



# DACORUM AND CHILTERN POTTERS GUILD



Issue 37

April 2021

## 4th Lockdown Edition

Accounts and reminiscences

from our members and

coverage of our zoom

demonstrations and POD

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*Cover picture: Pot by Thomas Bohle.*



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## Editorial April 2021

 Ros Mcguirk

The last year has been a time of change when we have had to adapt in so many ways to unexpected circumstances. New ways of doing and being have become normal for all of us. Most of us have learned the ways of Zoom and much has been achieved by this technology. The computer has truly come of age, providing a portal to the outside world.

As the vaccination programme rolls out and summer draws near we see better times ahead, but further than that the crystal ball remains opaque. We know only that we must remain resilient and adaptable.

This is also a time of reflection, for considering who and what we most value and what we really want to achieve. Some in the ceramics community have already been exploring sustainability, and how to reduce our impact on the environment. The concept of the circular economy is now in vogue, but how and what to do about it remains largely up to the individual. Digging up your own clay from the garden or elsewhere is not a viable option for most of us so clay and glaze materials

are bought in. Firing the work presents another set of issues as we aim for carbon neutral. These are hard questions to figure out.

On committee we build sustainability into our activities as far as practicable. It took years before we got used to bringing our own mugs to the church hall to eliminate disposable cups. Indian Railways has recently followed suit by announcing they will bring back the traditional clay cups which, when thrown out of the window simply dissolve away in the rain – please do not try this at the hall!

The newsletter will probably remain online for a few more issues despite some preferring a printed edition. It cuts costs and is almost certainly greener. The few who are not online are sent a printed copy each.

With thanks to the others in the newsletter team, Vicky our proof reader and David our designer and producer, and not forgetting all who have contributed as reviewers, letter writers and photographers, and of course, yourself the reader.





## Notes from the Chair



Mary Anne Bonney



So far today, I have toured the V & A ceramics galleries, watched Michell Erikson make a puzzle jug, visited studios and studies where DCPG members were working on everything from Christmas decorations - yes already - to monkey mugs and bed people (If you want to find out more join the next session on 29th April), had a quick recap of the Conversation from the Potters Open Day and read the South Wales Potters' magazine. I have also hung out the washing, caught up with emails and received a gentle reminder from Ros that the newsletter is waiting for my contribution, so here goes.

Zoom, YouTube and the rest have been invaluable over the last year and we will continue enjoy the expanded horizons they grant us even as we resume 'in person' activities. The Potters Open Day team, John, Jackie, Judi and Fiona, with help from Gay and Audrey, multiplied the Guild's technological capacity several times over in preparing for and delivering the Open Day. It took some 30 discussion and practice Zoom meetings beforehand, Fiona on 3 different computers on the day, a dedicated WhatsApp trouble shooting group, much googling of fixes for problems encountered, not to mention sleepless nights, and nerves on the day. All the contributors worked too, testing computers and wi-fi, preparing work, making videos and presentations, and discussing the format and the topics they planned to share. The result was a triumph, all the more so as several of the appreciative comments afterwards mentioned how calmly the day proceeded. Thank you so much to the POD team for a wonderful mix of talking and doing, and thank you Nicole and Fiona who have edited the recording, to be shared with those who have asked to see it shortly, and more widely in due course.

As we move, all being well, towards an easing

of restrictions, we are excited to be planning a Kingsbury exhibition and a mix of Zoom socials with meetings in gardens and parks as the weather warms up. As lockdown eases and people start re-jigging timetables to fit in work, travel, meetings with family and friends and all the activities that we have missed in the last 12 months, the Guild will continue to offer, via Zoom or in person, demonstrations, encouragement, companionship, support and inspiration.

All our activities are dependent on volunteers and I cannot say enough how much I appreciate the committee's and members' contributions to the Guild and willingness to adapt to new ways of doing things alongside all the other pressures of keeping going over the last year. Special thanks go to Ian who, sadly, has decided to stand down as Treasurer. He has done a fantastic job in a short time and in some respects against the odds: both the bank and HMRC with whom he has had dealings have both had bigger things on their minds than the Guild's small accounts and have not been easy to reach. Ian has also been instrumental in setting up the collaboration with Open Door and will continue to be involved, bringing the opportunity to work with clay to people who might otherwise not have the chance. We are looking for someone to take on the book keeping and join the committee, ideally as a Trustee, to help guide our decisions on spending and income generation. Could that be you? You will get plenty of support from Ian as outgoing Treasurer and also from the rest of the Committee. If you would like to know more, please let me know. In many ways, it is a good time to get to know the basics as activities start gradually to resume.





## Christine Pike



Judi Tribe

Christine Pike gave the Guild members a very special demonstration at our Saturday Zoom meeting in February. Due to lack of WiFi in her studio, Christine made an extraordinary effort to rearrange her study to accommodate all she needed for our morning virtual talk and demonstration. Christine told us that all her adult life she been involved with Arts and Crafts and, because of her fascination with miniatures and antique dolls, this led her to making and selling dolls around the world. After a successful number of years, Christine felt that this way of working was too limiting for her and she wanted to produce more artistic and sculptural pieces. She continued to combine different media and techniques including ceramics into her work. Her previous doll making strongly influenced her style of ceramics with emphasis on detail and the importance of the head in all her figurative works.

Christine said that her journey with clay was mostly self taught as well as attending workshops which have given her both inspiration and further techniques. She particularly raved about Brendan Hesmondhalgh's workshops, saying that he is a brilliant animal sculptor and teacher. He runs these courses at The Sculpture Lounge. (Brendan demonstrated at the Guild's Pottery Open Day in 2020 )

Christine began the morning with a slide and video presentation and she explained how she came to evolve her ideas and create her stunning pieces using a combination of media including clay. Christine's imagery in her figurative sculptures are from her fascination of myths and folklore.

'My figurative work is informed by ideas and reflections upon the nature of childhood,



play, half-remembered folk tales - and how these things impact upon us as adults. Sometimes light-hearted, sometimes unsettling or melancholy, my aim is to capture character and a suggestion of private thoughts, which can be interpreted in many ways. I try to imbue my figures with a sense of stillness at their core; in an uncertain world, they, at least, have a sense of themselves and of their destiny.'

Her mythical imagery during the 1<sup>st</sup> Covid-19 Lockdown changed and she started to make sculptures that were more pared back, forms that emphasised touch and nurturing and the love of the world. The series of serene Goddesses gradually evolved with hollow compartments containing either golden eggs or sleeping hares, symbols of protection. These sculptures were often untitled and allows the viewer to make their own interpretation towards the pieces.

Christine demonstrated in the video how she forms the Goddess' head. She likes to try and get the features symmetrical but she doesn't like to use a mirror, instead she turns

the head around, making judgements as to where to add or to take away the clay. Christine works extremely slowly and carefully, and she normally takes a day to make the head and another day to finish and tidy up the details. Christine likes to press extremely fine stoneware clay into her mould to make her head shape as this clay is best to have a flawless. For the eye details, she hollows out the eye sockets and then places a rounded lump of clay to create the peaceful closed eyes. For the mouth detail, Christine uses a small pointed tool to lift the clay rather than adding clay. She doesn't work from photographs or portrait drawings but responds directly with the clay and so she makes a beautiful, subtle and individual expression on each face.



