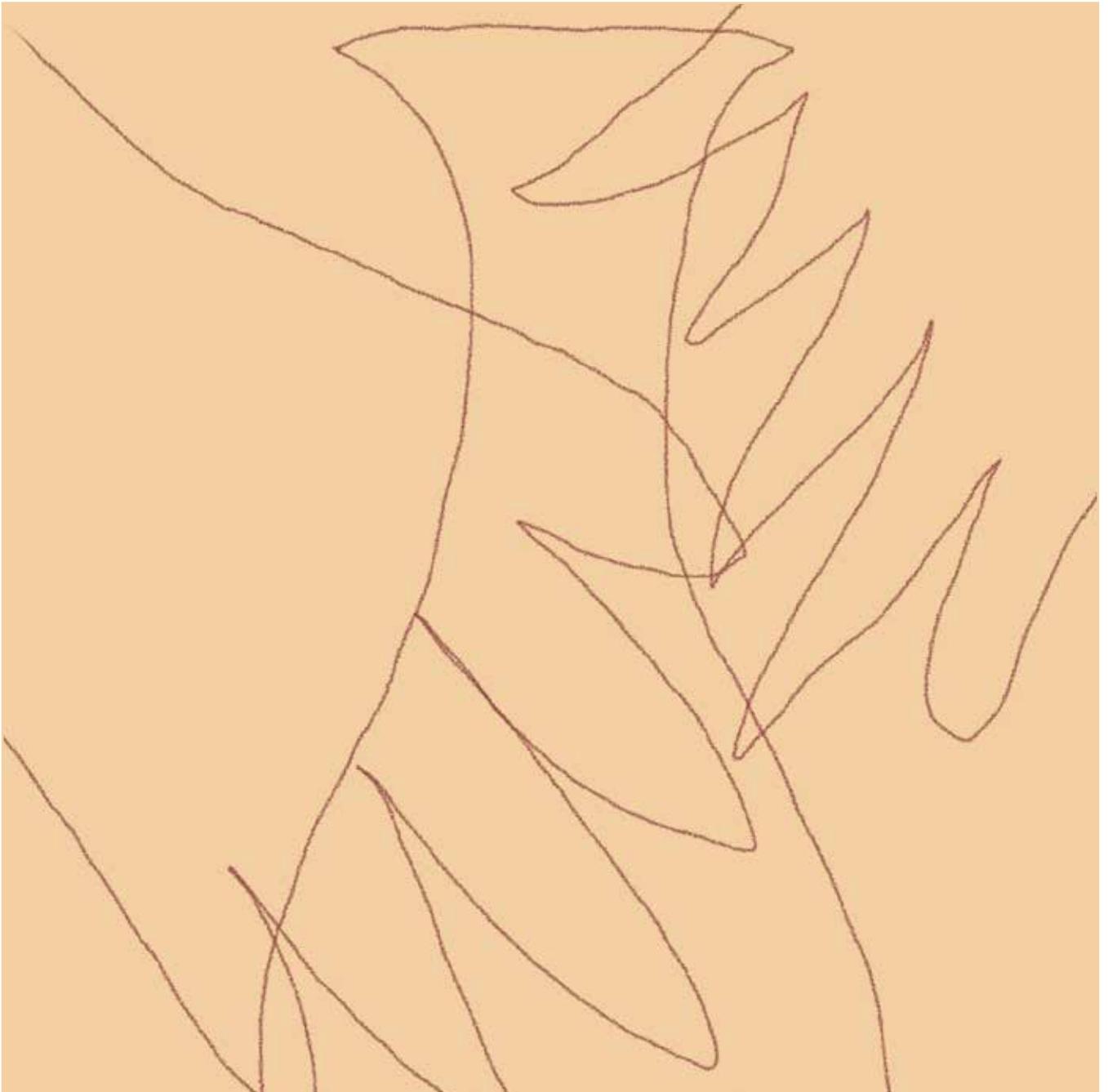


Touch & Clay.



By Matilda Lewandowski

VOL II.



How is making with clay, and connecting to our local environment, beneficial to emotional healing?



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Initial Thoughts.

For the making part of my project, I decided to explore healing through making by exploring and reflecting upon the entire ceramic process.

I dug local clay, processed it myself and experimented with its unique properties. It builds a deep connection with the final piece that may be lost in simply viewing a piece of fired ceramic or ordering your clay from an outside source. It also slows down an already slow ceramic process - it requires further patience, enjoying mistakes and an even deeper emotional connection to items we use in the everyday. In my project, this is tableware.

