



This symposium has been generously supported by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, and the Humanities & Arts Research Institute at Royal Holloway, University of London.



Front cover: Still from *Sounding Line* by Mella Shaw.  
Back cover: *Quotidian* by Julian Stair.



**Department of Drama, Theatre & Dance  
Royal Holloway, University of London**

# **The Performing Object: Ceramics as Performance An Interdisciplinary Symposium**

**Wednesday 24 April 2024**

# SCHEDULE

**9.30am Registration and Coffee/Tea**

**10.00am Welcome** Ashley Thorpe

**10.10am**

**Panel 1: Clay and Embodiment**

*Leaving A Mark: Gesture and Performance in Clay.*  
Tessa Peters

*Audience Events: Dancing, Throwing, Teasing.*  
Vidya Thirunarayan and Vasudevi Reddy

*A Conversation on Movement and Material.*  
Siobhan Davies and Clare Twomey

**11.30pm Tea and Coffee**

**11.50am**

**Panel 2: Clay and Ritual**

*States of Transformation: Sounding Line and Liminality.*  
Mella Shaw

*The Quiet Ones.*  
Natasha Fontenelle

**12.50-2.20pm Lunch**

At 1.30pm, delegates may choose to join a tour of the Picture Gallery,  
or view films in the Caryl Churchill Theatre by  
Julia Ellen Lancaster, Florence Peake, and Mariele Neudecker.

**2.20pm**

*A Static Unravelling*

Lindsey Mendick

**3pm**

**Panel 3: Clay and Archival Performance**

*The Chatter of Fragments.*

Susan Atwill and JP Guerrier

*Clay Fever.*

Bridget Foreman and Helen Walsh

**4.20pm Coffee/Tea**

**4.40pm**

**Panel 4: Clay and the Relational**

*“Who Shall Be Mother?”: The politics, decision-making, and consequences behind the selecting of sites for ceramic engagement.*

Julian Stair

*Small Talk, Small Stories.*

Natasha Mayo, Kim Norton, Sam Lucas

*Sensitising for Affect and Affective Touch through Ceramic Objects in Sensuous Choreographies.*

Laura König

**6.20-6.30pm**

**Closing Discussion and Next Steps**

Ashley Thorpe

# THE PERFORMING OBJECT: CERAMICS AS PERFORMANCE

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Ashley Thorpe

Theatre Anthropology has expanded the definition of performance to recognise ‘production’ as it pertains both to theatre and associated media (i.e., theatre, film or television production) and the practice of creation in an artist’s studio (i.e., artistic production, commercial production), as well as how restored behaviour encompasses embodied technique (e.g., archaeological digs) and modes of spectator engagement in the everyday (e.g., the use of a pot). Ceramics (especially, though not exclusively, the pot) can be regarded as intrinsically performance-based objects because they hold or pour (often described as ‘performing’ a function), evince social status, express ideology, memorialise, and/or enact other functions ad infinitum. In this sense, ceramics are performing objects both in action and inaction, at home and/or in the museum.

Despite this duality, most discussions of performance concerning art practices have focused on exhibition, which has led to the analysis of new modes of display and spectator engagement (Bennett, 2013). Indeed, several essays in the important edited collection *Contemporary Clay and Museum Culture* (2016) observed how ceramic displays bridge the interior of the museum and the exterior world. Developed from the AHRC project *Ceramics in the Expanded Field*, the volume emphasised the blurring of boundaries and crossing of disciplines, as well as the activation of domestic environments (mostly within the sphere of the museum) and personal associations, as the site of and for curatorial and artistic intervention. Tessa Peters spoke astutely of ceramics occurring in a social field where artists might become the “producer of situations” (101). However, the ways in which ceramic objects activated modes of performance, especially in the everyday, were glossed. In reflections upon his own practice, the US-based artist Anders Ruhwald observed how his intervention at the Saarinen House Museum, Detroit, worked to “add further layers of experience of the place” (84), but such layers were not analysed in terms of site-specific performativity in the everyday nor within the museum frame. Elsewhere, curator Juliet Carey observed “the ephemerality of site-specific experience” (195) in ceramic installations, but without recourse to the social cues (performances) upon which ceramics might, in some instances at least, be conceptually dependent.

It is tempting to locate the experiential dynamics of such installations within the domain of performance art. This arises from the fact that whilst performance art was initially rooted in a rejection of the marketisation of object art (Goldberg, 1979:98), the French artist Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux has tied performance art practices back to objects by tracing its roots in the readymade. As performance art evolved in the mid-1950s, so objects were incorporated into artistic practice to subtly allude to everyday experience (2009:44). By teasing out the subsequent implications of a collaborative and associative network between Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Allan Kaprow, Tadeusz Kantor, and George Brecht, Labelle-Rojoux asserted that:

There is no essential difference between the object and the event. What is an event? A score made of actions or gestures borrowed from daily life. They possess neither expressive nor spectacular qualities. But this score, if it can be written down on paper [...] and if it defines a few very brief and very open rules [...] also sometimes has the appearance of a minimalist device like the series Chair-Events (1968) [...] (57).

Chair-Events by George Brecht was an object-based performative and participatory installation featuring chairs and other objects. Such performance art scores and object-based installations, Labelle-Rojoux concluded, can be – and have been – monetised like any other form of object-based art. Like performance art, ceramics exhibits liminal vocabularies and modalities, existing betwixt and between the object and performance, the institutional and the domesticated, the spotlighted and the mundane. Unlike performance art, however, ceramics has a history of thousands of years.