'A master head is sculpted in clay, from which I make plaster moulds. The cast or pressed ceramic pieces that result from this process are then manipulated and modified

with added hand-built elements to create unique works which, nonetheless, share a common origin.'



Christine began to make and use moulds because when she started to make her head forms, she actually lacked confidence to be able to successfully repeat them by hand-building. 'I live in fear of the dreaded undercut'. During the Q&A time after the video, Christine suggested that it is best to have very few deep indentations and even profiles are best when creating successful master moulds. Christine also described how she has also used silicone resin moulds and said they are 'blissful' and very easy to use and more forgiving than plaster ones 'as you don't have to worry about having undercuts as the moulds can be peel back'. Since 2017, she has worked with Jesmonite - a water-based, environmentally kind resin,

which has enabled her to make larger sculptures suitable for outdoor display. However Christine has recently become aware of the environmental impact these materials have and she is researching other alternatives.

After the video Christine showed us her finished Goddess sculpture with the small hare nestling in the hollow of her body. We could see the beautiful subtle oxide washes and stains that had been applied to the face and horns as well as the dark pigment used for the hollow containing the small crouching hare. Such a thought provoking piece.



Next Christine began her live demonstration, 'Hare on the Hill'. She started by using paper templates for the sides, base and top for the hill and with neat scoring of the clay and slip, she joined the all slab pieces together. To create the texture on the hill, she made vertical lines with a wooden tool.

Christine then turned to make her small hare. The hare body was made from a small 'bear head' shaped template which was cut out from a rolled out flat slab of 5mm clay. After cutting a V-shape at the hare's 'head end', she carefully shaped the body into a hollow form and after making vent holes in the top of the hill, she scored / slipped again, and then placed the slightly twisted hare's body on top of the hill, ready for it's legs and head. These tiny pieces for legs and head features were skilfully rolled and modelled and placed on the body. The little hare emerged, full of life and character, slightly looking up, with its

exaggerated long languid legs crossed over one another and gently stretching down the hill. Christine only uses three tools when modelling her clay, a pointed £1 dental tool, a small wooden pottery tool with a sloping point at one end and a small round at the other end and lastly a small paint brush. Christine rarely uses drawing and photographs when she is creating her animal forms. They are a nod to realism and it is often a memory.

'Movement is the key to my animal sculptures. I do not try to capture an exact likeness of a creature but rather something of it's spirit and wildness. I work quickly and intuitively, handling the clay as little as possible to keep the surface 'fresh'. Using hollow-building techniques I push the clay out from the inside to create a suggestion of muscle and bone.'

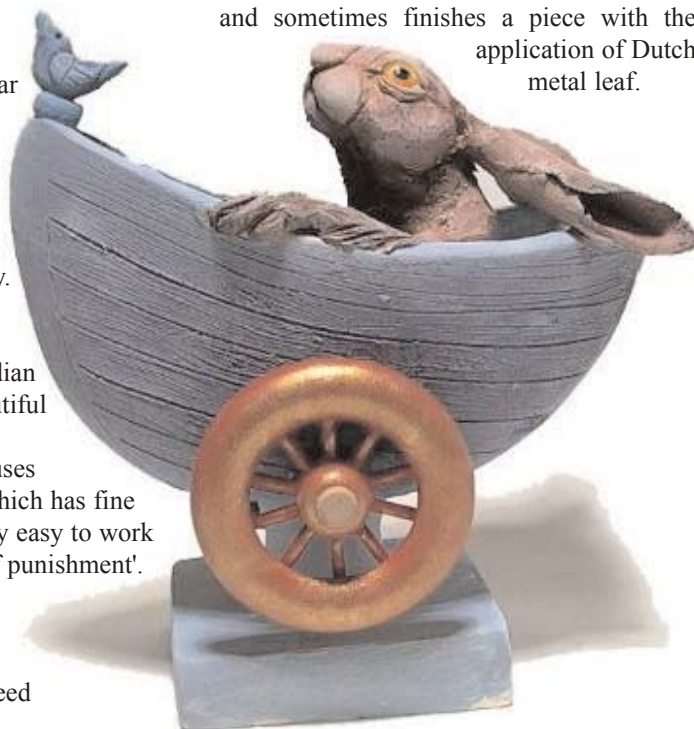
At the end of her 'Hare on the Hill' demonstration, Christine showed us a similar but fully decorated and the final fired piece. The hare had a dark oxide wash over it to emphasise the texture and then a delicately bluish wash over its head and body. The hill was a contrast of a dark black oxide which Christine deepened with Indian Ink after firing. Such a beautiful sculpture.

Christine told us that she uses Ashraf Hanna Raku Clay which has fine grog in it as she finds it very easy to work with and 'it can take a lot of punishment'. This clay is very good for larger pieces as that you don't have to wait for it to dry out and so there is no need to prop pieces up.

Also this clay doesn't slump in the kiln during the firing.

Christine also uses Earthstone clay and her own paper clay for hand-building.

Her kiln is electric because she doesn't want any surprises especially after the many hours she spends working on her each of her pieces. Her 1st firing are at 1000 c with the 2nd firing between 1125 c - 1130 c. She also fires at 1240 c. Christine keeps her colour decoration on her surfaces to a minimum and uses only light washes of oxides and stains. She also uses artist pigments and sometimes finishes a piece with the application of Dutch metal leaf.





Christine shows and sells through a number of Galleries and Craft Fairs. Her website is [www.christinepike.com](http://www.christinepike.com) and her work can also be seen and sold on the social platforms of Facebook, Etsy and Pinterest. Once a year Christine also shows her work at the The British Craft Trade Fair in Harrogate, the only trade fair of this kind in the UK.

Christine runs her own workshops, obviously this has been paused due to recent events, but the last one was in last September (2020) under a gazebo in her garden but normally these take place in an indoor space. The Guild will be booking Christine to run a workshop which will be very exciting for our members. And finally a big thanks to you Christine for propping up your screen on a pile of books and in a very small space and showing us how you created your delicate and beautiful 'Hare on the Hill' sculpture while all the time talking with charm,

humour and detailed information about your techniques and processes to your virtual audience. We look forward to meeting you in person at your workshop for us.





## On Being Centred: A conversation with Vasu Reddy, Ester Beck and Vidya Thirunarayan. Charlotte Anstey.

It was a joyful opening to the 2022 DCPG Potters Day as we were plunged into an improvised free-form conversation between three women- and what a rich interaction we witnessed!

The participants were brought together by our president John Higgins' own ceramic odyssey into 'wild clay' which inspired him to challenge us all to expand the boundaries of our ceramic practice and stimulate insight into what we are doing. We found ourselves in the zoom-mediated presence of three impressive, articulate and enthusiastic potters.

They were led, in an informal but thoughtful style, by Professor Vasu Reddy who opened by asking: "what does it feel like to be centred and what's it's like to feel centred"?

The ensuing conversation had multiple perspectives assisted by clips of film to illuminate and help the audience appreciate their experiential learning and its role in being centred. We entered into Esther's Becks studio practice via a video clip and she spoke about her daily dialogue with blocks of clay which she views as independent entities with their own centre. By initiating and reaching out for this dialogue she reveals the potential for interacting with the clay mass. She explained that she is reliant on her own capacity to embrace curiosity and lean into openness which enables the clay form to be developed, explored and realised. Ester's unique ceramic



art vessels reflect her focused, courageous immersion within this process of making.



