

# SANDY LOCKWOOD



## Curiosity – Hand – Fire – Time – Connection

**M**y relationship to clay is powerful, personal and seldom far from my daily being. Because it has been such a central part of my life over the last thirty five years, I have been driven to understand this phenomenon and where it comes from.

This introspective quest has produced some revelations and many questions. I am intensely engaged by weathered surfaces and objects. These may be human made or natural. They provide visual complexity that speaks to something deep within me. Working with the formidable expressive capacity of clay is my way of searching for understanding and it engages my whole being. Fortunately for me this material has the possibility for unimaginable expression and discovery.

I am using clay to help me make sense of myself and the world. Part of my journey has been to undertake doctorate research into the made world of Neolithic Britain.

Works then and now, widely separated by thousands of years and large distance, can evoke a strong and similar response in the viewer. It appears that this affective response has a role in connecting us here in the present with works of ancient makers. It also has the role in present time of connecting us to current works and makers as well as to the natural world.

The metaphorical landscape to be explored in this approach is filled with complex opportunities that arise in the field that contains curiosity, clay, the hand and body, fire, time and emotion. My intent in making is to provoke this profound response

in myself and others through direct experience of the unique expressive voice of clay.

### CURIOSITY

Curiosity is my central motivation. It lies behind the question, “What happens if?” Discovering an answer necessitates remaining open to things as they evolve. This curiosity guides the energy I put into evolving and developing my work. It informs every step.

Curiosity is present in many contexts such as clay formulation, processes used, finishing works, packing and placing in kiln, firing, grouping or pairing or juxtaposing post firing, and deciding how to move on. In a wider context for me, curiosity includes particular parts of the physical world such as old buildings, stone, natural features and weathered materials. I am curious about how they came to look as they do as well as how and why they have an effect on me.

Curiosity about ancient makers leads me to imagine their curiosity and their way of being in the world. I sense the way their hands manipulated material. The actions of these makers remain visibly present with us in their artefacts. I make some of the same movements as they did forming objects. We share our actions just as we share our humanity.

In Neolithic times people had relationships with others and with materials from other places. There were travellers who brought materials from far away and with these materials came

the knowledge of new ways to use them practically and symbolically. It is amazing to think that Neolithic ceramic pots in the Orkney Islands off the North of Scotland have been found to contain pieces of fired pot made from clay only available at the southernmost tip of England. Today makers also use materials that are local and from far away. We also share and trade information about what we have discovered.

Just as ancient makers did, combining clays and non-plastic materials such as local rocks in my work allows me to discover new material qualities and allows me to learn how materials behave in my hands and in the kiln. Material qualities are what we experience when we interact directly with materials though the body and simple hand held tools. This approach “makes the world in the world” in comparison to “making the world in the mind.”

## HAND

The prime connection between the maker and clay is often the hand. The hand plays a particularly important role in how we interact with the world. Frequently the hand is only thought of as a “tool” for manipulating the world. This is understandable as the significance of opposable thumbs in enabling us to manipulate our environment cannot be underestimated.

However, the hand also has a vital role in our sensing and understanding the world. Hands provide much information about our environment. We feel among other things the texture, temperature, wetness, density, hardness, and shape of things we handle and touch. We use hands to turn objects so we can see the other side. Often we use touch to confirm or check what the eye sees.



- linke Seite - Oval Platter - 50.5 x 20 x 3.5 cm - woodfired saltglazed stoneware
- oben - "Summer Shadow" - teabowl - woodfired saltglazed stoneware - 13 x 6.8 cm
- Mitte - "Midnight" - teabowl - woodfired saltglazed stoneware - 12.2 x 6.8 cm
- unten - Buried Axe Series - woodfired saltglazed stoneware - 42 x 8 x 20 cm





Adze Series IV - woodfired saltglazed porcelain and stoneware - 39 x 5 x 9.5 cm

Hands provide a unique way of knowing the world.

In his book *The Thinking Hand*, Juhani Pallasmaa considers the vitally important role of the hand in both knowing and interacting with our world. He argues that the hand is primary among our ways of interpreting the world.

For me, tangible evidence of the role of the hand in making ceramic works is important. In seeing and touching works, and particularly prehistoric works, evidence sensed by my hand leads me to imagine the maker's hand and its actions. I feel these echo in my body. The hand now is the same as the hand then. My hand is the same hand of another contemporary maker. This link is very strong.

#### FIRE

Fire has an even longer thread of relationship to humanity than does clay. Today fire contains a strong symbolic meaning in our and many other cultures. It is argued that fire enabled modern humans to come into being.