The blurring of the divisions between object art and performance art has had important ramifications for a consideration of object-based art and its display. In *Theatre, Exhibition, and Curation: Exhibition and Display*, Georgina Guy conceived of exhibition as “a model of performance which flickers between material object and performed enactment” (2016:183). However, by privileging the exhibition as the primary site for the activation of objects via the analysis of performance art, the complexities produced by ceramic form and its socio-cultural meanings are elided. Catherine Wood, for instance, has proposed a:

relationship between the immortal deadness of the art object within a museum or gallery display and the “world as a corpse”, revealing the psychological continuum that binds them. [...] In this way of looking at things, the object is simultaneously a relic (as evidence of prior action) and a prompt or catalyst (pointing towards its potential to be utilised in an action that is yet to be performed) (2009:89).

The “deadness of the art object”, Wood argued, enables perception of the transitory nature of our own existence; for we exist long enough to witness only a short moment in the perpetual journey of the archived object. Yet, one of the characteristics of ceramics – especially in the form of pottery – is its performance as a part of everyday life in domesticity, not just the museum or gallery. How can ceramics as objects be considered in any sense ‘dead’ when they are fundamental to everyday life? If one contemplates a jug as decorative rather than a functional object has it now become ‘dead’? Does the archiving and exhibiting of ceramics simply equate them with the “deadness” that Wood attributes to archived objects? The intrinsically liminal and socially relational qualities of ceramics require different frames of reference that work with, but also extend beyond, the vocabularies of performance art in exhibition.

Tim Ingold has called for the separation of material from materiality which, in turn, draws attention to the fundamentally relational nature of all material. As a starting point, Ingold proposed that:

Bringing things to life [...] is a matter not of adding to them a sprinkling of agency [i.e., through exhibition] but of restoring them to the generative fluxes of the world of

materials in which they came into being and continue to subsist. This view, that things are in life rather than that life is in things, is diametrically opposed to the conventional anthropological understanding of animism, [... which] entails the attribution of life, spirit or agency to objects that are really inert (2007:12).

Instead, Ingold argued that materials are bound to the “regenerative power of [...] circulatory flows which, in living organisms, are bound into tightly woven bundles or tissues of extraordinary complexity” (2007:12). This resonates with what Eleanor Margolies has described as “scenic writing”, where “the object has an independent scenographic role” and where time can be “encrusted in or embodied by those objects” (137). Exhibitions thus become one, but only one, means of highlighting specific kinds of circulatory flow. In this regard, exhibitions are no more or less agential (or, for the purposes of this call, ‘performative’) than the material from which the objects themselves are made. Ingold thus concludes that:

the properties of materials, regarded as constituents of an environment, cannot be identified as fixed, essential attributes of things, but are rather processual and relational. They are neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced. In that sense, every property is a condensed story. To describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate (2007:14).

In placing emphasis upon a relationism of material to be experienced – as opposed to objects and their materiality, and which is activated only in contexts of display – key assumptions about the nature of objects are challenged. Animism can be discerned in the way in which material “unfolds in relation to the beings that make a living there” (2007:14). Consequently, the ceramic object, as comprised of material, can never be ‘dead’ because it is always enmeshed into a relational network of which exhibition is only one (relatively small) part.

Ingold’s conception of material as an unfolding relationality connects with other contemporary theories of material and their deployment in performance. Andrew Sofer, for instance, has observed four key trends in recent thinking about performing objects: thing theory (where subject-object relations alter a non-descript object into a thing), object-orientated ontologies and posthumanism (object-object relations move beyond subjectivity), new materialism (the materials of object are imbued with their own agency), and actor-network theory (objects become components in a connective network that blur boundaries between them) (Sofer, 2016:674). All these perspectives are in some form or other contingent upon relationism. Ingold’s analysis also resonates with Andrew Benjamin’s description of materiality as a continuum where “production and materiality is always connected” so that “matter will become ‘mattering’” (Benjamin, 2010:98). The conjoining of production and materiality into a present tense verb (“mattering”) renders objects as active material stories of emergence and mutability, connecting them to performance in its widest anthropological sense.

Considering the above, this symposium proposes that ceramic objects perform both in and outside exhibition, and that ceramic objects lend themselves to a particularly rich form of relational performance analysis because of their material and formal variety, and their



cultural ubiquity across history. Ceramics can be comprised from a mixture of natural and manufactured material and may range in form from a functional pot to an abstract sculpture. Ceramics can also be exhibited in infinite contexts in both fired and raw clay states. Ceramics thus has the potential to challenge performance-based dichotomies of object-based and performance art, as well as a dependency upon exhibition for the activation of performance. To do so is to challenge Nicolas Bourriaud's relatively recent notion of relational aesthetics (which foregrounded art as a site for the engineering of social relations) in contemporary art, for ceramics has been a relational form for thousands of years, bound to processes of social consumption, interaction, communal belonging, and identity.