Prof. Vasu Reddy's psychological research examines infant development which is dependant on an interested external presence creating a feedback loop of interaction; this was vividly demonstrated when we saw film of a new born infant actively imitating the exaggerated mouthing movements of an adult carer. Vasu explained that conversations can't have scripts; and that it is the unscripted nature of conversation that permits teasing and provokes the exploration of boundaries which we see when babies make jokes and mischief. Vasu's brought these observations into perspective when she spoke about her ceramic practice; for Vasu creative transformations emerges within the experience of trusting the self to take risks by stretching boundaries, surprising oneself and losing self consciousness.

Vidya Thirunarayan is deeply grounded in classical Indian dance performance. For her 'centring' is a point of balance, rooted in calm awareness of breath which allows connection between the inner and outer world. She explored the dynamics of the dance conversation emphasising actions to reach out and connect with the key elements supporting the dancer: music, rhythm and space. She noted the performative nature of throwing clay and the dual tendency of 'technique' to both allow spontaneity but also become restrictive. As she developed her own ceramic technique she felt inhibited by her perfectionist tendencies but broke through this by creating a 2 week clay dance performance involving 200 kilos of terracotta clay! This morphed into a 2 year project to engage with the clay transforming it into various forms! Vidya's



last act was to treat us to a brief but scintillating dynamic dance performance staged in what looked like her kitchen!

As the Conversation drew towards a close Vasu brought further focus on existential ideas when she said that the idea that there is 'an inner self' is a myth! In her experience what we have is multiple potential selves that emerge and manifest in the context of dialogues. These dialogues provide space for the unexpected & unplanned new thoughts, feelings and understandings. She emphasised that what is essential is an openness and capacity to listen which alongside being centred in



Vasu promoted the concept of: 'Felt Thought' (TS Elliot) which suggests we can seek 'sensibility'- by unifying thought and feeling. This is appealing as much ceramic practice does demand a sensibility to focus simultaneously on detail and balance. As I gathered and centred my own thoughts I appreciated the lively warm guidance from these 3 wise women; It was a great pleasure to listen and learn, and be inspired to find places for my multiple potential inner selves in my future dialogues with clay.



humility makes it possible to find our own authenticity. She spoke about the attraction of incompleteness and the value of spontaneity (which has a pivotal presence in Japanese ceramics) instead of the drive towards refinement. As a parting gift







## Sasha Wardell - Potters Open Day 2021

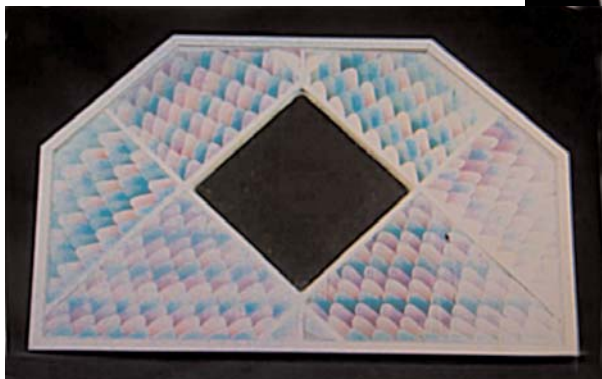
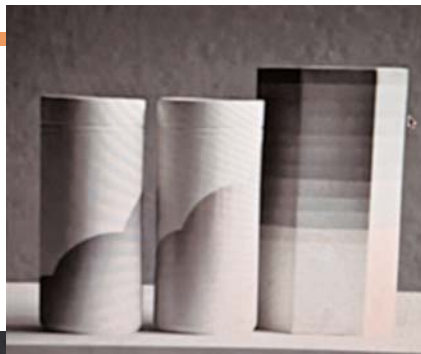
 Andre Hess.

Sasha Wardell was introduced to the international online audience by Judi Tribe who described a potter and her work in terms that would have encompassed several lifetimes it seemed. The key words which unified her methods and means were mould making and slip casting, and industrial.

When one thinks of a Sasha Wardell pot one thinks of softly coloured wistful narrow footed bowls that float a little above the surface of the table - and which seems able to fill a room in the way it draws the eye.

Therefore the sheer weight of industrial process behind her and her work was a surprise feature of her slide show illustrating her biography in pottery. There was indeed an almost-dysjunction between Sasha, the woman, and the hefty industrial nature and experience that makes up the picture of the maker and her wistful floaty pieces.

Sasha was keen on graphics and had gained a place at Bath Academy of Art, Corsham in 1976. Later in that course she ended by doing ceramics almost by accident, but had missed the wheel and handbuilding units.

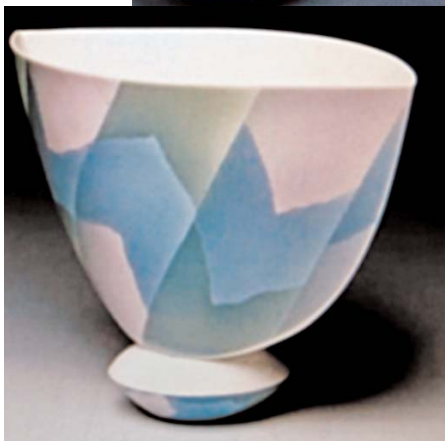


This was followed by an Erasmus Exchange to the Ecole Nationale des Arts Décoratifs in Limoges where they had a museum with an enviable porcelain collection. Part of the same building was where people were trained for the industry.

Key to how life panned out for Sasha was the coincidence that students had access to the factory and its processes, which included firing hard paste porcelain to 1420 degrees Celsius in reduction. There she was able to learn mould-making, turned plaster mould-making, and decorating.

Sasha stated, unequivocally, that this inexperience in France decided her direction in ceramics. She spent 1979-1981 at the Stoke Poly, now Staffordshire University, on the MA course, where she was sent to Royal Doulton to work in the industry as part of her training. She took with her the experience of Limoges, and continued to work as she did in France. Only in her second year did things open up to creativity and she was allowed to make her own work, which included plaster turning, mould-making, hand-carving, and lithographic transfer. Her work at that point was still entirely process-led, albeit her own.

After her MA she joined Alsager College of Higher Education (now Manchester Metropolitan University) as artist in residence and ran the ceramics department, together with Nancy Angus from 1981 to 1984. There she was able to teach half the week and do her own work the rest of the time. While there she developed her interest in turning moulds on horizontal lathes and



slip-casting with air-brushing and reverse inlay techniques.

Her earliest experience of exhibiting was with Contemporary Applied Arts on an exhibition called 'Black and White'. Her work at that time involved joining a foot to the main body of the vessel at the leather hard

stage to increase the height and add more interest, and airbrushing decoration was the main technique.

Next came France, where she lived and worked from 1989 to 1997, and did the archetypal British thing of restoration of a house and a barn. There, for a year, she had work-space in a factory while she waited for their studio to be completed.

