

The Absence and Presence of the
Human Form in Ceramic Sculpture –
Where is the Vanishing Point?

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the Royal
College of Art for the degree of Master
of Philosophy

December 2011
The Royal College of Art

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Abstract

Introduction to project

How is it possible that civilization has a global understanding of the abstraction of the human form? At a subconscious level as humans we have the ability to find the form of the **body** in the most minimal of shapes, objects, landscape and even natural phenomena such as clouds, it is an ability inherent in human nature. This deep-rooted facility to recognise the human form at various levels of abstraction is also developed further by our life experiences, environment and total education; specifically in the fine and applied arts.

For this research I have focused on the change between realistic representations of the human form to complete abstraction. I have broken it down to its most basic elements to explore at what point our visual language allows us to recognise and define a shape or object as being influenced by, or connected to, the human form. I have concentrated on extending my own visual language relating to the human form within my own practice. A series of practical research projects has been undertaken and has been supported by a new series of investigative works, drawings and written evidence of the ways in which the figure can be represented, documenting the process via the thesis and final works.

As part of my research, I have investigated the way artists working with clay have abstracted the human form focusing in particular on work from the 1950s to the present day using clay, drawing and installation. I have looked at how, over this period, artists have developed their own visual signifiers of the human form within their abstract/representational creations.

The aim of this research will be falls into two parts:

- To investigate how far one can push the human form in clay before it moves into abstraction
- To locate the vanishing point where viewers still identify the human within ceramic abstract sculpture

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Author's Declaration

1. During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.
2. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Edith Garcia

December 2011

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Historical and Contemporary Context | Studio Investigations

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Overview: Figurative Ceramics

The topic of ceramics and the human form is something that has been approached in various ways; both scholars and artists alike have tackled this subject, it has been explored through writing, research and in the studios with practical making. However, I found through my explorations that even though there has been numerous attempts at trying to capture this subject matter within publications and written articles it is difficult to create a cohesive representation of an ever growing and expanding field. Michael Flynn attempted to capture a sense of contemporary figurative ceramics in 2002 by creating a directory of artists entitled *Ceramic Figures*, this publication insightful but yet was simply a collection of images without any contextual essay that told us more about the artists intentions. Earlier publications by artists such as Betty Blandino's *The Figure in Fired Clay* (2001) was a great representation of the historical use of the figure within clay history, her texts focus more directly with the use of the human form within ceramics from Prehistoric to 2001. This publication was a great survey of the history of clay. Yet, for me, it was not until Jane Waller's, *The Human Form in Clay* (2001) whose approach to the human form and ceramics held a deeper understanding of the artists' intentions and the use of figuration and the body within ceramic sculpture. Upon her introduction to the book, she speaks of wanting to capture the fine art elements of artists working with the figure in clay as an essential goal for her; specifically with artists using the materials as a means to create works that dealt with various thematic approaches from personal, everyday life to those that investigated the human condition. Waller beautifully integrated the artists words and works into this publication capturing the practices of artists that used clay as an artistic and expressive sculptural material. These publications are very successful for their insight into historical and artistic approaches; yet, I found that they did not address some of the concepts that I have been exploring in my research. These being the artists' notion of the vanishing point of the human form within their practice and the introduction of artists' that use their own physical body as a tool to create performance based and abstract ceramic sculptural artworks.

Section 1.1 The Clay Figure in a Contemporary Art Context

Why work with the figure in clay today? Working with the figure, whether as a whole body or as sections, in clay has always been the way that I work. I have asked myself: 'Why do I continue to work with the figure in clay?' After reflecting on numerous experiences, I have come to the conclusion that my use of the figure indirectly correlates to my experience as a young teenager in Mexico particularly while visiting the National Museum of Anthropology (Museo Nacional de Antropología) in Mexico City.¹

Whilst viewing numerous Pre-Hispanic and Meso-American sculptural works in clay and other materials that were created between 1300 and 1521AC I was most impressed by the large figurines of the Aztec and Mayan Culture in the collection. Two that really left a deep impression were Tlaloc (Rain God) and Coatlicue (Earth Goddess of Life and Death). At that moment, I realised that even though vessels and pots have a strong resonance and history in clay, I was drawn by the communication and connection I felt with these figurative clay sculptures.

Tlaloc is a small carefully conceived red terracotta figurative vessel intended for the purpose of collecting rainwater. What captivated me was its sculptural detail and dynamic positioning of the figure on the side of the vessel, as if to remind us that it was falling from above. Coatlicue's sculpture, made out of stone, was impressive in both scale and the amount of detail. Not knowing then much of the legend behind the figure portrayed, I was simply enthralled by the presence that this two headed-serpent woman, with a necklace of hands and hearts wrapped around her neck, possessed. These works brought an appreciation for sculpture and the fact that, even after hundreds of years, they still stand with such authority, making me realise how these figures, rooted in traditional forms and myths can still speak to me today.

At the time, I was a student at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plastica in Xochimilco (part of UNAM), and realised that I had complete access to Mexico City's rich cultural and artistic history. I began to research other Pre-Hispanic, contemporary and artists from the 1920-1940s such as the Mexican Muralist group that included artists such as, Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, Jose Clemente Orozco, Rufino Tamayo and Frida Kahlo. Having access to these artists' works and



Figure 1: Tlaloc, The Rain God, Clay
Late Post-classic, Central Veracruz
Collection National Museum of
Anthropology, Mexico City

¹ The National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City house one of the world's largest collection of archaeological artifacts from the numerous ancient cultures in Mexico, including Maya, Golfo, Aztec and others.

studios enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the processes the artists used. The work of the artists that deal with significant political as well as autobiographical issues helped me to understand the way I approached my own work.

Art such as Diego Rivera's murals that melded together Mexican culture and politics, Frida Kahlo's self portrait that dealt with her growing up as a Mexican woman as well as an artist, had a significant influence on the way that I began to see my ceramic work. Their work gave me a fuller understanding of how the visual arts have the ability to carry each person's individual voice and its power to communicate various ideas simultaneously. Rivera communicated his political opinions through large-scale mural installation and Kahlo described her everyday life in smaller intimate paintings, yet the imprint that their lives and work left on me was the understanding that, as an artist, you had the freedom to communicate your own ideas and to record your own life experiences in your own unique voice. No matter what the medium, it was your own voice and expression that came through the works you create.

Minneapolis College of Art and Design

My first hands-on introduction to clay was simply to use it as a tool for modelling figurative sculptures, which were then to be cast in bronze. I worked with clay in this manner for two out of my four years at the college. When I realised that clay was a much more powerful tool than simply being used as a 'staging post' for bronze, I stopped taking clay for granted and became interested in it as a material in its own right. I looked at the history of clay and the more I learnt the more I became fascinated by the versatility and flexibility of the material and the fact that it was available in so many variations. It was a new world.

A further contributing factor was that it was also relatively inexpensive (as a student this was an essential quality) and, like bronze, it became a permanent material, once it was fired. I also began to identify with other fine artists who had used clay to create sculpture and began to see clay not just as a 'material' but also as a medium with its own qualities to be used to create one-off unique objects by both fine and applied artists.

The influence of clay is evident in the work of fine artists such as Auguste Rodin (b. 1840-1917), who traditionally only worked in bronze, whether in the more formal bronze forms or in the more spontaneous works, in which he allowed the modelled quality of the clay to find expression.

Joan Mirós (b. 1893-1983) who was primarily known as a painter; was also a prolific ceramicist creating numerous figurative works that danced



Figure 2: Joan Miro, Femme, Ceramic, 1956
Collection Famille Maeght, Paris

between figuration and abstraction. Mirós approach to clay was one that reflects a sense of freedom and comfort with the material in which there is a free-flowing sense of expression in his handling of the clay as well as in his approach to the mark-making in the works.

Artists continue to explore the representation of the human form even as our perception of it continues to change, with the advent of the computer and the technological developments that affect us seemingly taking place at lightning speed. During the period of the ancient Greeks and throughout the Renaissance, representations of the figure often took an idealistic approach in that artists changed the 'natural' look of the body to reflect a more "perfected" notion of the human form². In clay, the creation of figurines was a way in which the human form could be captured and used to create snapshots or postcards of everyday life in three dimensions, creating a scene that reflected the notion of an ideal life.

Despite radical developments in the post-war period and the popularity of Abstract Expressionism, post-war artists still chose to investigate the figure. One such artist was Picasso (b. 1881-1973) who continued to work with the figure in clay. In Picasso's early ceramic works he model his designs and shapes of utilitarian objects but as he developed his skills in clay there was a change in his use of the figure from a stationary pose to a more expressive stance. This is evident in such ceramic sculptures as 'Femme drapéé,' which he created in his Vallauris studio in France in 1948.³



Figure 3: Pablo Picasso, *Femme drapéé*, Ceramic, 1948
Collection Hammer Galleries. New York

Today artists are able to play with the possibilities of materials and form more than ever; digital technologies help us change the body with tools that make it easy to morph and fragment the human body. Within art and craft practice, artists continue to explore new possibilities for representation of the human form; not simply recreating it in its natural or idealised state, but in ways in which the body can be used to convey a sense of 'presence' or 'absence' without having to depend on using its anatomical likeness. Such as artist Clare Twomey (b. 1968) who was able to capture this essence in her work 'Consciousness/Conscience'. In this installation she created a false floor of unfired china tiles, then allowed members of the audience to step into the artwork imprinting their footsteps as they walked towards Polaroids of the artist making the tiles. This work spoke of the consciousness and unconsciousness of the participants in the work. It was not until after many participants walked across the floor and the weight of their bodies crushed the unfired tiles, returning them to dust, that you felt the phantom presence of others.

² Kenneth Clarke, *The Nude: Study in the Ideal Form*, Princeton University Press, 1992, Pg. 7

³ Illustrated in *Picasso Céramiste à Vallauris, Pièces uniques* au Musée Magnelli, Exhibition Catalogue, Chiron, Vallauris, 2004, Pg.108

California College of Arts and Crafts

After completing my degree at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design I came to the conclusion that my interest and future career lay within the ceramic arts. However, recognising that most of my education was focused on fine arts and in the history of fine arts, I realised that I had a very limited knowledge of clay history and culture. Therefore I began to research and educate myself on the use of clay by visiting artist studios, galleries, museum and reading numerous texts as well as taking part in ceramic residencies throughout the USA. This continuous research led me to the discovery of an extremely powerful movement in American clay history, the California Clay movement of the 1960s. As a young artist this was a movement that really held a deeper significance for me in terms of seeing clay artists push and expand the boundaries of clay and how it was perceived. Even today, nearly fifty years later, I can see the significant change and impact that this movement has had on American ceramic history. This discovery led me to apply for a Master of Fine Arts focusing on clay at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, a college where some of the most respected clay artist of that movement had studied and worked.

California Clay

To obtain a fuller understanding of what it took to acknowledge the impact of such a significant movement, I realised that I had to have a comprehensive understanding of what was occurring throughout the United States and specifically in California at that time. The California Clay movement happened during a post-war period a time of great cultural liberation. Many demobbed GI's enlisted (with the introduction of the GI Bill) at art schools, while the protest around the Vietnam war brought more questions on the limits of American influences abroad. The dawn of sexual liberation saw the rise of a greater awareness of human rights such as feminism, and the gay and lesbian movement. The introduction of the birth control pill for women was important in creating a cultural move away from the conformity of the early 1940-1950s, which was often concerned with reinforcing the idea of the nuclear family. This radical change in thinking brought in people that would not originally consider themselves to be artists.

These radical changes also gave way to a transformation within the visual arts that gave birth to a conceptual shift within clay art. This was particularly apparent in the new class of artists producing ceramic works from the West Coast (Bay Area) of the United States; artists such as Peter Voukos (b. 1924-2002), Susan Peterson (b. 1925-2009) and John Mason (b. 1927), all members of the American Ceramics Society, Southern California Section in the 1950s⁴, who radically questioned the traditional role of clay. These artists spoke about being influenced by a variety of ideas, including the artistic philosophy of Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada who wanted to move clay out of the factories and back to the artists' studios. Many clay artists responded to this idea and returned clay back to their individual studios and focused on the

⁴ Jo Lauria and Susan Peterson, *Color and Fire, Defining Moments In Studio Ceramics, 1950-2000*, LACMA in association with Rizzoli International Publications, Inc, 2000, Pg. 90

handmade.⁵ While not necessarily being concerned with the figure, but by questioning the traditional role of clay, they were part of a 'clay revolution' that was to have widespread effect on the way artist and the public perceived clay. This allowed artists to move away from making pots and take their own individual approach using clay as a more sculptural and expressive medium.

Members of the American Ceramics Society established their artistic careers with varying success. Peter Voukos was a pivotal figure in the history of the West Coast art movement, as Richard Marshall, a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, states: 'Peter Voukos is the acknowledged initiator of the revisionist approach to ceramic work. His central position in California's receptive and fertile artistic atmosphere in the 1950s, especially in its colleges and universities, generated the phenomenon of a university-sustained ceramic movement.'⁶ Voukos, who moved to the University of California at Berkeley in 1959 to set up the ceramics department, surrounded himself with artists such as Jim Melchert (b. 1930), Ron Nagle (b. 1939), Richard Shaw (b. 1941), and Viola Frey (b. 1933). Artists with a conceptual approach to clay became more prominent, particularly in the way some, such as Richard Shaw and Viola Frey represented the human form, Shaw in his assemblage works created a hyperrealistic view of the human form, whilst Viola Frey's interpretation of the human form was represented with colourful over life size totemic figures.