## References

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**Ashley Thorpe** is a Reader in the Department of Drama, Theatre & Dance at Royal Holloway, University of London. As author, editor, or translator, he has published eleven books, including *Contemporary British Ceramics: Beneath the Surface* (2021) and *Contemporary British Studio Pottery: Forms of Expression* (2023). He is an Advisor to the MAAK Foundation, a charity founded to support and promote studio ceramics. His latest book about ceramics, *Julian Stair: Memory, Material, Ceramics*, will be co-published by Yale University Press and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in 2024. His co-edited book, *Intercultural Japanese Noh Theatre: Texts & Analysis of English-Language Noh*, which contains his play *Emily* as well as two analytical chapters, will be published by Methuen, also in 2024.

# PANEL 1: CLAY AND EMBODIMENT

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## ***Leaving a Mark: Gesture and Performance in Clay.***

Tessa Peters

My proposed paper examines the experiential and performative character of clay artworks that foreground ideas of human gesture, drawing on a range of phenomenological perspectives. Emphasising bodily experience as a significant aspect of human consciousness, it considers contemporary works, which variously focus on clay process or finished product from artists that include William Cobbing, Neha Kudchadkar, Florence Peake and Nicole Seisler. Vilém Flusser's insights into how thinking and expression are significantly shaped by the ways we use our hands assist an exploration of the finer nuances of gesture and the individuality of touch evidenced by imprints of hand or body left in clay.

**Tessa Peters** is Senior Lecturer in the history and theory of art at the University of Westminster, and Associate Lecturer at Central Saint Martins. A member of the Centre for Research in Education, Arts & Media (CREAM) and the Ceramics Research Centre-UK at the UoW, her principal area of research is participatory and collaborative creative practice. She also works as an independent curator and her past projects include: The Uncanny Room (2002), House of Words (2009), Memoranda (2011), Tradition & Innovation (2012) and Cultural Icons (2019-20).

## ***Audience Events: Dancing, Throwing, Teasing.***

Vidya Thirunarayan and Vasudevi Reddy

This paper explores the nature of audience in three seemingly disparate domains of living: Bharatanatyam (one form of traditional Indian dancing), throwing pots on the wheel and playful teasing by infants. The distinctions between the performing arts, the crafts and interpersonal engagements in everyday life disappear when we think of the nature of their audiences.

In contrast to approaches which see audience as existing separately from but in engagement with the actor, we draw on the Natyashastra's classifications of audience which allow us to think of events of audience and actor unity (Coorlawalla, 2003) – hence the term 'audience events'. The notion of the sahr̥daya (the sympathetic yet discerning other) places the moment of connection between actor and audience, at centre stage in analysis. In all three domains of engagement the sahr̥daya is crucial to the accomplishment of the performance itself both in the moment and in its development into the future. The sahr̥daya could exist not only in immediate connection with another, but also within the self, with the actor acting as her own audience.

We draw on first hand experiences to explore shades of audience events – one of us is a dancer, one a developmental psychologist and both are potters. In Bharatanatyam performances the same dance composition provokes different interpretations from the dancer when performing to different audiences. Indeed, the dancer can sometimes become her own audience, responding with sudden emotion when she watches her gestures come alive. In ceramics, analyses of audiences have conventionally focused on curating and display of either ceramic objects or of installations. Much less attention has been paid to the nature and role of audience in the actual process of throwing pots, or to the dialogic engagement involved in it (Brinck & Reddy, 2020) where the 'voices' of past audiences and the self as a present audience are present within the throwing event, sometimes conflicting. Playful teasing by pre-linguistic events (Reddy, 1991; Reddy, Williams & Costall, 2022) offers a crucial arena for understanding how participating others not only enter interpersonal performance events as sahr̥dayas but also change the self as performer.

Challenging the binaries in the audience-performer relationship and taking audience events as the units of analysis might explain the pluralities of influence in creating, being and performing.

**Vidya Thirunarayan** is a Bharata Natyam dance practitioner and a ceramicist. She has over two decades of experience creating and touring dance productions internationally, supported by extensive education programmes across the community and the formal education sector. In recent years she has begun combining her dual practice in dance and ceramics under the banner The Clay Connection. Lives of Clay, her most recent solo production that toured the UK and India is a manifestation of this performance language that combines dance and clay. Vidya is currently pursuing her practice-based PhD on the same topic at the University of Chichester, UK.

**Vasu Reddy** has been interested in the origins and development of social cognition, mainly in young infants for three decades now, and has been exploring the role of emotional engagement in social understanding. She focuses on everyday, ordinary engagements (such as teasing and joking and showing-off or feeling shy) which often tend to get ignored in mainstream theories. Her interest in engagement as the route to understanding has led her to questions about the nature and influence of culture on social understanding. Her book *How Infants Know Minds* published by Harvard University Press in 2008 argues for a second-person approach to knowing minds, a dialogical and emotion-based route to an old problem. She was Director of the Centre for Situated Action and Communication (now the Centre for Interaction, Development and Diversity) and is Emeritus Professor of Developmental and Cultural Psychology at the University of Portsmouth in the UK.

## ***A Conversation on Movement and Material.***

**Siobhan Davies & Clare Twomey**

Siobhan Davies and Clare Twomey in this 20-minute conversation will unpack the work Siobhan Davies created in 2010 – Rotor. This dance work with four dance artists walking the perimeter of four circles, each circle fitting into another, was filmed from above and gave a structure to nine artists - a composer, poet, ceramicist, photographer, playwright and visual artists - to respond to through their own artform.