It was like having her own gigantic studio with technical help and advice, and kiln space. There she learnt to accept and enjoy her mistakes and consolidate her own voice. At around that time she stopped making in hard-paste porcelain and moved back to bone china. She made mainly jugs and bowls, finished with air-brush decoration (and mainly natural imagery in pastel colours). A crucial practical consideration was dealing with warping of the rims of open vessels. The solution came though altering the top of the models in the



plaster stage prior to moulding so that the inevitable warping looked like part of the design intention. Part of working in a way that was freer was to allow some of the design process to happen while turning the model on the lathe. It was also around this time that parts of architecture became a source of ideas. So did textiles, natural forms, and what happens when one layers slips to create translucency.

The next part of Sasha's presentation was a virtual tour of repurposed very old farmstead and buildings where she has her studio on the Somerset/Wiltshire borders near Bath.

This was followed by her Masterclass which took the form of a video, which she voiced-over. Here we saw her process from start to finish, and included some fired results. We saw her on Zoom, speaking and holding up some of her work, while viewing the video, which attested to the



hybrid nature of the day.

Much of the next part of her demonstration was to show a video of her multi-layering and carving/scraping technique. We also saw her incising, masking, and water-eroding. It was during this part of the talk where questions around materials and techniques arose.



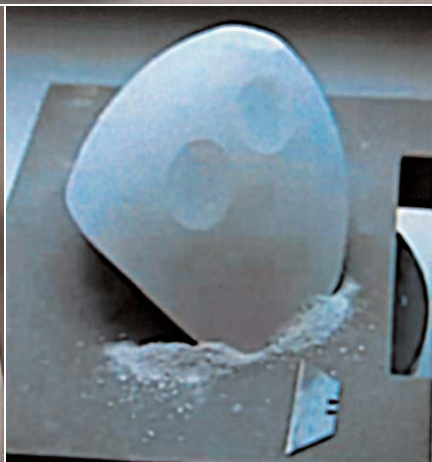
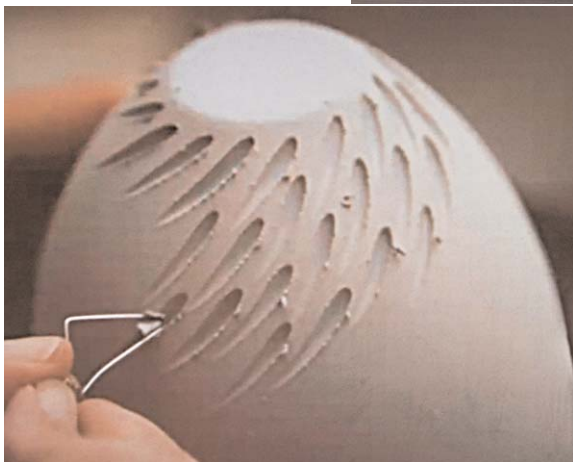
Sasha offered the audience a taste of the answers which could be found more fully discussed, and with illustrations, in her two books: 'Slipcasting - A Ceramics Handbook' (Bloomsbury) and 'Porcelain and Bone China' (Crowood Press). Both are available from Blackwells or from her website [sashawardell.com](http://sashawardell.com).



Her second slide presentation showed her curriculum vitae from 1988 to today. This includes a Research Fellow position at Bath Spa University, where she developed light fittings and lamp shades using her techniques of layering slips and overlaying and incising and carving.

Sasha concluded her section of the day with slides of her studio in France and of the Don du Fel, a contemporary ceramics gallery in the Auvergne where she exhibits her work. She is currently showing at Collect (online) and in Japan at Galerie Hu in Nagoya.

A key consideration with which to view Sasha's work is to understand that she uses undoubted industrial techniques adapted to the studio to produce work that is individual, delicate,



and elegant. This provides a conceptual tension between industrial process and the final object, which is interesting and unique to Sasha Wardell. Using the visual vocabulary of contemporary pottery and tableware, her pots

are undoubtedly objects of quiet contemplation that come out of the noisy history of industrial pottery processes, rather than the historical trajectory of studio pottery as we understand it.



## The Happy Accidents that Open up a New Path of Creation A Studio Tour and Demonstration with Thomas Bohle and Mario Feuerstein.

By Nicole Lyster



Leach, and this led to an apprenticeship until 1987. His marriage, and the birth of his son in 1989, galvanised his ambition and he finally opened his own studio in 1991.

His first works were traditional forms and functional wear, and it was this that led to his discovery of his unique double walled form. Creating a ceramic cake mould for gugelhupf - a yeast based sponge cake

With his assistant Mario Feuerstein as interpreter, for the last part of POD, we were introduced to Thomas Bohle in his own studio. He admitted to being a bit nervous about how the day was going to go, as he was not comfortable with his knowledge of technology, but with Mario's help he was pleased to be taking part and excited to show us what they had been working on.

History - Thomas and Mario started their session with a little history to map out Thomas's journey to clay. Thomas Bohle was born in 1958 in Dornbirn, Austria. When he left school he began an apprenticeship in retail sales, but realising this was not the profession for him he deviated to nursing, which he enjoyed for many years.

It was in 1984 that he first touched clay. Attending a pottery course in Exeter, he studied under Tim Andrews and David



cooked in a circle, he accidentally left it on the wheel and it dried too far to use. On cutting it off the batt Thomas flipped it over and noticed the interesting shape it created upside down. This was his epiphany and it led to his unique creations and a lifelong pursuit of perfecting the glazing of these forms in his own gas kiln.

Studio Tour and Glazing - Thomas works with stoneware clay WM2502 from Germany which has a wide firing range from 1000 - 1300C with fine grogg incorporated in it, making it very stable and ideal for the shapes Thomas creates. He initially bisque fires his pieces to 950C, taking about three months or more to create enough pieces for a full load in his gas kiln. The capacity of the kiln is just over 1m<sup>2</sup> and it fires on natural gas. The kiln has 4 large burners each side. It takes two people to fire it to ensure the gas burners are firing evenly inside whilst the oxygen flow is monitored from the outside.

The final firing of his work is about 1280C, and many pieces are second fired with additional glaze applications to create the flow and intricate movement in his glazes. The kiln is put into a reduction phase from 950C through to 1280, with a careful manipulation of the gas and a reduction of the oxygen allowed into the kiln. Where the pieces are placed in the kiln denotes the colour combinations that can be created. An iron rich glaze can show both brown and green on the same vessel, a copper glaze can be green and red. In some cases it is possible



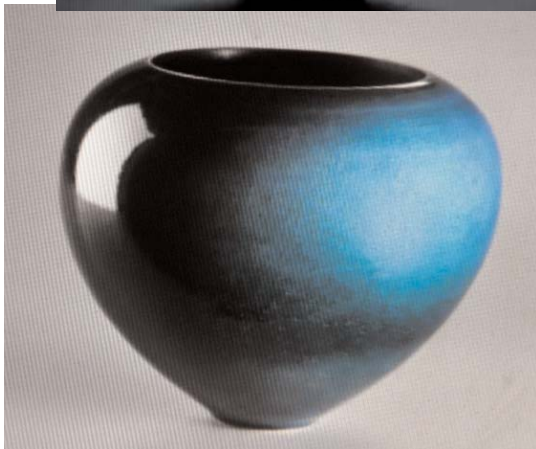
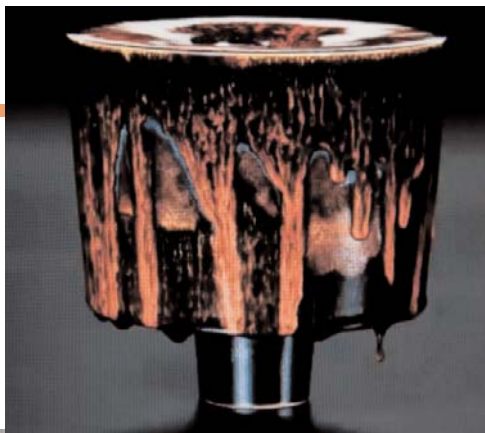
to create a double reduction effect in the centre of his works, creating a whirlpool nebula of reds and blues from the same glaze.



