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Image: **Sandy Lockwood**

After the Fire, flower brick, 2021

handbuilt, own formulation stoneware
with inclusions, woodfired, salt-glazed
1320°C, h.9cm, w.27cm, d.8cm

Photo: Colin Todd







Sandy Lockwood
wall piece from the
Meshwork Fragment
series, 2019, handbuilt
own formulation
stoneware with inclusions
woodfired, salt-glazed
1320°C, h.32cm, d.6cm
Photo: Colin Todd

VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

by Sandy Lockwood

How do you balance your work between functional tableware and sculptural work?

What questions are raised as you set out to make your work?

What makes work functional?

What makes work non-functional and more sculptural?

When I was asked to write an article addressing these questions I had to stop and think about what those terms mean in general conversation and to me in my practice.

I see my practice as 'thinking through making'.¹ This means my thinking about this topic is grounded in my practice and experience. As a result, this article is a 'view from the inside' of my practice rather than a more abstract perspective from the 'outside'.

I make work that can be considered functional, and work that can be considered sculptural, and importantly also work that lies along a spectrum showing elements of both ends and everything in between. There are traps if, in discussion, we harness such terms in too simplistic and reductive a manner. More traps lie in using these terms in service of other social cultural agendas like hierarchies, status, importance and fashion.



My approach is not to rule out the use of the terms 'sculptural' and 'functional' as they serve us well in everyday talking. However, it is important to remember there are blurry edges to consider.

My flower bricks illustrate this ambiguity between sculpture and function. They are a kind of vase – nominally functional, but edging towards the sculptural. The additional sculptural element of flowers takes the composition as a whole across the line to a kind of sculptural expression, while still retaining the function of holding flowers.

Sometimes I discover that pieces emerging from the kiln suggest possible compositions arising from contrasting colour, texture, form, clay type and making method. Often these compositions include pieces that could be considered functional on their own (such as little cups) that when brought together become part of a larger sculptural arrangement.

Inspiration for my work arises from a variety of sources – sculptural, functional, natural and constructed.

I have been inspired by bowls made by Scottish Neolithic people from Unstan in Scotland, encountered in the British Museum during my PhD research. From near pristine to weathered, patinated and reassembled, and with outstanding form and decoration, they spoke to me of thousands of years of weathering then being excavated from a dig. In trying to understand the profound effect these works had on me, I set out to make something that reflected their essence.



Opposite:
Sandy Lockwood
After the Fire, flower
brick, 2021, handbuilt
own formulation
stoneware with inclusions
woodfired, salt-glazed
1320°C, h.9cm, w.27cm
d.8cm

Left: **Sandy Lockwood**
Cups on a stand, 2019
thrown porcelain cups
on own formulation
stoneware handbuilt
stand, woodfired
salt-glazed, 1320°C h.9cm
w.55cm, d.7cm

One result of this exploration was a series of bowls, some with holes. They were not strictly bowls in functional terms, although they did have a bowl form. They were not watertight or smooth inside like the pasta or serving bowls that I make, but nonetheless they could be used to contain something. They expressed through their visual vocabulary something of the essence of these ancient pieces.



Sandy Lockwood
Unstan, bowl, 2017
handbuilt, own
formulation stoneware
with inclusions
woodfired, salt-glazed
1320°C, h.12cm
w.30cm

Photos: Colin Todd

An analogy for the various elements of my practice is a giant jigsaw puzzle laid out on a table. From time to time I go to different areas of the puzzle and move pieces around, adding pieces and taking pieces away. The whole remains a picture of my practice although the total picture changes over time, as does my work. I may work in one area or another until I have done enough exploration and I feel things in another area of the puzzle demand my attention. This attraction may be a realisation, an idea, an inspiration, or something as simple as the fact that my stock of mugs has run out. I may equally be exploring soft fluid possibilities in making a mug or the direct expression of movement and force in constructing a sculptural piece.



Work by **Sandy Lockwood**, woodfired, salt-glazed, 1320°C

1 Pourer, 2021, thrown porcelain, h.7cm, w.11cm, d.10cm; photo: Colin Todd

2 Beaker, 2021, thrown stoneware, h.9cm, w.8cm; photo: Schaller Gallery, Michigan

3 Mug, 2019, thrown stoneware, h.10cm, w.9cm, d.13cm; photo: Colin Todd

For me, the act of making arises from interacting with clay in particular ways. There is discovery in noticing what is happening as I throw, push, pull, squeeze, smooth clay to bring a piece into becoming. The term I use is 'noticing what I notice'. It is this foundational exploration of clay and firing that binds the variety of things I make into a coherent practice. My tableware can have elements that do not necessarily enhance function, while also having sculptural elements that enhance the aesthetic experience of the piece. As a result, someone may choose to place such a piece on display rather than using it (even if it would traditionally be considered functional).