Building upon my theoretical research as seen in VOLI of Touch + Clay, here I delve into the act of making;

and how this process becomes the story itself. I am connected to my environment, present in my making and proud of an 'outcome' - though the ending is not the goal. The simple act of digging my own clay, as seen in this moody photo above, can serve as a vessel to explore my own emotions. Perhaps, it can be a way for others, too.

In the woods,

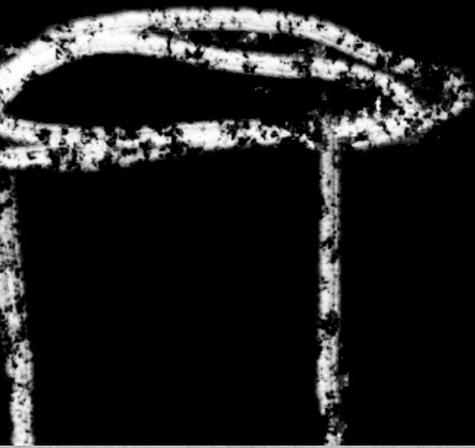




I find space for my own thoughts.

In the studio,





I find space to express myself
in ways that words can't.

PART I. ♦

To start the ceramic process, first we must locate some clay.

Often it can be in your back garden close to the surface. But it's also good to look near lakes ponds or streams. If you can find a piece and roll it up and it keeps its form, this is clay that can be workable! Some clays are better for bricks but some are better for making vessels. You can use a local geological map to find clay deposits in your area. Iron rich clays will be reddier in colour, but clay can also range from yellow and also blue!

Here I am in Plashett wood, near Lewes. Where there's lots of wet ground perfect for finding clay.

It's a beautiful area, incredibly quiet except for bird sounds or rustling leaves. The process was heavy work but rewarding and exciting to discover how this wild clay will fire!



DIGGING



WILD

CLAY ¹¹











It was a rainy, grey day but this made digging the clay easier. The deeper you go the more pure clay you get.







We got four large bags. It ended up being about two bags after processing and cleaning the clay. The rest is dirt, grass, stones and general debris.









PART 2.

Next, we have to process the clay by cleaning out any impurities such as dirt, stones or other debris.

It's a tactile and messy experience. I would often be covered in splatters of clay by the end of each day. It's arduous. Something that cannot be rushed, only completed. Much like facing or being with an emotion that may be unpleasant, unfamiliar or uncomfortable.

But a very rewarding process as I get to see what the clay actually is like to work with!

Overall it takes a couple of weeks, from digging the clay, drying it out, letting it soak and then having it filter it through a mesh strainer twice. I then have to leave the clay out on plaster so it becomes the right consistency in order to throw with.



PROCESSING



WILD

CLAY



A person's hands are shown, heavily coated in a thick, wet, greyish-brown clay. The person is holding a spray gun nozzle, which is also covered in clay. The background is a tiled wall with various pieces of equipment, including a control panel with buttons and a gauge. The overall scene is dimly lit, with a soft, diffused light source.

1. RAW CLAY

I leave this to dry out on a big plaster bat (which absorbs water content) so I can crush the big chunks of clay into smaller pieces. This means it'll turn into slip (liquid clay) faster.

2. FIRST SOAK

I leave the clay with about half water half unprocessed clay overnight to soak.

3. FIRST FILTERING.

I then filter the clay using a 60 mesh sieve.

4. SECOND FILTERING

I then use 80 mesh to get out any remaining non clay matter and I end up with a soup like consistency of wet clay.







Debris, found when processing the clay. From left to right: Soil, rocks, red brick, twigs, nails, dry unprocessed Portslade Clay.







PART 3.

By digging my own clay I've elongated the ceramic process by another step, as I have to discover what the clay is like to work with. What temperature can it fire too, what colour is it and how easy is it to throw with?