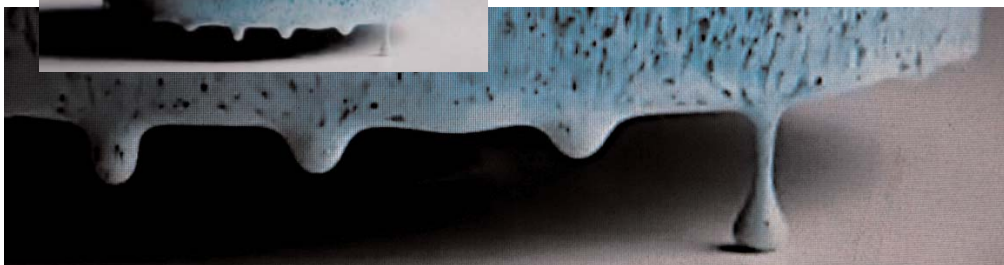
Even after 20 years of research and development of reduction firing and layered glazes Thomas is still confounded by the results. He showed us a beautiful light blue glaze effect, like a waterfall around the form, which he gained from double firing a piece. In this case there was a second application of glaze using wallpaper paste as a thickener to make it stick to the already glazed form. He has tried to replicate it many times but has never been able to, and this glaze remains stubbornly brown in most of its firings.

Thomas also found that the application of the glaze affects how it reacts in the kiln. Most of his tenmoku glazes are used as a first application and are overlaid with oxblood (copper carbonate rich glaze that is red in reduction). If the tenmoku is left to dry completely before the copper is applied there will be strong runs in some places but not in others. If the tenmoku is still wet while the second glaze is applied there is a much more even fluidity across the whole surface.

Thomas's work is famous for the capture of glaze drips suspended in time, but these cannot be planned. If he applies the glaze too



thickly the drips will fuse the piece to the kiln shelf, too thinly and no drips will be created. The drips come about through double firing glazed pieces with thick applications of glaze for the second firing, the additional heat work causing much more flow and reaction in the glazes the second time around.





Thomas likes to work very cleanly (a nod to his nursing past) and all his glazes are sprayed. He has a separate spray gun for each glaze to ensure they do not mix (unless he wants them to in the kiln). The application of glaze in the centre of the piece is a delicate process, to ensure that there is a clearly defined edge between the inside and the outside of the work. The inside of the work is glazed first and a wooden cork is then used to close the aperture, so that the outside can be glazed with no chance of it integrating with the inside. Thomas uses a scalpel to scrape a clean line on the rim of the inside of his pieces, and this is enough to stop the glaze from the outside flowing to the inside so there is a beautifully defined contrast between the movement of the outside walls and the solidity of the inside depression.

Thomas explained that he has always had an interest in architecture, especially the spaces in buildings and this is what intrigues him

about his double walled vessel. To show the space inside he takes his pieces to the local vet and has them X-rayed. These images are ethereal and clearly show the relationship between the outside form and the inside space. Interestingly, if there is barium in the glaze this will show up in the X-ray, giving texture to the image - and, as Thomas remembered, this is why it is given to patients when they need an x-ray

of their digestive tract because barium shows up on x-rays.



After explaining his glazing techniques Thomas took us into his designated gallery space. It was a large echoing room, full of reverence and astonishing work.

He explained that the proportions of his work and the shape of them allow them to stay true to their shape in the firing, but if he gets something slightly wrong (walls too thin, corners too sharp etc) they will sag. His gallery is where he holds special exhibitions and invites people to private views. Due to the current pandemic, he has no fixed appointments to show his work and is not particularly interested in virtual gallery shows as he prefers people to see and touch his work.

He and Mario have taken this time to investigate the local clays near the mountain where they live, and have produced many test pieces and test glazes using these clays. They dry it first, sieve it, mix it with water and sieve it again before they use it. So far they have made small double walled pots and fired the clay to 1160C. Thomas was pleased with how well the clays throw. They also use some in their glaze mix, firing it to 1280C to form a celadon like glaze the same colour as the clay. They have used their time to investigate oxidation firing in an electric kiln and mixed many different glazes to trial in this atmosphere. Mario has been Thomas's friend for many years and is now his official apprentice and assistant, enjoying the mentoring that Thomas has given him and the opportunity to perfect his own work and join in these experiments.



After marvelling at the gallery, the glazing room, the shelves of ceramics for sale and the kiln, we were taken into Thomas's 'Holy Place' as Mario called it - where he throws. Everything in the studio is clean and well organised (though Mario hinted that that was because everything had been shoved into the drying room, which we were not invited to look in). Here Thomas demonstrated how he throws his double walled vessels. He throws them in many different sizes, up to 70kg of clay. Today, he chose 4 kg. He uses a German made wheel (now out of production) which is quiet and extremely robust, and a Shimo wheel for smaller pieces. The wheel head has four holes drilled into it and Thomas's wooden batts (some up to 1m in diameter) have pins in place to marry up with these. According to Mario, Thomas usually throws to Indian music, but today, for us, the studio was silent.



**Throwing** - The thing I noticed about Thomas's throwing is the slowness of it, the gentle way he moves the clay, using the very tips of his fingers to coax it into shape. The forms he makes can be huge in size, but the process for making them is delicate and careful. If he is doing a large piece, he will take a day to move the clay around, stopping for breaks throughout the process.

After centring the clay, he starts by making a central opening in the clay right to the bottom of the batt and pulls the walls out to make a doughnut shape. He then creates an inside wall, essentially splitting the clay into two concentric circles, which he closes up, making a 'bubble' of clay that he can form into a perfect dome. Thomas likes everything on his work to be clean and finished, so the inside of these double walled forms is as neat as the outside - it also enables the form to dry more evenly if the clay slurry is removed from the surface. The outside wall is then carefully thrown, pulled up above the inside dome and then brought to a close. Because of the air inside it is possible to shape the base flat and clean off the surface to make the form as neat and perfect as possible. This means that there is very little turning of the piece when it is leather hard. Thomas puts a small hole in the base of the work with a drill bit, to allow the air to escape, so the form does not crack as it dries. For our benefit he cut this piece in half so we could see the inside profile, a dome inside a flat topped cone.



**Turning** - The piece is left on the batt to dry overnight and then

removed, turned upright and placed on the wheel for turning. Because it is double



walled the central depression is still soft and allows Thomas to manipulate it into a perfect round and smooth it off with his fingers rather than a turning tool. The outside needs very little work, just a perfecting of the inside and outside rims. Pieces are dried slowly under plastic, sometimes waiting for many months before they go into the kiln for their first firing.