So as well as all my work arising from a core exploratory approach to the expressive possibilities of clay, various things once made, feed into each other in subtle and interesting ways. The making of one piece feeds into other pieces regardless of whether they are sculptural or functional in nature (or perhaps neither). A development in one area can be seen in another area. Often such interactions are not conscious and do not necessarily become apparent until I step back and consider what I have made.

One such connection between pieces that I noticed was the act of grabbing handfuls of clay. This most intimate form of handling clay directly facilitates haptic sense and tactility as a guide to



Sandy Lockwood

Work from *Unearthed* series, 2019, handbuilt modified porcelain with inclusions woodfired salt-glazed 1320°C
h.21.5cm w.22cm
d.6.4cm
Photo: Colin Todd

action. In both the *Unearthed* series and the porcelain *Cone Form* series I grabbed handfuls of clay and pushed them together into a form. Then in another making session, I wondered if the same approach could be used with thick slip, so I grabbed handfuls of slip and applied it to a thrown form.

These examples are connected by direct and robust handling of materials through singular movement with no refining once done. It's not that such pieces are unrefined, it is just that any refinement is incorporated as the pieces are brought into being. Once made, they necessitate careful consideration as to whether they have anything to say. During making I do not consider whether the work is sculptural and/or functional. Rather, exploration and discovery constantly hover around as a welcome companion.

Work by **Sandy Lockwood**; photos: Colin Todd

Below left: Work from *Cone* series, 2021, handbuilt, modified porcelain with inclusions, h.23cm, w.22cm

Below right: Lidded jar, 2021, thrown, own formulation stoneware, h.20cm, w.14cm





Work by **Sandy Lockwood**, woodfired salt-glazed, 1320°C
Above: work from Standing Stone series, 2018
handbuilt own formulation stoneware, h.33cm
w.34cm, d.7cm
Right: bowl, 2021, handbuilt, own formulation stoneware, h.12cm, w.32cm
Photos: Colin Todd



Another interesting connection between sculpture and function within my work can be illustrated by a recent example showing how the blurring of boundaries can arise. I was commissioned to make a piece that reflected the colour, tone and tactility (the essence) of work I had exhibited as part of my PhD. The client had a strong visceral response to the 'standing stone' series and wanted a large bowl that used the same visual vocabulary and had the same tactile feeling.

I carefully considered this request and realised it was an opportunity to explore my visual vocabulary and investigate new territory. My proviso was that in the end I had to be personally happy with the outcome. The piece had to have an eloquent enough visual vocabulary to tell something of the qualities I had been striving for. I spent time resolving the materials and form and then made multiple pieces that were each placed in different areas of the kiln. As it turns out both the client and I were happy with the result. I now have a potential starting point to develop new work and my client has a bowl that he likes very much.

When considering ceramic works, whether made by me or by others, whether sculptural or functional, my initial response is holistic and affective. I then seek to find (sometimes with difficulty) words that connect to, or express, my experience.



Some questions I have found useful in this process are:

- Is the work eloquent?*
- Does it speak to me?*
- What does it say?*
- Does it engage me?*
- Does it have any life?*
- Is it skilfully done?*
- What is my affective orientation towards it?*
- How do the maker's words line up with what I see?*
- Are any interesting ideas or perspectives presented?*
- Does the work have any depth aesthetically, technically or expressively?*
- Does it exhibit visual complexity and/or subtlety?*
- Do I feel I am wasting my time engaging with it?*

Sandy Lockwood, platter, 2021
handbuilt, modified porcelain with
inclusions, woodfired, salt-glazed
1320°C, w.29cm
Photo: Colin Todd

These questions above reflect a view from outside the act of making, trying to get at the complexity and depth of my response to what I see. For me, making work and talking about work are separate but connected activities. This is because the view *##from inside##* my practice is different to the view *from the outside*.

1 Ingold, T. 2013, *Making: anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture*, Oxon, Routledge.

Dr Sandra Lockwood has been making, exhibiting and teaching in Australia and overseas for over forty years. She specialises in woodfiring and salt-glazing and her work is held in major public and private collections around the world.

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