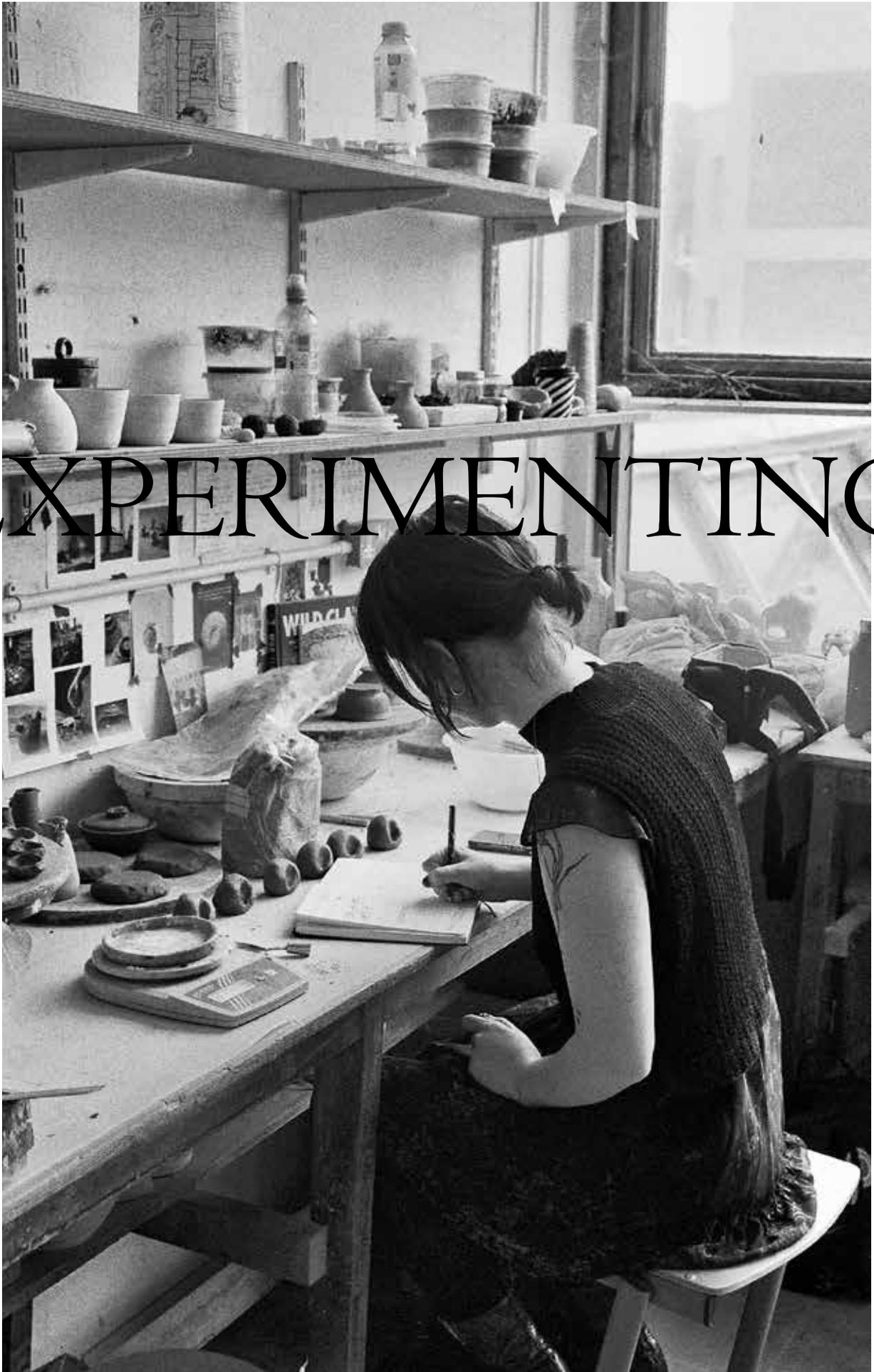
This requires more time and patience but is also really exciting as you don't always know what to expect when you open the kiln door after firing.

To the right you can see my workspace in the studio, I'm writing down different minutes I made with the clay to then fire to low bisc to see what happens!

It's a lot of weighing materials, adding bit or taking bits...and just hoping for something interesting to come out of the kiln.



EXPERIMENTING





Above, Portslade Clay fired to Low Bisc and Lewes clay fired to stoneware. Iron rich, hence the red undertones. Right, Portslade clay mixed with Cobalt, Pitch Black Stain, Sepia and Slate Grey stain to experiment in changing the colour of the clay body itself.





My tests of Lewes clay (top row) and Portslade clay (bottom row). From greenware up to stoneware. The Portslade clay bubbled from Earthenware firings.











SLADE



I've really enjoyed throwing and knew this was a skill I wanted to keep on pushing forward with. However, just the local Lewes clay was too flexible to throw anything higher than about 8cm.

