains medium strength after firing, has texture on the surface, and has medium light transmittance.</p>
Paper Board (M20)	<p>Test recording number is 7.9. It has low absorbency of slip, half part becomes split, hard to pick up off flat surface, has medium strength before firing and gains strong strength after firing, has texture on surface, and has low light transmittance.</p>
Sponge (M21)	<p>Test recording number is 7.10. It has high absorbency of slip, easily becomes split, easy to pick up off flat surface, has strong strength before and after firing, has texture on surface, and has low light transmittance.</p>
Felt (M22)	<p>Test recording number is 7.3.1 (brush on) and 7.3.2 (dip in). Both have low absorbency, no split after firing, slightly hard to apply slip, have medium light transmittance, have texture on the surface, and have strong strength before and after firing. The 7.3.1 is easy to pick up off a flat surface, while the 7.3.2 is hard to get off a flat surface.</p>
Wipe (M10)	<p>Test recording number is 7.11. It has high absorbency of slip, no split, easy to pick up off a flat surface, has low strength before the firing and gains high strength after firing, has texture on the surface, and has low light transmittance.</p>

TEST RECORDING 2015.08.24

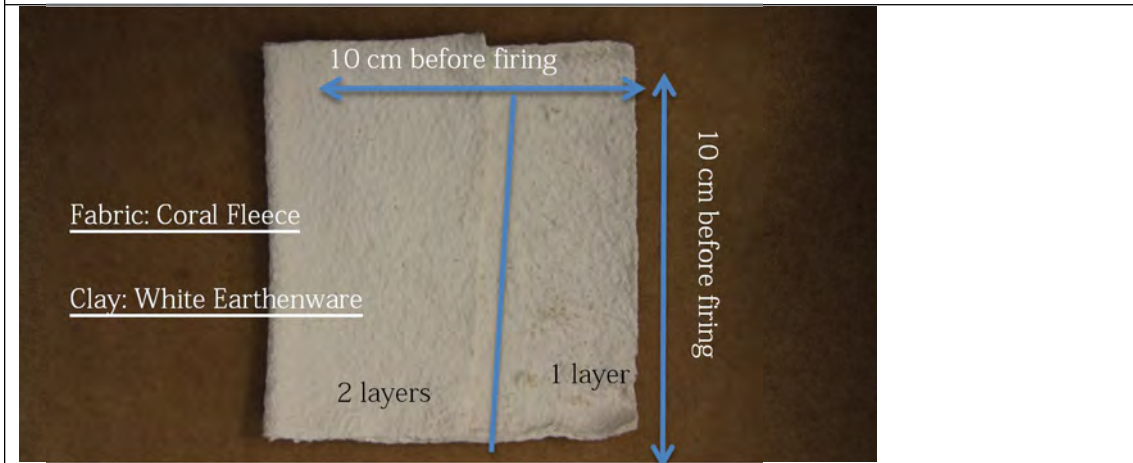
The second key test was 54.TEST RECORDING 2015.08.24, which is an example of glaze testing. This was not the first glaze test in the research period, there were several more tests conducted before that, but this is the representative one in the glaze test system that I was using. The basic concept of testing glaze is to find a suitable clear glaze first, then to add oxides or colour stains into it to get colour glaze. The 54.TEST RECORDING 2015.08.24 tested seven kinds of colour stains and ten kinds of oxides in two different clay slips and one glaze, and also in two different types of test tiles. The test showed a broad spectrum of colours, but also reflected how the same oxides behave differently on a different base.

The tests used Imperial Clay (100ml/136g) and White Midfire Clay (100ml/111.6g) as the two base clay slip, and Glaze 46.G.2 (100g) as the clear glaze base. It tested seven colour stains includes Green, Yellow, Orange, Purple, Red, Dark Blue, Light Blue, and ten oxides including Barium Carbonate, Cobalt Carbonate, Copper Carbonate, Iron Oxide Red, Chrome Oxide, Cobalt Oxide, Lithium, Manganese Dioxide, Nickel Oxide, Zinc Oxide. These ten elements were tested on two clay slip bases; only Iron Oxide, Manganese Dioxide and Nickel Oxide were tested with the clear glaze base. On each test tile, the colour was tested in four proportions by adding 1g, 3g, 5g and 7g in 100ml clay slip or 100g glaze from the bottom to the top of the test tile. Each test was on two types of test tiles, the recycled clay test tile and the fabric clay test tile.