Figure 4: Robert Arneson, Fragments of a Western Civilization, Terra-cotta, 1972
Australian National Gallery, Canberra

Another such pivotal artist was the self-self portrayer Robert Arneson (b. 1930-1992),⁷ who was part of the Pop/Funk movement well

known for his ceramic clay bust self-portraits, where he usually played the main roles in various narratives. The sculptures addressed political, social and everyday life issues. An example of this is his work entitled 'Fragments of a Western Civilization' originally meant to be a life-size standing sculptural work created out of bricks, which was turned into a fragmented broken man - Arneson making a statement on the 'the fall of man' and 'the breakdown of society'⁸.

Arneson was widely recognised for his place within the West Coast Funk, whether through his use of metaphor of his often confrontational work. He also played a major role in linking ceramics with the Pop Art Movement of the 1980s. This was shown in the exhibition at the

⁵ Jo Lauria and Susan Peterson, *Color and Fire, Defining Moments In Studio Ceramics, 1950-2000*, LACMA in association with Rizzoli International Publications, Inc, 2000, Pg. 90

⁶ Richard Marshall and Suzanne Foley, *Ceramic Sculpture: Six Artists*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York in association with the University of Washington Press, 1981 Pg. 8-9

⁷ Robert Arneson, San Francisco MOMA, Video Interview, Jan 1995
[<http://www.sfmoma.org/multimedia/videos/331>]

⁸ Richard Marshall and Suzanne Foley, *Ceramic Sculpture: Six Artists*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York in association with the University of Washington Press, 1981 Pg. 8-9

Museum of Art and Pennsylvania State University in 2005, entitled 'Arneson and the Object', where he exhibited works that encompassed pop art aesthetics such as 'Six Pack 16 Oz.' created in 1964. A group of six life-size Coca Cola bottles, reminiscent of Andy Warhol's soup cans, established a strong tie to Pop Art. As well as socially engaged work, there was political satire such as in 'Ronny Portable', where he touches upon his opinion of the political career of Ronald Reagan, portraying him as a TV set with horns. Much of Arneson's figurative work deals with serious issues, but mostly with a witty dark sense of humour, a humour that is particularly evident in 'Six Pack 16 Oz' where one of the life-size bottles has been opened suggesting a human presence.⁹

This conceptual shift brought new ways of thinking and working with clay, and the emergence of artistic 'happenings'. These saw the coming together of artists in staged events and the creation of ephemeral artworks where the human body was an integral part of the artwork. '...As potters, they mastered the technical processes of creating functional objects within the crafts tradition; pushing forward, they took the option of relating these processes to ideas outside the craft world...'¹⁰. Such events brought the use of the body to the forefront of art practice, focusing on how artists used their own bodies in the final artworks along with creating a certain blurring of boundaries within the art disciplines. Within this upsurge were the artists Ana Mendieta (b. 1948) and Jim Melchert (b. 1930).



Figure 5: Ana Mendieta, Silueta Series Mexico 1973

Within such 'happenings', there also emerged new opportunities for exploring the liberation of women; women sculptors working in clay emerged in a primarily male dominated art practice. Participating in 'happenings' allowed women to decide how their bodies were presented and used in art making, making it a more subjective experience that allowed control of use and presentation of images of women's bodies. The 1960s gave way to many powerful provocative theories that artists began to employ within their art practices and this brought about a rise of body art throughout the early 1970s in which artists began to create works not only within galleries but also outside of the gallery walls.

Mendieta's work dealt with numerous concepts including a concern with feminist ideas, but in this essay I focus on what she called her 'earth body-works'¹¹. In the early 1970s Mendieta created the 'Silueta' [Silhouette] series works where her body was the primary instrument used to create temporary works and outdoor live performances. Each performance was as significant as the residue or documentation of each work – be it the imprint of her body as a red-stained

⁹ Cary Levine, *Robert Arneson at George Adams*, Art in America, Sept. 2005

¹⁰ Suzanne Foley, *Ceramic Sculpture in California: An Overview from Ceramic Sculpture: Six Artists*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York in association with the University of Washington Press, 1981, Pg. 11

remnant on a sandy beach or a black burnt charcoal outline of her body created by fire on the earth.

At much the same time, Jim Melchert staged 'Changes: a performance with drying slip' a happening in which artists dipped their heads into slip and allowed the clay to dry – encasing themselves in a skin of clay and focusing on the internal body sounds – for the duration of the performance whilst filming it. His intent was to encapsulate the head in dried clay so that we would draw attention to the body functioning as a vessel.¹² The work brought a wider understanding of clay as a conceptual medium.

Fragmented Figure

The technological/scientific/medical developments of the 1980s also gave impetus to artists wanting to create a deeper human connection with their audiences, establishing more of a personal voice and a resonance with their viewers. This period saw artists trying to capture the presence of the body, not by using it in a representational manner, but instead trying to focus on ways to transform its meaning to audiences in a conceptual way. They began to propose other ways of looking at the body by concentrating on presence/ absence, ephemeral quality and the idea of the human fragment - all of which signified the human body in one way or another within their art practices. Among the artists dealing with the fragmentation of the human body in clay were Stephen De Staebler (b. 1933) and Mary Frank (b. 1933).

De Staebler's large monumental sculptural works captured the physical movement of the artist's body within the finished artwork, giving it the ability to capture the artist's gestures and movement as it was built. Along with these larger works, he also created smaller fragmented figurative sculptures that give a hint of the presence of the human form. It is evident in these sculptures that the body is almost entirely enveloped or trapped in the clay. Mary Frank's work dealt with fragmentation in a way in which her bodies were snapshots of everyday moments, people melted together with their environments, transforming the everyday act of a woman swimming in the Cape Cod river into a clay sculpture which captures the gesture and movements of the swimmers' movements with the flow of the oceans waves.¹³



Figure 6: Stephen De Staebler, Figure with pink knee, Ceramic, 2008

¹² Simon Groom, *A Secret History of Clay: from Gauguin to Gormley*, Exhibition Catalogue, Tate Publishing, London, 2004. Pg. 15-18

¹³ Herrera, Hayden, *Mary Frank* by Hayden Herrera, Harry N. Abrams, New York, USA, 1990 Pg. 9



Figure 7: Antony Gormley, Field, Terracotta, 1989-2003

Antony Gormley makes works that explore the direct manipulation of clay, exploring marks of expression that capture gesture to communicate the essence of the human body. An example of this is 'Field' a project with various incarnations from 1989-2003. Gormley brought together a group of volunteers and handed them a

lump of terracotta clay asking them to create small hand size figures, with only

two restrictions, which were that the figures all be similar in size and that each have two small punctures as eyes. The concluded piece was 'Field' of approximately 35,000 small clay figurines. As Gormley states: there are two factors in this work, 'the spirit of the ancestors; the primal population made of the earth, where mud takes on the attributes of sentience and the evocation of the unborn – those who are yet to come' and the overwhelming gaze of the figurines and its affect on us such as which look to us to find their place.¹⁴

The Disappearing Body

In the early 1990s works by artists such as Robert Gober (b.1954) and Felix Gonzalez-Torres (b. 1957-1996) influenced my way of thinking by creating works that reflected some of the fragilities of the disappearing body. Robert Gober's works dealt with the duality of life and death and he translated these ideas into fragmented body parts such as 'Untitled [Leg] 1989 – 1990' a surreal leg jutting out of a clean white wall – as if a person was either trapped or crushed by the building. Along with these figurative works he created mutant sinks that reassembled crucifixes almost as if he is trying to create a place where 'we could wash away all our sins'. Sharing similar sensibilities in his work was Felix Gonzalez-Torres who created 'Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)' a work in remembrance of his deceased lover. Gonzalez-Torres created work that was comprised of a pile of sweets that was the exact physical weight of his ex-partner. He then invited audiences to take a piece of candy with them as they left the exhibition; in essence the presence of his lover was placed within the gallery walls and at the end of the exhibition period the audience had removed him and he was symbolically gone.

¹⁴ *Antony Gormley, Artist Series*, Phaidon Press Ltd, 2nd Edt. 2000, Pg. 94



Figure 8: Andrew Lord, cast neck (negative). The Bowery, 2007, Plaster and Beeswax

Other artists that use the body, its functions, interiors and exterior negative spaces as a tool for expression are Andrew Lord (b. 1950) and Giuseppe Penone (b. 1947). Andrew Lord explores the body as a tool in clay by capturing the negative spaces of our bodies as well as being influence by the physical interaction with clay and its ability to capture the ephemeral qualities of our bodies, such as breathing, eating and smelling. Lord uses his own body in creating works that touch on issues such as our ethereality and the passing of time, as in 'Twenty-seven pieces. Touching and holding, 1985', this work focuses on expressing the individual elements of the body, specifically the gestures of our hands – the end results are abstract ceramic objects that are filled with the essence of touching, immediately recognised as something created by the hand. In the early 1990s, he continued to explore this approach and

processes of making with 'biting, breathing, listening, tastings, smelling, swallowing and watching'. He states 'This physical interaction with clay, using my body as a tool for building, enabled an intimacy that I hadn't known before and access to a different range of ideas.'¹⁵ In these and other works Lord was able to create an archive of his own physical body in clay, creating an index of it but broken into segments. Lord continues to explore ways in which he is able to create concrete fingerprints of his bodily actions into clay - he states '...in the case of breathing that was pressing my chest against the clay – became breathing solidified in clay. The action solidified into itself.'¹⁶

In some ways Lord shares similar concerns with the 'Breath 5' by Giuseppe Penone (b. 1947) a terracotta form in which the artist imprints his torso into the wet clay. On close inspection you can see the pattern from his jeans. Most significantly, he bites down onto the clay and similar to Andrew Lord creates a sculpture of the interior space his mouth – he then shapes the edge of the clay to be reminiscent of his own breath. As Elizabeth Manchester from the Tate Modern states: '...These works made during this period investigated the mark-making potential of the sculptor's hand and skin on his creative materials...'¹⁷



Figure 9: Giuseppe Penone, Breath 5, Terracotta, 1978 Collection of Tate Modern, UK

Works with similar aesthetics as Penone and Lord who have informed my thinking are the married duo Janet Cardiff and George Miller; their work focuses on the

¹⁵ James Rondeau, *Andrew Lord*, Milton Keynes Gallery Exhibition Catalogue, 2010, Pg 21.

¹⁶ James Rondeau, *Andrew Lord*, Milton Keynes Gallery Exhibition Catalogue, 2010, Pg 22.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Manchester, *Giuseppe Penone*, Tate Modern Online, 2000 [<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=11512&tabview=text>]

absence and presence of the human form – they concentrate on bringing to our attention the disappearance of the body, at times with a eerie and unsettling response. Works such as 'Opera for a Small Room' and 'Killing Machine' both works give you a strong sense of the presence of someone within the exhibition space; you can feel movement and see the fragments of captured moments. However, knowing that there is no one in the work you still find yourself as an audience member undeniably asking yourself 'so when is the person going to come out of hiding?'

Subject and Object

By focusing on the changes in concepts and use of the human body in clay practice, I have mapped out some of the ways in which the body has been transformed from being anatomically and conventionally represented to being at the centre stage through the art disciplines. For me the survey has brought an understanding of why the body continues to be significant within the applied and fine arts. This is not only so that it can be depicted in its entirety, but for its ability to be the translator for many different ways of thinking and concepts.

The use of the body in clay continues to be represented in diverse ways, primarily due to the nature of the material, its endless possibilities to be transformed into a hyper realistic sculpture or to be pressed into a physical body to create a record of something as fleeting as a breath. It is the ability of clay to lend itself to various ways of working processes and concepts that keeps its moving forward in the arts.

Through analysing the work of these artists and looking at the ways in which they approach clay and the human form I have a new awareness of the ability of clay to create a sense of wonder by simply alluding to itself or its ability to be a major part of wider changes within the art world.

Section 1.2: Contents
Background to my work and Studio Investigations

- 1.2 Background to my work and Studio Investigations
 - 1.2i *Studio Investigation*: Whole figure to abstraction
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 - 1.2iii *Studio Investigation*: The abstracted figure

1.2 Background to my work: My research in context



Figure 10: Edith Garcia, *Happy Ugly Scars*, Northern Clay Center, Clay and Mixed Media, 2009-2010

During the last few years I have developed a way of working that originates through drawings, sculptures and clay. An example of this is *Happy Ugly Scars*, an autobiographical installation composed of a series of drawings and sculptures, that interprets certain personal childhood memories and aims to translate life struggles and experiences that leave us with metaphorical scars, be they happy, distressing or traumatising, all of which shape our development as humans.



Figure 11: *Displaced Series, Fearless I*, 2006

Through the history of my career my work has been highly influenced by popular and urban culture by artists such as Camille Rose Garcia, Mark Ryden and Clayton Brothers; these artists depict their own personal experiences and everyday life into dark and somber pieces of art. Their unique styles and approach to storytelling drew me towards their way of thinking and working. Much of the work that I had created connected directly to graffiti, illustration, comic books and toy culture, this work focused even though colourful and playful with the darker areas of reality, what some might call the raw actuality of society. Coming from a Latin American background, I felt my work also carried a sense of magical realism and personal narratives were always present within the works. My work tried to always touch on what it means

to be human and the human condition more specifically addresses current happenings within my life and the environment around me. This led me to create works such as Displaces Series, Contemporary Monsters and Happy Ugly Scars all dealing directly with real life scenarios and experiences.

Whilst I was pleased with the visual impact of the work, but felt that the clay figures were too rigid and I have been constantly searching to find a way to make them more expressive. These clay figures were slab built, but this process of working made the sculptures feel quite stiff and rigid. I was dissatisfied by the rigidity of the works and wanted to have more expressive qualities that could come from a more direct handling of the clay and wanted to move away from the total representation of the human form to a more abstract interpretation.