So, I experimented with adding different elements to give the clay body more stability.

First I bisc fired the clay and ground it into a grog like powder with a pestle and mortar. This would also add a textural quality to the pieces which I like and evoke a more natural effect which is in theme with my project.

I also added molomite, which is a granular material made from firing low-iron kaolin. The second row of test pieces have both my grog and molochite added and visually they look tactile, however, the clay was now a difficult mix of flexible but with a powdery and grog texture on top. This, did not

make throwing any easier.

I then decided to mix it with modelling clay, which is still smooth but would hold shape better. I experimented with first a 80/20 ratio of local clay to modelling; then 70/30 and finally 50/50.

I knew eventually I wanted to make narrow and tall jug forms so to ensure this was possible I decided on the 50/50 mixture.







I weigh out both clays to 1000g gram then cut and layer them onto one another. I then proceed to stack wedge them. This is where you cut the entire piece in half then slam it on top and continue to do until

they are fairly well blended. I then finish by wedging with the rams head method.



I also experimented with making sprig moulds whilst on a walk in Peacehaven. I wanted to take inspiration from nature, which relates to the environmental aspect of my project, by looking at textures in the local Sussex landscape. This also links back to the locality of my wild clay and the roots we have with the Earth.









PART 4.

I then moved onto making my tableware on the pottery wheel. This meant lots of revisiting and practising simple forms like cylinders and bowls, in order to gain confidence and technique to make lidded teacups and also larger jug forms.



MAKING





I originally wanted to do a tea set but throwing a functional and well made teapot at my throwing level would be a hard task! So I settled on jug and teacup forms, to really create vessels I was happy with. To the left are sketches of various shapes, looking at touch and simple forms

as inspiration. I like forms with wider bases going up into thinner, it's how I naturally throw and I love the aesthetic. It feels weighted and comfortable to hold.

THROWING.







Three test vessels using just the wild Lewes clay. With crumbling effect to highlight the use of wild clay in the form.

BISC-WARE.







Jug forms. The first and middle are decorative and uses dried cracked pieces of clay to create a natural clay effect, evoking the use of wild clay. The third is in its pure form.





Three lidded
teacups inspired by
hygge and mingei
movements. Thrown
and trimmed.





Lidded teacups with cascading rocks as an additional effect. It makes the pieces more visually tactile, to indicate my research

into the healing benefits of touch and clay.





Two small jugs, one lidded, both for pouring tea into my teacups. Wild Lewes clay mixed with modelling clay. The forms are rounded

to fit easily into the users hand.



My studio shelf space with all my tests and bis fired pieces.



PART 5.

I wanted to continue exploring natural and local materials to create earthy toned glazes. Ash glazes are perfect for this.

I cleaned local cherry wood ash. I let it soak in a bucket with water overnight then siphon off the water the next day. I then repeat this process until the water turns clear and then process it through a sieve to remove any bits of charcoal or other big pieces of wood. The washing removes any sodium so the ash has a more consistent effect in the glaze.

The ash is too harsh for our skin (it will make it peel!) so I wore gloves for the process. I also wear a mask and use an extractor when the ash is dry.

I mixed a matte base ash glaze where I could add stains and oxides to create colours.

I also experimented just adding ash and glaze and water which creates a dark glassy texture.