The results of the tests are as below in the images. As noted above, there are two types of test tiles, the clay tile and the fabric clay tile.



Tile 46.1



Tile 46.2

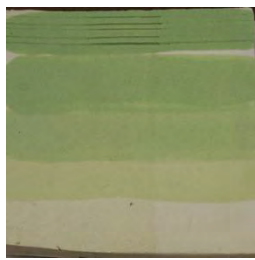
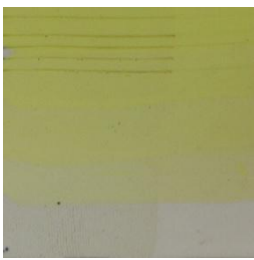






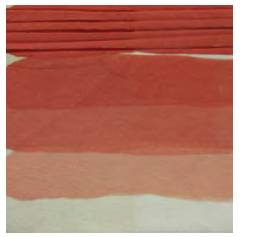




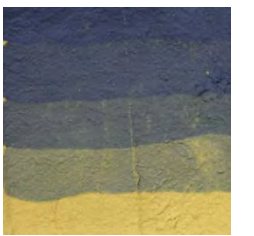

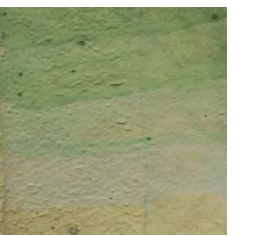

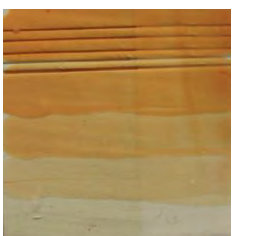
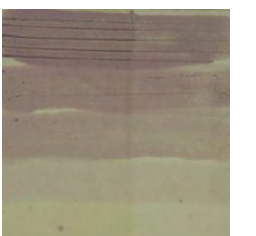

The glaze recipes are as follows:



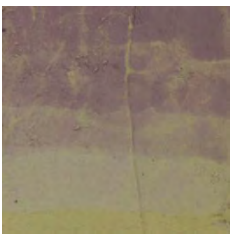

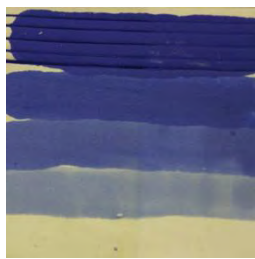

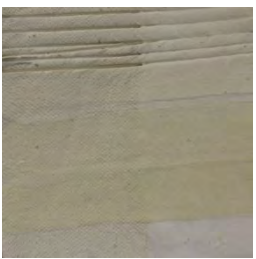




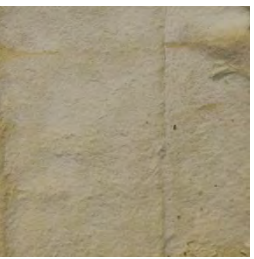

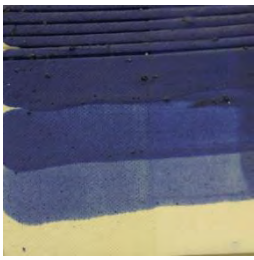
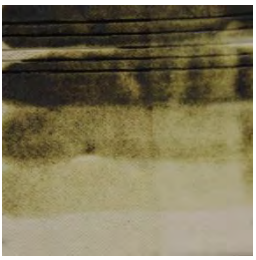
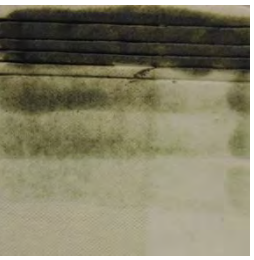
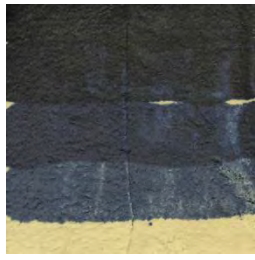
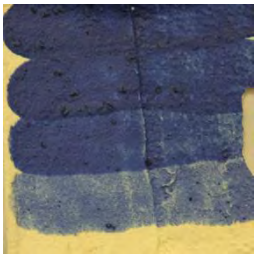
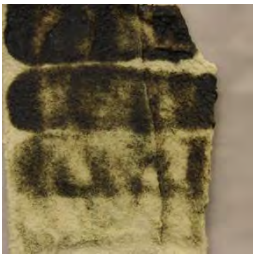

