

Transmutation

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Venue Support: NIE Art Gallery

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The NIE Centre for Arts Research in Education (CARE) is a research centre based in the Visual and Performing Arts Academic Group and it generates, collects and disseminates high-quality research which promotes education in and through the arts through a strong collaborative network between the National Institute of Education, and like-minded individuals and organisations in the Asia-Pacific region. Its vision is to be a centre for excellence in arts research in education in Singapore and in the region.

Video recorded interviews with the five artists can be found on the Events page at the Centre for Arts Research in Education (CARE, NIE): <https://www.rebrand.ly/NIECARE>



An Institute of



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Head VPA's Message

Paul Lincoln
Head, Visual and Performing Arts

A dynamic university is one that not only embraces the unfamiliar, but desires positive transformation, growth, underpinned with sustainability as essential facets in shaping the minds of learners for the unpredictable challenges that lie ahead. At the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University (NIE, NTU) Singapore, this belief in the continual and relentless process of transformation was palpable and exemplified by this process focused ceramic art exhibition *Transmutation*. This exhibition featured sessional faculty member Ahmad Abu Bakar alongside esteemed artists Thomas Cheong, Nelson Lim, Teo Huey Min, and Todd Tok. It was a testament to our institute's commitment to foster innovation and creativity across a range of disciplines.

Through the versatile medium of ceramics, *Transmutation* reoriented viewers towards the transformative and dynamic nature of process-based activities. Rather than being fixated solely on the final product, the exhibition foregrounded the journey of discovery through a continual change in exhibits over the months of January to April 2024. It celebrated the intrinsic value of learning and change, even in a world where technology could sometimes overshadow human ingenuity.

As visitors navigated through the intricate tapestry of ceramic artistry showcased at The Art Gallery NIE, they were encouraged to appreciate not just the technical prowess but also the stories waiting to be unveiled. From the delicate intricacies of glossy forms to the evocative interplay of texture and colour, each creation served as a profound reflection of the artist's inner world, inviting viewers to embark on a journey of personal transformation and growth.

Behind the scenes, the success of this exhibition is owed to the unwavering support of my colleagues within the Visual and Performing Arts, particularly the dedication of our faculty member Dr. Twardzik Ching Chor Leng. Their tireless efforts in conceptualizing and developing this exhibition, alongside conducting associated research, seminar presentations, and publications, have been invaluable that brought this vision to life.

To all who engage with this catalogue, I extend the hope that the insights contained herein will serve as a catalyst for your own journey of positive transformation and growth, unrelatedly of your academic discipline or personal interests. May you find inspiration in the stories told through the ceramic artistry and embark on a path of lifelong learning and discovery. Enjoy!

Curator's Note

Twardzik Ching Chor Leng
Curator

Transmutation was the belief held by alchemists in the potential for elemental transformation within the very essence of substances, such as the conversion of base metals (copper and lead) into precious metals (gold and silver). For centuries, alchemists tirelessly pursued chemical reactions in their quest for this elusive *Transmutation*, yet their efforts consistently ended in disappointment. Despite its relegation to pseudoscience, alchemy's persistent inquiries yielded numerous crucial chemical revelations, laying the groundwork for contemporary chemistry (Matson, 2014).

Ceramicists, akin to alchemists, engage in continuous experimentation, resulting in remarkable technical breakthroughs. It took ceramicists generations to discover porcelain, develop kilns with adequate firing temperatures, and refine chemical compositions and firing methods to attain the translucency of jade green celadon. During the inception of celadon glaze, when jade held paramount value in China (Gompertz, 1980), its creation must have seemed like sorcery. This exhibition endeavors to demystify the magic by shedding light on the profound importance of process-focused approaches.

The emphasis has thus been shifted towards the transformative reality of a process-based practice rather than the finished artwork. This act of making, passed on from generation to generation, speaks of humanity's technological advancements and the passing of knowledge through the ages. It beckons a reflection on our value systems: process versus product, spiritual versus material, change versus constancy, play versus limitations, mistakes versus finality, and ideas versus gold. Ahmad Abu Bakar engages with clay to attain a form of *Spiritual Transmutation* through the process of artmaking. Time to learn, hone and master skills, time used to practise his craft, are all time spent on spiritual refinement, resulting in the elevation of mind and body, a transmutation of physical labour to spiritual character. Thomas Cheong creates an interactive space for his audience through *Spatial Transmutations*. Every time he stacks and restacks his neon shelves and ceramic forms, the composition changes and every time a person walks into the installation, their shadow is cast anew and the artwork changes again. Nelson Lim's everchanging architectonic sculptures can be likened to a form of *Nuclear Transmutation* expressed in large modular shapes. He believes in encouraging artists/students' freedom to play and explore with the medium and beyond, clay with metal, clay with fabric, clay without firing and without setting boundaries. Teo Huey Min's mimicry of nature is driven by her painstaking attention to detail. Her process of *Transmuting* plant to mould, mould to mould, mould to cast, cast to art, mirrors the meticulous approaches of alchemy and science in solving complex problems. Just as the process of *Transmutation* aspires to turn base metals into precious metals, Todd Tok seeks to turn detritus into art. Questioning the value of art, in place of dollars and cents, he aims to exchange his artworks for ideas, collaborations and conversations.

What was once thought to be an impossibility, the converting of lead into gold, has been achieved. In very small amounts, nuclear *Transmutation* utilises a particle accelerator to transform one element into another, the impossible has become a reality (Matson, 2014). Ahmad, Thomas, Nelson, Huey Min and Todd are conjurors of magic, alchemists who believe that through art, imagination has the potential to manifest into actuality. Through the hands of these artists, the seemingly impossible *Transmutation* of earth into forms, tradition into innovation, wire into pillars, slip into seeds, and detritus into art has taken place.

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Ahmad Abu Bakar





Dialogue with Ahmad Abu Bakar

AB: Ahmad Abu Bakar

MT: Marcus Tan

Present Experimentation

MT: Perhaps you could tell us what you're doing at this point and which part of the ceramic process is this?

AB: As we know, this show is basically about responding to the whole idea of process. So, I proposed to the curator that I want to literally show my process of making my own personal body of work. I also thought it would be interesting to bring in the concept of a studio into a gallery. And to make my objects [in a studio inside a gallery]. So that has been happening since week one when we started the show.

MT: So which part of the ceramic process is this [that we are seeing here]?

AB: I started with about six or eight pieces of work which I have already bisque-fired (Fig. 1) . From there, I worked on the glazing for those pieces. That body of work now is currently inside the kiln for firing. I'm now going into the second phase of my work, which is to produce a new body of work that would be presented at the end of this exhibition. This would be in terms of a new experimentation with the body of work that I have been making.

Now, I'm working with black clay so I'm making the initial forms or objects. You will get to see how, in the next one or two more weeks, this will be a combination of black and white or black and red clay.

MT: So, what are you trying to make with these two pieces that we see here.

AB: So basically it's like a 'Part A', 'Part B'. These will be connected by other parts or components of the [final] object. They will be joined in sections. So, [I'm using] a slotting method. The audience will get to experience [the piece] in terms of the contrasting colours, and probably with very minimal usage of glazes so they get to experience the clay body.

Currently this body of work is my personal experiment with and experimentation towards a range of objects I'm intending to produce.

MT: Most of the pieces that I see that are joined are 'melded'. So, if you're just joining pieces through a slotting method, then the calculation has to be very precise.

AB: Yes, they have to be precise. A lot of calculations. That's why I started with the body of work that I have already made, then glazed and fired. So eventually, I would create the smaller objects that will be slotted into those pieces.



Figure 1: Bisque-fired pieces

Chance in Space and Time

MT: You've been exhibiting your works for a very, very long time. You're one of the veterans in ceramics [scene] here, but most of your exhibitions show just the product, like ceramic piece itself. This exhibition is about the process. Is it very different for you?

AB: Yes, it's very different. I had thought it would be quite straightforward, but actually it's not because a gallery will always be a gallery; a studio will always [be a studio]. In terms (of) mindset, I have to adjust. Actually, I'm surprised this is happening because you have to be conscious about, for example, the floor. [Also,] There are people [...]

MT: People walking in and out.

AB: They ask me questions [and] I have no problems [with that] but the whole experience is surprising in a sense [that] I have to really get used to the idea of, for example, some shortages of simple things. I need, say, a ruler, then I don't have it. And I don't teach here full time right? So, I only come here once a week. Also, in my proposal, I proposed to come once a week to respond to the work: so how does it reacts? How do I behave? So, it was really a challenge where I had to set a different kind of discipline for myself. I had to become more conscious [of myself and my process]. Usually, I am more spontaneous but this time round I have [to have] some objective every day [about] what I want to do when I come in. It's a little bit more systematic. Good or bad, I'm not too sure.

MT: In the studio, nobody really looks at you and you do [your work]. Here, because it's a gallery space, people are looking. How has it changed your process of ceramic making?

AB: [The process] doesn't change but it affects the decision-making because of the 'disturbance'. So, you have an idea, but also then someone comes and we have a chat. Then, that someone goes off, you continue but there is a change happening. Again, it is not about [whether it is] good or bad. It's an experience. So, that's the one that I am quite interested to experience. And I guess that's the beauty about putting yourself in a different perspective or in different experiences.

MT: In one of the exhibitions at the Esplanade, *Candy Garden*, you talked about how chance is part of your philosophy in ceramic making. And you just mentioned earlier as well that when people come in here to the gallery it sort of changes the way that you approach your work [or rather your experience]. So how does chance fit into this particular exhibition?

AB: The whole thing is about responding; responding to circumstances or situations that I'm put in. This means, suddenly, because of certain distractions, I have to relook at [my] decision making [and it's a process that is] between [the] conscious and subconscious. Of course, this [challenge] doesn't seem much of an issue because of my experience but it does [shape] you subtly. Then, sometimes you are asking yourself, "did I make a right [decision]" and then you will tweak [the work].



Figure 2: NIE Art Gallery/Ceramics Studio

Time and Skill Development

MT: For us, from [the] outside, we can't really see that. So, this decision is very internal for you.

I'm also learning ceramics as you know. And my teachers tell me that the process is very important and it takes a long time to master the process but a lot of people I see nowadays who want to learn [ceramics] are not really interested in mastering [the [process]], they just want to make something. What do you think about this?

AB: Yes, I guess I'm more or less like your teacher. Basically, I was trained in two very conventional approaches: Lim Meng Khuang and Iskandar Jalil. Both [place very strong importance on] mastering the skill. So, the emphasis is more skill-based. And it is very true that you need to really have a very good solid foundation. And to have that good solid foundation actually takes years to understand. Like, for instance, people always ask me how best can I learn how to throw. I say the best way to learn is from the project that my lecturer, Lim Meng Khuang, gave. He actually said, "OK every week you [will] produce 100 cylinders" and every week I had to produce approximately between 80 to 100 pieces for him. On Mondays when he comes [in], I have to prepare one hammer and two or three empty buckets. Then he will just knock a few [pieces]. He will say, "OK, this is your mistake." Then he will ask you, when is your recent [piece]? When is your last piece? So, you show [them], then you break [them]. Then he says, "OK, these are still your weak points, how to improve." Then he would just suggest, you know, "probably [it's] your finger" etc. But, in the process, what happens is you're not only learning how to throw, I also actually learned about the behavior of clay because I have to recycle the clay. Then one day you come to realize how it is that when I recycle everything is OK but when I keep on throwing and have a cylinder, it collapses 5 minutes later. Then you start to ponder what happened. Having a simple conversation with your seniors then helps you discover how your clay has actually weakened. So then how to rectify this?