Figure 12: Edith Garcia, Blue Vein, from Pause Series, Slipcast clay, 2007

In late 2007 I began to focus on the complete absence of the representational image of human form within my sculptural work. In response to this shift in direction I created an experimental series of works entitled *Pause*. This work dealt with using the human form a

more conceptual way by breaking it down to its building blocks and using them as metaphors for the human element in the sculptural work. However, the works created felt cold and unexpressive; I wanted to learn the skills to be more critical of my work and I sought a new critical language in order to understand my work and to look at the figure with a more sensitive response, and to increase an emotional attachment to the work. I believed that it was the handling of the clay in a different way that would create the response I was after. I sought a sense of freedom in the work rather than the restraints I had seen in previous works.

With time the work began to change organically, but to develop a more critical approach a clear methodology was necessary in order to see the logical process of the figure moving to a more abstract solution. I felt that a concentrated period of time would help me to be able and achieve these goals, I have done this by creating a series of tests that measure and quantify this development and I have subsequently reflected on the results to make some conclusive pieces. At the Royal College of Art and within this MPhil research I have been exploiting clay's ability to convey a sense of expression. I have been rigorously looking at my work in the context of other artists and their thinking processes have helped me to create a context for my own work.

Working in a methodical approach to the making of the figure has helped me identify and understand the processes that led to a successful translation of my ideas. I have been able to bring life into the work a greater expressive sense of touch and sensuality, as well as being able to find a freedom to move away from a prescriptive way of working.

Studio Investigation

1.2i Whole figure to abstraction

1. Investigation:

This investigation is the first in a series of explorations into the human form and how far I can manipulate the material so that there is no longer any obvious human likeness within the clay objects.

2. Aim:

To reach a point within the investigation where I can see/create a visual pattern (a scale) within the clay figure where there is a record of changes in the clay figure from the starting point of the recognisable human form as fully anatomically correct to one that is totally abstracted. In essence to record visual pattern and process.

3. Method:

This investigation began with the making of a single modeled figure from which a two-piece plaster mould was made as a means to creating multiples that I could systematically alter - each one in a count of three by squeezing them (using both hands), beginning from the bottom to the top of the sculpture. In that process I recorded how many times it took to squeeze/alter the sculptures until you could no longer recognise any human elements.

In preparation for this investigation I created six press moulded figures, all from the same plaster mould, using the same amount of clay and wetness - and placed them on a shelf; beginning from left to right the sculptures were then squeezed/alterd, 0, 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15 number of times.

4. Results:

During this research, I was able to create a visual scale, from 0 to 15 (squeezes) - which progressively saw the human form diminishing within the sculptural objects.

From this investigation I concluded that it was possible to create a visual scale, which demonstrated that the human form could be transformed from full to negative form in the sculptural objects. I found that sculpture 12 and 15 showed the least amount of figurative elements, whereas 15 almost had none, I was intrigued by the finding of a hand to hint at figuration hidden at the bottom of the final work.



Figure 13: Mould for small scale investigations



Figure 14: Whole figure to abstraction investigation



Figure 15: Video stills from Whole figure to abstraction investigation



Figure 16: Whole figure to abstraction investigation, transition from figuration to abstraction



Figure 17: Final work of whole figure to abstraction investigation



Figure 18: Final work of whole figure to abstraction investigation. Figuration Detail

6. Conclusion

I found this research to be extremely helpful in establishing a working model that can be useful for future investigation in creating a visual scale from representation to abstraction. I was able to reference the original object and the end object to verify the beginning and end of the final investigation. The use of the squeezing technique also created an unexpected expression in the work. I found that in the final work (shown above) with the 15 squeezes there is still some figuration visible – but what compelled me to move forward to the next investigation is the suggestion of figuration in the objects.

Within this investigation I realised that a number of observations could be made:

- Methodological squeezing has added an unexpected expression to the objects, which were subsequently used in the following investigations.
- The action of squeezing impacted on the emotional expression of the test and suggested potential sensuality.
- The direct action of squeezing the clay had a direct impact on changing the figure into something less recognisable and more abstract but the few remaining identifiable features such as the hand and foot provided valuable information.
- Suggestions of sensuality, a sense of touch and tactility were created by the direct contact with the clay and the resulting forms.
- This investigation helped me to identify that a certain vanishing point could be reached-

but the systematic documentation was necessary to record/show the object's original shape. This helped in identifying the transition from the beginning point of representation to the end point of abstraction.

Final work

The final piece of work (see Figure 15: Final Work) in the investigation was the platform that helped me to realise that the level of figurative/abstract information is what dictates how the object will be viewed. The hidden placement of the figurative hand beneath the piece **pushed** it more in terms of how it would be seen and placed in terms of its figurative or abstract elements.

Note: This investigation helped to create the methodology that I could continue to use for future investigations in terms of using the creation of clay figure: the creation of a plaster mould – therefore ensuring all objects began at the same starting point – yet the final results would vary.

Studio Investigation

1.2ii Figurative fragment to abstraction

1. Investigation:

An investigation to explore, to what extent the human form and figurative fragment can be altered and abstracted but still remain recognisable as figurative or abstracted human form.

2. Aim:

To research the varying stages of figuration to abstraction by altering the press moulded figures using deliberate choices informed by the results of my previous investigations.

3. Method:

Using the same methodology from the previous investigation, seven objects were created from a the same single press-mould then squeezed and altered in an attempt to create a scale of figuration to abstraction. This investigation was based on the derived final piece of the previous 'Whole figure to abstraction' research.

Results:

I was able to establish a series of small objects that moved from representational form to abstraction; each one a step from figuration to abstraction in a scale from 1-7 (figurative fragment to abstraction); each piece was a response to the results of the previous piece. In this investigation there are a few things that were significant:

- The first piece (Fig. 1) is quite recognisable as a figure and follows on from the previous series of tests.
- I am much more aware of the subtle suggestions of hands and feet.
- The second section (Fig. 5-7) of the investigation has changed, it indicates that I have become too self-conscious and the works that were created echo existing examples of abstracted figurative sculpture.
- The second row indicates that I tried to impose the language of abstract sculpture.
- The language imposed derives from the art language of abstract sculpture – not directly from the clay – so this is a reflection of where this investigation did not work so well.

Conclusion

I was able to create a 'scale' of figuration to abstraction but I noted that the language of abstraction I was using was highly influenced by the history of abstract sculptural objects. I found that my fine arts background informed the visual language that I was employing in that I recognised that each piece suggested the works of other artist such as Henry Moore and Isamu Noguchi, but none reflected my own personal language of abstraction. I therefore decided to conclude this research and move on to next investigation following the original methodology.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

From Figuration to Abstraction:

All objects started from same press-mould then squeezed and altered to explore the stages of figuration and abstraction.

Figure 19: Scale of works for figurative fragment to abstraction investigation

Studio Investigation

1.2iii The abstracted figure

1. Investigation:

In a positive response to some of the results of the previous investigation I decided to continue with the same methodology but simply increase the size and make a larger plaster mould in order for the tests to have a greater physical presence.

2. Aim:

To capture some of the expression of the smaller pieces but working in increased scale to create a set of seven pieces that would respond directly to the results of each piece as it was made.

3. Method:

I modelled a large-scale anatomically proportioned figure from which a plaster mould was made. The intention was to press mould works that respond directly to the results of the previous investigation into abstraction.

4. Results:

The larger press moulded pieces proved too solid to be successfully fired, as several pieces, exploded during the firing process. In the original set of investigations the pieces were solid but were made with a smaller amount of clay (see Fig. 17) – this did not create any technical problems. However in the larger works, requiring a larger amount of clay, it was decided that in order to continue with the investigation the pieces would be hollowed out. The hollowing out of the figures proved to be a pivotal point in the continuation of this research.

This hollowing out brought a whole new way of working and handling the clay. In the first set of investigations the objects were solid, giving me a sense of freedom since most of the squeezing was done with one hand – however this larger scale brought new challenges such as dealing with a larger amount of clay and the clay responding differently since it was a significantly larger size and weight in relationship to my physical body.

5. Conclusion:

Being able to work at a larger scale brought a different feel in relations to my own physical body and the work that I was creating. Beginning to work with hollow pieces also introduced a new process in making of the work – I recognised that the direct handling of the clay gave expression that was related to the process used in the creation of the object. There was a change in my perception of the work I began to notice a greater sense of expression and sensuality appearing in the final results. There was a stronger sense of freedom in this way of working and squeezing the clay to make the abstracted form.



Figure 20: Seven-piece mould for large scale investigations



Larger scale work



Small scale works

Figure 21: Solid larger scale works created in direct results to previous smaller sized investigations



Due to technical issue - I needed to begin to hollow out pieces; since they were too thick to fire and would fall apart. So objects from this point are hollowed out.



Figure 22: Untitled 4: Example of larger scale work from abstracted figure investigation



Figure 23: Untitled 1, 2 and 3: Examples of larger scale work from abstracted figure investigation



Figure 24: Untitled 4: Detail of larger scale work from abstracted figure investigation

1.3 Hands and Clay: Sensuality, Colour and Surface Markings

“This physical interaction with clay, using my body as a tool for building, enabled an intimacy that I hadn’t known before...” – Andrew Lord¹⁸

Sensuality is the sense of touch and sensation fuelled through our own personal experiences of touch and perceptions whether it is visual or phenomenological. Sensuality is something that can be understood physically or subconsciously, a sensation that is intangible, yet immediately recognisable; something that exists throughout the world but that cannot be completely captured. Our understanding and experience of sensuality and intimacy is an unspoken primal knowledge that is fed by our own personal experiences of touch and perceptions.

Sensuality is the controlled sense of connection and touch – the act of allowing your senses to take over - allowing your touch to guide your experience in a variety of activities. This does not imply that it is necessarily sexual - but more to the erotic or the sensual. In the following text I will try and explore the difference between sensuality and sexuality within the context of everyday life, advertising and fashion as well as within the practice of creating sculptural objects.

Sensuality: What it means to me?

Sensuality is the direct sensation of touch or being touched by someone or something else, I do not link it directly to the sexual – but to the senses. I find various things sensual, the softness of skin, the coldness of a ceramic object, the simple caress of someone on my arm. The sensations that come from these actions, the trance-like feeling of reverie and tranquillity are all part of the sensual experience. The sensation of soft delicate hair running through my fingers and the fulfilment I get as I gently caress someone’s head and watch the effect of my touch as they fall asleep. All these levels and others of sensuality are fuelled through my own lived experiences and perceptions; sensuality is that memory of tactile and sensory perception that stores each moment as learnt knowledge.

Sensuality in recent sculptural clay objects

The level of sensuality found in my most recent sculptural objects is dictated by the process in which they were created. Being created in the material of clay, which by nature is earth, wet, soft and pliable – speaks to the senses, primarily to the sense of touch and sight. The ability of hands to shape and model the clay into almost any state focuses on the manipulation of touch and the direct sensation of touching and interacting with the sensuality of the material. Working with the figure in clay, even though it is simply a figuration of the human body, is pleasing on a subconsciously tactile level, yet during this process I try to primarily focus on the composition and form of the object. The human form, especially that of the feminine form, is redolent-with seductive qualities that I find are beginning to come through in the work I make. However,

¹⁸ James Rondeau, *Andrew Lord*, Milton Keynes Gallery Exhibition Catalogue, 2010, Pg. 21.

seeing that all these sculptures began as male (being all pressed from a male mould), make me question if I am simply reading these sculptures as female – since I have been conditioned to read the sensual as feminine.

What is my perception of the sensuality of these objects?



Figure 25: Figure 1: from Figurative fragment to abstraction investigation

The sensuality of these objects is found in the shapes themselves, the undulating, curved and voluptuous lines that make up the poses of these objects. It is the minuscule details in the figures such as Figure 1 (from Figurative fragment to abstraction investigation) pictured to the left that bring to mind a captured gesture that is reminiscent of a delicate move of a dancer; a tiny toe floating mid-air as if almost tempting to touch the ground but failing to do so – reminding us to use our learnt knowledge of such movements to

recall that sense of action as sensual as well as physical. Such as in the Untitled 5 (pictured at below, right) a pose were a gentle tilt of the head and wrapping of the arms around the body suggest a playful moment, enhanced by the positioning of the feet which seem to be gently caress one another. This moment captured in clay implies a pensive and suggestive thought, a moment perhaps that deals with the thought of seduction.

Sensuality vs. Sexuality

What is sensuality in regards to sexuality? Sensuality as stated above, is touch associated with thought and the sensation and perceptions that you have which might allude to desire and seduction – be it through body contact, words or objects. Sexuality is sex and/the sexual; something that is constantly reinforced through such things as advertising and fashion. In our everyday lives we are endlessly sold sexuality; we absorb it throughout our daily environment, we are subjected to visual representation and signs/signals of sexuality throughout our daily experiences whether on television in magazines or advertising. In contrast, sensuality is referenced and used in a more subtle and tactile fashion; it is designed into our everyday objects, clothes and shoes. Perfumes are produced with the intention of seducing our senses; the leather in our car seats creates a seductive sensual sensation as you touch.



Figure 26: Untitled 6: Example of work from abstracted figure investigation with a hint of sensuality

Jean Baudrillard stated that the secret of seduction is the transubstantiation of sex into signs.¹⁹ My most recent experience of this seduction was a perfume advertisement, that shows a dismembered torso with the words 'sex on skin' branded across the well sculpted image which reminded me of the sexual signs with which we are constantly bombarded; ... 'calculated sexual signifier' rather than of 'intimacy and sensuality' (1998a: 133). Consumerism, advertising and fashion, Baudrillard argues, deny the body as flesh in their evocation of the body as a sign: the scrubbed, toned, perfected body is the body as sign...".²⁰ This simply reinforces Baudrillard's belief by stripping this image of all its sexual power – only to leave an empty shell of what is supposed to be a powerfully charged image hanging inside a bus stop.

Consumerism, advertising and fashion at times tend to focus more on the raw instinct of sexuality losing the power of sensuality. Most of us understand the power of sexuality, but sensuality and touch for me have greater power than sexuality. It is a deeper connection to the mind and the body. Sensuality is something that is a primordial almost instinctive response – something that is shared with others within and outside our immediate environment. It is the sensory understanding of sensuality that urges us to want and desire.