Davies curated this collection of newly commissioned works that in their different media relay the original dance score. ROTOR includes work by: 1. Siobhan Davies Dance, new live dance work, featuring Andrea Buckley, Lindsey Butcher, Annie Lok and Charlie Morrissey 2. Composer Matteo Fargion, performed by the dancers 3. Artist Angela de la Cruz 4. Playwright E V Crowe, performed by the dancers 5. Ceramicist Clare Twomey 6. Poet Alice Oswald 7. Visual artist Sam Collins 8. Photographer Alexandra Hughes 9. Artist and engineer Ben Tyers 10. And visual artist Massimo Bartolini who presents a new outdoor work at the South London Gallery.

Clare Twomey and Siobhan Davies will focus on the role of ceramics in the work *Is it Madness*. *Is it Beauty* by Clare Twomey and attend to the role of the choreography and its intersection with interpretation of the work by Siobhan Davies.

**Clare Twomey** is a British artist, researcher, and curator (b 1968) Twomey is among the most ground-breaking and influential ceramic artists of her generation, Clare Twomey is a defining figure of the 'expanded field' of ceramics. Her practice encompasses site-specific installation and performance; she frequently collaborates with institutions and embraces audience participation and temporality. This artist lead exploration is located in the area of art, ceramics and crafts practices in museum and contemporary art institutions, making original and significant contributions to knowledge in the field.

**Dame Siobhan Davies** Founding Siobhan Davies Dance in 1988 and creating the RIBA award winning Siobhan Davies Studios in 2006, she works closely with collaborating artists to ensure that their own artistic enquiry is part of the creative process. By 2002 she moved away from the traditional theatre circuit and started making work for gallery spaces. Davies applies choreography across a wide range of creative disciplines including visual arts and film. Davies is currently an Associate Professor at the Centre for Dance Research at Coventry University. Davies was awarded a Damehood in 2020 for her continued service and contribution to the dance industry.

## PANEL 2: CLAY AND RITUAL

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### ***States of Transformation: Sounding Line and Liminality***

Mella Shaw

Mella Shaw will discuss her environmental project *Sounding Line* - which recently won the 2023 British Ceramics Biennial Award prize - through a lens of relational performance theory and analysis of audience experience and artist intent. The paper will involve close reading of the film component of this project with particular discussion of modes of environmental activism through storytelling, and how themes of transition and loss can be uniquely performed, explored and revealed through the mediums of unfired clay and film. The film will be viewed in the context of liminality - first outlined by Arnold van Gennep in 1908 to – and explored more recently as a performative concept of transition (and for which Shaw will argue clay has particular relevance). Shaw intentionally chose an “in-between” and transitional space of a beach on the Island of South Uist in the Outer Hebrides as the stage on which to set her film and on which play out themes of ritual, ceremony and transmutation in the pursuit of environmental awareness. These performed rites of passage are experienced by the viewer both as a passive audience as well as actively through a connection to self and the Jungian concept of individuation.

**Mella Shaw** uses clay to make thought-provoking objects and site-specific installations around environmental themes of tipping points, edges, longing and loss. Originally gaining a First Class BA in Anthropology at Durham University she specialised in anthropology of art, critical theory and material culture. After a period making documentary films, she moved to London to work in the museum sector and became Head of Exhibitions at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London and subsequently Exhibitions Manager at the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. This career was dovetailed with her ceramic practice; in 2009 she took a two-year Diploma in Ceramics at City Lit, London and went on to complete an MA in Ceramics and Glass from the Royal College of Art, graduating in 2013. Mella now lives and works in Edinburgh where she combines her ceramic practice with teaching and freelance curation. She is a visiting lecturer on the BA Ceramic Design course at Central Saint Martins (London), Tutor at Edinburgh Ceramics Workshop and a recent board member for Visual Arts Scotland. In the last ten years since graduation from the Royal College of Art Mella has shown work nationally and internationally. In 2018 she showed at Collect Open, in 2021 was awarded the Henry Rothschild Ceramic Bursary Prize and in 2023 the British Ceramics Biennial Award.

## ***Quietly Making Noise: Project Blackbird and Into the Silver***

Natasha Fontenelle

I will talk about two residencies PROJECT BLACKBIRD (2021) and INTO THE SILVER (2023).

I became the Blackbird during my first residency in Saint Lucia. I was there for three months (between the first and second year of the MA). While there I created four fabric paintings then at the end of the residency began the Blackbird experience. This involved me waking at sunrise to begin the performance at 6am. I would go onto the platform, connect to the birds, trees, elements of the day and work with local clay - what happened happened – (I would spend a few hours on the platform) then at sunset/6pm go to swim in the sea. I repeated this process for three consecutive days and came back to UK with hours of footage which I edited down by just under half the time. Day one and two are an hour long, day three half an hour.... I was told it was too long, but I felt attached to the length – attached to the bird.

During the second residency in Saint Lucia (after the MA and again for three months) I created 10 fabric paintings and became the SILVER DRAGON SPIDER - a multidimensional being (conceived in the sea of Grenada - born on the earth of Saint Lucia) representing growth, maturity, resilience, strength, protectiveness – a quantum being – timeless and timely. I again returned to the ritual of going to the beach at sunset the evening before to swim in the sea. Then wake at daybreak to start at 6am ready for the experience – A happening that was about to take place. (the whole piece lasted nearly two hours, over one day).

I will discuss my need for ritual, staging, preparation and planning before the work – movement, stillness, vulnerability, and openness during – then relationship with the editing and translation process after.