MT: I don't know how to rectify this actually.

AB: You just support with a new body of clay. I will, for example, buy some SMK clay, then I will buy some [clay] from the UK, and the UK is our key supplier. So, let's say I buy 25 kilos and another 25 kilos then plus whatever I have, we then portion it, dry them, pound them, then join them together and recycle after that. Recycle them, then wedge them. So, it's one massive process but the process actually [trains you] to exercise your finger. You exercise your arm. You exercise your breathing.



Figure 3: Working with different clay bodies

MT: And you feel the clay. It's so important to understand its behaviour.

AB: So eventually you get your strength because in ceramics and pottery you use a lot of 'chi'. And to discover that, to build that, you need to do all these laborious jobs. This is the 'not so glamorous' thing about pottery [...]

MT: Which nobody really sees. They don't understand.

AB: They don't want to do it. I share it with my students. For those who want to try, you will start to see that they actually build this [skill]. I teach in the prison apart from teaching in institutions, right? They have time. Those who have time, those who have ambition, will do it. Then eventually you will start to see the difference. But those who don't, you wouldn't get the results. You will still see what happens elsewhere when they are just doing [for a product].

MT: Yes, they just want to make something and take home for Instagram.



Figure 4: Wheel-throwing in the gallery/studio

AB: You see a person through, you will know whether they are actually applying pressure. And the most important thing is ... [it is similar to] when we cycle a bicycle. You're scared to cycle while balancing, correct? Especially for beginners. This is similar to beginners when they are throwing. Once they feel that they are already able to centre and are able to pull, that seems to be enough. [They think:] "heavy, never mind, as long as something that looks like a vessel."

MT: And then you put [on] some nice glaze, and place on Instagram, take a photo.

So that's what my teachers have also been saying. A lot of people just want to do that now. They're not interested in actually learning the process. And they don't wedge the clay properly, also because they don't like wedging.

AB: Oh, that's very interesting. I have a student [who is that way]. Actually, I didn't know that until I introduced that student to another friend of mine, [also a student of Lim Meng Khuang]. That friend of mine shared with me that actually this student hates wedging and what happens is, she will buy clay, then she packs and makes [a vessel]. If that doesn't happen, the student will cut it up, put it aside and throw [the clay away]. That friend of mine comes from a background where we are very highly disciplined in terms of our training. So, throwing away clay for that reason [is wrong]. That is very disrespectful to your materials. Because for ceramicists, for potters, [ceramics] is a very philosophical medium, especially if [one is] doing pottery or ceramics in Asia. We have a lot of respect for the material, to the facility, to your teacher, your fellow contemporaries. You know, there's a lot of these layers that people are not aware of.

MT: So what happened to that student?

AB: My friend told her, "if you want to work in my studio, you have to wedge the clay and you use it." But she refused. [My friend then responded,] "That is OK, you can take this clay, get your bag, and you go off." Eventually she managed to kind of convince my friend. But after that, my friend said, "no, you don't come back to my studio." So, you know, it's quite pointless. Such a character, such kind of person, there is no way you can train [them].

MT: Because they're not interested in the process. They just want the product. I spent many lessons just wedging.

AB: People keep asking me how to do spiral wedging. I say, "yes, you can learn spiral wedging, but which is the easiest technique?" If you can do the 'Bull's Head', do it. The most important thing is to understand that you are able to wedge properly. Many people do not understand.

Process and Performance

MT: Your works like this piece are very performance-based. You use the shape and texture to communicate an idea. When do you think a piece is ready for a performance and when do you think it's still in the process? I mean this from a philosophical point of view because viewers just view that final work.

AB: At the moment, most of my work, the ones that are shown in this gallery, are my experimental pieces. They are my test pieces but all of these are also recorded in my personal journal which eventually will translate into another set of works. So, these are all my recollections of my studies. Interestingly, this exhibition has allowed me to introduce the probabilities of another perspective of a practice.

I would love to do a work where while I'm making a 24-hour project it is also live. It means everybody in the world can see it. Doing work like this involves technology and you must have a sophisticated team to support you. So that remains an idea for now. I am hoping to do this 24-hour work that is done as a live presentation in this gallery where people can come see, experience, and talk to me.

It is also very interesting because it is not about me standing beside my work, talking about my work. Instead, we are casually discussing my range of work. [Right now] the whole setup is different [as] we are in a gallery inside an institution. It will be different if this gallery is a commissioned gallery – the audience would be very different. Here, the majority of the audience are students or staff so the engagement is different. This is almost like an art environment [or ecosystem]. You get interesting questions and responses.



Figure 5: Cikgu Ahmad in action



Figure 6: Black and Red clay with Underglaze

The Future of Ceramics in Singapore

MT: Where do you think the culture of ceramics in Singapore is going? More people are learning it now.

AB: There's always these two or three sets of practitioners. Some people really go to institutions and equip themselves with good proper knowledge in ceramics. So, this group of people will definitely lead the ceramics culture in Singapore. Then, we do have people who are very keen and interested in ceramics and they also learn from a proper group of people. Another group is just the ones who see ceramics as a business opportunity. And they think they can contribute. I would see them in a positive way in the sense that they will be the introduction [to ceramics] to create interest for some of these people. Then eventually, after people have tried and experienced them and realise they are getting stagnant, they will move on to seek better teachers [those that have learnt ceramics seriously]. So, there is this cycle in Singapore.

MT: You've been around for some time. How has the ceramics scene changed over the years. In the early years, fewer people did pottery.

AB: Yes, in the past, the opportunity to do pottery was very exclusive. You [would be] like Mr Chua [Soo Khim] because he's born into a family [of ceramicists]; Lim Kim Hui is exclusive because he is from the company that does pottery painting. So then, from there he moved on. So, he happens to be in that environment. It's the same with Iskandar Jalil and Ng Eng Teng. They happened to be in that environment. Then came us, the group of people that went to LASALLE. LASALLE was offering ceramics at that time so we were introduced to that experience in that exclusive way as well. Eventually from an art school, an institution, it led to a career path where you became a practitioner. It's the same as those groups of artists or students who went to NAFA and studied under Peter Loh. These are the groups of people who have become the pistons for the ceramics environment in Singapore. I and those in my generation are more relaxed, and now my students are the ones that are starting to push and develop ceramics in Singapore.

MT: How do you think institutions like universities can support ceramic artists?

AB: We have a good studio here. We have good facilities and we have good support from staff and of course the institution itself. Something like what's happening now, this exhibition, definitely will be remembered in history and will become references for teachers and for fellow researchers who are keen on discovering another group of ceramicists that are in this country. Definitely, it does contribute something, a lot in fact. And I guess it will be interesting for other institutions also [to] step up and be as forceful. I believe this show is not cheap to host. And where would you find a show that runs for one semester in a gallery, for 13 weeks. That's expensive. I would say the whole experience for this show is very special because, as I mentioned, you get to do your work in the gallery for 13 weeks and realise a body of work. Isn't it amazing? At the end of this exhibition, I can say these are my study [and] research [of clay] right? As much as these are studies, it is a study that happens in an education institution. So, there is no finality, only possibility. From there, ideas will start to evolve.

MT: Thank you so much for your time. It's really enjoyable seeing you throw. I always see your works. I hardly see you throw. So, this is quite amazing. Thank you.



Thomas Cheong



Dialogue with Thomas Cheong

TC: Thomas Cheong

RH: Rebecca Heaton

A Liminal Space: Exploring New Frontiers in Ceramics

RH: Thomas, could you tell us a little bit about your work, please?

TC: Sure! Ceramics, for me, is this amazing blend of the old and the new, tradition and innovation. I'm really drawn to the fact that ceramics has this ancient history, yet it's also so adaptable to modern expressions. It's like this timeless material that's always evolving.

I find a lot of inspiration in that contrast—the idea of taking something ancient and giving it a fresh, contemporary twist. It's like a dialogue between the past and the present, and I love exploring that dynamic space where transformation happens. Whether I'm playing with textures, experimenting with forms, or integrating new technologies, ceramics offers this boundless playground for creative exploration.

I also see ceramics as a way to capture and reflect the richness of human experience. It's not just about making objects; it's about creating pieces that resonate with people on a sensory level, that evoke emotion and connection.

And that's what keeps me constantly excited and inspired to explore the possibilities of ceramics.

The Artistic Process: Embracing Spontaneity and Time

RH: Thomas, why is process of this exhibition so important?

TC: You know, we often talk about how the journey of creating something is just as meaningful as the final outcome. It's a lesson I try to instill in my students too. But sometimes, in the art world, there's this pressure to only focus on the finished, polished pieces. And while those are great, I think we sometimes overlook the value of works that are more temporary or fluid in nature.

For this exhibition, the process of bringing the installation to life is really something special. It's tailored specifically for this space, so every little detail has to come together perfectly. Imagine hundreds of different pieces fitting into place within a certain timeframe—it's like tackling a massive, three-dimensional puzzle!

Personally, I love the uncertainty and spontaneity of my work. I hardly ever sketch or plan ahead; I prefer to let the piece take shape on its own as I go. It keeps things exciting and authentic for me. Working this way infuses my work with sense of immediacy and energy, allowing me to respond intuitively to the moment. And you know what? It's those unexpected moments that often shape my artistic journey.

Time is a crucial element in all of this. Having the luxury of time to really experiment and play around in this space has been a refreshing change for me. In the past, I've often felt rushed to get everything ready for opening day. But this time, I've had more freedom to explore different ideas and let the installation evolve naturally.

And what's really special about this exhibition is that the audience gets to be a part of it all. They can come by at different stages and watch as the installation takes shape. It's like inviting them into the creative process, giving them a behind-the-scenes look at how everything comes together.

So, for me, embracing spontaneity and time in the artistic process isn't just about creating art—it's about inviting others to join in on the journey and find beauty in the unexpected twists and turns along the way.



Figure 1: Process Documentation - 100124-250324

Artistic Experimentation: The Ongoing Process of Transmutation

RH: This exhibition is called *Transmutation* and you have had time to work on these pieces, adapt and change them and watch them grow, so what do you want to do with your next piece?

TC: Currently, I estimate that I've completed about 30% of the installation. There are still numerous pieces lying around that haven't been stacked yet. Moving forward, I aim to push the boundaries further by introducing higher complexity in the composition. One aspect I'm particularly excited about is experimenting with image projections on clay and ceramics surfaces. I believe this adds a dynamic element, giving the artwork a new life with each projection. It's like the pieces are donning different "clothes" or "skins" every time, offering endless possibilities for adaptation and transformation.

Working with three large-scale projectors from the start has been exhilarating. I plan to leverage the light sources from these projectors to cast shadows, aiming to create illusions of depth, movement, and perspective. My goal is to transform the two-dimensional surfaces into immersive environments that challenge viewers' perceptions of reality, inviting them to engage with the artwork from various vantage points.