54.G.1	Material	White Midfire	Green Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.2	Material	White Midfire	Yellow Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.3	Material	White Midfire	Orange Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.4	Material	White Midfire	Purple Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.5	Material	White Midfire	Red Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.6	Material	White Midfire	D Blue Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.7	Material	White Midfire	L Blue Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.8	Material	Imperior White	Green Colour Stain

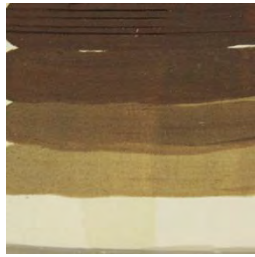
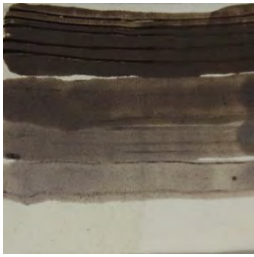
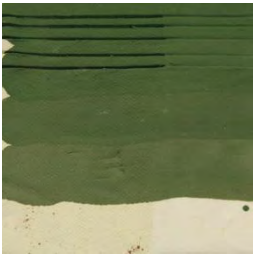
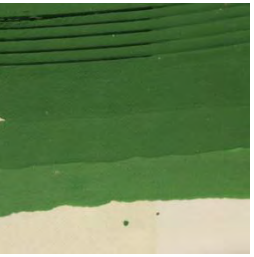
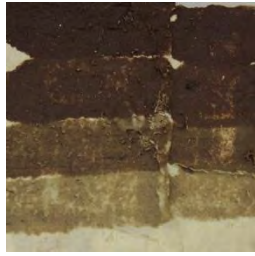
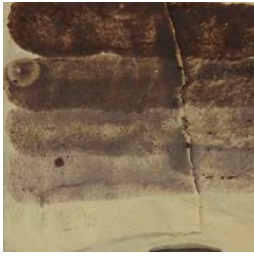


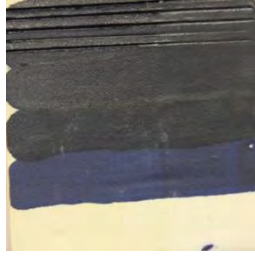
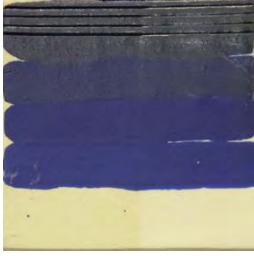


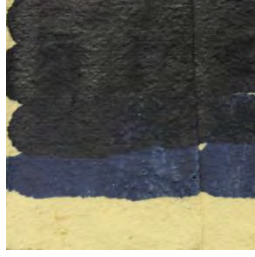



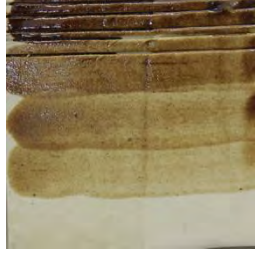

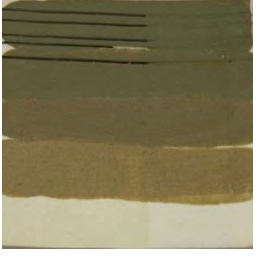
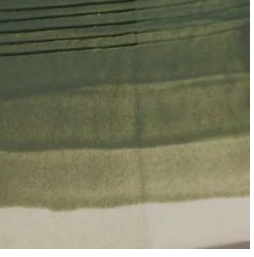
	Wet.	100ml/136g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.9	Material	Imperior White	Yellow Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/136g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.10	Material	Imperior White	Orange Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/136g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.11	Material	Imperior White	Purple Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/136g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.12	Material	Imperior White	Red Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/136g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.13	Material	Imperior White	D Blue Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/136g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.14	Material	Imperior White	L Blue Colour Stain
	Wet.	100ml/136g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.15	Material	White Midfire	Barium Carb.
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.16	Material	Imperior White	Barium Carb.
	Wet.	100ml/136g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.17	Material	White Midfire	Cobalt Carb.
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.18	Material	Imperior White	Cobalt Carb.
	Wet.	100ml/136g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.19	Material	White Midfire	Copper Carb.
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.20	Material	Imperior White	Copper Carb.
	Wet.	100ml/136g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.21	Material	White Midfire	Iron Ox-Red
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.22	Material	Imperior White	Iron Ox-Red
	Wet.	100ml/136g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.23	Material	White Midfire	Chrome Ox
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.24	Material	Imperior White	Chrome Ox
	Wet.	100ml/136g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.25	Material	White Midfire	Cobalt Ox
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.26	Material	Imperior White	Cobalt Ox
	Wet.	100ml/136g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.27	Material	White Midfire	Lithium
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.28	Material	Imperior White	Lithium
	Wet.	100ml/136g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.29	Material	White Midfire	Manganese Dioxide
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T