**Large Pieces -** For his final demonstration Thomas showed us the special trolley he had built to turn his larger pieces over for trimming. 70Kg of wet clay is too much for one person to flip over, and still very difficult for more than one person to handle. So Thomas had a hand cranked forklift truck made. It has a flipping mechanism on the forks. He manoeuvred this under a large piece he had ready on the wheel, secured it in place with sponge and a wooden batt with the centre cut out to match the pot. He flipped the pot on the batt upside-down, then cranked it back on to the wheel. It was a smooth, effortless operation, and anyone who has to move heavy items around their studio would want to invest in one - though it will not magically glaze the piece you are flipping (that was just for demonstration purposes).

It was a wonderful afternoon spent with a kind, gentle man and his assistant, happy to share and laugh about his love of clay and glazes, and the 'accident' that opened up such



exciting prospects in creating. I left the day looking forward to getting back to my tiny studio to try new things, to let go of control and to see if I could make some happy accidents that would lead to a new line in creation - oh and to try a double walled form upside-down on the wheel (though not so huge that I need a special trolley to turn it over).





### **Kate Windibank = Balanced Bowls**

These sculptural bowls are made using stoneware and porcelain clays, oxide enriched slips and crystalline glaze. They are weighted at the bottom so they remain upright which protects the delicate porcelain rims.

Creating these bowls is a therapeutic experience. There is a pleasant rhythm to the making:

I roll.

I tear.

I layer.

I blend.



The rims are created by working the porcelain at the torn edges to create multiple ridges. Undulating and translucent, they catch the light and give each bowl a unique silhouette.

And of course as with all my pieces, the interior is equally important as the exterior.

If you are interested in finding out more please do not hesitate to email me.



These bowls can be purchased in the UK at my online stores  
[@Cluster\\_Crafts](#) and [@Cambridge\\_Ceramics](#)

**Doug Jones** is moving his workshop after it flooded for the fourth time. His first pottery, 'Floating world', was a barge moored on the River Chess, until it sank. Thereafter he kept the name, which was perhaps a trifle too prescient.

Doug was renowned for putting on the best open studio in the area.

Fortified by Simone's wonderful cake, served beside the river, you would head over to the pottery on the opposite bank by pulling yourself over on a pontoon. The pots were pretty good, too. As Doug would say, every pot is a little piece of art. His open studio was always a little piece of magic.

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### **Margaret Tatton-Brown**

Will be showing her useful, high fired stoneware pottery as part of Bucksartweeks at Stotts Nursery, Ibstone Rd, Stokenchurch, HP14 3XS, exit 5 off the M40, from 12 - 27 June, 10am-4.30pm, closed on Sunday. Refreshments including gluten free cakes will be provided.

[www.Margaret-Tatton-Brown.co.uk](http://www.Margaret-Tatton-Brown.co.uk)



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### **You've been corbelled!**

Faces tend to grow more interesting with age, at least that is what I tell myself on the increasingly rare occasions when I take a good look in the mirror. "Not quite a gargoyle yet!" Sure that few of us will ever get to be a gargoyle, but one of us has had a near miss. Look up as you walk around the outside of St Helens of Wheathampstead and you will find a well known face gazing down from a corbel.



Do you recognise him from the photograph?





## Kingsbury and the market stall



Jacki Harrop.

We have an opportunity to hold the Guild's annual exhibition at Kingsbury Barn during the heritage weekend of 10th 11th and 12th September. This is also the weekend of the scheduled Pub in the park, which could mean a good footfall if Covid restrictions enable both events to proceed.

The Heritage weekend provides an opportunity for the Barn to be viewed by the public and for our members to have use of this magnificent space. In the past this has been a very successful event with exhibitors displaying and selling their work and provides an ideal platform to promote the guild's profile and objectives. We propose to organise a Covid secure event with fewer exhibitors ensuring social distancing and secure hygiene measures for exhibitors, stewards and the public. We would not run the social evening nor any Have a Go. Demonstrations would have to be limited and carefully orchestrated.

All payments would be contactless and exhibitors would need to be willing to share stewarding, setting up and dismantling in a rota. If you would be interested in taking part please contact [jackieharrop1@gmail.com](mailto:jackieharrop1@gmail.com)

We have been approached by the St Albans market team to see if we would be interested in having a market stall again during April May and June. This proved very popular with the public and productive for sellers during the autumn last year. The stall would be available on Fridays, starting 16th April through to 25th June. This is for the craft market which started up last summer. It worked well to have 3 exhibitors each time, offering different kinds of work, and ensuring capacity to maintain social distance. Stallholders would need to be able to take contactless payments and to ensure Covid safe conditions according to the guidance issued. They would also need to be prepared to work as a team to set up and dismantle the stall, erecting the gazebo and tables and also share responsibility either for storing the equipment between sessions or delivering it to the next team. The cost of the stall is shared between the sellers (less than £20 each) If you would like to be a member of one of these teams, (or to organise a team of 3 yourself) please let me know, indicating the week(s) you are interested in. There are no guarantees of sales, or of good weather but if you'd like to give it a try, contact [jackieharrop1@gmail.com](mailto:jackieharrop1@gmail.com)





# Open Door Community Project



Amanda Toms.

With Covid -19 restrictions stopping the Guild's usual community outreach activities Ian Jones with the help from Audrey Hammett, Fiona Booyes, Amanda Toms and guidance from Ros McGuirk set up a pottery activity to trial with Open Door [www.opendoorberkhamsted.co.uk](http://www.opendoorberkhamsted.co.uk).

To get the scheme started a set of Pottery Packs went out to Open Door's Memory Café group who are currently unable to meet at the centre in Berkhamsted. This commenced in early March and feedback with a review was presented to the DCPG Committee Meeting on 23rd March. The total cost was £179 consisting of 8 activity packs and instructions, using air dried clay from Bath Potters and sets of acrylic paints.

The responses were predominately positive from recipients of the

packs. It helped Open Door evaluate what sort of projects and tools are needed for continuing activities.

Another exciting recent development at Open Door is they have received a £3,000 Grant from Dacorum Borough Council to purchase and install a kiln in the grounds behind their premises.

Open Door have ordered their Kiln through Kevin Sparrow and it is due for delivery in late April/early May. They are considering building a brick Kiln Room on an existing 10' x 6' concrete base and are looking for assistance to spec it for a builder. Open Door are looking forward to future projects using the kiln and providing classes to the local community. They have close links with both



Adult Art education and local Schools which gives several opportunities for ceramic projects to develop.

DCPG members interested in being involved / offering donations of materials or equipment.

Contact: Audrey:

[dcpgmembership@gmail.com](mailto:dcpgmembership@gmail.com)





## Other Events for your Diary



Check before you go.