As I continue to work on this installation, I'm taking the time to review and reflect on how I can refine my approach to utilizing the projectors to create a more immersive experience within the space. It's all about experimentation and fine-tuning to achieve the desired impact for the audience.



Figure 2: Experimenting with light and shadows

Traversing the Boundaries: Navigating the Real and Virtual Worlds

RH: Ok, brilliant. There's some lovely themes connected with relational aesthetics in your work and links between physical and digital artworks. Can you tell us more about the themes in your work.

In my work, I aim to capture the essence of the intersection between ceramics, modern technology, and human experiences. An ongoing project of mine, *XF-169* encapsulates these themes, drawing its name from the 16:9 aspect ratio ubiquitous in the digital world.

Over the past decade, *XF-169* has evolved, reflecting my personal journey as a contemporary ceramist navigating the delicate balance between the real and virtual domains. It explores the sensation of being "trapped" between these realms, where I immerse myself in history and material culture through digital screens, yet i am drawn to work with tangible materials that may not fully capture those experiences.

My intention with *XF-169* is to convey the disconnection and fragmentation often felt in the digital world by intentionally distorting ancient vessel forms. I contrast the sterile, untouched surfaces of these pieces with the tactile nature of traditional ceramics, eventually planning to juxtapose classical forms with contemporary motifs or digital-inspired elements, incorporating abstract patterns reminiscent of pixelation or glitch art to symbolize the digital's intrusion into our physical reality.

The physical process of stacking and firing pottery in a kiln is a deeply analytical one, requiring careful planning and consideration. In Taiwan, where I work, our school boasts a large anagama wood kiln that takes days to pack.

The surreal experience of peeping into the kiln at high temperatures, where stacked pottery emits an otherworldly glow, is something I seek to recreate using fluorescent materials. These materials have the remarkable ability to emit vibrant colors, adding an ethereal dimension to the artwork, transcending traditional mediums' constraints.

By amplifying color and light, these materials create a landscape that feels simultaneously familiar and alien, prompting viewers to question the authenticity of their surroundings.

Through this installation, I explore the relationship between the digital and physical, reflecting on how they intersect and influence one another in our modern existence. It's a contemplation of the evolving nature of human perception and interaction in the digital age, and the evolving role of traditional art forms like ceramics in our technologically driven world.



Figure 3: *XF-169*

The Transformative Power of Play: Thomas's Insights from Transmutation

RH: Has this *Transmutation* exhibition given you more opportunity to play as an artist?

TC: Absolutely. The extended time period and near-perfect conditions for creating this work in this show have provided me with ample opportunity to play and experiment as an artist. The luxury of time allows me to take more risks and explore new ideas without the pressure of immediate deadlines. Additionally, having the space to reflect and think about my next moves is invaluable. It enables me to refine my concepts and techniques, ensuring that each decision contributes meaningfully to the final piece. I'm particularly excited about the opportunity to play with the projectors in this space. Experimenting with light and imagery adds another dimension to my work, and I'm hopeful that the images will complement and enhance the overall experience of the installation. Overall, *Transmutation* has been a liberating and enriching experience, allowing me to fully embrace the creative process and push the boundaries of my artistic practice.



Figure 4: Installation process

Ceramics in Flux: Navigating Change in Singapore's Artistic Landscape

RH: Please could you tell us more about how you feel the ceramics community is changing in Singapore at the moment?

TC: Over the past couple of decades, I've witnessed some significant shifts in the ceramics scene here in Singapore. One of the most noticeable changes is the growing interest in ceramics among people from all walks of life. Social media has played a big role in this, portraying pottery-making as this cool and trendy activity that's really caught people's attention. Alongside that, programs like the Art Enrichment Programme (AEP) have been instrumental in nurturing talent and promoting ceramics arts since the early 2000s.

Another trend I've observed is among my fellow ceramic artists, particularly those from my generation, who are increasingly choosing to pursue education and gain experience abroad. This decision to explore different cultures and techniques is incredibly enriching for us as artists and has a ripple effect on the community back home. We come back with fresh perspectives, new skills, and a deeper understanding of clay, which all contribute to the ongoing evolution of ceramics in Singapore. I'd say these changes paint a picture of a dynamic and thriving ceramics community here in Singapore. There's a palpable sense of growth and excitement, with more people getting involved, perspectives constantly evolving, and ideas bouncing around both locally and on the global stage. It's an exciting time to be part of the ceramics scene here!

Fostering Creativity: NTU's Role in Supporting the Ceramics Community

RH: What do you think institutes of higher learning, like NTU, can do to support the ceramics community and its development in Singapore?

TC: Hosting more exhibitions and showcases dedicated to ceramics would provide a much-needed platform for ceramic artists to share their work with a wider audience. It's not just about displaying the finished pieces, but also about fostering a sense of community within the ceramics field. When artists have opportunities to showcase their work, it not only boosts their confidence but also encourages collaboration and dialogue among peers.

Organizing masterclasses, symposiums, and artist residencies would be incredibly valuable for both established and emerging ceramic artists. These events offer opportunities to learn new techniques, refine skills, and gain insights from experts in the field. They also create spaces for artists to come together, exchange ideas, and form connections that can lead to future collaborations or mentorship opportunities.

Collaborating with other institutions and organizations to establish a network of support for ceramic artists is crucial for the long-term sustainability and growth of the ceramics community. By pooling resources and expertise, we can create more opportunities for funding, access to equipment and facilities, and mentorship programs. This not only benefits individual artists but also strengthens the overall ecosystem of the ceramics scene in Singapore.

RH: Apart from giving you an opportunity to be playful as an artist, do you think this exhibition has afforded you anything specific?

TC: Beyond just being a platform for artistic playfulness, this exhibition has afforded me some incredibly meaningful opportunities. Firstly, collaborating with my longtime artist friends, with whom I've shared friendships for over two decades, has been incredibly fulfilling. We've talked about exhibiting together for years, so seeing it finally happen is truly special. Moreover, I believe this exhibition will pique curiosity within the ceramics community. It's a chance for us to showcase our work and share our passion for ceramics with a broader audience. I'm genuinely grateful for this opportunity, and I'd like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Leng and her amazing team at NIE for their unwavering support throughout this journey.

RH: Where could people find out more about your work?

TC: My IG handle is @Longgonetomorrow or you can check out my website at ThomasCheong.com. You can also visit me at my studio at the potters' guilt which is situated in Chinatown.

Nelson Lim







Dialogue with Nelson Lim Sang Choon

N: Nelson Lim

CH: Chee-Hoo Lum

Becoming a Ceramic Artist

CH: We would like to ask you about your profession as a ceramicist or as you say, someone who plays with clay. How did you come to this artistic practice and what is your background that led to this point?

N: 1999, after my NS, I wrote to Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and during that time the most popular major is multimedia. So I signed up for multimedia and during the first year we have to attend all the minor like painting, sculpture, ceramics and print making and so on. I attended Mr Peter Low's class in ceramics and like I just fell in love with it and I asked him is it possible, besides (class if) I can come back and do more. So yeah, he encouraged me and then he said welcome. So every day, if I don't have class, I'll just go and then he teach me like throwing and other techniques. I learned a lot from him and become sort of like an apprenticeship. Yeah. And then during year 2, where we have to choose our major, I switched from multimedia to ceramics. So during that time, a lot of people like ask me, like my family and my friends, "Hey, what are you going to do after you choose ceramics? Like, you know, how can you make a living?" Guess (it's) just the passion. I never really think about it that much. And because I applied (for) the student assistantship, so I don't have to pay the school fees, but I have to do all the firing for the ceramics department. And during that time we don't have the electric kiln. It's all using gas kiln. You know, like using the gas kiln, you have to stay back so in fact, like my year two and year three, I stay in NAFA old campus to do all the gas firing.

Teaching and Learning

After that, I graduated and I teach for a while. I built up my company provid(ing) ceramics workshop to schools (for about) 10 years. I conducted ceramic workshops in primary schools, secondary schools and also teach NAFA night classes and then NAFA junior arts so for about 12 years. I built the connections and also during this period of time I never give up practising so I go to different overseas studios to do my residency. I also attend Ceramic Biennales overseas to see exhibitions and take part in the group shows. Then in 2013, I went to National Tainan University of the Arts and did my MFA in applied arts, ceramics. I went because the company is more stabilised. I did some planning (so) even if let's say I'm away for three years or four years to do my masters, the company can still run smoothly. So that point I decide I want to continue and practise and learn more because there's so much more to explore in ceramics.

Yeah, and I get to know the Tainan National University of the Arts. So the programme is run by Professor Chang Ching Yuan. Every week we have a small critique (session), every three months they have like an assessment. You have to set up your work like an exhibition. Yeah. And in the studio, (there's) always invited artists, well known international ceramic artist in residency. We share the same studio space so we can exchange ideas and then we can learn from them. And also during the programme, Professor Chang always brings us to a lot of overseas trip Korea, Japan, Europe, America and we attend like NCECA (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts). NCECA is like a gathering of all the Uni's ceramics faculties in US and also international universities. They have a lot of exhibitions, exchange, lectures. It's like a big ceramic trade show. It really exposed me a lot.



Figure 1: Construction of Memories

Art Residencies

N: I got a job offer at NAFA, So I teach there part-time. I also applied some overseas residencies like in Shigaraki, Japan, Arctic Clay Centre (ACC) Posio, Finland. Last year I went to Jingdezhen, China, for three months, after that I went to Shanghai Art and Design Academy (2 weeks). I went AKCC, Icheon Ceramics Park, South Korea for 2 months residency. At every residency, I learn and explore something new. You interact and you learn from the different cultures, different materials, different space, different environment that each country offers and that kind of shapes who you are as you move along.

The residency programme I attended is focused more on ceramics but then when you are over there you will visit other artist studios like painters, sculptors, print makers etc, from the visits and exchanges, you deepen other knowledge and understand other practises. Even within like artist practising ceramics, there are also so many different kind of ways of concepts, ideas and the thoughts behind their artworks. I think interacting and building the relationship with different artists, technicians, craftsmen is important.

Creative Processes

CH: Let's talk more specifically about your practise. How has it evolved over the years and what are your fundamental explorations?

N: After learning from my mentor Peter Low, who received training in both the UK and Japan, I gained a thorough understanding of traditional ceramic practices rooted in strong fundamentals. This provided me with a solid foundation in my craft. Upon exposure to numerous contemporary ideas during my time abroad, my understanding of ceramics expanded significantly. I realized the vastness of the field and the multitude of possibilities it offers, acknowledging that my initial knowledge was limited in comparison. When I went to Taiwan, I've been exposed to different materials and in the studio Professor Chang don't restrict students on the sort of method or the kind of directions that you're trying to practise so it's like total freedom. Like for this series of work (*Construction of Memories*), before that, I didn't know that's ok, clay can mix with other materials.