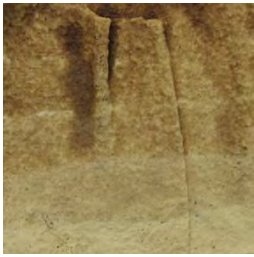
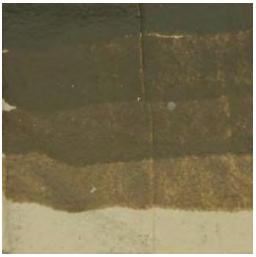



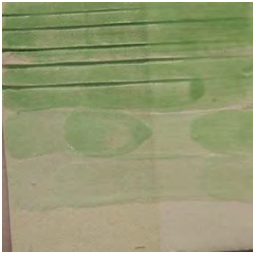
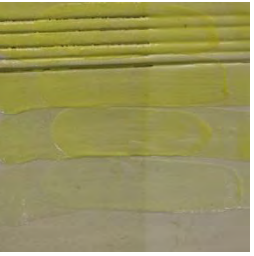
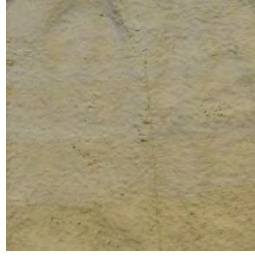
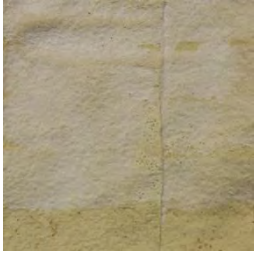
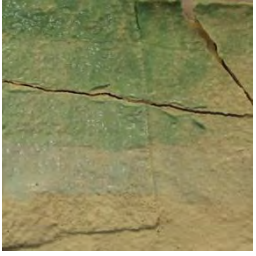

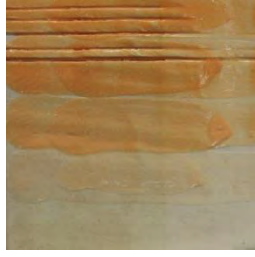


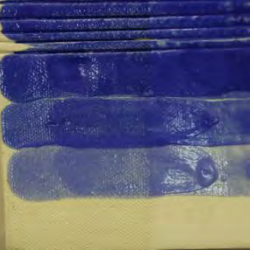
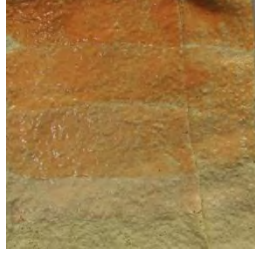

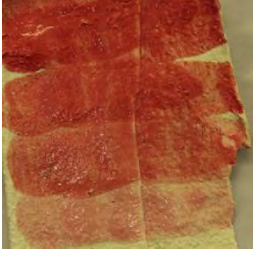
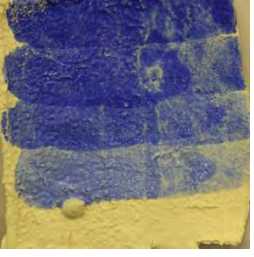
54.G.30	Material	Imperior White	Manganese Dioxide
	Wet.	100ml/136g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.31	Material	White Midfire	Nickel Oxide
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.32	Material	Imperior White	Nickel Oxide
	Wet.	100ml/136g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.33	Material	White Midfire	Zinc Ox
	Wet.	100ml/111.6g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.34	Material	Imperior White	Zinc Ox
	Wet.	100ml/136g Wet	2-8/+2 B to T
54.G.35	Material	Nepheline Syenite 50g / Zinc OX 12.5g / Silica 37.5 g (46.G.2)	Green Colour Stain
	Wet.	100g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.36	Material	Nepheline Syenite 50g / Zinc OX 12.5g / Silica 37.5 g (46.G.2)	Yellow Colour Stain
	Wet.	100g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.37	Material	Nepheline Syenite 50g / Zinc OX 12.5g / Silica 37.5 g (46.G.2)	Orange Colour Stain
	Wet.	100g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.38	Material	Nepheline Syenite 50g / Zinc OX 12.5g / Silica 37.5 g (46.G.2)	Purple Colour Stain
	Wet.	100g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.39	Material	Nepheline Syenite 50g / Zinc OX 12.5g / Silica 37.5 g (46.G.2)	Red Colour Stain
	Wet.	100g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.40	Material	Nepheline Syenite 50g / Zinc OX 12.5g / Silica 37.5 g (46.G.2)	D Blue Colour Stain
	Wet.	100g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.41	Material	Nepheline Syenite 50g / Zinc OX 12.5g / Silica 37.5 g (46.G.2)	L Blue Colour Stain
	Wet.	100g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.42	Material	Nepheline Syenite 50g / Zinc OX 12.5g / Silica 37.5 g (46.G.2)	Iron Ox
	Wet.	100g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.43	Material	Nepheline Syenite 50g / Zinc OX 12.5g / Silica 37.5 g (46.G.2)	Manganese Dioxide
	Wet.	100g	1-7/+2 B to T
54.G.44	Material	Nepheline Syenite 50g / Zinc OX 12.5g / Silica 37.5 g (46.G.2)	Nickel Ox
	Wet.	100g	1-7/+2 B to T