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- May 27 – 31**     **Ceramics Congress.** Online International Pottery Festival with + 36 workshops by top ceramicists including Gareth Mason, Fitch and MacAndrew, Jin Eui Kim, Craig Underhill and Felicity Aylieff.  
See <https://ceramic.school/the-ceramics-congress/>
- June 11 – 13th**     **Potfest Scotland.** The only big ceramic fair north of the border and well worth the journey for its eclectic mix. At Scone Palace, Perth, PH2 6BD  
Adults £7 and accompanied under 16s are free. 10am – 5 pm.  
See [www.potfest.co.uk](http://www.potfest.co.uk)
- June 12 -27**     **Bucks Art Weeks.** Open studios across the county.  
See [www.bucksartweeks.org.uk](http://www.bucksartweeks.org.uk)
- June 25 – 27**     **Potfest at Compton Verney.** A new show in Warwickshire.  
See [www.potfest.co.uk](http://www.potfest.co.uk)
- July 2 – 4**     **Childwickbury Art Fair.** Small quality art fair near St Albans.  
See <http://childwickburyarts.com/>
- July 16 – 18**     **Celebrating Ceramics.** The new version of Art in Action with demonstrations etc in the beautiful grounds at Waterperry.  
See [www.celebratingceramics.co.uk](http://www.celebratingceramics.co.uk)
- July 23 - 25th**     **Potfest in the Park.** Selected show of about 80 potters in splendid grounds at Hutton in the Forest, Cumbria, CA11 9TH.  
Adults £8 (this includes access to the gardens), accompanied under 16s are free. 10am – 5 pm.  
See [www.potfest.co.uk](http://www.potfest.co.uk)
- July 30 - 1 Aug**     **Potfest in the Pens.** One of the longest running shows organised by potters for pottery lovers. Held in Skirsgill Auction Mart, Penrith.  
See [www.potfest.co.uk](http://www.potfest.co.uk)
- Aug 20 – 22**     **Art in Clay.** Windsor Race Course. The biggest international ceramic show in the UK has moved from Hatfield House.  
See <https://www.artinclay.co.uk/>  
Check out the website for their new online show.
- Sept 1 - 30th**     **Open Studio in Herts.**  
See <https://www.hvaf.org.uk/>



## DCPG Programme of Online Demonstrations

### From UK and Australia

**Friday 14th May 7 – 9 pm.**

**Midori Takaki**

[www.midoritakaki.co.uk](http://www.midoritakaki.co.uk)

Midori makes figurative sculptures which express the dream world of her imagination, fed by images, myths and legends. Her work is to be found in collections and galleries throughout the world.

**Saturday 12th June 10 am – 12 noon.**

**Jane Annois**

[www.janeannois.com](http://www.janeannois.com)

Jane lives and works in Warrandyte, 30 kms from Melbourne, Australia. She teaches, runs regular ceramic tours to France and produces beautiful raku and terracotta slipware.

**Friday 9th July 7 – 9 pm.**

**Mary-Lou Pittard**

[www.pittards.com.au](http://www.pittards.com.au)

The Pittards live in Melbourne. Mary-Lou is well known for her brightly coloured stoneware. Chris trained in fine art and now produces both landscape paintings and pots that are decorated with painterly images from nature and landscape. He also teaches art and ceramics.

**Friday 13th Aug 7 – 9 pm.**

**Jane Sawyer**

[www.janesawyer.com.au](http://www.janesawyer.com.au)

Jane's pots reflect her love of the tactile qualities of clay and slip. Softly distorted rims and fluid use of slips make for pots you just want to pick up.

Jane trained in Australia, Japan and Edinburgh and now lives in Melbourne. She lectures widely and founded Slow Clay where she teaches Japanese techniques. She has exhibited in Denmark, Japan, UK and Australia.

**Friday 8th October 7 - 9 pm.**

**Pie Bolton**

[www.piebolton.com](http://www.piebolton.com)

Pie Bolton is a contemporary ceramic installation artist working on Bunurong country in Melbourne. Geology and geological forces are the focus of her work. In 2019 she founded The Kiln Room, a unique ceramic resource for other potters to learn and share studio space and equipment.

**Friday 12th Nov at 7 pm.**

**The Oriental Collection at Durham**

[www.dur.ac.uk/orientalmuseum](http://www.dur.ac.uk/orientalmuseum)

A talk on the wonderful collection of ceramics and other artefacts bequeathed by Malcolm Macdonald, politician and diplomat and son of Ramsey Macdonald, PM.

Our guide to the collection will be Craig Barclay, Head of Museums, Galleries and Exhibitions at Durham.

**Saturday 11th Dec 10 – 12 noon.**

**Imogen Noble**

[www.imogentaylor-noble.com](http://www.imogentaylor-noble.com)

Hand built pots inspired by the Japanese aesthetic of minimal glazing and anagama firings.

Imogen moved to Devon last year where she is already organising covid secure classes in addition to developing her work. Up until the move she worked to recreate the subtle colourings of long wood firings using an electric kiln.





It certainly has been a year of Zooms ! Something that I had never heard of let alone used before last year but it has been an amazing way of keeping in touch with other Guild members during these restrictive times. At the beginning the coffee zoom socials started with chats about soda bread, grocery online bookings and some pottery talk but generally we were sharing with others about how we were all feeling in the 1st Covid lockdown as well as getting to grips with using Zoom. A year on and the monthly Guild coffee socials have now changed and now everyone is sharing pottery experiences, techniques and top tips as well as helpful suggestions to any questions asked. There is now a focus theme for each time we meet up, and where members have shown pieces of pottery and talked about its significance to them. Past themes have included, a treasured piece of ceramic, a holiday pottery studio, a favourite mug and

a memorable UK studio visit. You can pop in for as long or short a time which suits you. So if you have a free moment, please come along and below are the next dates and times for April and May.

There is also an Evening Social on Friday 9th April at 7.30pm - 9.00pm. The Zoom links will be sent through via MailChimp to all members nearer the time or please you can contact me and I will send through the links to you via email.

[juditribe0@gmail.com](mailto:juditribe0@gmail.com) ( 0 is a Zero )

### **Diary dates for April / May**

Evening Social on

Friday 9th April at 7.30pm - 9.00pm

Morning Coffee Social on

Friday 16th April at 10.30 am - 12.00 noon

Morning Coffee Social on

Thursday 20th May at 10.30am - 12.00 noon



### Open Studios

The Open Studio Zooms started up a few month ago and it gives members a chance to get together while working in their studios or spaces in their homes. It has been a such a great way of connecting up again and seeing what others are working on. All sorts of activities have been going on and watched on people's screens including sketch book work and drawing out ideas, throwing on the wheel, hand building, decorating pots, even glazing pots and packing kilns.

The Open Studio is time to share what you are doing, the different tools you use etc as well as seeking help and advice on a host of different techniques and processes. Sometimes there is a lot of chatter going on but on other occasions everyone is concentrating their own work and there is complete silence. It really feels like you are working alongside people in a studio. Please come

and join in or just a catch up chat and to see what people are working on etc. Again the Zoom links will be sent through via MailChimp to all members nearer the time or please you can contact me and I will send through the links to you via email. [juditribes0@gmail.com](mailto:juditribes0@gmail.com) (*0 is a Zero*)

Diary dates for April / May

Studio Zoom on Monday 26th April at 10.00am - 1.00pm

Studio Zoom on Monday 24th May at 10.00am - 1.00pm

### Outdoor Socials

Last year the Guild had a number of Rule of Six Garden Coffee Socials which was most enjoyable Hopefully this will happen again during the Summer months and even perhaps we will be able to return to meeting up at outdoor cafes etc. Fingers crossed. Until then, see you on Zoom !



### New Members

A warm welcome to three new members,



Martin Eastabrook, Susan Swales and Chris Norden.

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### Martin Eastabrook

Martin is fascinated by the interactions between clays and glazes and enjoys experimenting with blending his own glazes. Retirement has given him the freedom to develop his hand building and throwing skills. He uses stoneware clays including porcelain and fires in both oxidation and reduction. He has a propane gas kiln and is currently building an updraft wood kiln with a catenary arch.