**Natasha Fontenelle** is a fine artist working performatively with a variety of materials, processes and disciplines interwoven around her ceramic practice. (These include, textiles, drawing, performance, sculpture, glass, 3d printing, moving image, wearable-art and poetry). After completing a Ceramics Diploma from City Lit 10 years ago she went on to share a workspace at 401 1/2 studios for nine years. She graduated from the Royal College of Art/MA Ceramics and Glass in 2022

Fuelled with an incessant need to be immersed and embodying the act of making, her practice involves herself as maker, observer and actor within the work. Exploring themes of intuition, vulnerability, ritual, movement and quiet noise, she uses cultural and societal issues to inform and direct works. Interested in how the undercurrents of quiet narratives, can be conjured up and channel an innate urgency to create through constant experimentation and documentation of ritualistic practices where the making experience is as integral as a final piece.

Inspired by music and imagination she hand-builds working intimately and empathically in collaboration with either the material, environment or other artists, to create new worlds and inhabitants. These inhabitants currently manifest as THE QUIET ONES; the multidimensional beings who dwell inside her sculptures. These creatures are hybrid self-

sufficient organisms, who live in symbiotic harmony with their environment - neighbouring tribes inhabit different sculptures and have varying hierarchical roles. They had been QUIETLY MAKING NOISE deep down inside the sculptures for many years - only appearing in drawings on paper. During her first year at the RCA, they began to migrate outside the sculptures, en masse and with great urgency, shapeshifting form and speaking on their experiences – Natasha's role is as their silent observer.

Along with THE QUIET ONES, she also transforms herself into new multidimensional beings - the BLACKBIRD, SILVERDRAGON SPIDER and other nameless creatures are some previous incarnations – her next (might be) the PLATINUM FIREFLY.

*She*

*Never lost control  
Allowed herself to be led*

*Surrendered to the dance  
Said what needed to be said*

*Voice heard by listeners  
Language power inside her head*

*No need for all the answers  
Or awareness of every rule*

*They won't run free if you don't leave them be  
Stop to question – stifle creativity*

*Dancing forward is how she breathes  
Quietly Making Noise*



# SCREENINGS

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Screenings will begin in the Caryl Churchill Theatre at 12.40pm.

## ***Clay Sound (2023) by Julia Ellen Lancaster.***

[Running Time: 5 minutes 51 seconds]

Film and sound enable a dynamic exploration of ceramic work, adding visual and auditory stimuli to the viewer's experience. But what happens when, for a moment, sound is isolated from the image of a particular material or action? Can it enhance the narrative and aesthetic dimensions of the process of making by drawing on imagined or learnt visual associations.

By using film techniques such as close-ups, slow motion and montage to document ceramic processes, the viewer gains an intimate glimpse into the artist's work, as intricate details, gestures and techniques are revealed. At the same time, through the lens of the camera, the methods of transforming a raw material into what may later become a fully formed artwork, becomes a mesmerizing visual narrative, and a more intimate, performative process.

Soundscapes can perhaps deepen the sensory engagement of an object, inviting audiences to understand a ceramic object beyond its immediate visual appearance. In 'Handful of Dirt', its purpose could be seen as amplifying the emotional resonance of making, adding a heightened sense of connection and immersion. Transcending conventional methods of display, by harnessing the power of audiovisual storytelling, artists can perhaps forge deeper connections with their audiences.

**Julia Ellen Lancaster** is an artist working out of London and Kent, UK. Graduating from the Royal College of Art she spent time in Tokyo, exhibiting at Youkobo Arts Centre, Tokyo. Lancaster was subsequently selected for the Leach 100 Residency, St Ives, UK in 2020 as part of the Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada pottery centenary celebrations. In 2021 she was awarded a further residency with Leach Pottery, being one of the first artists to take up a residency at the historically significant restored Anchor studio, the original home of the Newlyn Art School. Exhibiting across UK and internationally, Julia teaches in a professional ceramics studio and leads a series of seminars, Clay in Conversation, in partnership with the Ceramics Research Centre UK. A member of the Royal Society of Sculptors and the Craft Potters Association she is currently Artist in Residence 2024 at Powell Cotton Museum, Birchington and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia.

## ***Rite by Florence Peake.***

[Running Time: 13 minutes 15 seconds]

## ***Rite – Research by Florence Peake.***

[Running Time: 6 minutes 57 seconds]

**Florence Peake** is a London-based artist who has been making solo and group performance works intertwined with an extensive visual art practice since 1995. Presenting work internationally and across the UK in galleries, theatres and the public realm, Peake is known

for an approach which is at once sensual and witty, expressive and rigorous, political and intimate. Peake produces movement, interactive sculpture, paintings that use the whole body's physicality, text, film and drawings which respond and intercept each other to articulate, extend and push ideas. Peake's work explores notions of materiality and physicality: the body as site and vehicle of protest; the erotic and sensual as tools for queering materiality; the subjective and imagined body as a force equal to those that move in our objective flesh-bound world.

By encouraging chaotic relationships between the body and material, Peake creates radical and outlandish performances, which in turn generate temporary alliances and micro-communities within the audience. Peake's painting is as an extension of the body itself: it is produced gesturally and performatively, and is both a manifestation of the external body in motion and the way personal experience and feeling is recorded within the tissue and bones. Their painting practice comes together with sculpture and performance in a reciprocal nature: engaging in a shared dialogue and creating multiple modes of processing performance, and the interrelations between dancers, audiences and sites.