As an artist, these objects can be perceived on many levels. Physically we can respond to the squeezing, pulling and contortions of the clay and what it took to create these works. We can also respond to them emotionally seeing the sensation of creating these works was as an instinctual process. We can also see that as the work progresses it becomes more controlled as if wanting to take the intuitive part of touching and partnering it with visual perception. This branching away from the sensual is also part of wanting to communicate something deeper – a move, past the primordial touch, to one that might include a fallen broken spirit, an object wanting to break free of the material and speak on a basic human level of the darkness that parallels the human desires. This perhaps suggests that the squeezes, ripping and tearing apart are not mere actions of sensuality or seduction, but that of aggression with an underlining of passion.

Colour in Clay and Surface Markings

Along with the sense and sensuality in the objects, the contrasting colours of clay and surface marks play a major role in creating the dynamic tension within these sculptural artworks. The contrast between the black and white clays help to create divisions between the figurative and abstract elements within the sculptural works; the use of colour and mark making helps to guide the viewers eye around the works. The darker the clay body the farther the surface is pushed back, the lighter the clay body the cleaner and purer the surface seems. White suggests purity in form and enhances the sensuality in the work. Black creates a visual illusion of the form in recession or disappearing, enhancing the notion of the absence and presence of the human

¹⁹ Baudrillard, Jean, *Seduction, The Ecliptic of Sex*, New World Perspectives, 1990, Pg. 13

²⁰ Pawlett, William, *Against Banality, Jean Baudrillard: The Body, Sexuality and Seduction*, Routledge, Pg 94.

form. With the addition of mark making on the surface of the objects acts as a highlighter providing a focus to selected areas of the form. The marks can be gestural, sensual or precise and staccato. Such marks on the surface enhance the relationship between the object and the viewer by creating different sensations for the eyes to read and digest.

Alternative approaches to Colour and Surface Markings

Surface qualities help to dictate the relationship we have directly with the objects. The marks left by the action of making enables the viewer to have a physical understanding to the forming of the objects. In an attempt to explore this further latex gloves were worn to reduce the actual finger prints on the objects to create a clean surface quality to the objects in an attempt to enhance its sensuality and purity. The use of colour and other materials (wax, ink and gouache) where initially explored to enhance the physicality of the objects, however, I realized it added additional visual complexity that was unnecessary for this investigation and the decision was made not to alter the surface or the form using colour or glaze but allow the inherent colour of the clay bodies to create changes in visual speed across the form. So therefore any further colouration besides black and white was discarded. (Appendix I: Page 67)



Figure 27: Detail of Colour and Surface Markings



Figure 28: Colour Test Trials

Section 2: Contents***Contemporary Artists: Figuration through to Abstraction and Alternative approaches to contemporary figuration*****2.1 Introduction: Clay and the Figure Today**

2.1 Illustration: Introduction to Figurative, Abstract artists and artists using alternative approaches to contemporary figuration and examples of works.

Section 2.1

Clay and the Figure Today

In framing the research question 'Where is the vanishing point of the human form within ceramic sculpture?' I began by asking myself what are the different realms and spectrums of how artists are working with the figure in clay today. What degree of variation and levels of human elements do artists use in a conscious/subconscious manner for the work to be considered either figurative or abstract? How do they approach the figure in these works? And how do they define their way of working with the figure? And to what levels do they push the work towards realism, middle abstraction, complete abstraction to the vanishing point of the human form within the work...but what is that point? And what exists after that point?

To situate my research within this field, I have created a map/continuum showing the work of artists working with the figure in ceramics ranging from the figurative/representational to the abstract/expressive. In creating this continuum it has allowed me to both assess other artists' approach from figuration to abstraction as well as create a visual record of the process of the figurative and its move towards abstraction. This will in turn help to depict my research visually and to record and assess the levels of the human form as used within the current ceramic practice. The artists can be divided into a number of categories that I have titled in terms of my perspective: Figuration, Towards Abstraction, Abstract, Vanishing Point and Alternative approaches to contemporary figuration.

At the beginning of the scale I have focused on artists who use figuration and then have moved towards artists closer to the Vanishing Point. In Figuration the artists use the whole of the human form, whereas the Vanishing Point is the moment in which it might be no longer possible to read any elements of figuration that would allude to the human form. As the scale progresses towards the end I have created a different set of categories which depict artists using the actual physical

human body in the creation of their works, or where the human body plays a role within the works. An example of this is Richard Slee's performance *Big Nose* 2005 in which the artist, in a satirical joke, pokes fun at his own physical features lying on a wooden plank in a white suit, his head hidden under an oversized ceramic nose. Another performative piece is Clare Twomey's, *Unconscious/Subconscious*, where



Figure 29: Richard Slee, *Big Nose*, Performance, Korea, 2005

porcelain tiles shatter as they react to the participant's weight each time a person steps on the work, slowly destroying the objects and returning it back to its original dust form.

There are currently many artists who work with the figure in clay, some approach it in a direct and fully representational way, whilst others might destroy, hybridize or manipulate the figure in an attempt to address a concept, emotion or narrative. Yet others have simply turned to clay for the material's ability to record and capture the most minimal of gestures that can/will then be fired to a solid permanent state. Within these examples there are variations of figuration and in the following text I discuss a few of the selected artists and their work. In addition within each section there will be a gradual move from figuration to abstraction: Figuration, Towards Abstraction, Abstract, Vanishing Point and Alternative approaches to contemporary figuration.

Figuration

Christina West is currently considered to be one of the most realistic figurative sculptors and this is why she is placed at the forefront of the scale. She is the absolute opposite of abstraction setting the tone at one end of the line – she is not concerned with the disappearance of the figure, she is celebrating it with her own form of hyperrealism.

A step away from Christina West is Irish sculptor Claire Curneen. Curneen focuses on the use of the entire figure, yet the form is not completely rendered or as polished in its sense of reality as West's. Curneen allows the clay tactility to be a crucial part in her large-scale porcelain works. It is the process of pinch building that gives Curneen's figurative work a fluid expression. Her work touches upon the everyday life of being a human as well as alluding to issues around religion.

Towards Abstraction

Arthur Gonzalez moves farther away from using the entirety of the figure in his sculptural works; he tends to focus more on the narrative and the content behind the work. Gonzalez does not concern himself with depicting the entire figure, but abstracts it and erases limbs and features and replaces them with completely different media in order to ensure that the concept that he is working towards is clearly conveyed in the work. An example is his series Pinocchio, in which he created a series of heads and altered them using various mixed media such as glass and found objects. His incorporation of other materials enhances the notion of the fragility of the physical human form as well as addressing the issues within the children story bringing to light the uncertainties of life.

Abstract

Tom Bartel and Lisa Clague are two artists who use the human form within their work, but more as a gateway to their imagination. Bartel creates small figures that are dark and somber and focus on the gothic nature of humanity. Bartel's work derives around the cycle of life, the realisation of our birth, life and death. His child-like sculptures touch a cord to an innocence that is lost as we live out our lives; his work sits in a realm of uneasiness and provokes questions

about sexuality – in terms of what is right and wrong. Clague's figures come directly from the dreams/nightmares that she faces each night; she translates into large and small-scale animalistic creations. Clague's sculptural work even with deep dark undertones still retains a child-like innocence, her figures are in constant play at carnivals and merry-go-rounds, they seem to require the sound track of a circus to make them come to life. Clague, like Bartel, simply uses fragments of the figure in her creations and incorporates metal into her works as skeletal structures to ensure that she is able to give her work the ability to be transformed into any character that it needs to become.

Vanishing Point

Xavier Toubes and Michael Lucero both push the human form to the end of the spectrum. Toubes uses clay to create drawings in space, creating spontaneous and dynamic lines yet it is the unique groupings and tensions created between his lines and the placing of figurative clay pieces next to them that help the viewer recognise the human figure. Lucero creates sculptural works from objects often discarded from everyday life. He gives them new meaning by slip casting these found objects and creating assemblages that mimic the essence of the human form. Lucero then moves the works further away from figuration by camouflaging figurative elements with other materials, or he coats them in psychedelic surface colours. Both artists use their work as a way to communicate direct experiences in their own lives.

Alternative approaches to contemporary figuration

Andrew Lord and Giuseppe Penone are both artists who approach the use of human form and clay in a unique way, instead of simply creating the likeness of the form, they use their actual physical bodies as a tool to create their works. With this approach they are able to capture ephemeral actions of the body such as breathing as well as record the negative space and contours that make up the human body into clay.

2.2: Illustration

Contemporary Artists: Figuration through to Abstraction and Alternative approaches to contemporary figuration

Contemporary Artists: Figuration through to Abstraction and Alternative approaches to contemporary figuration

Figuration >



Christina West



Christyl Boger



Kelly Garrett Rathbone



Cristina Cordova



Justin Novak



Chris Antemann



Louise Hindgavi



Barnaby Bradford



Cynthia Consentino



Claire Curneen

Towards Abstraction >



Akio Takamori



Arthur Gonzalez



Adrian Arleo



Philip Eglin



Kensuke Yamada

Abstract>



Tom Bartel



Lisa Clague



Sergei Isupov



Chuck Aydllett



Andy Naisse

Vanishing Point >



Gertraud Mohwald



Michael Lucero



Xavier Toubes



Rebecca Warren

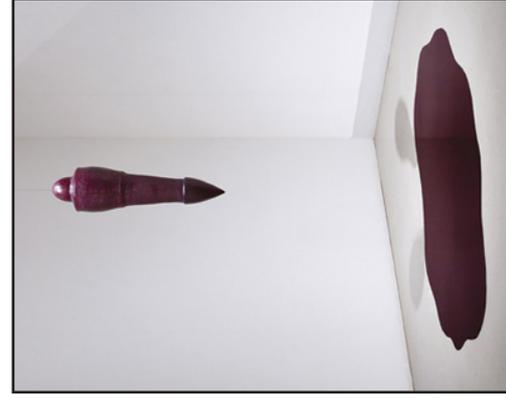


Stephen De Staebler

Alternative approaches to contemporary figuration >



Heringa Van Kalsbeek



Jeffrey Mongrain



Ana Mendieta



Andrew Lord



Giuseppe Penone

Section 3: Contents
Conclusion

- 3.1: Evaluation of finished works
- 3.2: Images of final works
- 3.3: Conclusion

3.1 Evaluation of Final Works

I have produced a series of final works as outcomes of my research. They have all been a direct result of the methodology used and investigations created within this research. I used a methodology and a systematic way of working with the figure in clay, which had a direct impact on my approach and implementation of a new visual language visible within the final works.

The methodology of squeezing and press moulding was used to create the works. The various levels of figuration to abstraction were recorded photographically and through text which enabled me to understand that a certain vanishing point of the human form could be reached where only a suggestion of figuration remained yet the pieces could be understood and read as figurative pieces. This new approach to making also created a new sense of touch and tactility through the direct forming and manipulation of the clay with my hands; it created an unexpected expression and sensuality within the works.

When making larger works I initially used quantities of solid clay that led to a change in the technical making in order to retain some of the sensuality and expressive qualities found in some of the earlier and smaller investigations. Working with solid quantities of clay caused technical issues, cracking and warping and so the removal of the press moulding technique was abandoned in the methodology and I began to focus solely on the squeezing and the hand forming of hollowed out works.

This change in methodology created a change in the feel of the work, New to me this process of the hand forming of hollow pieces made me realise that it was the direct handling of the clay that gave expression to the objects I was creating. For example, the initial results for the investigation 'the abstracted figure', felt tight and restricted in comparison to the works created directly after the hollowing out work such as *Untitled 4* (p.32) They began to show the direct result of the squeezing and the advantages of being able to manipulate both the interior and exterior of the works. This approach to the handling of the clay gave me a new sense of freedom in what I could make and to the work itself. In the final works it also helped me to understand the levels of visual information needed to read the object as figurative or abstract.

Untitled 1, 2 and 3, are a direct response to the new approach to handling the clay. In these works you can see the expressive qualities of the clay being used to create a sensuality throughout the works. The direct impact of working with only my hands and the clay, without the use of any traditional tools – created a direct link between my physical body as a tool with the clay.

Untitled 1 and *5* are both created solely by squeezing the clay, and are an example of the sensuality and expression created by this way of working; these works also illustrate a level of abstraction – the nonexistence of any figurative suggestions of the body are acknowledged, there is only a hint of facial features and other visual markers to suggest the face, yet there is still a presence of the face and body elements within the works.

Examining the final works, it is the surface pattern created through the handling of the clay that allows me to see various figurative elements in the work, which are not fully physically represented. Being intrigued by the results of the previous works and the minimal figurative suggestion needed to provoke a sense of the figure, I created a series of objects that directly responded to this entitled *Embodiment 1, 2* and *3*, focusing on the head as the embodiment of the figure as well as a means to explore levels of visual information need to evoke the sense of a head; Figures 28 below to show results of this test. These works were created as a reflection on my previous investigations, the process of working and methodology of squeezing of clay were used without making any conscious choice whilst building the works. As previously stated I recognised that it is the visual pattern created by the process that helps suggest the figuration and expression in the final works.