When I was there (in Tainan) I run every day around the Uni, our school is surrounded by paddy fields, I saw like dry straws, when they harvested, I mix them with the porcelain slip. This is really accidental, because there's this whole row of metal wire I mixed it with the porcelain slip. After firing, I really love the kind of effect because the metal turn to black colours and then it contrasts very well with the white porcelain also the cracks and the melting of the metals inside the kiln. For this series, *Construction of Memories*, I actually do a lot of tests because the melting temperature of the metal and the clay is different. So how to balance the two different very contrasting materials. It takes a lot of experiments. During my MFA, I exposed to a lot of different possibilities. And it really tells me that ok, clay is not just the material itself, it can be a lot of other things. It can be not fired, it can have different ways of presenting, different forms, shapes, different firing etc. This kind of experimenting clay with other materials is possible and investigating in terms of firing and what kind of effect they all have.

Works

Construction of Memories

CH: Maybe we can talk a little bit about why it is called *Construction of Memories*?

N: The materials that I use, the chicken wire is a very basic material for construction in the industry. When I was building this piece, it's like constructing and our memories are built up just like a building or construction, build layer by layer, and I am also fascinated by every joint of the wire, kind of like a crossroads representing life. Sometimes if you turn left or right at a junction, your life might be changed. So when I was building this work, the process is quite long because after I construct this structure using the chicken wire, I have to dip it into the porcelain slip, every time I dip, I wait for it to dry. Total I need about 3 to 4 layers of dipping to get the thickness, the process is long. During the process, I always like, recap some of the memories that I had. Like relationship with my parents, my mom, you know, the first incident, first memories of like you being caned or something like that, you know? Things that happens in life, it's all the memories and the way I construct it. At different spaces, I constructed differently and I'm talking about this right here at this beautiful gallery space. I think like the light changes every day or even every hour and the way that I construct it also like changes a lot. I think sometimes our life can have many different possibilities. And for this shape, it's being built like that but (if) any of the parts is being taken off, for example, like your memories or things that happen to you, the whole of your life might change or you might collapse. That's why I titled these *Construction of Memories* (Fig. 2).

CH: It's really interesting. I mean with this particular, this little rotation, we noticed some vulnerabilities have happened and in that sense maybe that's also something you are prepared for, right. And then you are expecting these things to happen, maybe. Do you want to speak a little bit about those vulnerabilities?

N: You never know like what's going to happen next. In fact when I turn this over, although I tried something like this where I overturn the whole sculpture before but I cannot guarantee 100% it will stay. So yeah maybe 70% I know it works, but then you never know like the outcome or the stability. For sure, when I turn it over right, then I just sort of like, Ok, let it be even (if) the whole thing collapse it's fine.

CH: Yes. Still kind of trusting your process.

N: Yeah. Quite safe. Just now me and Steven Low added a lot of cable ties (before we tipped it over).

CH: It's also very interesting that in this space because the exhibition lasts for a period of time and each week I understand you reconstruct and reconfigure. What does that provide you with and is that similar in other spaces that you get to play with it like that?

N: I think because of the title for this exhibition is called *Transmutation* and the space allowed me to come in and make changes to the artwork, even though the exhibition is already open, in many other exhibitions you have to put on the works and it is like the final. So I think this is really a good opportunity, I really like it. The idea of the artists can come in and make changes, I mean not all the artworks, but for mine, because it's more like an installation and every piece is individual where I can take it down and then reconstruct something like a Lego block. I also play with the light and the space, very much on that day itself, because I never really planned beforehand. So every week I will come in depending on my feeling that day and depend on how I want to construct. I really like the idea.



Figure 2: *Construction of Memories*

Cast and Mould

CH: I want to probe a little bit into the earlier series (of your work) and how that kind of builds up into this (*Construction of Memories*). Or are they also about exploration of different materials in these other instances and what are the sort of philosophical ties? And yeah, like I think there's the *Still* and *Cast and Mould* series?

N: In the MFA, every three months we have to present our work or possibly in different ways or different concepts. So I think that is a very good practise. I think a good training in fact for artists rather than some artists just stuck with one very similar form or idea. So during that time I play with different concepts and one particular that I quite like a lot and I still hope that I can continue. It's the *Cast and Mould* series (Fig. 3). So I've been thinking a lot about the life process.

It's like a repeated cycle. Every day you wake up, you spend the day and night you sleep again. Sort of like the cast and mould. And there are many instances where people, (their) (lives) are like cast or being moulded. Maybe we are being unintentional or subconsciously being cast in the way that the society want us to be.



Figure 3: Cast and Mould

The information being fed especially now using multimedia. So that piece of work, (I) used something that I use daily, for example the mouthwash bottles. So I make that into moulds and then I slip cast them. That series of work, I didn't fire them and then I make a lot pieces. Each represent the life, everyday life. And I add water to it, when the clay is not fired and you pour water in it, it will disintegrate. Once the bottle breakdown and the moment when it breaks, the water rushes out. It's that moment that I want. I want to break away from these cycles. When the water dries up, everything's settled. I will recycle the clay, make into slip, will pour into the mould and then cast the object again. So it's like the repeated life. I feel it's like our life, how do we break away from the cycle of life. I've been thinking a lot because in my Buddhist background, we (are) in these reincarnations. They are talking about like thousands of cycles and we are just like currently present in just one life and some people (already) think that it's too long. That is the thought process.

CH: Fascinating because I think with each recast and remould, there are subtle changes as well. And I think that's sort of a reflection of the way we run through life. But at the same time being more observant, I guess and even listening to see what are these subtle moments of recurrence and how that could change or not change. And or even if you tried to change, Yeah, you might still return in some form.

N: I think that is the work (*Cast and Mould*) that I will probably want to continue. When I'm doing that series of work, I make a lot of mould so they are all in my storage in Tainan. So when there's an opportunity, then I will re-present again.

Still

CH: Let's talk about *Still*?

N: *Still* (Fig. 4) is also same thing where I mix the clay or the porcelain slip with fabric. So I realised that if I dip the fabric into the porcelain slip and then I hang it, let it dry, you can create a kind of motion but then it is still when you look at it. It's like the time freezes. Yeah, yeah. So, that is probably a stage where I probably want to achieve.

It's like I want to be still. It's like we are always thinking and we are always on the move. But maybe I want to achieve a state of my way. I want just to be still, you know, calm down. That's the whole idea, the concept of the *Still* series.

CH: When I looked at that series, yes, it's still, but it's also movement, right? It's a movement in stillness frozen in time. But it does sort of urged me to think it's going to do something else or before that it was something else. So this sort of fluidity with that stillness, it's quite a fascinating image.

N: During last year November, December when I did my residency in Icheon Ceramic Park, in Korea. So I further develop the *Still* series and I make it bigger and then I see the impact. There are more possibilities of different way of hanging and presenting. So I'm now trying to apply a residency which can have like a bigger kiln, maybe 2 metres high. Then I'm going to reconstruct that series of work. It might be bigger than the metal series, so that is also a lot of challenges I can foresee. So it also allows me to push or to take up the challenge to push the materials like further.

CH: Yeah to see how far you can go, right. I guess the ethos of your work is this whole playing with different materials and kind of testing and challenging and kind of looking at where it will go and how it will kind of land up.

N: Yeah, always exploring, doesn't matter. I think a material that is quite, very strong and hard. Yeah. But then play with fabric is something that is soft. And it allows more form or shapes. We should maybe move like water. Yeah, so don't be so hard or so confined, you know, with the end result. But there's so many ways of possibilities to move forward. So many ways to play. So many ways. Yes, flow, yeah.



Figure 4: *Still*

Art Education

CH: Let's turn to education because you have taught for quite a number of years. And so I'm curious with this ethos of yours, how does that translate in the way that you teach students? Are these thoughts of exploration, experimentation part of what you try to impart?

N: Always tell the students the most important thing is you must have the interest. I think what makes me continue like today playing with clay or ceramics is the interest you must have, No matter I think like what medium you choose. So during my teaching like to different age group, for the primary school kids it's most important to let them play and let them enjoy, don't restrict them so much, cannot do this, cannot do that, you know things like that. Then for like the NAFA students, I always encourage them to explore, to have interest in the materials. I think when you have the interest, you can continue doing. You don't choose because of any other reason. I've said that you just love. Yeah, this is, I think, my way. And then always encourage them. This is just learning. It (the outcome) doesn't (have to) come out like what you expect. But it's a process. Yeah. And I always tell them that I don't mark their works based on the final (product), but it's the process, the effort, the passion they put in.

CH: That's wonderful. And so you allow them to play with different materials as well.

N: Yeah, a lot of people think that the word play is, is not serious, but I think play is a very important part of whatever you do. Yeah, If you can (do) the work and something that you enjoy, why not?

The Singapore Ceramic Scene

CH: I'm going to ask you now about the Singapore scene, the ceramic scene. What do you feel about the scene currently? Where do you think it's going to go to next?

N: Yeah, I think it's growing, especially for the past few years, right? I think there's a lot of ceramic studios, private ceramic studios opening up. And more people are interested in the medium, the clay. And there are people who like for example, the clay festivals. I heard so many people, they attend and then the response is quite well. And yeah, so more collectors. I feel for those who are really serious. I mean because there are so many events or things happening around the world in ceramics field. So those people who are really interested, they should go out and see for example like the Korea Ceramic Biennale, Taiwan Biennale, Japan Minos Ceramic Biennale and if like in the US, there's NCECA and then there's IAC International Academy of Ceramics. Every two years in different parts of the city in different countries. I also hope that more galleries can present like ceramic shows.

I think slowly we were bringing up the level of our ceramics in Singapore. I always encourage those who take up 3D in NAFA like because when they major in 3D ceramics and sculptures. So I tried to encourage them. You know, sometimes I bring the graduate students overseas if I have events overseas, and then I recommend them some residency overseas as well. And I hope the local art gallery can also showcase more ceramics exhibitions. Like what Leng has, like this show. So I think it's a very, very good platform. Getting to really interact with the different ceramicists and also looking at the different processes.

Surviving as an Artist

CH: Are there other ways which I guess a full time artist (can work towards) in terms of sustenance?

N: A few of my graduate students, I think they're doing quite well now, especially with social media. I always tell the students you must be good at your craft or at your work. So there's a lot of effort that needs to go into that. I think like now (with) social media, a lot of platforms like, unlike during my time when I just graduate, we always have to go through like galleries or third party, but now some of them they are doing quite well. And then of course, like teaching. So I engaged some of the students to help me to teach in my workshop and then they can learn from there.

I would say that it's very important like to survive, because I see many graduates, right? In the end they are not doing (their) major maybe doing something else. So I'm sort of like blessed because when I graduated I was given the opportunity. So during that time MOE was like encouraging a lot of schools to have this ceramics workshop. And I realised we are actually very lucky because in Singapore, a lot of primary schools, I wouldn't say all, but a lot, they have kilns. And then they do offer like ceramics workshop to their students, which I travel like so many different countries, right. I don't think any country offer ceramics workshop in their curriculums because I think lack of the facilities. And it's also with that right condition, it can allow a lot of students who major in ceramics opportunity to teach. But first you must learn the basic, you must learn the basic route. Yeah. That is very important. Yeah. I mean essentially to be really good at your craft.

CH: Lots of food for thoughts. And yeah, I mean I'm surprised I didn't even think about the facility bit in (our) schools and how we have all these possibilities.

