

Materials, Making, and Movement with

SANDY LOCKWOOD

by Heidi McKenzie



I met Sandy Lockwood in 2017 during my three-month artist residency in Sydney, Australia. A mutual friend, Penny Ryan, drove me out to the scenic Southern Highlands to visit Lockwood at her Balmoral studio during her annual open house. Lockwood has always been entranced by atmospheric firing, and has established herself over the last four decades as a formidable wood and salt firer. I was immediately struck by Lockwood's nuanced understanding of the sensual in her glazing and in her straightforward yet absolutely considered approach to design, form, and function. Lockwood's *chawans*, or teabowls, exude a perfect balance of the abandon of *wabi-sabi* (the Japanese aesthetic of perfection in imperfection), and the precision of a master craftsperson. As with the lidded forms, the surface textures invite touch. Be it rough or smooth, it is viscerally satisfying to hold each piece in the palms of your hands. I couldn't leave without adding a tiny wood fired, salt-glazed shooter glass to my collection.

In May of 2019, I was invited to present and exhibit at the Australian Ceramics Triennale held in Hobart, Tasmania. I made it a priority to attend Lockwood's session. I found myself rapt; Lockwood's journey is a story worth the telling and, in my opinion, the key points, findings, and summations of her thesis should be within reach of every artist's studio.

Becoming Hooked on Clay

Lockwood was born in London, England, to Argentinian parents, both of whom had strong artistic talents that, for the most part, had to be suppressed due to circumstance. Her family emigrated to Australia when she was seven, she did most of her schooling in New Zealand, and then the family returned to Australia and settled in Sydney. Her first encounter with clay was as a toddler, fashioning mud pies from the earth. At university, she enrolled in psychology and social work. When she became disillusioned, a friend suggested she try a pottery course at the local drop-in arts center. Through that connection, she met and ultimately worked for Derek Smith, a production potter who ran Blackfriars Pottery in Sydney. Lockwood threw, jigged and jolleyed, glazed, and loaded kilns. After two years, she was irreversibly hooked on clay, and enrolled at the East Sydney Technical College.

Lockwood espouses a way of being in the world that enmeshes the very essence of who we are as human beings and how we respond sensorially and emotionally to all organic and inorganic materials within the environment. Lockwood's insatiable curiosity has led her to investigate the underlying foundations of making—what might otherwise be termed “the meaning of making.”

Lockwood focuses on three main themes: materials, making, and movement, and points to the importance of concentrating on noticing, not only as a skill, but also as a disposition toward the physical world around us. She encourages us to really stop and see the detail of a rock face, the texture of the bark on the tree, or the effects of corrosion on the debris washed ashore from the ocean. As a child, she was encouraged to take in the minutia of her environment, which has led to a lifelong relationship with the materials that surround her.



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Opposite: *Unearthed Series*, 11½ in. (29 cm) in length, wood-fired and salt-glazed stoneware, inclusions, slip. **1** Chawan, 5½ in. (13 cm) in diameter, wood-fired and salt-glazed stoneware, inclusions, slip. **2** Lidded jar with ash run, 5 in. (13 cm) in height, wood-fired and salt-glazed stoneware, slip. **3** Chawan, 5 in. (13 cm) in diameter, wood-fired and salt-glazed stoneware, slip.

Materials

Lockwood's inquiry led her to undertake field research into material use and qualities of British Neolithic pots. The makers' marks in these pots create an instantaneous bridge over five millennia, connecting the artist viscerally and emotionally to the Neolithic potters, their aesthetics, and their idea of function. Lockwood understands that the experience of material qualities is a fundamental, non-verbal, bodily way of knowing the world that often lies below any conscious understanding.

In her own studio experimentation, Lockwood started to work with natural rock, pebbles, and ceramic-shard inclusions in her firings. She also began to allow melts to happen. Through wood and salt firing, Lockwood began to hypothesize that the process of atmospheric firing is akin to the process of weathering, hastening the passage of time through fire. The altering of the material quality adds another layer of visual complexity to Lockwood's sculptures.