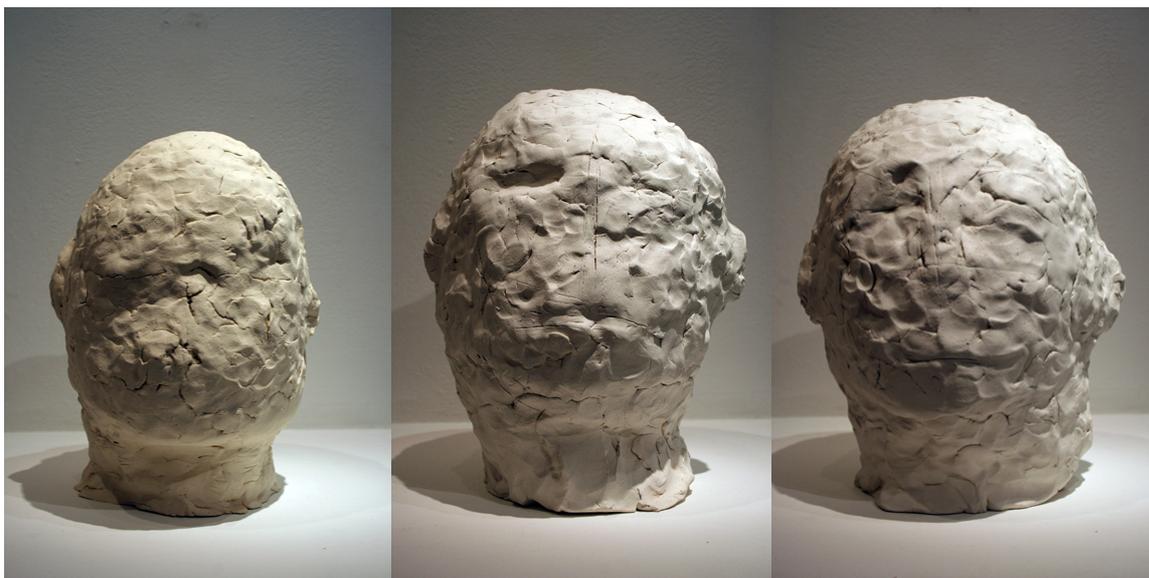


Figure 30: Final Works: Embodiment 1, 2 and 3

3.2 Images of Final Works



Figure 31: Final Works: Untitled, 1, 2 and 3



Figure 32: Final Work: Untitled 5



Figure 33: Final Work: Untitled 1, Detail



Figure 34: Final Work: Untitled 2, Detail



Figure 35: Final Work: Untitled 2, Detail (Close Up)



Figure 36: Final Work: Untitled 3, Detail



Figure 37: Final Work: Embodiment 1



Figure 38: Final Work: Embodiment 2



Figure 39: Final Work: Embodiment 3

3.3 Conclusion

In an attempt to further illustrate my research and to place it within the current ceramic art practice, I have read texts focusing on contemporary sculpture as installation and alternative approaches relating directly to working with the human figure and clay. I have looked critically at artists and how they approach working with clay and the human form and how they move towards the question of abstraction within their own work. With this I was able to create a series of investigations that helped to encapsulate the various stages from figuration to abstraction.

This research has enabled me to create a completely new approach and technique of working, as well as implementing a new visual language in my work that has allowed it to move closer towards the language of abstraction. This project has enabled me to expand my working methods with clay and my understanding of the whole figure through to various levels of abstraction. This practical and analytical approach to research has made me understand and realise a new and critical way of looking at the human form. It has given me a new mode of thinking and awareness in the creation of expression within the figure, the ability to be able and communicate various levels of the figure with minimum figurative references; the ability to be able and communicate emotion and expression with minute details such as a finished polished hand or foot, along with the use of different clay bodies and surface markings has helped in deepening the connection and relationship with viewers as well creating different qualities and levels within the work to heighten the expressive and sensual connections with the finished objects.

This way of working has helped to create a greater sense of self-awareness whilst working with the figure and the combination of colour and surface markings has helped to deepen my connection between the figure and the expressive manipulation of the clay. With this working method I was also able to create an approach to working that comes from the process itself, and it is this process that has created a stronger sense of freedom and expression in the work.

This project has created a turning point in the development of my current art practice with the creation of a new visual language that will allow me to continue to work with the figure, but with a stronger sense of freedom and expression. It has also enabled me to move away from the previous way of working where figurative objects felt stiff and focused purely on the narrative. This new approach has allowed me to concentrate on the figure itself and its ability to create an expression and narrative using the language created through the making. I have developed the skills to take a more critical view of my work allowing me to step away and understand the choices I have made. This research has given me a new understanding of the context of my work.

In 2011, I exhibited these works at the Milton Keynes Gallery Project Space coinciding with the major Andrew Lord retrospective exhibition. I recognised similarities in our approach to making which has only helped to reinforce the context and my understanding of my position within current ceramics practice.

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Appendix I - Journal

Edith Garcia | RCA Research | Journal

In the following pages you will find Appendix I, my typed unedited journal that was created during my research at the RCA. I felt it was important to keep a journal during the practical making, documenting the ideas and process of the investigations whilst I was working and essential as a direct and immediate record of what I did and my response to the tests I undertook. I submit this as additional documentation of my research at the RCA, to help give insight in to the environment in which I was working and provide more context. This journal has not been edited in any way, it is submitted as it was originally created and typed during my time at the RCA.

November 24, 2009: Strand of working | thinking while making.

From the investigation of the press moulded work arise three different strands of making. The first strand is that of press moulding a piece, and then subconsciously altering it with no direct visual intention. Second strand is that of making conscious choices as to how I altered the press moulded piece to create an artwork and the final strand is that of sculpting directly into clay without first press moulding the figure.

November 13, 2009

Press moulded three pieces 3 pieces, working on them working on them trying to ensure that I get some sort of minimal movement, but at the same time wanting to ensure that I try to eliminate as much as figurative elements as possible, however finding that the clay is really wet, makes this much easier – also having to think that would be the least information needed to hint at the fact that this is a figure.

Press moulded first piece (Number7), using the super-white clay this is really nice clay, I love the white colour that you get – that way the graphite can stand out more on the work. Press moulded and put on rubber gloves to minimize fingerprints – then closed my eyes and squeezed the object. The resulting figure, seems to be a man kneeling, with folds of fat layered on top of one another, all details of the head have vanishing into the fat of the torso and all you can see are a small remnants of the fingers press into the groin area. I find it quite pleasing, it seems as the figure – or person has been broken down and has collapsed in an emotional state, perhaps one of despair or longing. I like this work. However, I need to find a way to erase the marks on the back of the torso – which are clearly my finger imprints.

I press moulded second pieces (8), I am going to let this sit for a moment so the clay is not so wet – I waited 15 minutes to give clay a moment to harden a bit, wanting to see how much detail I can get from the clay being a bit harder as opposed to so soft. For the second piece, I keep my eyes open and fold the piece in half, It felt strange to fold a figure in half- legs to the back of head. Then squeeze it in the middle from bottom to the top. The head split in the joint and I really loved the

way it seems to break open. To me it seems the face collapse inwards into the head. I find the movement created by squeezing the clay has created some nice sensual lines in the figure – the hands are moving towards the groin area – this piece has more of a feminine quality than the first piece. I think that I will sculpt the sides of this piece a bit more – so highlight those nice lines of the body. It is really nice and smooth – so will polish it up a bit more – to make it more sensual and clean. The first one had a more masculine quality. The movement in this piece calls for it to be floating in space – so I will make a hole in the back to make it a hanging piece on the wall.

Creating third-piece: Press moulded the figure and decided to see what would happen with letting the figure sit for a moment, waited 10 minutes again – then closed my eyes and squeeze the piece quickly counting in my mind to ten. The resulting object was – or does not have much figurative information left, Perhaps the clay was too wet since I feel that this object has just returned back to being wet clay. I tried to press it back in to the mould to see, if I could give it any hints of figuration, but I do not think that this has been successful so I will stop here now.

Handbuilt work

Now on with handbuilt work see if I can complete it for WIP progress. I quite enjoy the change of trying to reproduce something that was created by chance, Keep thinking of John Cage and his chance drawings. The image of his amazing scores keep jumping into my mind loved that systematically idea of chance. Makes me feel there is some elements in what I am doing that relate to his idea. I was able to finish the head, but there is something that is missing in this work right now, I am not sure what it is – I feel that the smaller work has better ability to keep the movement and quick gestures of the hands captured on the clay – the handbuilt work because it is so mechanical in a way has lost some of the in the translation from solid to hollow. I am going to have to figure a way to try and keep some of that instant gratification in the work – onto the larger pieces. However in terms of it being reminiscent of the smaller pieces, it does work. Think I will make a few drawings of this piece see if I can get a better understanding of its structure.

November 16, 2009

Need to load kiln tomorrow so need to finish of works – they dried nicely over the weekend. So will clean them up a bit and drill holes in the work. I think that the larger handbuilt works need to be cut into and the holes made deeper so I will – cut it with an x-acto knife and put some slabs of clay so try and increase the depth in that area to match the piece and drawings that I made. Perhaps covering this piece in graphite will help to push the depth even more. Will see, now thinking I should have put stain in the clay to push it back some.

Handbuilt- Re-sculpt piece

The cutting and re-sculpting has increased the depth of the piece and I think that it works much better, it gives the piece a more depth and different layers for your eyes to look at. Still feel that this will need for me to push it more after firing.

In relationship to the original smaller pieces, I think that I was able to capture some of the smaller pieces qualities: however, I feel that the smaller piece still has more of a presence, the qualities of motion and lines are clearly missing in the larger piece. I do think that in terms of wanting to create a sort of copy of the smaller piece, it has some key indicators to say that this was the idea. I do think that I will need to push this harder and farther.

November 19, 2009

The works that have come out of the kiln, look exactly as I expected – was happy that the new kiln sequence work in terms of firing wet solid pieces. I will polish these and focus on the presentation for the WIP show. I am pleased to see the qualities of the pieces amplified by the white clay body. I think that a partnering with black would help to expose that more. However, the next step will be to begin to think of the finished surface and the final scale size for these works. I think the this small scale works well in terms of being able to create quick gestural pieces, but the scale seems to small. The notion of viewer having an intimate relationship with works is great but still will not be pleased with these until the scales can be large. I will make some test of two figures placed together see if that will help to move the scale up. The idea of couples, is interesting in terms of the development of visual relationship and dynamic between the two objects – yet that puts me in the realm of two figures as apposed to just the one...perhaps the creation of a larger mould would be a good way to step away from this smaller works. Perhaps a mould of a toddler size figure would work.

November 20, 2009

Researching new figurative artist – there seems to be a good section of work that partners the figure and multi-levels of abstraction. I think Xavier Toubes is the closest in sense and feel to the current work that I am creating. Even though, his works are larger – I think that he is still able to evoke that sense of movement in the works. I especially like the heads since I am trying to see how he solved the problem of scale and works. Also his drawings with clay and the negative lines and spaces that he is creating – is quite amazing. I do love that movement found in the work. He also shares a sense of that captured gestural quality – however in this work it looks more finished and complete. I think perhaps more in-depth look in to his core idea would be good – to see how he has tackle this idea between abstraction and complete disappearance of the figure in his work.

November 25, 2009

Having laid out what will be in the WIP show, I see that I have more pieces that I need to show. So have spent the last few hours – laying out the show in terms of the space we will be allocated. I think that 4 plinths will work with a few sample on one and, more of a grouping on another and the wall piece from Philly will work in terms of being able to show audience, the process that I am using and the way that I am investigation the vanishing of the figure. Would like to have something to show the visual scale that I am working on, but don't think that will be possible for this – but I should try and think how I would lay that out for the final show if

possible. Will go and build plinths for the show and also get vinyl black cut piece so that the white clay body can reflect on the plexiglass – so you can get an all over look to the works.

Perhaps, creation some silhouette shapes in illustrator to help mimic the works would help to create a more visually interesting set-up – don't think will have enough time for that so will just create some plinths with black plexiglass.

November 26, 2009 – WIP Show | Work Set-up

Seeing the work up in all up in one place and out of the studio space. Makes me see in a new light, how many things are working and what is not. I think that I have placed to many pieces, in the grouping – I think that the wall pieces work in terms of showing the process. I still think that is the best one in terms of showing the way I am investigation the vanishing point.

The grouping looks good, however – there are some pieces that still look to me that need to be moved more – so that they can be more expressive and hold there own space. At the moment I feel that some of the pieces are getting lost within the clay itself; ironic, I understand seeing that is the whole question that I am asking – now I am faced with how can the figure disappear in to the clay in an eloquent manner, in a well composed way – where it is visually pleasing, alluring and get try to only to hint at the figure. Small scale does work in that sense, but yet – troubled.

I will create some new press moulded pieces and try to focus on the composition of the movement and the relationship that it has with hinting at the figure – do I push it to the end where it simple returns to clay, or do I try and see if I can create a figure with a dynamic tension that will call to be a looked at – but how can I manage to create that tension and still, only evoke a sense of the figure in the works. Searching for a moment/a sense of lingering presence with these works.

Wanting the viewer to feel a sense of nostalgia/melancholia – longing for the forms. Or is that what I am placing in to them already? Need to move away from the renaissance remnant feel – I see to many links to Greek sculptural fragments or ruins.

November 30, 2009

Took another look at the WIP Show. Looking at research work, I think that it will be essential for me to try and figure out how I can create a relationship with the figurative work and the work where clearly the figure is diminishing. I find that these pieces are still not pushing the vanishing point far enough. I will need to focus on this question between – figurative and non-figurative. I will press mould some pieces and sculpt a solid piece to see if I can push this any farther.

I created a few pieces, but was only pleased with two pieces – there rest I have recycled. I still feel that there is not enough energy within this works to make them able to stand-alone. And also I find that they are not questioning the vanishing point enough – it is the small signifiers of the body that are imperative here and I can't seems to find a balance between the chaos and the suggestive elements hinting at the body. Gr.

December 1, 2009

Early tutorial with Alison this morning, I found it very helpful – it is always great to have someone opinion on something that you are doing. Really did help me to step away from being so

absorbed in finding this vanishing form. And to take a look and question what I have done so far and what she sees – when she looks at the works. Seems she felt what I was feeling and told me that I need to focus on being more subjective & objective – which I have been trying to focus on, but it is good to try and take a step back and question, why I am doing – what I am doing? And is this the correct way to find the answer? And have I found any answers that have led me to the next step.