N: Yeah, yeah. When I talk to a lot of overseas artists, I say, hey, do you have ceramics programming in (your school) elementary curriculum? Not really. Not enough. Even like countries like Japan or in Korea. Maybe some private schools, I think doing ceramics... I realised even now sometimes I go to school to teach as well. Now these primary school students, they are very bad at their motor skills because I think we are too into 2D like screens especially like smartphones or iPad. So when I asked students to use a piece of clay to even like pinch heart or star shape, I realised like the P3-4 or even P5 student they can't do that. They are lacking basic hand motor skills, which is really, I feel like surprising, really slowly lost, you know that kind of touch. Yeah, yeah, the physicality of doing things. So I think it's important to have these clay workshop in the schools...so that they don't just visualise but have the ability to manipulate.



Teo Huey Min



Dialogue with Teo Huey Min

HM: Teo Huey Min

JM: Choong Jia Ming

Artist's Journey

JM: Hi, Huey Min. Thank you so much for really giving the time and space to have a conversation with us. Let's start off with you giving us an introduction about yourself and your journey.

HM: I'm Huey Min. I mainly work with clay. So you can call me a ceramic artist or just an artist. I graduated from LASALLE in 2003. After that I was teaching hobby pottery for a while before going to Taiwan to study in 2010. Following that, I went on to Japan to practise for a few years and now I'm back in Singapore.

Nature, a Deep Influence

JM: We wanted to also go deeper into understanding more about your craft because we see that you mainly work with motifs surrounding nature. How does connecting with nature have such a close sentiment to you and your works?

HM: All along, I've been interested in the formalistic aspect and nature or nature's presence in life. But it really came to me strongly when I was overseas, when I was in Tainan National University of Arts. There, the pace is slower and not so busy. That's when I started, taking my time to "smell the flowers". There were also change of seasons in Taiwan so you really see the transition (in nature). It was then when I started my works on collecting botanical parts and then using them as an element in my art-making. Then, I didn't really know what kind of artworks I wanted to create. I was just testing and seeing how all these things worked for me and then it slowly developed into the processes that I adopt now.

The Making: Foraging and Mould making

JM: Can you share with us a bit more about how you create these works and the processes behind it?

HM: For most of my work I make casting moulds from the original botanical parts. I will have to forage these seeds and seed pots first and most of them were picked up from my surroundings back when I was in Singapore. I sometimes make use of the collections I have from when I was travelling as well as elements from Singapore. The foraging, picking-up and collecting is a very crucial part of my works. Looking back at my works now, it transports me to the time when I was picking those things up. The selection process follows, where chosen parts are casted and made into duplicates. During this process, I have to study the form really carefully, asking questions like "how am I going to divide it?" or "how does it work as a cast?" At this point in my process, I still don't know how the final works will be like.

Only after the cast is made will I decide on how I want to put it together. From the picking-up to the making of the mould, the plan might change depending on how the element responds to me. Another factor to consider would be the resources I have around me, like the kilns and their sizes. The size of the botanical parts will also affect the final size of the work.

A Documenting Space

JM: What is so different about this process-based exhibition and what affordances has it provided you as an artist?

HM: This space, unlike other shows that we do in galleries, allowed me the opportunity to show my processes. Viewers usually see the final product. This is the first time I exhibited and got to share my master moulds alongside other casting moulds. Out of all the different processes, mould-making is my favourite part because I enjoy the problem solving aspect. This exhibition allowed me to surface all my works from different times of my art-making. I can now see them in one room, like a snapshot, how my art-making evolved and documenting the different periods where I was interested in either exploring a different glaze or technique.



Figure 1: Documentation of processes (Vessels of Hoard 2015)

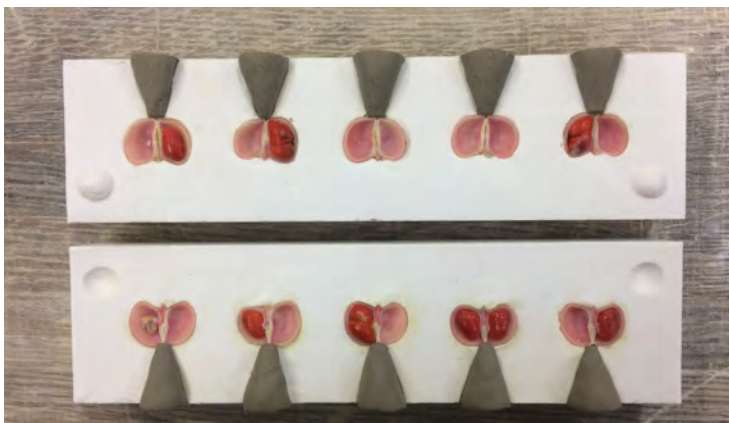


Figure 2: Documentation of mold-making and slip-casting processes. (Mayumi 2016)

Appreciation of Ceramic

JM: What are some highlights of ceramics and its processes that you can help shed some light on for people who want to find out and appreciate this art medium more?

HM: This medium, it humbles you. It can be very frustrating and challenging which I feel is a characteristic that charms people and lets people push and rework on for longer. For example, at different stages there's just so many ways it can go wrong. Like the cracks—the vessel can crack before even reaching the kiln. You can take care of every stage from the making until the glazing stage for the glaze to go wrong. If anybody is thinking of embarking on learning ceramics, don't get discouraged when pieces do not turn out as expected. We kind of learn through mistakes. Ceramics were mainly just drinkware, dining wares and sanitary wares, until the 1960s when artists started to use clay/ceramics as a medium for art making. Even though its presence in human civilization dates back to the caveman period, it's only quite recent in the contemporary arts.

The Singapore Ceramic Scene

JM: Where do you think the ceramics community and culture in Singapore is at right now and where do you see it heading towards?

HM: Compared to about over 10 years ago, there are more people doing ceramics as a hobby. So I definitely see more interest and more audience, which is good. But as for the art market scene, maybe we can have more. I foresee that there will be more ceramic artists. I'm looking forward to it.

JM: How do you think we or the institutions can also support the local ceramics community in Singapore?

HM: I feel that in Singapore some of the techniques are not so accessible because we don't have the equipment to support, for example, a gas kiln for gas firing. There's only a handful of places that have a gas kiln in Singapore. Therefore, people don't really get to learn about the different techniques like gas firing. Art institutions having a wider variety in kilns and equipment will make a difference, taking this art form to the next level.

Art Education

JM: What kind of ceramics process and the different aspects do you think are beneficial for the education of ceramics in Singaporean public schools?

HM: I feel personally that clay is a material that can teach kids a lot of things. When you're playing with clay, even for adults, you are so focused. Your hands has clay on it and you don't think about using your handphone. It is also a medium that is tactile and responds to you immediately. If it's too dry, it cracks in front of you. It also teaches you how to be patient and to wait after you throw or make a clay work. Kids might go "I want to put on the colours now!" but no, they will have to wait! It is the progressive nature of working with clay that makes the material so fun and different, especially now in the digital age of fast and disposable information. Clay also introduces children to an experience of a different sensation. I definitely encourage ceramics to be part of the curriculum for schools. Not everybody needs to be a ceramic artist or potter! But I feel that this ceramics process is something they shouldn't miss out on. It's really fun even for adults, more so kids.

Works

Reliance (2014)

JM: We have a lot of your works out here on this table. Can you maybe share with us a bit more about this (Fig. 3, *Reliance*) work?

HM: This piece was made in Taiwan for my MFA graduate show. During that period, I was interested in presenting them in part vessel form. This two-part work cannot stand on its own without its counterpart. This very work was also where I started to assemble the parts of my works with just glazes. My earlier works are joined when it is still in the clay stage. Throughout my different works, I have new discoveries about the different techniques and the glazes that I'm excited about. To further test and proceed.



Figure 3: Reliance



Figure 4: Moss



Figure 5: *Spheroid*

This (Fig. 4, *Moss*) is slightly different—an evolved version of this glaze-joining technique. On its own it's really fragile, so paraffin wax is used at the bottom to reinforce it. These little bits of the making process is what makes me very excited.

JM: We can see a little bit of a difference in the white colour between the two works, can you share with us more about that?

HM: *Spheroid* (Fig. 5) and *Moss* (Fig. 4) were made during my time in Kanazawa Japan. The glaze for both is exactly the same, with a tinge of yellow, but the only difference is in the firing—reduction firing and oxidation firing. The finish is totally different.

The Art Classroom

JM: As an artist, how can you translate your works or the different processes into classroom activities that you think are suitable for the younger children?

HM: My processes can be extremely time consuming but there are still parts that I feel can be really fun for them, like the initial foraging portion of my art-making process. They can just go out to pick up branches, seeds and put them together into an art piece. It's a quick activity and these materials are close and accessible to them, like a tree that they walk past every day that they haven't had a chance to pay attention to.

I had a workshop with an artist before. We used a cloth to blindfold ourselves. She played some music and all we did was to just respond to it. When you take off your blindfold, the work will be totally different from what you'd imagine. It was not about the end result, not even about firing those pieces. We were adults, just having fun. The enjoyment came from how the material responded. This would be such a nice activity for young children. The end product is not necessarily that important. We tried another activity where we touched some objects blindfolded and tried sculpting it out. The aim was to avoid using the logical brain or rely on sight but to use the sensation to touch. Again, like the previous activity, the final result is not what's important.

Todd Tok





Dialogue with Todd Tok

L: Twardzik Ching Chor Leng

T: Todd Tok

Becoming a Ceramic Artist

L: Todd, welcome! Thank you for spending time with us today. Maybe you can tell us a little bit about how you started this whole art journey as a child, as a teenager, as an adult.

T: I was in Ngee Ann Polytechnic studying engineering. About 3 months into the program, I found myself in the Internet café playing games and it dawned on me that engineering was not for me. So, I left poly and found a job for a year and at that time quite a few of my friends were going to LASALLE. I just wanted to be cool, decided to apply for a place in LASALLE. My parents were not very happy about it, but over time they became very supportive. They observed that I would go to the library of my own accord...you know, library wasn't a go to place for me ever. They're like, "why is this guy going to the library now?" So they gradually supported me from then onwards.

I encountered clay only during my foundation year in LASALLE, and I remembered realising how interesting it was to create something. It was really a leap into an unknown but also trusting that the process of working with my hands in a creative way would lead me somewhere. After finishing LASALLE, I realised that there were a lot of things I still did not know about ceramics. Limitations to technical expertise (in ceramics) had me feeling empty, so after army I decided to save some money and travel overseas. I could learn about building a smokeless wood-firing kiln in Hungary or Bali. Most of these programmes are usually one month long, concentrating on a specific skill set, and while I was there, I could interact with practitioners from other countries. It became a self-designed curriculum from 2008 to 2013, almost every year I travelled to broaden my learning and experience in ceramics.

In 2013, I managed to get accepted into a one month master class programme organised by the Korean Biennale called "Mentoring Camp" and during the program I met Professor Chang Ching Yuan from Tainan National University of the Arts, Taiwan. He was giving a talk about his school, his way of teaching, and he was showing slides of the equipment that they have in the school. I was very attracted to it because the facilities were fully equipped and there's 24hr access to the studios. During the three or four years in the Masters Programme, Professor Chang facilitated a lot of exchanges by having foreign artists in the programme as resident guest artists and sending students to various parts of the world to learn from international professionals. So from 2014 to 2018 I was in ceramic heaven. As for the PHD, I was interested to further push my theoretical knowledge and artistic practice and to establish my practice and base in Taiwan.