There is invariably something primordial with regard to the human behavioral drive to gather around fire; it is a sociobiological imperative. Fire is the kiln goddess who offers up many surprises. For Lockwood, post-firing critical assessment plays a key role—and that process is unfiltered, affective, and physical.

I found myself drawn to the *Unearthed Series* piece that was on display at the Australian Ceramics

Triennial; you have to look twice to ensure that you are not looking at a piece of nature, cleaved from its natural habitat and placed on a plinth. The gray-green of one of the featured pieces from this series (7) is reminiscent of some of the rock formations I encountered in the Northern Territories of Australia, while at the same time it echoes the feeling of the rock face in the formidable gardens of the Forbidden City in Beijing. Regardless of the origin of their geographic antecedent, their patina evokes a connection to ancient geologies, weathered through acceleration in the firing process. The other, more vivid piece (8) appears to come directly from the depths of the Great Barrier Reef. I feel Lockwood's work plays a vital role in connecting and grounding us to our natural environment as viewers and perceivers. I like knowing that there is some happenstance in the making, that the process is not 100 percent controlled or contrived, that the materials themselves have a say in how they ultimately present themselves to their audience. As an abstractionist, I find meaning in contemplating the complexity and simplicity of the forms, their material qualities, and aesthetic values.

Making

Through her research, Lockwood came upon the term meshworks, as coined by UK anthropologist Tim Ingold.¹ She adapted Ingold's term for the purposes of the ceramic making community, where meshworks are the weaving together of a multiplicity of factors that make us each individual. Our meshworks impact our making: they are living, morphogenic networks that influence our conversations with our work and our way of making. Making in this way is an approach Lockwood calls "making from the inside." Based on an understanding of multiple interrelated experiences, she allows clay and material to be co-contributors to her creations.

Lockwood explored the relationship between left and right brain in the process of making. Grossly simplified, the right brain processes the world as a whole, deciphering meaning, yet it is unable to fully perform the tasks allocated to the left hemisphere of the brain. The left side of the brain holds the ability to verbalize, articulate, categorize, label, and sort that meaning. The research points to learning in a haptic way that is akin to all of us makers. Lockwood's boldest thesis statement is that "making is thinking." The act of making something out of clay is a non-articulated form of expression that uses a visual vocabulary and necessitates corporeal learning.

Movement

Lockwood evokes the ancient Sanskrit term *rasa*, which references the emotional essence of dance or music in Indian classical performance. The gestural essence or *rasa* of a sculpture can be expressed as metaphor due to its complexity. Consequently, memory, emotion, imagination, and affective processes are triggered in a complex meshwork of responses. Movement occurs in making, in firing, in bodily learning. There is an unpredictability to the





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4 Two jars (*Black and White Series*), to 9 in. (23 cm) in height, wood-fired and salt-glazed stoneware and porcelain. **5** *Buried Adze Series*, 13 in. (33 cm) in length, wood-fired and salt-glazed stoneware and porcelain. **6** *Unearthed Series*, 12½ in. (32 cm) in length, wood-fired and salt-glazed stoneware. **7** *Unearthed Series*, 10 in. (25 cm) in length, wood-fired and salt-glazed stoneware, inclusions, slip.

movement of clay at virtually all stages of making. Movement can also move away from the literal into the realm of allegory, as one's idea or assessment of one artist's body of work might be repulsive upon first viewing, but over repeated viewings, one might shift their affective response, and come to appreciate and even enjoy the same work.

I believe that Lockwood's applied theory in her endless quest for eloquence in non-verbal communication, as briefly summarized above, has the potential to be transformative. Many voices are signaling that we are witnessing a resurgence of increasing popularity of the craft and the handmade in developed countries. Lockwood draws a parallel to this resurgence as a global response to the alienation of our technologically-based material world.

Certainly this is a positive trend, and if it helps any of us make sense of ourselves and our place in the world, then working as a craftsperson as a vocation and profession holds inestimable value.

All quotes are taken from Sandy Lockwood's presentation in Hobart at the Australian Ceramics Triennale, May 2, 2019.

Sandy Lockwood's work and writing can be viewed on her website, www.sandylockwood.com.au.

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1 Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, Routledge, Oxon, 2013.