I am finding that this work is flowing very well, from the initial grounding in the investigation in Philly – to now and the progress that I have made. Still using the primary model of research with the mould and seeing various outcomes – that have led me to question and investigate – various variables. How can I comment on this and still try to keep the work floating without over thinking and wanting to lead the work? Well perhaps stopping to draw and focus on what I have done so far and see if that helps to resolve any of these issues.

December 3, 2009

WIP – Opening. Had some great feedback from public. Architect was pleased to see someone trying to battle this question – of something that is so embedded within the human subconscious, She said she was always intrigued by our ability to see figurative forms in objects, stains – building we see. Was nice. Also two young women stated, that they found the smaller works really seductive/sexual and like the movement that the objects suggested – one said the objects held a certain sense of voyeurism as if we were catching someone in the middle of a private sexual act.

December 4, 2009

Take down of show. Again was nice to see works all in one place. But will now have to think about moving them forward. Each strand – press moulded sequentially, handbuilt and press-moulded altered. I think that at this point the Press moulded altered will be the most quick in terms of results – but will simultaneously need to figure out how I can capture those qualities in the larger work. I will begin to build a larger solid head and see what I can capture in relations to the smaller works.

December 7, 2009

Handbuilt: Focused on handbuilt work – created a large head of solid clay. There is something about it that is quite displeasing. I keep thinking of the visual qualities of Rebecca Warren's work; constant same size mark making while sculpting. I put on plastic gloves to try and minimize fingerprints – yet, I think at this scale it is the quality of the movement created with the fingers – that reads specifically as what it is. And it is not being reflective of the visual elements of the smaller pieces. I am having a hard time focusing on what that is -

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I think it is the quality and the scale of the mark making created by my hands on the smaller work that is not translating in to the larger pieces. I will need to make the marks on the larger works

with something that will mimic the gestural qualities of my hands and try to keep that motion in the clay.

December 8, 2009

Press moulded figures: after tutorial with EC, last week and the suggestion of removing the plinth on the pieces would allow for the objects to have more gestural ability. I decided to work on a few press moulded pieces without a base to and see if I could push the movement even further. I decided to take more time in each work and use more visual judgement when making the works to see if I can resolve the balance between the vanishing of the figure and figuration.

Created three figures; these three seem to have more movement and visually – more negative space than previous pieces:

Figure 1:

Being one of the most difficult to sculpt in terms of trying to get a sense of movement and create an openness and visual space. This work seems to have some Michael Flynn like quality; the squeezing of the clay has created similar visual qualities in the work in terms of rawness with the clay and it has an unfinished sculptural look. Therefore in this work I tried to give it various visual layers, I brushed on some white slip to try and subdue some of those marks that were reminding me of Flynn's heavily glaze white figures. Looking at this work even though you can clearly read the figure within it; I find that the outcome composition of the figure is quite visually interesting in terms of a dancer like pose. The brushing on of slip has been successful in creating a different surface, yet perhaps a touch of stain to this would help to push those levels more. I find the slip seems to be invisible to a certain level – since it is white on white.

Figure 2:

From my previous thought, I decided to put stain in to the clay to try and create a different sensation to the work. I have added black stain to super white clay. Whilst sculpting I was very aware of the piece, I keep thinking of wanting to break it apart – and retain the figure, but also wanting to push it past just normal figuration. The work began to remind me of Berlinde De Bruyckere, but not wanting to be so hyper real in small nuances of the figure in this work – yet wanted to create a sense of familiarity – an unease whilst looking at the works – trying to fill them with meaning and a want to decode them. Whilst sculpting, I felt, I needed to give birth to this object that is between the figure and a bit of darkness in terms of emotion. The conscious choices that I made towards creating this piece have made it one of the successful pieces to far. Yet, how close is this piece to the vanishing point. Next. Push the piece until I can sculpt it to the point of vanishing but without passing that point and back to clay.

Figure 3:

In the last figure, it was nice to take a break from the constant thinking, composition and layout while working and I just allowed chance and childlike playfulness to lead the way. Play. I was curious to see if the subconscious could take me closer to the vanishing point of the form than my conscious choices.

The result was a mix of abstracted elements and figurative form – I don't feel that this piece is closer to the vanishing point than my conscious decision, which I think is helpful in terms of being able to now focus directly on the direction of the work and moving away from just the John Cage way of working.

December 11, 2009

Research meeting this morning was excellent. Meet with Glenn Adamson and it was fantastic to get this opinion on the work and theories that I should look at for the research that I am doing. Went to library to check out Michael Fried, Art and Objecthood – looks interesting and relevant to what I am doing at this point. So hope to be able and read a bit of that this weekend. Glen made an interesting point about my research – that I needed to make it multi access, to ensure that I think about people way of looking – of not just the human form, but also that, which is figuration such as Anthony Caro, did with his sculptural works. Also need to re-visit Hal Foster, The Crux of Minimalism. And to get a copy of The True Vine, which deals with western understanding of figuration.

Handbuilt work: stained sculptural piece and loaded in to the kiln, I tried to create more depth as I painted it so it would help to create more visual layers. Using the drawing I create it to help guy me thought some of the shading. However, looking at it after the wash, it seems to be more figurative, since some of the wash – has a created the illusion of tears.

Press moulded work: have created a set of hands to go with one of the smaller pieces to try and create more of a visual dialogue between the smaller pieces. I feel that perhaps the hinting towards the human form can be done with other objects as opposed to just the one main object. Figure 3: (11) seems to have dried a bit and now has a more tortured quality, there seems to be a narrative starting to unfold with the smaller works – which is begin to read of not just sensuality but also of humanity – as if there forms are being pulled apart by force or internal emotions. Perplexing.

December 15, 2009

Tutorial with EC and FA – what dealt with the apparent shift in the work and research, we discussed the possibilities of keeping the journal format as a way to continue to document the research and the possibility after cleaning it up that would be used as my thesis. Which I think is a fantastic approach to the writing as apposed the usual format and style. Also, we decided that it would be beneficial to move the scale of the work to a larger mould – I believe that this essential in terms of having more physicality with the objects as well as whilst working on the pieces I can have more of a physical interaction with the works as apposed to solely utilizing only the space/size and dimension of my hands – therefore I can use more of my torso and force to shape the objects. Which will make the works more dynamic I think – and can have more interaction. So I will begin to model a larger piece as soon as we return to RCA – and create a mould that will

allow me to stick to the same methodology of the previous investigations – and see what the outcome will be.

Also, a few other threads we thought were important is to ensure that I start to work on surface test for the finished objects, I believe since the clay body is white already that would be logical, but also lazy choice to a certain extent. SO I think that a combination of white and other materials as well as some transparent glazes will help to create depth to the works – however, seeing that the research here is focusing on the human form in sculpture, I do not want to alter the surface or the form to much – so I think minimal yet, additive surface textures that specifically dealt with the body would be the first logical step. But also want to test other artist materials such as graphite – to help create a sensual touch and feel and perhaps wax in layers to help create that dimensionality – but also since I would be able to add some pigmentation that would help to bring it back to the notion of the body. So will create surface test tiles as well when I return – but during this I will also test different clay bodies and mix a few of them to see what possible combination of clay bodies I can get and how they will work with the form. During this I will also ensure to keep good records of all surface test as well as continue with my exploration of drawing –as a physical sensation as apposed to completely representational of the figure. In continuing with the writing – we believe that my investigation in to Sensuality during the break would be a good way to investigate what sensuality is in sculpture as well as what I mean by the word sensuality – since the subject is such an ephemeral concept.

December 29, 2009

Sensuality (Identify what sensuality is in a broader context and what it means to me?)

'Seduction is always more singular and sublime than sex, and it commands the higher price.' – Jean Baudrillard²¹

January 19, 2010

10:30 am tutorial with EC + FA, to touch base on the progress of the work that I have completed since our previous tutorial – since we had just arrived back from break – I received feedback on my notes on Sensuality – I was told that I needed to go more in-depth into my own perceptions of sensuality and what that means in my work. I thought that I had wrote some good background on the subject, but need to go more in-depth then – was suggested again that I read the Caress, I will need to check that out from the library. Some of the points which I thought where important was the fact that I could use the journal format as possible format for thesis – however if not, then it could be used as by basis for raw material for the thesis paper.

Also talked about creating a larger scale model to progress with the work – I was asked why this was essential and I responded that it was important since I currently felt that the smaller pieces did not allow for the physically that was needed with this works as well as I felt that the works

²¹ Baudrillard, Jean, Seduction, The Ecliptic of Sex, Page 13. New World Perspectives, 1990

would have more presence in terms of space and the viewer would be able to have a more physical response to the work. Also in terms of making the smaller works where more focused within the space of hands as opposed the entire of my body. So that energy was important for me to translate into the final pieces. In the following two weeks I will:

1. Create a larger full clay model, plaster mould from model and press mould the pieces so that I can alter – but yet, they all begin at the same starting point – to maintain the method of the previous investigations
2. Ensure to write the journal as I go progress with the work and try to focus as I write: On what is driving the work ahead and why? Try and talk about where I am, and what I am trying to achieve with this work...
3. Create a new timeline – to ensure that the work and research is finished for the May 2010 deadline. As well as complete and write more in-depth PD1 forms.
4. Will begin surface pigment test – clay bodies – and decided whether to use glaze or not (but I believe glazes in combination without materials will offer a more fluid quality – but will test)

2010

February 1, 2010

1: First attempt at press moulding figures in large mould:

Press moulded two figures – each figure was press moulded in two halves then scored and slipped together so there would no gaps in the joints. Each of the two press moulded figures where a test to see if I would be able to get the same essence, quality and emotion of the smaller works, in a larger scale I am very pleased to see that the mould that I created for the larger scale works – works very well – with minimal clean up after on the pieces and I think that sticking to this method of creating the new works with same method as the smaller works – has proven to be more fruitful than trying to re-create the works by handbuilding.

For the first press moulded piece, I used the same body of clay though and in sculpting tried to mimic the feeling and sensibility of one of the smaller investigations – I was able to recreate it closely, but did find it a bit more challenging working in the larger scale in terms of weight and size – however I feel that these larger pieces have more energy and presence at this scale than there smaller counterparts.

The second pieces that I press moulded, was created with 3 types of clay bodies – feeling that the first press mould was successful in terms of form – I decided to test the 3 clay bodies together in the second press moulded piece and see what results I get after the firing. Used the buff clay on the upper torso, the white grogged clay in the middle area and black stained super white on the right hand. I am interested to see what the results of the three clay bodies will look like and if there will be any separation between the three bodies and what the visual relationship to each other and the form will be after the initial firing. Also am interested to see what having different clay bodies partner together will help in reducing the surface work – so that the pieces can stay as

true to the form as possible, that way as a maker and viewer can focus more on the form and surface. I will wait to see after the firing on Friday to see what the results will be or if I will need to push the surface further to help bring out the form.

February 2, 2010

Completed sculpting three figures, all with various test for clay body and some with stains to see what the visual impact would be. Also began to sculpt a red terracotta piece where I am going to allow myself to not edit and just try to push the pieces as close to the vanishing point as I can and see if I am able to get something that has less of a figurative feel than the previous pieces that I sculpted. I do love the energy of the larger dancing like piece and also like the fact that I the similar to the smaller models cutting into the clay to create sharp edges is helping to pieces to move away from that “just squeeze” feel, which I think is important to create a visual tension between the constant undulating lines and the clean sharp break of the form. So I will continue to explore this and will also try to highlight those cuts with either slips or another material. At this point, I will finish with the three pieces and I will focus on sculpting the terracotta piece and see to what point I able to reach with this work.

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To this point I feel that the terracotta piece is the most successful so far in terms of retaining some of the feel of the figure as well as getting closer to the vanishing point of the human form, I am more interested in the look and feel of this work as opposed to the other pieces which relatively kept the hands and legs adhere to where supposed to be, instead I feel that this pieces has jumped though a few stages and allowed me to push the form further –and be able to give it more meaning. I think that this is the way to develop the work, yet I have to be a bit more focused on trying not to make the works to surreal or if I do, to push them to a higher level of this uncomfortable sensation.

Growing from the sharp cuts it seems interesting to push the clay flat so I will continue to incorporate that with the work and see if that evolves into a way to shape the form but remain in line with the abstraction of the human form; but yet continue to allude to it.

February 8, 2010

Opened kiln to find all the test pieces for the glazes and colour slipped worked perfectly, however all of the sculptures blew to pieces in the torso area, being that this was the first time that I used the larger mould, I thought that extending the firing cycle would help to dry them out so they would not explode – but there are two possibilities why this happen

1. The joining point from where both pieces had an air bubble and looking at the remaining pieces, this could be the possibility since even the heads which where the same thickness remained intact – so possible air bubble
2. The pieces where too wet.

Therefore I am re-sculpting them and will allow them to dry for two weeks times and fire them in cycle – but will continue to sculpt other pieces as they dry.

February 8, 2010

What I am finding as look at this new works – there are a few things that seems to be working but there are a few things that are not working – even though the pieces blew up in the kiln, I can tell that the movement of the pieces is working well, however the surface texture of the pieces is still to reminiscent of the way it was made, I need to be able and work the surface so that it connects better with the emotion of the movement. The squeezing gesture worked well with the smaller pieces, yet, I am personally finding a bit distracting in this – perhaps since I feel that this motion is to instinctual when you are working with clay, I need to try and search and find another surface or way of building this that would help to tie the pieces together more cohesively.