Making a Living as an Artist

L: A question that my students often ask me about practising artists is how do they make a living? So, putting yourself through school, how did you manage to make a living and continue this study?

T: Hmm. I think most of us are driven by this passion and it is a drive whereby we have to make things work. I started off working in an art transport company, and I was working with Earl Lu Gallery part time to learn how to set up lighting and paint pedestals. I even had to wait at restaurants...there are many things that we could do in order to sustain a life of practice. At the very beginning there's always this rite of passage where you have to go through very hard times. But for me personally, I wasn't so worried about it when I was younger. I was making do with whatever means possible to continue my art practice.

Yeah, in a way I was lucky to dive into ceramics because after all these years of accumulating experience, I think I've come to a point whereby I am very confident that my skill set could sustain my life. It took a long time to get to where I am. So, for the younger artists or students, it's normal to be uncertain. It's actually good to be aware of circumstances, and the interesting part would be how to creatively navigate around, along or against the limiting conditions.



Figure 1: Discarded homework accumulated at NIE ceramics studio

Art Making Process and Philosophy

L: Can you tell us a little bit about your ideas and philosophy behind your art making process?

T: I think it has to do with my background, working behind the scenes in various companies and institutions, in art packaging, art transportation, in Earl Lu gallery, in ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts), in SOTA (School of the Arts). Because my family wasn't so well to do, so a lot of times buying materials for making art is tricky, and I have to admit to a certain extent when I was in LASALLE, I had to scavenge the dustbins for leftover acrylic paint tubes. Me and my friends would visit the dumpster regularly to look for found objects or found materials. Because of this experience, I'm always very aware of potential materials available in the surroundings, things being left behind by students, by this sort of production of art. And in a certain way the waste generated from all these events, be they biennales or exhibitions or art education they have not only a very personal meaning to me, but a very special meaning about art making in our contemporary times. What is this whole production? It's like a commodified economy of art, which I'm very interested in. Coming back to Singapore for the past two weeks, whenever I meet with artists or my friends, the main conversation would veer towards money. Yeah, I find it's very unique to Singapore. While I was in Taiwan, America or Europe, people were more curious about art practice. But here, all I hear is this money exchange and this triggered my practice of using waste material.

The second thing I'm interested in is using discarded art objects/materials and the whole idea of appropriation. What is originality in this era of making artworks? And by using, rethinking or reconsidering these things or material I had collected, to be then remade into something else, to a certain extent the authorship of works produced included everyone else. The students yesterday were looking at the artworks and remarked "this is mine, that is mine. Ohh, that is mine", this sort of interaction I think is very interesting to me because it's a very localised thing, these students find it very interesting that someone is using their works (Fig. 3a & 3b). But when I was in Shigaraki, Japan, as I was beginning to experiment with this way of working, two of the artists were pretty unhappy that I was picking up their broken stuff into my own practice and the reason behind it was I suspect that their garbage maintained their signature or signature style. Maybe they were uncomfortable that their imperfect works would reveal their mistakes or [affect their] market value once appropriated or plundered by me. Since then, I became very interested in the research of art garbage, commodification of art, and I wanted to critique it and make fun of it.

L: Why do you think these artists found it offensive that you're making art out of discarded things that they are throwing away, like for landfills, for the garbage, they're not even recycling them, right?

T: There's a practice of smashing failed ceramic works into bits so that people will not copy them or reuse them. So what they do in Shigaraki is that they will fling it over the dumpster so the force will smash it into bits, but some of the works are cushioned by the other shattered pieces. I'm also quite provocative, I would purposely pick up artists' failed discarded works and display them openly on my studio table in order to instigate some sort of conversation/debate/argument. Though the majority of the artists present at the studios couldn't care less, two Japanese artists were not too happy about my "research".

One of the concerned artists made sure I returned the broken pieces back into the dumpster and the other was adamant that permission should be sought first before taking someone else's property. These experiences motivated the project further and provided real time questions on authorship of an artwork and ownership of garbage. I decided not to heed these artists' call to leave their garbage alone, the collected items became an important element for my work and research. As for seeking permission, which I did, provided case studies of how different artists from different countries/cultures/background perceive their waste. In Japan, there are actually laws in place to deter scavengers. I mean who would be glad to see someone else going through your garbage. It's quite personal, right?

For the European based artists, when I contacted them they said, "oh sure it's free for you to use...I'm glad that someone is using this rubbish and...giving new life to it". And another artist was like, "you don't need to ask me, just use it!" But the concerned Japanese artist who was adamant about being polite with another's garbage, I mean, I don't need to report to him, but he made it a point to ask if I had sought permission daily, "have you asked? Have you gotten permission? Why is the item still on your table?" I just simply refuse to answer him. I just wanted to purposely provoke and see how far his anger or his ideology would take him.

L: In the Western world I can think of several examples of other artists having done that. A classic one is Duchamp putting a moustache on the Mona Lisa (L.H.O.O.Q.) or Rauschenberg erasing a de Kooning drawing. There's a whole tradition behind appropriating other artist's work.

T: I think in craft training, mimicking the masters and repeating an action to the point of being exquisite is in a way the source of appropriation. The avant-gardes created an opening for an endless possibility of making art. We can see it in popular culture, in music, movies and so on. Appropriation is an essential part of contemporary life.

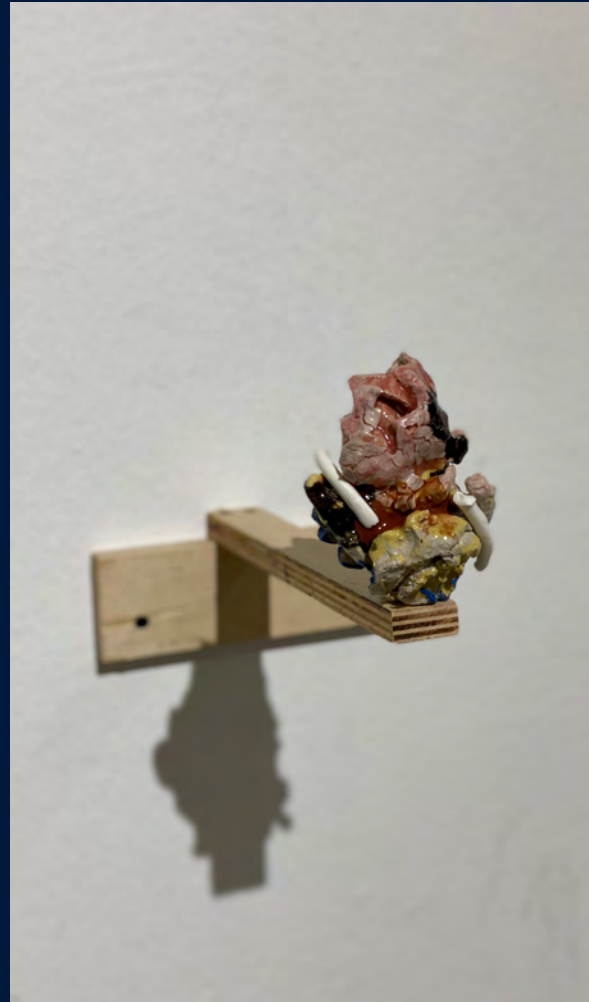


Figure 2: Made from current NIE students' discards

The Value of Art

L: When I asked you about acquiring your artwork, immediately, you said, “let's not talk about money, let's talk about a future collaboration”.

T: I think because right now I'm doing my PhD research on my own practice and some of the key points is that at the end of the day, I'm producing objects, and I'm curious what kind of value the audience, collectors, or buyers have in mind. Money could be the easiest exchange item with the artwork. So, I wanted to do an experiment that whenever someone is interested in acquiring my artwork, specifically ones made from art waste, I want to have conversations with these people. I want an interesting challenge and to add another layer of process to my practice and to the experience of the audience/collector.

I'm also trying to talk about the idea of collection. What happens to the works when they are collected, beyond a monetary exchange? It's a very strange thing...I'm trying to avoid this kind of status thing...I feel a little bit guilty to a certain extent because I'm using materials here and detritus from the students or the construction clay that we got. So, I cannot say that this is my work because I'm just a medium. I'm putting sort of an idea out there, how much can this idea be exchanged...instead of money. I think an idea to be exchanged for an idea would be more interesting than the idea being exchanged for money. And I think it's a very powerful way for me to talk about [art] in Singapore...we are so rich here, financially rich, yet...we can't afford to fail.

L: Your response made me realise something...why do we always think about the value of things in terms of dollars and cents, when actually, there is more value in, for example, a collaborative project...in an exchange of ideas, but we're so used to talking about things in terms of dollars and cents, and art doesn't escape that either. I think that we need a mindset shift about what we value more.

T: There are artists who correspond with letters, with poetry, with paintings. I think this is a sort of correspondence or exchange I was seeking for.

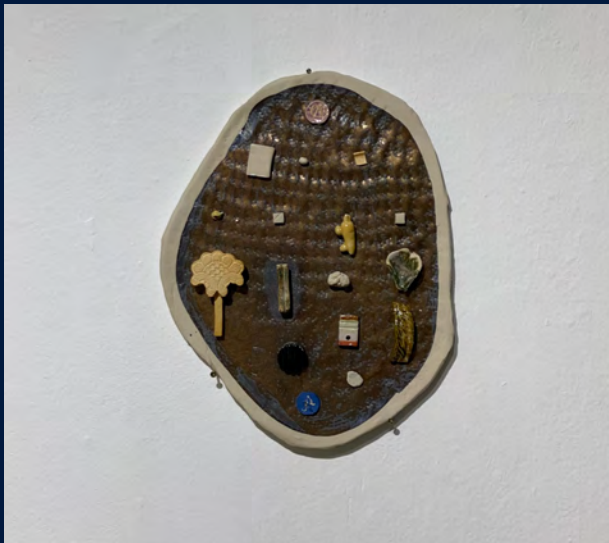


Figure 3a: Discarded Composition



Figure 3b: Discarded Composition

Process-Based Approach

L: The other thing that we should really talk about is your piece (kiln) that we've been sitting across from. Would you like to tell us a little bit about this work in relation to the whole idea of process-based art, which is what this exhibition is about, an emphasis on the process?

T: I think when you first brought up the idea of this show, to explore having a kiln within a gallery space, I was thinking maybe I could build the kiln of my dreams, right here in NIE, something that could function and be ready for firing. But I realised that if it was built in bricks, it has a very high chance that it would end up as construction waste.

I wanted to try and avoid making waste in this manner. In construction sites, this clay is considered waste...so this is garbage for them. For me, this is wonderful material. Because throughout my ceramics practice, I am accustomed to working with recycled clay. It's usually free and provided possibilities.