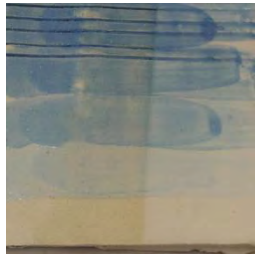
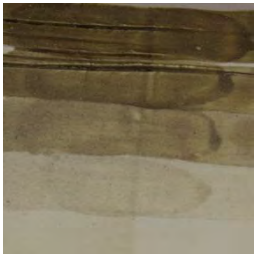

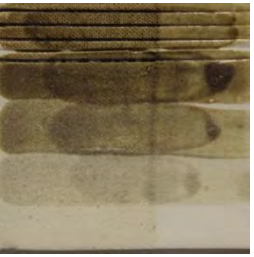
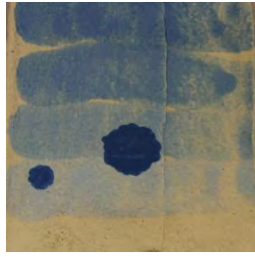
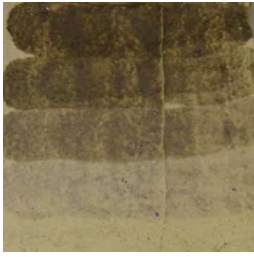

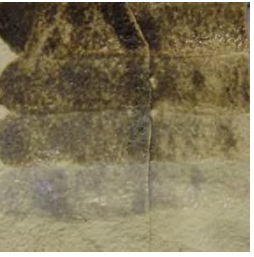
The pictures of test results are as follows:

			
54.G.1+ Tile 46.1	54.G.2+ Tile 46.1	54.G.3+ Tile 46.1	54.G.4+ Tile 46.1
			
54.G.1+ Tile 46.2	54.G.2+ Tile 46.2	54.G.3+ Tile 46.2	54.G.4+ Tile 46.2
			
54.G.5+ Tile 46.1	54.G.6+ Tile 46.1	54.G.7+ Tile 46.1	54.G.8+ Tile 46.1
			
54.G.5+ Tile 46.2	54.G.6+ Tile 46.2	54.G.7+ Tile 46.2	54.G.8+ Tile 46.2
			
54.G.9+ Tile 46.1	54.G.10+ Tile 46.1	54.G.11+ Tile 46.1	54.G.12+ Tile 46.1

			
54.G.9+ Tile 46.2	54.G.10+ Tile 46.2	54.G.11+ Tile 46.2	54.G.12+ Tile 46.2
			
54.G.13+ Tile 46.1	54.G.14+ Tile 46.1	54.G.15+ Tile 46.1	54.G.16+ Tile 46.1
			
54.G.13+ Tile 46.2	54.G.14+ Tile 46.2	54.G.15+ Tile 46.2	54.G.16+ Tile 46.2
			
54.G.17+ Tile 46.1	54.G.18+ Tile 46.1	54.G.19+ Tile 46.1	54.G.20+ Tile 46.1
			
54.G.17+ Tile 46.2	54.G.18+ Tile 46.2	54.G.19+ Tile 46.2	54.G.20+ Tile 46.2

			
54.G.21+ Tile 46.1	54.G.22+ Tile 46.1	54.G.23+ Tile 46.1	54.G.24+ Tile 46.1
			
54.G.21+ Tile 46.2	54.G.22+ Tile 46.2	54.G.23+ Tile 46.2	54.G.24+ Tile 46.2
			
54.G.25+ Tile 46.1	54.G.26+ Tile 46.1	54.G.27+ Tile 46.1	54.G.28+ Tile 46.1
			
54.G.25+ Tile 46.2	54.G.26+ Tile 46.2	54.G.27+ Tile 46.2	54.G.28+ Tile 46.2
			
54.G.29+ Tile 46.1	54.G.30+ Tile 46.1	54.G.31+ Tile 46.1	54.G.32+ Tile 46.1

			
54.G.29+ T Tile 46.2	54.G.30+ Tile 46.2	54.G.31+ Tile 46.2	54.G.32+ Tile 46.2
			
54.G.33+ Tile 46.1	54.G.34+ Tile 46.1	54.G.35+ Tile 46.1	54.G.36+ Tile 46.1
			
54.G.33+ T Tile 46.2	54.G.34+ Tile 46.2	54.G.35+ Tile 46.2	54.G.36+ Tile 46.2
			
54.G.37+ Tile 46.1	54.G.38+ Tile 46.1	54.G.39+ Tile 46.1	54.G.40+ Tile 46.1
			
54.G.37+ T Tile 46.2	54.G.38+ Tile 46.2	54.G.39+ Tile 46.2	54.G.40+ Tile 46.2

			
54.G.41+ Tile 46.1	54.G.42+ Tile 46.1	54.G.43+ Tile 46.1	54.G.44+ Tile 46.1
			
54.G.41+ T Tile 46.2	54.G.42+ Tile 46.2	54.G.43+ Tile 46.2	54.G.44+ Tile 46.2

The recordings of the physical quality of the test results are as follows:

No.	54.G.1		54.G.2		54.G.3		54.G.4		54.G.5	
Fluidity af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Gloss af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crazing af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Visible Crystallization af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Melting bf.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Pinholes af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crawling af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Others	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2
No.	54.G.6		54.G.7		54.G.8		54.G.9		54.G.10	
Fluidity af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Gloss af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crazing af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Visible Crystallization af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Melting bf.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Pinholes af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crawling af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Others	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1
No.	54.G.11		54.G.12		54.G.13		54.G.14		54.G.15	

Fluidity af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Gloss af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crazing af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Visible Crystallization af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Melting bf.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Pinholes af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crawling af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Others	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2
No.	54.G.16		54.G.17		54.G.18		54.G.19		54.G.20	
Fluidity af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Gloss af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crazing af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Visible Crystallization af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Melting bf.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Pinholes af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crawling af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Others	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1
No.	54.G.21		54.G.22		54.G.23		54.G.24		54.G.25	
Fluidity af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Gloss af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crazing af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Visible Crystallization af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Melting bf.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Pinholes af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crawling af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Others	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2
No.	54.G.26		54.G.27		54.G.28		54.G.29		54.G.30	
Fluidity af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Gloss af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crazing af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Visible Crystallization af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Melting bf.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Pinholes af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crawling af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Others	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2

No.	54.G.31		54.G.32		54.G.33		54.G.34		54.G.35	
Fluidity af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Gloss af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	√	√
Crazing af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Visible Crystallization af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Melting bf.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Pinholes af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crawling af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Others	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2
No.	54.G.36		54.G.37		54.G.38		54.G.39		54.G.40	
Fluidity af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Gloss af.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Crazing af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Visible Crystallization af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Melting bf.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Pinholes af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Crawling af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Others	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1
No.	54.G.41		54.G.42		54.G.43		54.G.44			
Fluidity af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×		
Gloss af.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
Crazing af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×		
Visible Crystallization af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×		
Melting bf.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
Pinholes af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×		
Crawling af.	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×		
Others	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2	Tile 46.1	Tile 46.2		

This testing has concluded that the colour stain has a very limited effect on the quality of the glaze and clay slip, but the oxides and other elements may affect the quality of the base glaze. The glaze normally has the same colour tone on different test tiles, but the texture of the tiles may change the visual effects of that same glaze.

Even though I haven't chosen the glaze from the 54.TEST RECORDING
2015.08.24 for my work, it was still worth testing as part of the exploration of colour in my research. In the later colour and glaze testing, I expanded the test system, which provided a quick method to test more materials. The glaze and colour tests are an essential part of ceramic research, and even when, at the end of the testing, I found the natural colour of the clay to be preferable to the glaze, it still played a very important role in my research period, helping me find the right direction on colour.