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Looking at the combination of clay bodies together, I think that works really well and am happy to see that is making the pieces more interesting and focusing on the form. Yet, I still think that this pieces need to be push further in terms of the vanishing point, I like the hints and suggested human elements but I really would like to see how close I can get to the vanishing point, however, I am finding it (being a figurative artist) to allow myself to let go of all the perfect shapes that come out of the mould. So I need to battle and constantly remind myself that this is investigation into the vanishing point of the human form in sculpture! I will try and push the pieces harder. I think that the terracotta piece which I started to work last week is moving closer to what I am after, yet I need to step away from making the pieces to surreal, since the first terracotta pieces does have some surreal like qualities in terms of the composition of the form.

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Had a quick tutorial with Liz (and scheduled a longer one for tomorrow at 4PM) to ask her opinion on the work the blew up – to see if it was necessary to re-sculpt all the work, but the one piece that I felt was necessary to re-sculpt was the one she suggested as well, so will focus on that. She took a quick look at the red terracotta piece and she was interested to see what was happening with the flat forms and the work (she asked if the terracotta was the best clay – but I was never personally a fan) so will continue working with the white clay since that is more of a blank canvas for the finished surface work that I will do. I can however, use it as an accent or touch in certain places to highlight something. I will focus on re-sculpting and finish that so I will have it ready for the kiln at the end of next week.

February 9, 2010

Completed, the re-sculpting and am moving on with the work of the terracotta, I asked Alison B. briefly – if she was to walk into a gallery and saw both figure one and the new terracotta piece which would appeal to her more – she immediately stated the red piece for the form and visual feel (even though Figure 1 did have some elements she enjoyed)! I am really pleased to hear that Felicity and both Alison liked the new work, so I will aimed to follow the thread of research and to ensure that I properly document the steps.

- So the terracotta figure came from the same mould and the flattening the limbs from originally doing that in the previous investigations.

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Began work second piece that reflects some of the visual aesthetics of the first terracotta piece, I can see that this piece has more of a sensuality to it that the original terracotta piece which I am pleased about –

Had a tutorial with Felicity – was good to catch up so that she could see the direction that the work was going, she was happy to see that the work was moving forward but mimic the statement that I felt that the larger pieces were loosing some of the freedoms and emotional gestures – I replied that I felt this was happening because, I was trying to mimic the smaller works and see if this approach would work to be able and follow in the same lines as the previous investigations which I think – it has and will continue to do so. I am pleased that she also suggested that I focus on the artwork fully for the next week or so to see how far I can come and see how much I can resolve in this new works in time for our next meeting with Emmanuel and he can see the development on the work. She also suggested that I do not focus on the writing at this time and just simply have a moment of making – so the work can advance more quickly. I will therefore focus mainly on trying to push this new work and try to take more risk in terms of allowing the development happen as apposed to simply focus on the “vanishing point” since at this point I feel that the works is moving towards the vanishing point on its own.

February 10, 2010

Completed the seconds sculpture in the new series of work, I really think it is stronger work and am excited to see it developing so quickly. I am also pleased with the drawings that I am currently doing to accompany the pieces. I think that I will incorporate some glass to help balance out the rough texture of the clay and create a more interesting dialogue between the materials. Also reading more on the sense of touch and body – in terms of the disappearance of the body for some strange perception the notion of ghost limbs have started to appear in my approach or context to this work. The idea that a limb can be cut off or removed as I am doing with the clay and somehow the mind is able to still feel as if it is there and still mentally attached...

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Did some surface test and was happy to be able and use the coloured wax on these pieces and see what the results where: I do think that the combination of underglazes, inks and coloured wax will create great transparent layering on the works which will help to create a sense of depth on the pieces.

February 12, 2010

Created a new work today, which I am really pleased at how it challenges the vanishing point of the human form, instead of creating a work that was primarily fingers and hands – I thought it would be interesting to see how the sculpture would be read when it was primarily made up of a torso and one hand and not much else. In the end however in terms of contrast and composition it

was more visually interesting to leave the remains of the legs as well as an arm – to help create a dynamic within the work, this will be the first wall pieces of this series so am happy to see if that will work the same on the wall as it does on the table, I will also see if creating a standing unit frame work for it to sit on after its fired would be more appropriate so you can see the sculpture all around. I will take a look at this next time I am in the studio and see if this piece should be wall based – if it is then I think that I will create a partner for it and see if I can create a dialogue between two pieces, since now I feel that singular objects on their own are not as strong as they could be visually – and pairing them up to create an overall feel within a space that would work best. Will speak to James about the addition of some small glass elements to help give these sculptures a different feel. I will ask him to help me in creating some test pieces to see if that is a good direction to go – or simply stick to the clay.

February 16, 2010

I was able to complete the first hanging piece and now trying to focus on how to make the works from the mould without them having the air bubbles that might have caused the first of the pieces to explode. The last few pieces I have been hollowing them out to make sure that there was no chance of this happening – and that has helped in the construction of the form in terms of pushing the clay out to create a more broken surface which I think works really well against the sharp cut lines of wherever I might amputate a foot or hand. I think that now I will explore press-moulding a hollow piece and see what type of moment I will be able to get with a piece that is a little bit more rigid and that will not allow me to squeeze it too much as the solid press-moulded works.

I have press-moulded the piece and joined it and now will let it rest so that the seams will be stronger and the slip will have a chance to dry...

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Worked the hollowed out piece a bit more, I do like the look of the press-moulded surface against the raw and rough qualities of the wetter clay attached to it for sculptural purpose. I think that this piece has a lot of potential in terms of being able to combine the hollowed out press moulded pieces as well as being able to incorporate more handbuilt sections – I think this technique in working will help to move the development of the work along as well as has more of a finished feel – yet is able to contain some of the raw qualities that I am after. This way of working has taken me back to the similar finding that I had with the press moulded investigation that I did when I was in Philadelphia. Seeing that this piece forms is coming along nicely – I think that this form will be able to inform the surface so I will see where and what the surface of the piece will call for.

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February 18, 2010

Came in and completed the sculptural section of the press hollowed out pieces, I am really pleased with the outcome, it is not as surreal as the previous pieces but it holds its own unique qualities, I am very certain that this is a way in which I will work in the future. This work does not have the free flowing qualities of the other works – but it also does not have that overly wet clay look – which I think at times is too much information on the surface of the pieces. I will now try and

explore what surface qualities would work well with this piece and use this as a 'test' piece – and hope that I get in results can be transferred unto the other pieces.

Decided to explore the possibilities of painting on stains mixed with a porcelain slip. I will approach this in a more painterly fashion as see if I cant pull out the form as apposed to covering it and having it fall back. I mixed three slips, a pearl grey which is from the USA, and two colours that are in stock here: a red slip and a yellow slip. I will try these three on the test piece and see what type of outcome I get after firing it and see if I cant use this on the next few pieces that I create.

Just finished painting the piece and I feel absolutely ecstatic and excited about this approach to the surface. It has helped immensely to keep the attention on the form, yet highlight certain elements. It is very important that I focus be on the form and not the surface since this is about the human form in ceramic sculpture so I will do my utmost to ensure that the focus and direction stays on the understanding of the vanishing point of the human form in the ceramic sculpture works.

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Just had an excellent meeting with MS, FA and EC – talking about the scope of the research, writing and how I feel the work had developed. They suggested that the work is taking a shape but that I might need more time in terms of developing the work and finishing the writing for submission. I think that they might be correct in terms being able to work on the development of the work until July – then being able to focus on the writing during the summer then that would allow me to focus on the human form as apposed to simply trying to push it and see what happens. Having until July I think would be beneficial – then show the work as it is whenever I they have the chance to show the work – either this May or next. I can simply place the work in storage if it's May. Also, I am pleased to have Martin there to help me with the argument that surface and glazing is not a vital part of the research and that the concentration should be placed on the work itself. So am please he was able to reinforce that for me before I began that discussion. The end result of the meeting: was the universal understanding that the work has evolved from the begging concepts unto a different one now but that its does – derives from the original research questions that I investigated. Therefore for Monday, I will meet with Liz to discuss this development and how it has changed and what the format for the Table of Contents should be in terms of subject headings (note: we think that sexuality – has been replaced with sensuality in the most current framework). Also to discuss what needs to be done to achieve the finalization of the project and if extending my research for a terms would be the best results...which now I believe would be. **Now, I will focus on creating a piece that will try and capture some of the comments in the meeting where I can achieve more of the movements found in the smaller investigation pieces as well and try to see how far I can push or erase the human elements to see if and an abstracted object can still hold a human-like emotions or feelings without making the sculptural object to rigid.** Also, I will stop working on the

surface samples at this point and simply focus on the development of the sculptural work and the constant detailed tracking of my thoughts as I progress.

(Note: Liz stated: “Edith it is very important that you take time for the work to develop to show the world this is what you were doing (trying to achieve) and now after working and thinking (developing yourself) this is what you have done (new work)” And Martin stated ‘It is important that it reflect the quality of the department and it reflects who we are.’)

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Decided to focus on making a few small investigations using the original mould from the (first) original investigation in hope that it would help me to quicker develop the work and content. Since the larger pieces take a bit longer in the drying time as well as material used. So therefore I think I will try and create a few pieces with the new results found in the larger mould to see if I can get quicker results.

With this the result of the investigation was: I was able to create a small work that is closer to what the larger works sensibility (coming from the larger mould but with more risk). I think that working in the larger mould takes a bit longer in terms of waiting time to dry as well trying to get the clay to a state where it will hold its own weight to sculpt, therefore - I will use the smaller method to move forward a bit quicker in the development of investigation and then take the results that I find and apply it to back into the larger moulded work.

Therefore I am going to give myself the task of creating as many possible smaller pieces in the next few days then take the best result and try to use that approach in the larger moulded piece. I did notice that in this scale I was able to move quicker through the re-composition of the piece as well as I started to approach some elements almost as drawing elements, especially the flatten out pieces – I initially began by pressing the head into a large circular form – and with this I was able to insinuate the head – however I began to see the edge of this flat form as a drawing line – as if the edges job now was to create the missing facial features. From then on I went to reconstruct the torso from the original hollowed out press moulded human form....again I found that my thinking went back and forth from the three-dimensional object and the edges into two-dimensional elements as if I was drawing in three-dimensionally as well as using the flatness to create an illusion of three dimensionality. I think that the end result still holds strong figurative qualities, yet it is close to pushing that barrier and understanding why and how I made choices to create the object or manipulate them as I have and where the thinking has originated (come from) to make those choices.

February 19, 2010

Completed the first final small pieces – am able to make some quick sketched and explore various elements quicker than the larger pieces which I think is great. I completed the first piece and went on to press mould a second piece, I find that now I am begin to hollow out the small pieces even though I don't need too – since it allows me to push the clay from the inside- I like the texture that

I get almost a cracked surface. Also explored the surface by scoring some lines in to the clay – then pushing from the inside out to see if I could get a balance or a dialogue going between the clean soft surface created by the blade and the rough quality of the cracking from the more leather like clay. I do like the qualities that I see so will continue to try this with other pieces. Press moulded one final piece and quickly slices off the legs and arms to give me less human form to work with – and used that clay to sculpt other elements of the form. Completed two pieces for today and will continue with this same vein on Monday.

Did again notice however that by flattening the pieces and placing them onto the sculptures – I keep wanting to draw (2d) the missing elements. For the research I do wonder how much I can push myself to let go of using the human form since I am a figurative sculptor – I keep having an internal struggle within that does not allow me to stop wanting to use the figure and I think once I have overcome this I will be able to move solidly in to abstraction.

February 22, 2010

Had a tutorial with Liz, this morning it was very helpful for me to have someone to understand the point of development that I am at. We both agree that I am at the point in the research where I am trying to make the human form disappear. I feel that I am close, but do need more work. I feel that if I continue to do this will I will get to a point where the form will no longer be “human” but at the end will I have just created another visual language in my head which will represent the figurative elements – that only I will understand. I keep thinking of Matthew Barney and his work – and how so much of it was surreal yet if you want to understand his work and approaches you simply begin to educate yourself on his visual language and in a sense decode what he is saying is the work. I feel that at this point, some of the visual language that I was being to create in my previous work is beginning to seep through but with new meaning. I am really excited to start using this new way of speaking. I think that it will be good for me to start drawing and see if I can progress the development of the language with 2-D symbols as well as the sculptural work. So I will now focus on solely on the creating of the sculptural work until July and hope that I will be able to progress and develop it to a stage (or what will result from working on it and see what develops organically) where I will be able to have a completed solid finish body of work as well as have a complete and well understood visual language (to me) – that I can use through out the work and drawings to relate to the work.

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Created a piece that has moved close to the vanishing point of the human form – the closes I think at this point, however and feeling hints of Isamu Noguchi – yet not as clean a precise. I know that I will have to be cautious of making work that might appear to be too influenced by other artists – so will take a look at Noguchi’s work in the library and see what elements he used and I will try to leap from where he left off (in a sense) but not use the similar elements in my work.

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Took a look at Noguchi work as well Ruth Duckworth – and I think that the new work has moved a bit past the figuration that Duckworth was using but still want to ensure that I do not

subconsciously mimic any of the approached or elements that the use. But was good to see how they approached abstraction in two very different ways, yet had a similar feel. Isamu was able to push it farther in to abstraction that Duckworth, I believe in the visual sense and well I felt looking at the work – that he had a stronger more unique visual language. I will aim to do some drawing tomorrow in hope that it will help me to get a better grasp on the development of the work moving away from the figure.

February 23, 2010

I started to make some quick sketches on the bus, while looking at the photos of the works that I have made – to try and get a sense of what it is that I am trying to do with the abstracted shapes of the figure. I think that at this point it would help me if I create almost a linear line as to how my research and thinking process has developed these shapes. I began by creating quick sketched in just simply black felt pen – to try and get some strong shapes and a clear understanding of the shapes. I will then try to sketch out some ideas for a possible sculpture using these shapes. I think what Liz said in terms of moving away from the mould and beginning to use some the visual elements that I think are strong will be useful.