Peake has worked with filmmakers, artists and choreographers including Joe Moran, Gaby Agis, Tai Shani, Jonathan Baldock, Serena Korda, Nicola Conibere, Gary Stevens, Catherine Hoffmann, Eve Stainton, Station House Opera and Theatre of Mistakes.

### ***You Are Always On My Mind (2007) by Mariele Neudecker.***

[Running Time: 3 minutes]

**Mariele Neudecker** was born in Germany, where she studied as well as in Cork, Ireland and the London, UK. She is now based in Bristol. In her work Neudecker is exploring the interphases and overlaps of the two and three-dimensional, as well as analogue and digital. She uses a wide range of media including sculpture, film, photography as well as sound, with the quest to find a 'Contemporary Sublime' and has a particular interest in Art, Science and the Environment. Her practice often takes her [and us] to the thresholds of human experience, she tests our perception of natural and scientific worlds. Neudecker uses technology's virtual capabilities in order to reproduce a heightened experience of landscape. For her, technology both enables and limits our perception and experience of the worlds we inhabit.

Neudecker is Professor of Fine Art at Bath School of Art, Film and Media; where she runs the research cluster "Material : Art : Science : Environment : Research" (M|A|S|E|R), which is a forum that addresses questions around overlapping developments in the Arts, Sciences and the Environment. She is a Guest Artists on the Arts at CERN Program, and exhibits her work widely around Europe as well as the rest of the world.

# ***A Static Unravelling***

**Lindsey Mendick**

In this presentation, Mendick addresses her attempts to freeze moments in time through her ceramic practice. The artist sees her works as frozen moments of chaos, brutality and vulnerability in an ever-changing world. Mendick's ceramics subvert the historic connotations associated with the medium of clay, to create skilled monuments to the contemporary experience. She uses her revisionist lens to offer an unapologetic and humorous catharsis, thus underlying the performative and dynamic role that clay can play.

**Lindsey Mendick** (b.1987) works primarily with ceramics, embedding her sculptures within installations that include stained glass, film, furniture, large stage sets and performance. She received a BA from Sheffield Hallam University and an MA in Sculpture from the Royal College of Art, London. Her autobiographical work offers a form of catharsis, encouraging the viewer to explore their own personal history through the revisionist lens of the artist. She was the recipient of the Henry Moore Foundation Artist Award in 2020, the Alexandra Reinhardt memorial award in 2018 and was also selected for Jerwood Survey in 2019 and the Future Generations Art Prize in 2020. Mendick has participated in solo and group exhibitions at Jupiter Artland, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Hayward Gallery, Carl Freedman Gallery, Somerset House, Jeffrey Deitch, Cooke Latham, Hannah Barry Gallery, among others. With her partner, the artist Guy Oliver, Mendick initiated Quench Gallery in Margate to provide vital support for early career artists through exhibitions and mentoring.

# PANEL 3: CLAY AND ARCHIVAL PERFORMANCE

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## *The Chatter of Fragments.*

Susan Atwill and JP Guerrier

Using a combination of mudlarked, found and handmade ceramics we create a live soundscape exploring imagined molecular qualities of clay. Combining spoken word, digital and handmade, these activated objects lead us to a new shared space stretching across time and questions our experience with the 'vibrant matter' of clay, through gesture, touch and sound.

References: "A lot happens to the concept of agency once nonhuman things are figured less as social constructions and more as actors, and once humans themselves are assessed not as autonyms but as vital materialities." Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.

Drawn to edges of rivers, excavating mud and other elemental materials, **Susan Atwill** is inspired by her cultural history and roots in the mining communities of North-East England. She believes objects speak, materials sing; and merges tangible precious debris\* with sounds of heritage and inheritance. A ceramicist using sound, her work 'Ear Plan' was chosen for *New Contemporaries* in 2021. She met JP at the RCA in 2020 and they continue to perform, write and make together.

**JP Guerrier** is a London based artist and sound designer, and a graduate from Information Experience Design at the RCA. His work explores the life of materials through physical and sonic making. JP comes from a background in theatre sound design, having previously graduated from drama school in London (Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts) and worked on various productions as a sound designer. Performance is another focus of his practice, and he is interested in questioning boundaries between the body and its surroundings. Further work can be seen <https://jpguerrier.com/>

## ***Clay Fever.***

**Bridget Foreman and Helen Walsh**

Public collections of ceramics may seem still and silent, vessels and sculptures imprisoned in glass vitrines gathering dust. Yet each object in a collection has a tale to tell, and powerful, moving human stories of love, obsession, commitment, and sacrifice run through the collections held in the Centre of Ceramic Art at York Art Gallery. A collection of collectors, none has had a more transformative effect on curatorial practice than the WA Ismay Collection. Consisting of over 3600 pots by more than 500 makers, it was amassed by Yorkshire librarian Bill Ismay between 1955-2001, who gifted it to the city of York on his death in 2001, along with his extensive supporting archive of documentation. The study of this collection has revealed a hidden autobiography of the collector and his pots, nurturing new forms of thoughtful curation and reinterpretation to give them a voice.