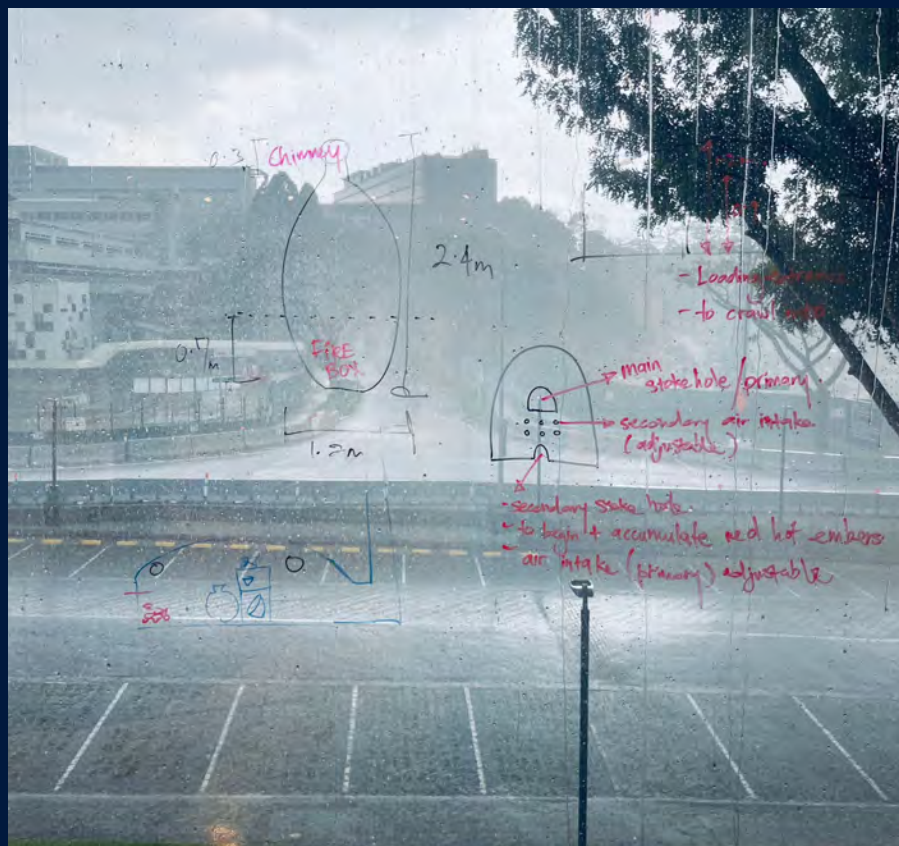


Figure 4: Kiln design

I really enjoyed this chance because first and foremost I think Leng you gave us the freedom to work with our ideas. It is very rare to be able to have a pugmill in a gallery and everything is dusty, you know, dirty floor all the way to the toilets. It was also enjoyable to have students come in to see this form slowly take shape, and help to make coils and observe how layer by layer this object is growing (Fig. 5).

I think the kiln making became more activated when it piqued the NIE students' curiosity about the history, technicality of wood firing. Things can shift. Things can move, things can break. I hope the audience will touch or pick it up or accidentally damage my artworks. I wanted to offer a different exhibition experience which would not really happen nowadays in museums or alternative spaces. Yeah, and you can see that over time, cracks are being formed and at very strange areas because the clay has its own characteristics. I could solve it by using commercial clay and other materials such as grog, but should I? I really enjoy the whole idea that it can fail.

L: Students actually learn more from seeing you work rather than seeing a complete kiln already built.

T: You raised a very important issue, because we are so result driven and for a lot of artists or potters...there's this secretive zone where people outside will not be able to see. I think it's good to be free and open about it.

Ceramics Scene in Singapore

L: You're so involved in the ceramic art scene internationally, what do you think about the ceramic scene in Singapore?

T: I will be very straightforward. I think the Singapore ceramic scene is growing, but ceramics involves a lot of craft elements, meaning you have to know the material, the techniques, and be aware of the available resources in order to make something good or of a certain quality. It's really very hard to learn in Singapore.

First and foremost, the ceramics curriculums here are not robust enough. The time given is too short for there to be a deeper understanding of the medium, and the equipment is limited. As many of us would understand, working with our hands seriously takes time. My advice to those who are interested, you have to go overseas, you have no choice. And not many would want to do that, because again, back to the fundamental question, MONEY.

Many so-called ceramics experts or curators do not really have time to research or be exposed to other artists apart from the usual names we hear. You also will find replicas of certain artists, why is this phenomenon happening? My speculation is that the web of ceramics collectors is small to begin with...likely, they see collecting as an investment. I was advised before by a gallerist to replicate certain elements of a senior artist and that my work was not contemporary enough. Our ceramics scene here is dominated very much by amateurs. Because to become an expert in ceramics, there is a huge price to pay.

Art Education

L: NIE being an institute of higher learning for teachers, what do you think the student teachers can get out of this process-based exhibition and how can they bring it back to their classrooms?

T: I think it is wonderful that in NIE you invite a constant flow of guest artists for talks and workshops where students get to mingle with people from the art scene, this is important as an out of classroom practice that would encourage them and to give them another view of art practice.

My suggestion to the young art teachers is to induce creative methods to navigate set limitations so that their students can benefit from it.

I hope through our exhibition, the young teachers could take back the creative process of art making, include possible creative interactions or participation, and just like my process, to welcome possible failure and still continue working. More importantly, how to allow a space for the students to simply enjoy making art.



Figure 5: Kiln Building

Reflections - Lai Liming

Play. Reflect. Repeat

It is rare to see an art exhibition in Singapore purely dedicated to ceramics, or at least to a layman like me who knows little about the craft. It is even rarer to see five local ceramic artists, namely Mr Ahmad Abu Bakar, Mr Thomas Cheong, Ms Teo Huey Min, Mr Nelson Lim and Mr Todd Tok, coming together. As the description of this exhibition states, unlike any others, visitors can see not just complete works, but more of process-based works. In a way, it allows the “mess” or the behind-the-scenes to be portrayed, hence echoes the theme *Transmutation*. And because of this, the exhibition feels “active” and “alive”, as the artists come in regularly during the exhibiting period to continue with their works. It also allows visitors to see, discover and learn new things each time they return. As an art educator on a work attachment to National Institute of Education (NIE), I had the privilege to observe and interact with the artists on site, thus gaining some insights of how this exhibition reflects the various 21st century competencies that are essential to our students.

As mentioned, the exhibition mainly focuses on the artists' processes. Other than the displayed works, Mr Ahmad Abu Bakar demonstrates his studio practices weekly to continue his artworks, complete with potter's wheel, tables, and drying racks. Huey Min showcases her slip casting moulds, together with her meticulously crafted ceramic works. They are mostly in white, which further emphasizes the details of the works. Thomas' stacking of ceramic pieces and specially coated acrylic shelves installation in another smaller gallery which takes place throughout the exhibition period. Nelson's wire sculptures that see weekly rearrangements, while Todd's kiln building and sketches define works in progress. Over time, the unfired kiln started cracking and might eventually collapse, showing the true nature of clay.

During their setup, I not only observe the artists' passion but also their resilience towards practicing their craft and creating artworks. This is an essential soft skill that our future generations should mirror. Huey Min shared the countless failures she had encountered through her processes as a ceramic artist, how the works did not turn out as expected. On the eve of the opening, one of the racks gave way and broke a display mould but Huey Min persisted, pivoting to displaying her silicon moulds instead. Thomas painstakingly finds and measures the perfect balance of his numerous ceramic works and acrylic pieces with the spirit level ruler, constructing a brand-new installation each time this artwork is displayed. Nelson shared how he had to record and document the different temperatures as he fired each batch of his installation while he was in Tainan, as each batch of wires used reacted differently. Some of his wire sculptures melted and collapsed in the process, causing damage to the kiln, which he had to fix after. But none of these deterred the artists. They viewed these as part and parcel of the experience that they will encounter during their processes that in turn helps them learn and develop resilience.



Figure 1: Ahmad at his pottery wheel

This exhibition highlights the development of critical and creative thinking while honing and pursuing mastery of the craft, another 21st century competency that our students should pick up. Mr Ahmad used digital drawing techniques to enhance his ceramic artworks. Instead of throwing away his collapsed wire sculptures, Nelson continued to use them as part of his installations, connecting them to the rest and giving a more wholesome meaning to his series of works. While Thomas could have fired his ceramic sculptures at the same temperature to give similar sizes, he challenged himself to fire the works at different temperatures to create different sizes, hence giving rise to various compositions in the installation. The open and unfinished sculptural kiln Todd built cleverly showcased the details of what a wood kiln could be like. The glazes that Huey Min used to hold her ceramic works reacted differently during the firing process, and this helped derive a surprising contrast to her end-products. All these show how the artists take up and accept challenges, embrace uncertainties, and adapt according to arising situations.

In addition, the choice of materials by these ceramic artists emulates discipline, courage, and exploratory spirit, which are soft skills that students can learn. Thomas' combination of acrylic pieces and clay to form huge installations, Nelson's dipping of wire sculptures into porcelain slips, Todd's usage of throw-away clay and artworks, Huey Min's repetitive and time-consuming slip casting processes with natural elements also display the above qualities. To many, ceramics remain as a traditional art form. It probably can only be considered as Art when the material used is purely clay or porcelain, appearing in various forms of aesthetically pleasing vases, pots, bowls, and plates on display. Nevertheless, through their processes, these artists break the boundaries to explore the unknown and communicates a new definition to what ceramics can be, in this highly digitalised and technologically advanced world we reside in now.

In my opinion, *Transmutation* redefines what ceramics and even what an art exhibition can be. Apart from the finished works, we are immersed in the processes that bring them into fruition. A sense of desire to know more, and appreciation of the artists' commitment, skills, and their artworks continues. The artists' practices and processes also continue to emphasize the critical role of Art in society and art teachers. As an art educator, it reaffirms that Art is more than just a subject to complete till Lower Secondary but helps prepare the future generations that we are or will be teaching, to attain the desired outcomes of education and be future-ready.



Figure 2: Huey Min's sculpture cast broke during preparation for display



Figure 3: Thomas assembling his installation



Figure 4: Nelson adjusting his installation

Reflections - Hairul Md Hossain

Patience: A Path to Artistic Journey

As I walked into the National Institute of Education's (NIE) Art gallery to explore the exhibits from five Singaporean artists, I was mesmerised by the elegant simplicity and intricate details of the ceramic pieces on display. The participant artists, namely Ahmad Abu Bakar, Thomas Cheong, Nelson Lim, Teo Huey Min and Todd Tok, each infused their distinct styles into their exploration of clay as a subject matter. The theme for the exhibition is *Transmutation* which explores the dynamic process of transformation – both the action of changing or the state of being changed into another form. In most art exhibitions, viewers are invited to appreciate the finalised artworks and less so the opportunity to witness the artists' unique journey and creative processes.

This exhibition, however, bucks this trend which has become its distinctive feature. At each station, I took a moment to pause and meticulously scrutinise the works of the artists. My fascination intensified as I pondered the journey each artist undertook to create their masterpiece. Commencing with the conceptualisation of the idea, delving into material exploration, finalising the form, to considering the time invested in firing all the pieces, every step of the process offers an opportunity for learning and reflection. I hold immense respect for all the artists, acknowledging their perseverance and commitment towards excellence, never taking shortcuts in their artistic journeys.