February 25, 2010

Began to roll out clay in an attempt or investigation in to creating a work that would tie together all of the shapes in the previous works that I feel are relevant in terms of helping to push the human form in to disappearance. Also will begin to get works ready to load into the kiln. I will go to the library as well and try to take a look at other abstract artist that have worked in terms of pushing the figurative elements in to complete abstraction. Also at this point I do think that a drawing journal or diary in a sense will help me to move quicker through the visual language or alphabet that I am trying to create – to give me a sense of where the research is going. I feel as at this point I am retraining myself to understand how I think of the figure, and how breaking it down to these shapes that have come from my investigation are and will help me to create my own unique voice within the new work.

March 3, 2010

Unloaded the kilns with the previous works and was happy to see some results that are beginning to take shape. I feel that I am getting closer to losing the major figurative elements in the works but still and having a hard time struggling with still being able to completely remove the ambiguity of the human form in the works. Not as in the extremities, but the actual shapes of the form. I was able to create various different shapes that relate specifically with the body and am pleased to see that they are begging to help in terms of the disappearance of various elements. I will now to continue to focus on creating the larger handbuilt pieces that will help to tie these ideas and visual symbols/language together.

March 5, 2010

Have come to a point where I think that this larger handbuilt piece is starting to lose the sensation and familiarity of surface that is more flesh than in the previous works. I think that the previous works such as the terracotta piece and the last larger mould pieces, still have very figurative qualities – even though I do enjoy them immensely in terms of the sensation and qualities that they have – I still feel that they are not pushing the line of the disappearance of the figurativeness of the form. I really need to push this much harder. I am however having a hard time with the stiffness and crispness that is coming from handbuilding the pieces, which is something that was not present in the other works, I realise this is the case since the other pieces were created in/by a completely different process – and of course this would reflect, since the clay was very wet coming out of the mould and the surface a bit dry since it had been touching the plaster so it gave it a more cracked and broken surface quality. And the slab build pieces have a more clean canvas texture on them. I will need to try and retain some of that movement in the bigger pieces.

But my primary focus at the moment is building the visual language up first then the surface – since this research is about the form. I will however continue to add – a bit of colour clay and slips to keep my mind thinking about the surface as I continue to investigate these forms.

March 11, 2010

I have just gotten back to research after being out with a terrible cold for three days. I have come back to read my journal to try and help me to see where I have left off. I continued to finalize the large handbuilt form. Looking at it after a break, my immediate reaction was one of disappointment, in the lack of visual energy that this piece holds. I feel that the shapes are correct but they are not as visually interesting and appealing, as it should be at this stage. I assume that this combination of the lack of surface qualities since it looks so plain. But I have to remind myself that this is an investigation in to the form and the surface will come after I feel that I have a strong hold on the visual/shapes language. Also had a short tutorial with EC, and it seems that he is still drawn and invested into the other works – such as the terracotta piece – he stated that the new handbuilt pieces was stiff and uninteresting – which agreed with – but the coldness it has, is simply since I am trying to focus on the shapes themselves and not the emotion per se. I would have loved to have Liz take a look today but she is not in on Fridays. I will try and grab her on Monday just for a moment. But for today – I am going to focus on drawing out the quick sketches that I had previously done on the bus to a more refined drawing so that I can explain the investigation and thoughts as to where these forms grew from. Also, I am going to take a deeper look in Xavier Toubes work today since he keeps cropping into my mind especially some of the figurative drawings he has done in clay. Today, will be a good day to research other artists and see if I can't find a connection to their way of thinking and perhaps there will be some connection to the work that I am doing now and see if I can add them to my artists scale. Since I am feeling that the work is at a bit of transformation and I need to see what other artists are doing and see how that might reflect in what I am trying to do with this research.

March 15, 2010

Was great to be back in the studio today – spent the weekend, looking at so many different artists trying to figure out how and why they worked with clay and the figure in the way that they did. I am so glad that I have collected so many of these artists books in the past – since it made it so much easier that trying to come back to the library at the RCA. I started by revisiting some of the artists that have shaped my way of thinking to see if my concept on the way that they worked has changes since beginning this research. I began by looking at Ruth Duckworth and found that her work was clean and had delicate figurative features – but they had an almost totemic quality – in my memory, I always saw them in a much more fluid state, but now I find that they are quite upright and stone like which made me come to the realisation that I myself in the past had been adding the sense of movement to the pieces that I saw. I took a deeper look into her work that addresses figuration- and I did feel quite moved, by the relationships that she was able to create within the pieces, or more so the dialogues that she was able to create. As to why she worked the way she worked, I feel that the dialogues and quality of the forms is what she focus on in the works – the clean lines and the richness of the final forms feel as if they where her main element of interest. Also wanted to try and take a deeper look in some more established figurative artist that might also combined materials with clay and why? Took a look at Arthur G, Tom B, and some new younger artist such as Kelly Garrett Rathbone, Chuck Aydlett, trying to get a sense of their approach to working with the figure and clay that might differ in terms to how they see the figure and approach it.

In the studio, I found that the handbuilt piece that I made – shared some of the similar visual qualities and surface texture as my previous handbuilt investigation I felt that neither piece had the intensity in visual force that I find in the smaller pieces. However, I do find that these pieces have a visual tension but not as much movement and sensuality than the press moulded pieces. I think that this investigation was good in terms of answering the question of “what would happen if I took some of the elements that I discovered from the previous investigations and put them together to create a sculpture work?” I placed the piece in the kiln today and once I get it out of the kiln I will compare it with the previous investigation and see whether I think this was a way to learn anything new – or what it just 3 days in the wrong direction. I do love happy accidents so I hope that the piece will give me some direction.

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Spoke to James since I would like to be able and complete the final element to the terracotta piece for Thursdays meeting – will spend the remainder of the afternoon creating a 3-D model for him to work of tomorrow if I am able to squeeze into this schedule to complete it. I think that this will make the work so much more refined in terms of the notion of absence and presence – this idea of ghost limbs keep appearing and disappearing while I have been working with this idea of the disappearance of the form, along with the constant want to see a sense of sensuality and movement in the work.

March 16, 2010

Arrived today to a clean slate in the studio in terms of getting my mind clear from being sick last week – re-read some of my journal again to try and help me get back on track. One of the pieces that I want to complete for Thursdays meeting with FA and EC would be the terracotta piece with the missing glass limb. I spoke with James yesterday so hope to get a chance to make it today. I will also create a new piece today – I think that I am going to explore the combination of press mould fragments of the figure as well as handbuilding some areas to see what the combination of both of this approaches can do in terms of trying to get back to that sensuality with the work as well as the movement – that seems to get a bit lost with solely slab-building.

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I am excited to have been able and create a glass piece (ghost limb) to accompany the terracotta piece – I feel now that this work is finally moving in the correct direction and hope that I will be able to have more finalised for Thursday. I will now focus on the creation of the large piece in hopes to find a happy medium between the approaches of working of press moulding and hand-building.

March 18, 2010

Had a tutorial with Emmanuel and Liz – where we took a look at the newest works, there was some feedback on the visual qualities of the new work - and the suggestion that I should focus on the creating of 5 works over the Easter holiday where I would focus directly on the work – without overly - thinking and overworking the pieces. I began to work on a few pieces and will come in next week to try and see what develops from the works. I really like the combination of the press-moulded work with the altered pinch process. They are helping to build a dialogue and a contrast between the figurative elements of the pieces as well as the abstracted elements of the works – that is really helping in terms of creating a new vocabulary with the work. I would like to however push the abstracted element further and see how far I can push it so I can no longer distinguish too much of the figuration.

April – Easter Holiday

April 7, 2010

Came into RCA to try and test creating works without using the moulds to see if I would be able to retain some of the textures and feels that I am getting by pinch building. The combination of handbuilding and pinch building together is helping to be able and push the concept of the work in terms of figuration vs. abstraction. I will keep working on a few pieces to see what I get as a result of combining these ways of working as well as trying to ensure that I keep the movement that I had got in the smaller pieces.

April 29, 2010

Returned to RCA after Easter break. Hope to get some work in the kilns, but was all booked up. During the break I keep thinking of the research and the way my work was developing and Xavier

Toubes keep creeping into my mind. So I brought in his catalogue today so I could get some ideas as to how he approached working with the figure and the steps he took in abstracting them. I think that his approach of placing a figure or figurine like sculpture next to a more abstracted form – makes viewers read similarities between the two objects. I think that I will attempt a similar piece and see if that in anyway helps me to better understanding or thinking of abstraction depending on the objects environment.

April 30, 2010

Began working on two part piece that is the figure and the abstracted form – I keep fighting the urge to create a replica of the figurine instead of the trying to create a more abstracted object. I am going to attempt to see how little if any information I can put into this piece and see if viewers are still or willingly relate it to the object next to it. Also will begin to make another piece to complete the five pieces that I wanted to complete for this Thursday. I think the new work has gotten to a stage, where the marriage between some recognizable and completely abstract elements are working in unison to create works that have some or not much figurative reference. But I think the duality between the figurative qualities and the abstract elements is what give these pieces their unique voice.

May 6, 2010

Had a great tutorial with Liz today, was the first I felt that was relaxed but completely imperative in the development of my work. I showed Liz the pieces that I had done over the Easter period. They had not been fired – but at that point, I was able to show her the work, I did before the break and then a new piece that I was able to create when I got back. It was interesting for me to see the work that I had created before I left to Texas. I can see what Liz meant by over thinking the work – I think that the pieces that I made before the break where to complex and visually uncertain. I think the aesthetics of the pieces where interesting but almost too much information in each work. When I returned after having a break to thinking about what I was doing and also in having the time to reflect while in Texas- I think it helped me immensely to understand the direction in which I was moving. The time that I had to create a skeleton of the thesis also help me to better understand the process or format in which the final written conclusion will look like. During the tutorial Liz had really great insight into the way that I work and understanding into the direction that I was going. We discussed a bit about the thoughts that I had while I was in Texas – the realisation that the interest that I had in the work was the duality between the interior of the body as well as the relationship between the figurative elements and the abstracted elements. The duality or the underlining thread is the duality between the representational and abstract elements that make up the works that create the visual tension between a work being “abstract” or “figurative” it is this level or/of towards one way (abstraction) or (figuration) that make the work what it is. It is not the process in which it is made, but the levels of duality within the work. The sense of touch is part of the process of making but it is not the center point of my question of the vanishing point of the human form – but the duality between the figurative and abstract elements the work is showing; a unified duality between the figurative and abstract elements – in

the sculptural works. The Scale into which way I push the work will determine its visual reading by others – it is this duality this pushing that will determine the works outcome.

At times the works leads or has a natural progress and with others conscious choices need to be made in creating the work – to help reach this duality

But both processes will still depend on the duality between the figurative and abstract elements. From the begging of the research with the original investigation it was this duality that created the interested and tension within the work.

Liz and I decided for our next tutorial meeting that I will try and create 5 new pieces that all start at the same (starting point) which will be from the same pose – and work to see how much the works change in the duration of the creation of those five pieces. Also we will discuss the layout of the skeleton of the thesis as well as what I will need to do to finalise the table of contents etc.

Currently looking at the table of contents I feel that I am currently working on the hybridization of the human form and moving towards the disappearance of the fragmented human.

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Also, remembered that Liz and I looked at the scale – and she will take a look and give me some feedback on what she thinks of it at the moment. I feel the scale is a good example to show that I currently have a good knowledge and understanding of the current ceramics practice – which I think is good in terms of showing knowledge in the field. But also being able to show artist that are working from figuration to abstraction in a linear line, I am having a little bit of difficulty finding artists that work past the figurative and more conceptual – but will keep researching.

May 7, 2010

Today, I was able to load the kiln and fired all the works that I had created before the break. Also began working on two new pieces – I had five pieces to do – but I decided that it would be good to see if I could create 6 pieces, two couples to see if I could create 3 groups all still from the same pose – but will different clay bodies etc. just to give them a different visual feel so all five sculptures would not look to similar.

May 10, 2010

Returned to RCA today, with the worst terrible cold, I have had in a while – a strange sore throat that is just so painful, I can even describe. I think I might also lose my voice, which is not the best of times for this. However, I focused on the work and unloaded the kiln – was happy to see that the pieces were all in tacked and looked good. I have booked another kiln for the 22 – and will work hard to have all 6 pieces ready for the kiln for that date. At the moment feeling a bit dreamy from the cold – but need to focus on creating these works so I will focus on that now. Also will begin to take a look at the works and begin to create some slips so that I can fire them with some colour to bring out and highlight some of the elements in the works.

May 12, 2010

Was out yesterday since this cold took over – but even then I tried to focus on the development of the thesis of my work. I am beginning to see how well the written and the actual studio work – work in parallel form. I will make sure to finish up this new version and try to submit to Liz before our next meeting. Will continue to work on these pieces for the kiln next week.

May 13, 2010

Began modelling two sculptures in the studio – created a combination of colour into the clay to create a division between some abstract elements and more figurative sections. I am hoping to be able and complete both of the works by tomorrow – so am focusing on that so they can dry over the weekend. I feel that this work is coming out more organic and the duality of the work is working very well together. I think the aesthetic that is coming out in the work – has a great sense of rawness and immediacy - which I feel the previous work that I was making before I began this research; was very stiff and totemic. So am very please to be able and be creating this work – all freehand without the use of a mould since that means that I am begin to create my own visual language with this way of working. I noticed that for the heads I am beginning to sculpt the cranium more than the head now – I am beginning to focus on the design of the skull and translating that into the works – as apposed to the thinking of the skin and the shape of the meat that is on the skull. Now it seems I am focusing on the core of the figure as appose to the – figuration of the figure. So am interested in pulling those bones through the skin of the clay in a sense. I am going to continue to work – and see how far I can get today.