He writes : “ I’ve been a member of West Forest Potters for 15 years but living at Newbury the DCPG events have always been a little too far away. With the advent of Zoom this changes, so I am taking advantage of the sessions. No matter who presents I always learn something new or have spin-off projects.



## Susan Swales

Susan Swales writes: I discovered clay at school and loved it straight away. After spending my 20's doing other things I was reunited with clay in the early 2000's and went on to study ceramic design at Central St Martins in London. Since then I have spent as much time with clay as I could wrangle amongst the business of family life. I have a very small garden studio (a shed) which just about houses me and my kiln.

I love elephants and have made many over the years. More recently



I started making pet portraits to commission which I love. The challenge of achieving a likeness of the pet is very rewarding when it comes good. I also enjoy seeing the happiness on the face of the owner when they see their treasured pet recreated in ceramic, (usually porcelain). Narrative is important to me and I am coming to realise that all my work is about people and their relationships with other species.

<https://susanswales.co.uk/>

## Christopher Norden

Chris got hooked when he joined a local pottery class in 1997. That same year he built a shed and started a two year diploma course at City Lit where he studied three days a week. He joined several ceramic associations and started to exhibit his work. Within a few years life got in the way and he had to give up "playing with clay...always with the intention of getting

back to it".

He retired about 5 years ago and has finally just cleared the shed. "It's now almost a studio and, thanks to the DCPG, I have a wheel to use.." He likes slab work, quirky art and throwing practical usable wares, and is busy playing again. He was particularly inspired by Thomas Bohle at POD.





## A review of 'Special Effect Glazes' by Linda Bloomfield

 Colin Hazelwood.

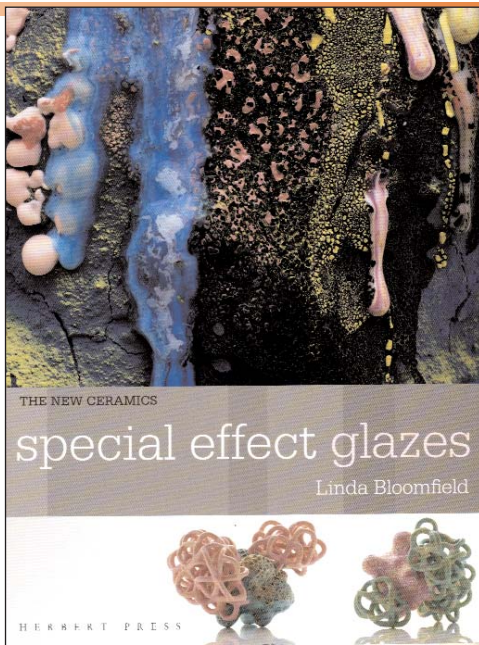
The author of this book, Linda Bloomfield, is one of a rare breed: a potter with a master's degree in material science.

'Special Effect Glazes' is the latest in a series of glaze related books by Linda. The first half of this book provides the reader with a revision of standard glaze preparation techniques so that the second part can be better understood.

That second half of the book deals with the Special Effects which are best summarised in Linda's own words. "Special effect glazes are often on the limits of what makes a stable, durable glaze. Crystalline glazes can be low in alumina. Crackle glazes can be made using materials that have a high coefficient of expansion, while crawl glazes use materials that shrink on drying. Materials that release gases during firing can produce a range of effects from oil spot to volcanic crater surfaces." Significantly for the hobby potter, Linda shows us how to produce celadon and copper red glazes and many others in an electric kiln.

As one might expect with modern technology, the text is very well illustrated with colour plates which are so essential when talking glazes.

Throughout the book, Linda makes liberal use of diagrams displaying the Unity Molecular Formula of a glaze. This is a



way of anticipating and classifying the properties of a glaze based on the ratio of the molecules of  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  (alumina) to  $\text{SiO}_2$  (silica) it contains, and where the various special glazes lie on this matrix.

The book is full of illustrations of the Alumina /Silica matrix but strangely, Linda does not give a practical example of how you derive a Unity Molecular Formula for a particular glaze, nor how you would go

from a given Al /Si ratio to a practical glaze recipe. Coincidentally Gerry Seaborn gave an example of the former in the last edition of the newsletter.

Without this there is a disconnect between text and the phase diagrams which Linda uses so liberally. (However the procedure can be found as Appendix 10 of David Green's excellent book "A handbook of pottery glazes" published by Faber and Faber in 1978 which I used as a guide to my own programme and which we have in our library).

The omission of this somewhat academic chemical analysis should not detract from the plethora of special effects and the recipes to be used to achieve them. Each special effect is illustrated and provided with the recipe to achieve it, together with the cone at which it should mature. Some of these effects look exciting and I look forward to experimenting.



## 'Kintsugi The Poetic Mend' by Bonnie Kemske (former editor of Ceramic Review)



Ian Jones.

'Kintsugi The Poetic Mend' by Bonnie Kemske (former editor of Ceramic Review) This is a fascinating book if you want to understand the philosophy of Kintsugi, its various facets and how it is being adapted to how we live our lives today. If you are looking for a manual on how to become a Kintsugi craftsman, which by the way takes as long as 10 years, this is not the book for you.

I did enjoy the explanation on how the Philosophy came about and the meaning it has to those that practice the craft. I had previously read a quote from another article on Kintsugi "I am a craftsman not an Artist.

Kintsugi only becomes an Art when it is view by another". You are presented with examples of various Chawan (tea bowls) that have been repaired using Kintsugi and are revered in Japan as being a quintessential

Kintsugi pieces with the power to transfer their essence to the viewer or the holder of the pot.

However, in an attempt to sound authentic, the author uses Japanese words without the English meaning in the text. This results in the reader continually going backwards and forwards to the glossary.

In the final chapters the author explains modern world to be a metaphor for healing and rebirth. How someone who is "broken" can be mended and continue to exist in a new life, but still be proud of the visible scars from their previous life.

This is an Interesting read, but I am left with continuing my Kintsugi journey with gorilla glue and gold mica, and no idea how to get it right.





## DCPG Officers for 2021.



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## Stan Romer Competition and Fitzwilliam Prize 2021



The Guild's annual competition is your chance to shine and we need your help in choosing a topic to challenge fellow members. Please can you send your suggestions for this year's competition to Nicole, nicole1lyster@gmail.com by 26th April.

The next stage will be an email poll to choose the favourite and then it will time

to get making.

Entries can be fired or unfired - many of you are still without facilities - but all pieces should be the work of one person and made after the topic is announced.

Pieces will be judged at the AGM, date to be confirmed around the middle of October.



Valentine Clays holds  
the key ingredient...



**Valentine Clays Ltd**

*Manufactured in the Heart of the Potteries...*

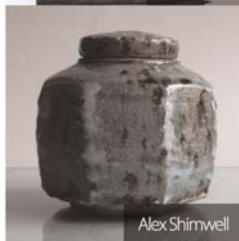
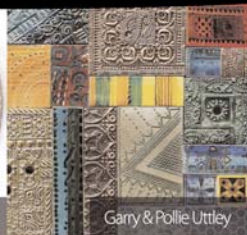
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