In *Clay Fever*, playwright Bridget Foreman drew on this archive and on letters and research by Helen Walsh to craft a tender, moving play, offering a glimpse into the studio pottery world through the long friendship between collector Bill Ismay and potter Michael Cardew. In exploring the hold that pottery exerts over them both, and the bond it forges between them, the play also reflects on the complexity of human relationships and the fragility of life. The result of a unique collaboration between curator and writer, existing archive and new writing, *Clay Fever* was performed live during the 2018 Restating Clay conference at the Yorkshire Museum. As one art-form reflected on another, pots from the CoCA collection were employed within the play, where the objects were translated into an alternative form of performance, re-entering the live space in a journey from domestic use, through exhibition, and into theatrical performance.

This paper will reflect on the twin journeys of archive and ceramics into performance. It will consider the ways in which both can be animated through the intersecting work of researcher/curator and playwright/practitioner, and the resulting exploration of personal, social and curatorial histories through performance.

**Dr Bridget Foreman** is a playwright and Lecturer in Playwriting at the University of York, School of Arts and Creative Technologies, where she is Co-Programme Leader for MA Theatre-Making. Her co-authored chapter in *Decentered Playwriting* (Routledge) was published in 2023, and she has presented her practice research at numerous international conferences. Her plays have been presented in theatres and on tour across the UK and internationally. Her recent writing credits include *My Place and Surprise Ending* (Riding Lights Theatre Company) *The Whispering House*, *Clay Fever* (York Museums Trust) *Everything is Possible - the York Suffragettes* (York Theatre Royal / Pilot Theatre) *Simeon's Watch* (Riding Lights Theatre Company), *In Fog and Falling Snow* (co-written with Mike Kenny) for York Theatre Royal / Pilot Theatre. She currently has a new play, *The Bare Bones*, in development with York Theatre Royal, and is also under commission to York Trailblazers and Riding Lights. [bridgetforeman.co.uk](http://bridgetforeman.co.uk)

**Dr Helen Walsh** has a background in crafts and has worked in the museums sector since 2001. She has been the curator in charge of York Museums Trust's important contemporary

British studio ceramics collections and of the historical ceramics collections since 2004. Her exhibitions at York Art Gallery include the touring exhibition and book 'Gordon Baldwin: Objects for a Landscape', the 'Lucie Rie: Ceramics and Buttons' exhibition and catalogue, and the 2023 redisplay of the permanent ceramics collection to celebrate women artists. Helen founded the UK's Contemporary Studio Ceramics Subject Specialist Network in 2012, leading its activities including developing the 2018 two day international 'Restating Clay' conference. She helped establish the Centre of Ceramic Art (CoCA) at York Art Gallery, which opened in 2015. Helen completed Doctoral research on the WA Ismay collection through Manchester Metropolitan University in 2017, which resulted in the exhibition and a publication 'The Yorkshire Tea Ceremony' based on her PhD research. She has written and presented a number of articles and conference papers and has supervised a range of student placements, including an AHRC CDA student researching York Museums Trust's ceramic collections, in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University and the British Ceramics Biennial. Helen has sat on a number of steering groups and is a judge on the Henry Rothschild Bursary.

## PANEL 4: CLAY AND THE RELATIONAL

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### ***‘Who shall be mother?’: The politics, decision making and consequences behind the selecting of sites for ceramic engagement.***

Julian Stair

I will argue that the multi-modality of ceramics, and pottery in particular, operates as a radical artistic practice within the theoretical framework and praxis of contemporary art. In actively shaping life through rituals that embody narratives from the daily to the profound, from ‘breaking bread’ with family to mediating death, pottery offers an opportunity for a philosophical re-evaluation of how institutions validate contemporary art. This talk will focus on my project *Quotidian*, a dinner service exhibited at Corvi-Mora Gallery, London in 2014. The presentation of the work – laid out as if a meal was about to take place - was accompanied by a previously recorded video of a meal using the same 188 artefacts in order to reveal their performative nature in real time and space, given the limitations of conventional white cube display. I will argue that the orthodoxy of consuming relational art within the hierarchical structures of institutionalised galleries and museums narrows experiential potential for audiences by situating them as passive observers and, as a corollary, reduces creative potential for artists by limiting them to the role of facilitators. In an increasingly atomised metaverse, the materiality, agency and social locus and rituals of pottery can demonstrably act as a glue binding human communities and reminding us of the attendant role of art.

**Julian Stair** has exhibited internationally since 1982 and has work in over 30 public collections including the V&A; British Museum; Museum of Art & Design, NY; Mashiko Museum of Ceramic Art; Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Kolumba Museum, Cologne. From rites of passage to the daily touch of a cup, Stair’s work celebrates the multi-valence of pottery through the dynamics of use. His work encompasses the domestic and the monumental, the studio and the factory floor and has been sited in environments from places of worship to columbaria, with a long-standing enquiry into how pottery can help mediate death through commemoration. Julian is also a historian of English studio ceramics completing the first theoretical PhD in the Ceramics Department at the Royal College Critical Writing on English Studio Pottery: 1910-40. He has held research posts at Northumbria University, Newcastle; Royal College of Art; University of the Arts, London; Westminster University. He edited *The Body Politic: the role of the body in contemporary craft* (Crafts Council, 1999) and, with Clare Twomey and Christie Brown, co-edited *Contemporary Clay and Museum Culture* (Routledge, 2016). He has been published by Tate, the Courtauld Institute of Art, Yale Center for British Art, Leeds Art Gallery/Kettles Yard/Dulwich Picture Gallery, Bloomsbury and Routledge. He was awarded an OBE in 2022 for services to ceramics.