Fire is a powerful element that can change things. Apart from providing warmth, cooked food and social connection around a hearth, it can burn vegetation and houses. In Australia fire is necessary for germination of many native plants. It can be productive and destructive. For the last 35 years I have been transfixed by the way fire can magically transform clay.

#### TIME

We have been makers as long as we have been human. Making defines us biologically and socially. There is a shared and inherently human thread in the activity of making objects from clay and firing them.

Archaeological literature identifies that Neolithic British artefacts have particular material qualities that arise from chosen materials and how they were made. These prehistoric objects and their materials tell much of their birth. Reaching across time, a finger print or finger nail mark on a pot or the way a stone tool sits comfortably in a human hand all lead to imagin-

Metamorphosis Series - 44 x 6 x 10 cm - woodfired saltglazed porcelain



ing a hand then and a hand now.

The process of making implies adding something of the self to the object. This is seen when making goes beyond mere function. Neolithic makers created objects which were also striking. They added decoration to clay objects with their fingers and shells and rope. They made personal markings that intimately transmit through time much about the humanness behind the process of using materials. They made objects for use, for symbol and for ceremony. Like us they used texture, pattern, colour, and placement as elements to make their world. Such artefacts can produce a strong imaginative and affective response in the contemporary viewer.

I can see, feel, and experience their humanity through their artefacts. They were the same as us in many ways. Our imagination evaporates the intervening years so we can envisage their life.

Through the effects of time some Neolithic objects are worn, broken, pitted and cracked from use and from being buried. This metamorphosis produces aesthetic characteristics that are powerfully engaging. The result is a characteristic look and feel that is strongly evocative.

My work embodies deliberate choices of material and methods in an endeavour to produce objects that have some of these qualities and bring forth an affective response.

### CONNECTION

The affective response arises in the primitive parts of the brain. It is triggered by seeing, touching, hearing, feeling, tasting. The affective response is produced first by quick acting circuits that take the world in holistically from sensory stimulus. From this response come feelings and emotions. After this come logical and language based responses and analysis.

Whilst hard wired into our biology, this affective response is not commonly considered in current thinking about objects and making.

This response arises not only from ancient artefacts. I am also affectively engaged by such things as natural rock, worked stone, weathered buildings, weathered structures and wood. I respond strongly to patination, rich texture and visual complexity.

This response is deep and intuitive. It is archetypally human. It is very interesting to realise that this affective response can be evoked by both contemporary and ancient objects and thus link them together.

An affective connection with both our immediate world and with ancient artefacts can emphasise our humanity. It provides us with an emotional reminder of the similarities and connections between Neolithic makers and ourselves, and between all of us today.

It is this primal emotional and metaphorical response that I seek to provoke in the works I make. This response has the potential to take us beyond the mundane. I hope it can contribute to us relating to and caring for our world and each other.

### ARTIST'S STATEMENT

During the thirty five years of woodfiring and saltglazing my primary focus has always been on making work that expresses the character of clay. I have come to call this, "Allowing the clay to speak." I am curious to explore the materials and processes I use. I am also curious about my own response to what I make as well as to the visual world about me. I find rich textures and visual complexity arising from the forces of nature and weathering to be extremely engaging. This can be seen in Neolithic artefacts that show the action of nature over thousands of years. It can be seen in ancient domestic and monumental structures as well as in more recent human made weathered stone and wooden constructions. Natural features such as weathered coastal cliffs or mountains also have a visual richness that I find inspiring. My doctoral research has included investigating the biological and affective foundations of these responses. This has been undertaken to help me better understand my relationship to my practice, to my medium and to my world. This generous visual world inspires and nurtures me. I am connected to it in many complex ways. The thread that binds me, my making and my world is the feeling of connection to these various visual experiences. In the act of making I am striving to respond to my curiosity and to make a connection with others using the language of clay.

Sandy Lockwood was born in London and lives in Australia. She has been working with clay, woodfiring, saltglazing and teaching since 1980. Her ceramic works have been widely exhibited and are represented in public and private collections in Australia, UK, USA, Europe, Korea, China and Japan. Her work has been published in journals and books and her status as a maker has seen her as a presenter on wood-firing and saltglazing in Australia, UK, USA, Denmark, Japan, Taiwan and France. Sandy's writing has been published in a number of ceramics journals. Sandy holds a Master of Visual Arts degree and has taught at a number of tertiary institutions. She teaches part time at the National Art School, Sydney and runs workshops both at her studio and overseas. She is currently undertaking a Doctorate of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong.

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