During my interactions with the exhibits, one word resonated in my mind: patience. The artists displayed remarkable patience, as the intricacies of their art-making processes required self-discipline, resilience, dedication, and flexibility. Working with clay requires great patience, as one must invest time in understanding the language and nuances of this versatile medium. It is time consuming as clay needs to pass through different stages of the process. For instance, one must observe and appreciate the varying durations it takes for clay to transition from a wet state to leather hard and eventually, bone dry. In each state, the potter has the opportunity to engage in specific activities before the clay body transitions into the next phase. The size of the artwork also plays a crucial role, whether the artist is creating a single piece, a series, or an installation. This choice significantly contributes to the artist's testament to patience. Success is not assured at every stage of the *Transmutation* process, as the potential for failure or mishaps looms during various aspects of artmaking, including glazing, firing, and more.



Figure 1: Drying the cube



Figure 2: Applying oxide and slip

The exhibition will evolve over a span of three months, during which the artists will periodically visit the gallery to engage in ongoing artmaking. The culmination of their efforts, with the resolved artworks, will be revealed to the audience on the last day of the exhibition. The unpredictability of the fate of these works post-exhibition encourages the audience to patiently anticipate the unveiling of the finished forms at the exhibition's conclusion.

Personally, I am also immersed in the process of crafting an artwork for an upcoming group art exhibition scheduled for March 2024. The journey has been exciting and challenging, from conceptualising the idea to experimenting with clay, slip and oxide to create a tangible piece that aligns with the exhibition's theme, ensuring it resonates with both the curator and the audience.

At each stage of the process, I encountered potential setbacks and challenges. Particularly challenging was my first attempt at crafting a cube capable of balancing on its tip—an unprecedented feat for me.

Despite the daunting task, I found immense satisfaction in tackling the challenge head-on. Engaging in this process not only compelled me to delve deeper and broaden my thinking but also allowed me to refine and enhance my skills along the way. I have attempted to divide my artmaking journey into four stages below. At every stage, there was a possibility of things not turning out the way I want especially when it was my first time creating a cube form able to stand at the tip (I had to chamfer the tip).

Stage one- I had to wedge 3 sets of 7kg clay and shape them into three large cylinders. As the clay formed into a concave shape, I meticulously used a metal brush to etch marks, lines, textures, and scratches onto the exterior surface of the walls.

Stage two- After dividing the cylinder into halves, I ended up with six pieces of rectangular slabs. When the clay reached the leather-hard stage, I meticulously cut each slab into square measurements of 20cm by 20cm and carefully chamfered all four sides. It was at the fourth attempt that I realised this method was much easier.

Stage three- I approached the task of joining all six square slabs with utmost care, ensuring that the sides and corners were securely attached. Any oversight in this process could lead to the formation of cracks, resulting in an uneven appearance of the cubic form.

Stage four- Following the bisque firing, I meticulously applied black iron oxide to the surfaces adorned with cracks, lines, textures, and scratches. After covering all sides, I carefully cleaned off any residue and allowed it to dry before proceeding to apply red slip. To achieve this, I utilised the bristle of an unwanted toothbrush as a spray, evenly distributing the slip across the cube's surface.

Following these steps, I carefully placed the cube into the kiln for its second firing, hoping for a successful outcome. Should the result fall short of expectations, I would need to repeat the entire process from the beginning – this occurred to me four times. It took me nearly four months and four attempts filled with nerve-wrecking moments, to reach the final outcome I desired. It was a great challenge as I enjoyed how the process pushed me to think deeper and broader and helped me hone my skills. Now, I feel more ready than ever to continue my art-making journey, as fresh new ideas are beginning to emerge and I am excited to explore where these ideas will lead me next.

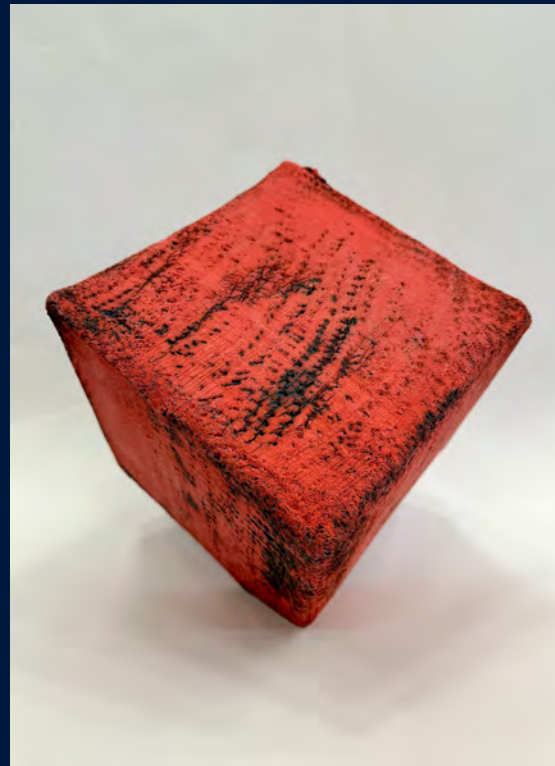


Figure 3: The resolved artwork

Biography

Ahmad Abu Bakar

Ahmad Abu Bakar is a prolific artist whose works have been showcased internationally including China, Thailand, The Philippines, Korea, Australia, Indonesia and France. Notable exhibitions include the *Jakarta Contemporary Ceramics Biennale*; *International Contemporary Ceramics Exhibition* at the National Art Gallery, Malaysia; *Ini Tanah Aku Punya* a solo exhibition at the Esplanade; and *Secret Archipelago* at Palais De Tokyo in Paris. Ahmad has been actively involved in mentoring inmates at the Singapore Prison since 2009, fostering creativity and self-confidence through art, culminating in collaborative projects like the *Singapore Biennale* in 2013. Presently, he is an adjunct lecturer at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Thomas Cheong

Thomas, a distinguished member of the International Academy for Ceramics, brings over 15 years of educational expertise to his craft. With a Master of Fine Arts in Ceramics from Tainan University of the Arts in Taiwan, he has exhibited his work in numerous local and international exhibitions. Through artist residencies across Asia, Canada, Finland, and the USA, Thomas has further enriched his practice, refining his artistic vision. Notably, he was awarded the Silver Award at the 1st New Taipei City Ceramics Award in 2013 and recognized as an invited artist at the esteemed 9th Cheongju Craft Biennale in Korea.

Choong Jia Ming

Choong Jia Ming is a second year NIE student researcher with a major in Art and English. Her research is anchored in her passion in the art of ceramics and curiosity to learn more about the local ceramics history and art-making processes through stories and rare insights of local practicing artists. She aims to shed some light on the benefits of having ceramics in the Singapore school curriculum and encouraging the understanding and appreciation of the unique beauty of this art form.

Hairol Bin Mohamed Hossain

Hairol Bin Mohamed Hossain is an educator and inspiring ceramist. He utilizes clay in his artistic journey to mirror qualities of resilience, adaptability, and grit. Through his art, he demonstrates how these qualities can transform into something extraordinary when moulded in the right direction, inspiring others to harness their creativity to overcome challenges. Hairol has participated in local group exhibitions, and some of his artworks are in private collections. Notably, in 2019, he was commissioned by the National Parks Board (NParks), and the piece is exhibited as a public display in Fort Canning Park as part of a commemoration showcase in celebration of the Singapore Bicentennial.

Rebecca Heaton

Rebecca Heaton is an Assistant Professor in Visual and Performing Arts at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She disseminates research internationally concerning creativities, cognition, art, technology, and education. In 2023 Rebecca was awarded the International Society for Education through Art (INSEA) Excellence in Research Award. Rebecca is involved in the development of national and international art education curricular content. Her recent publications include A systematic literature review of cognitive exchange in higher degree visual art education published in the Arts and Humanities in Higher Education Journal (2023) and Managing cognitive dissonance in art teacher education (2023) published in the Cambridge Journal of Education.

Lai Liming

As an Ministry Of Education educator for more than a decade, Liming strongly believes in the importance of Arts Education and how Arts Education lead to the development of 21st Century Competencies. Leading the school's Arts Education committee for the past few years and the Art Unit, various Arts programmes such as student-led performances, learning journeys to museums and Arts workshops were implemented. Liming has also been attached to National Art Gallery for professional development.

Nelson Lim

Nelson Lim, a celebrated ceramist from Singapore, began his journey into ceramics at NAFA. Under mentor Mr. Peter Low, his passion flourished, leading to international recognition through exhibitions and residencies across Asia. Renowned for his conceptual approach, Nelson pursued mastery through the MFA Applied Arts program at Tainan National University of Arts. Notable accolades include honors at the Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale. His monumental work *Construction of Memories* debuted at Taiwan's Yingge Ceramics Museum in 2017. Inducted into the International Academy of Ceramics in 2018, Nelson continues to exhibit globally, with recent showcases in Singapore, South Korea, and China, showcasing his artistic vision and technical prowess.

Chee-Hoo Lum

Chee-Hoo Lum is Associate Professor of music education with the Visual & Performing Arts Academic Group at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is the Coordinator of the NIE Centre for Arts Research in Education (CARE). Chee-Hoo's research interests include examining issues towards identity, cultural diversity and multiculturalism, technology and globalization in arts education; children's musical cultures; creativity and improvisation; and elementary music methods.

Marcus Tan

Marcus Tan is Associate Professor of Drama at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He researches primarily in intercultural theatre, performance soundscapes and acoustemologies and has authored several books and articles in these areas. Marcus started his ceramics journey four years ago, under the tutelage of Patsy Chua and Chua Soo Kim of Sam Mui Kuang. He sees the confluence of his yoga practice and ceramics in the ways they speak to and speak about life's processes. Marcus's works are on sale via Instagram, @mettaclayworks, and all proceeds go to Metta Cats and Dogs Sanctuary, an animal shelter.

Teo Huey Min

Teo Huey Min, a studio ceramic artist from Singapore, also shares her expertise by teaching pottery classes at The Potters' Guilt pottery studio. She enjoys creating both functional ceramics and clay sculptures. After completing her Master of Fine Arts in Applied Arts from Tainan National University of the Arts, Taiwan in 2014, Teo was shortlisted to work as a resident artist at the Utatsuyama Craft Workshop in Kanazawa City, Japan for three years. Huey Min has showcased her work in various local and international exhibitions. Notable achievements include receiving the UNESCO City of Craft Memorial Award and the bronze prize at the 6th Kikuchi Biennale in Japan.

Todd Tok

The name Todd was an alias, a name appropriated from a second-hand uniform belonging to an employee of a waste recycling plant in America. Call it fate, Todd currently researches and works on his PhD thesis regarding the production of contemporary art waste at Tainan National University of the Arts, Taiwan. Which was a result of his extensive travel experience to various studios/workshops/institutions/programs overseas, pondering about the "obesity" in the arts.

Twardzik Ching Chor Leng

Twardzik Ching Chor Leng is an artist, researcher and educator who is currently Senior Lecturer at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her latest co-authored academic book *Reimagining Singapore: Self and Society in Contemporary Art* examines how Singaporean artists negotiate between identifications of self and society through their artistic practices. Her landmark exhibitions include, Jakarta Biennale #14, Indonesia; Roppongi Art Night, Japan; Imaginary Travels, Germany; Istana Art Event; President's Young Talent; Singapore Bicentennial celebration; Singapore Night Festival; and the Orchard Boulevard MRT station. Corporate collectors include Crown Life Canada, University of Regina, and Google Asia Pacific.

