

Abstract

Evoking Intimacy: Touch and the Thoughtful Body in Sculptural Ceramics

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This PhD by Project challenges the existing cultural hegemony of vision, argues that there are experiential benefits to more fully engaging the body's sense of touch within art, and proposes that humankind's long historical intimacy with fired clay objects makes ceramics an appropriate medium within which to investigate these assertions.

The key developments of this research are the establishment of a knowledge base of touch and perception, an understanding of the relationship between maker and created object, and an articulation of the experience of the embrace. These were investigated through neurophysiology (the biological mechanisms of touch), philosophy (Merleau-Ponty and Nishida), and feminist theory (Irigaray), and an experience and knowledge of *chanoyu* (Japanese tea ceremony). Concepts from anthropology, psychology, and sociology also influenced the development of the project.

Within the research a concatenated or linked methodology evolved that interwove theory and practice. Issues that arose from theory prompted questions that were addressed within practice, resulting in issues arising within practice being addressed theoretically. The methodology is iterative, in that each research question reflects and revisits the work that went before, and emergent, in that the results are not calculated or fully anticipated. This allowed for both systematic and serendipitous development.

Using techniques that incorporated my own bodily embrace, practical investigations led to the creation of sculptural objects in fired clay that aimed to more fully engage the body's sense of touch through a progressive experience of grounded sensuality: seeing _ touching _ grasping _ lifting _ holding _ caressing _ embracing. In the studio the physical experience of the hug and the embrace was captured in soft plaster. The resulting plaster casts were used to create textured, non-figurative ceramic works to be caressed and embraced. Viewers become touchers, moving away from sight alone and its required distance, to the intimacy of bodily contact.