## ***Small Talk, Small Stories.***

Natasha Mayo, Kim Norton, Sam Lucas

*Small Talk* is an exploration of what can be learnt from correspondence between the activity of speech, gesture and clay, by identifying the 'small stories' usually hidden within the hesitations and utterances of emergent and growing ideas.

It is a presentation in two parts:

First, bringing together three separate investigations into material language: 'Flightlines: the bits left out of the story', 'Haptic Tacit: physical traces of making' and 'My Body in My Hands', projects that in different ways examine how our interaction with clay can be used to sensitise understanding of the nature of human interaction.

The second, comprises footage from 'Small Talk' a collaboration of those artists involved: Natasha Mayo, Kim Norton and Sam Lucas.

The aim of this endeavour is to understand how the activity of 'practical talking / practical making' can be used to generate 'events,' points at which the primacy of creativity can be seen as entirely relational and achieve a certain aesthetic arising from the push and pull of spoken and tacit knowledge.

Still in the early stages, the conversations taking place around the studio table, have enabled us to compile poetic passages of interaction, what Bamberg refers to as 'small stories', a reaching of shared understanding or attunement that no longer requires full or grand explanations and instead can achieve a kind of choreography of ideas.

These conversations are insightful not only for their capturing of searching, honest, often humorous, sequences of propositions and decisions in the pursuit of an idea, but for the possibility that they contain the very kernel of creativity as it takes place.

**Dr Natasha Mayo** is a practitioner, researcher and senior lecturer in ceramics at Cardiff School of Art. Her practice moves between drawing, sensory anthropology and relational aesthetics alongside more traditional approaches to clay, to identify more wholistic generative approaches to creativity. Her figurative work explores ways of 'thinking through the skin', an experimentation with the ceramic surface to convey a sense of knowledge as it travels through the body. A practice in clay, that echoes an ongoing interest with the practice of 'in Conversation' and 'Small Talk' evident in her drawing, participatory work and writing.

**Sam Lucas** creates ambiguous figurative objects predominantly in clay. Her creative practice draws on her experience of being a neurodivergent woman today bringing a distinctive take on models of communication. Her practice-based exploration 'Same, Same but Different', concentrates on the neurodivergent lived experience and the importance of creativity, especially through clay, in managing and communicating personal experience. #mybodyinmyhands forms part of her doctoral study in ceramics and wellbeing



at University of Sunderland and demonstrates a contemporary approach to creative practice as research within an interdisciplinary framework.

**Kim Norton**'s interdisciplinary project-led practice involves working collaboratively and site-specifically, exploring scale and making work that focuses on interaction with spaces and human senses.

Materiality, physicality, and presence of material are always evident.

Kim predominately works with clay, often from the site's locality and in some cases in a raw state.

Kim works collectively with Jane Cairns and Grant Aston in haptic/tacit, which curates thematic-driven exhibitions, events and publications. The group works with other artists and writers in an evolving creative network to encourage dialogue.

Kim is a graduate of MA Design - Ceramics at Central Saint Martins.

## ***Sensitising for Affect and Affective Touch through Ceramic Objects in Sensuous Choreographies.***

Laura König

This contribution is embedded into a practice-based research project, which investigates strategies to treat interhuman touch deprivation through the outcome of ceramic practice. Due to our skin's physiological condition lies one (beautiful) challenge in meeting its requirements of affective stimulation while each individual can achieve emotional experiences—a condition which argues for a thematic exploration in the art as distinguished from recent scientific research and its tendency for physical reductionism (Huisman, 2022). The consideration of Massumian Affect Theory applied in dance choreography by Ingri Fiksdal (2022), Jane Bennett's writing on the affective potential inherited within matter (2010), and Jan Švankmajer's experiments on the Gesture Sculpture (2014) will all feed into the development of an artistic research method, which I term 'Sensuous Choreography'. With attention to the interlinks between emotional and physical stimulation and a careful arrangement of situations for intangible, active, and affective touch, the concept is to slowly transform the spectator into a participant in the performative dimension of ceramic practice. As Jane Bennett recognises, the recipient's capacity ultimately allows matter to affect us (2010, p10). Therefore, this project aims to contribute to exploring and creating narrative and spacious rooms that sensitise for, or even let to, touch and affection by ceramic art.

**Laura Johanna König** (\*1992) travelled between departments and countries for her porcelain education, accessing the material porcelain from various viewpoints. She studied Ceramic and Glass Design at Kunsthochschule Burg Giebischen in Halle, Germany, and graduated with a Master of Fine Arts from the Ceramic department at Konstfack University, Sweden. Two working periods in Arita, the so-called 'birthplace of Japanese porcelain', fundamentally impacted her material relationship. Since then, moving between design techniques and narrative approaches, science and art, Laura has been fascinated by porcelain as a material with supernatural qualities, functional applications, and sensitive responsiveness to the human body. These approaches are applied in her PhD studies, currently undertaken in the Ceramic Research Centre at the University of Westminster. At the symposium, Laura will discuss the psychological, phenomenological, physical, poetic, and affective embedding of porcelain objects in artistic suggestions for treating Skin Hunger, the negative consequence of interhuman touch deprivation.

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