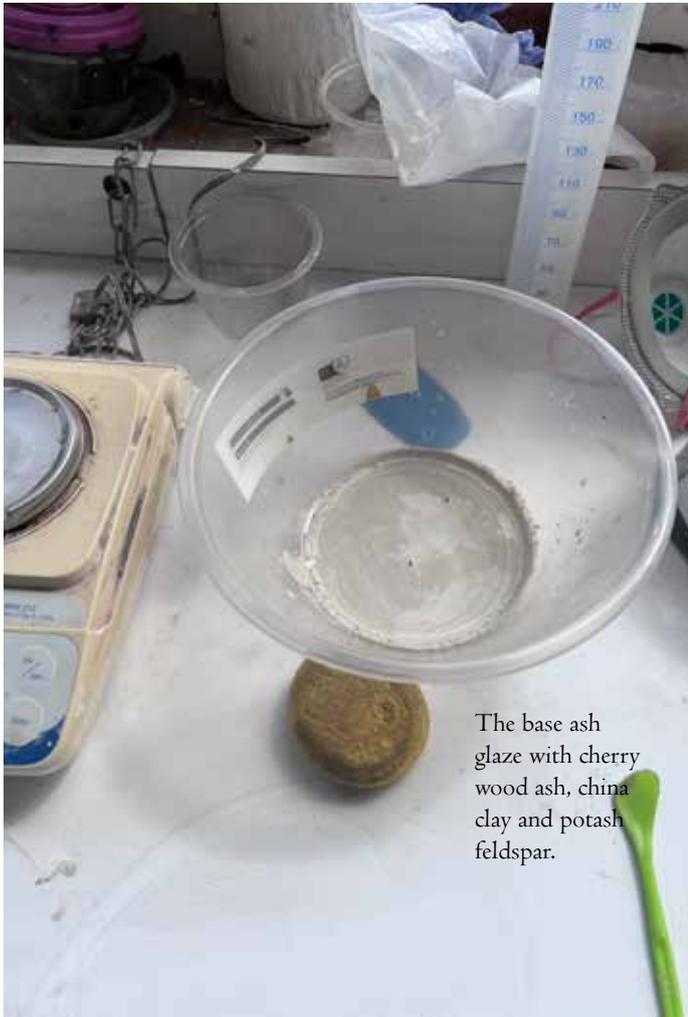


GLAZING

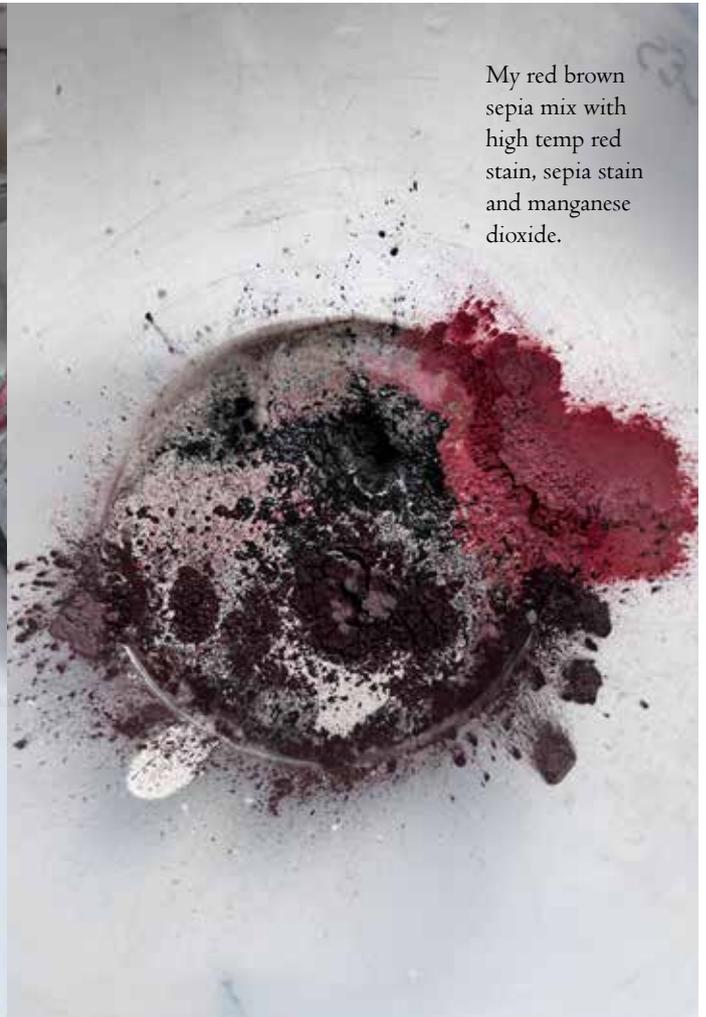
PREPARING THE ASH



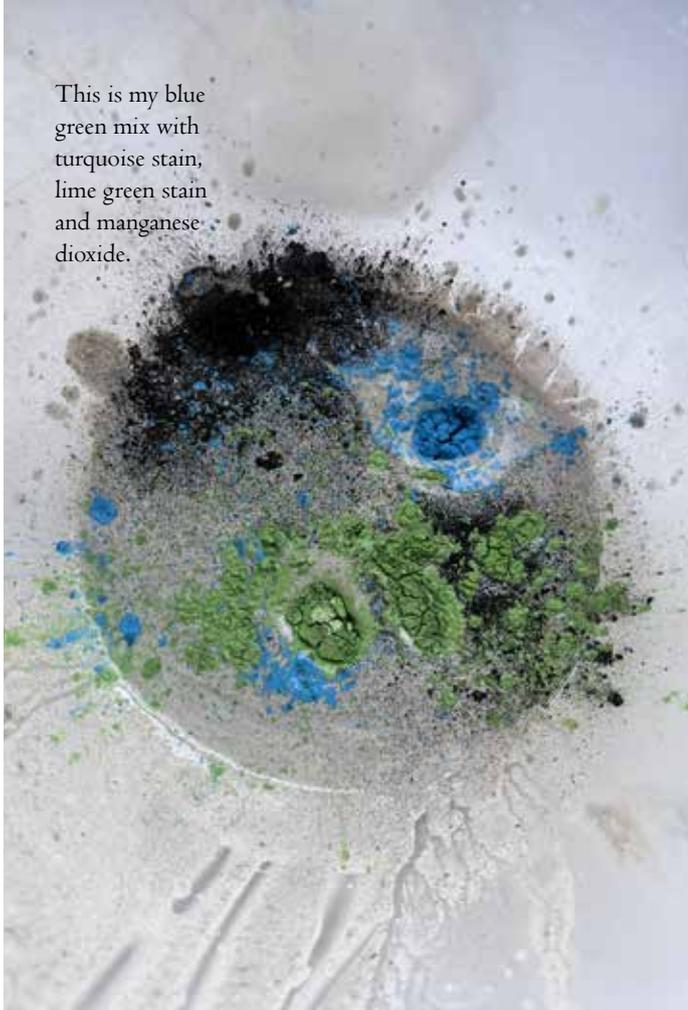




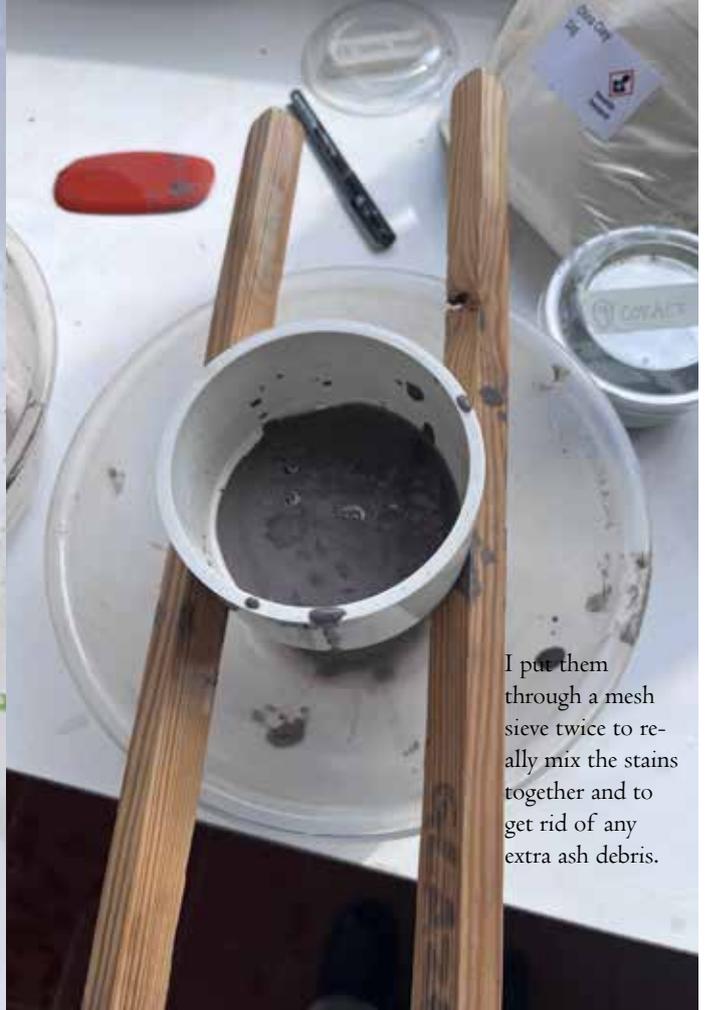
The base ash glaze with cherry wood ash, china clay and potash feldspar.



My red brown sepia mix with high temp red stain, sepia stain and manganese dioxide.



This is my blue green mix with turquoise stain, lime green stain and manganese dioxide.



I put them through a mesh sieve twice to really mix the stains together and to get rid of any extra ash debris.

CHERRY

WOOD ASH

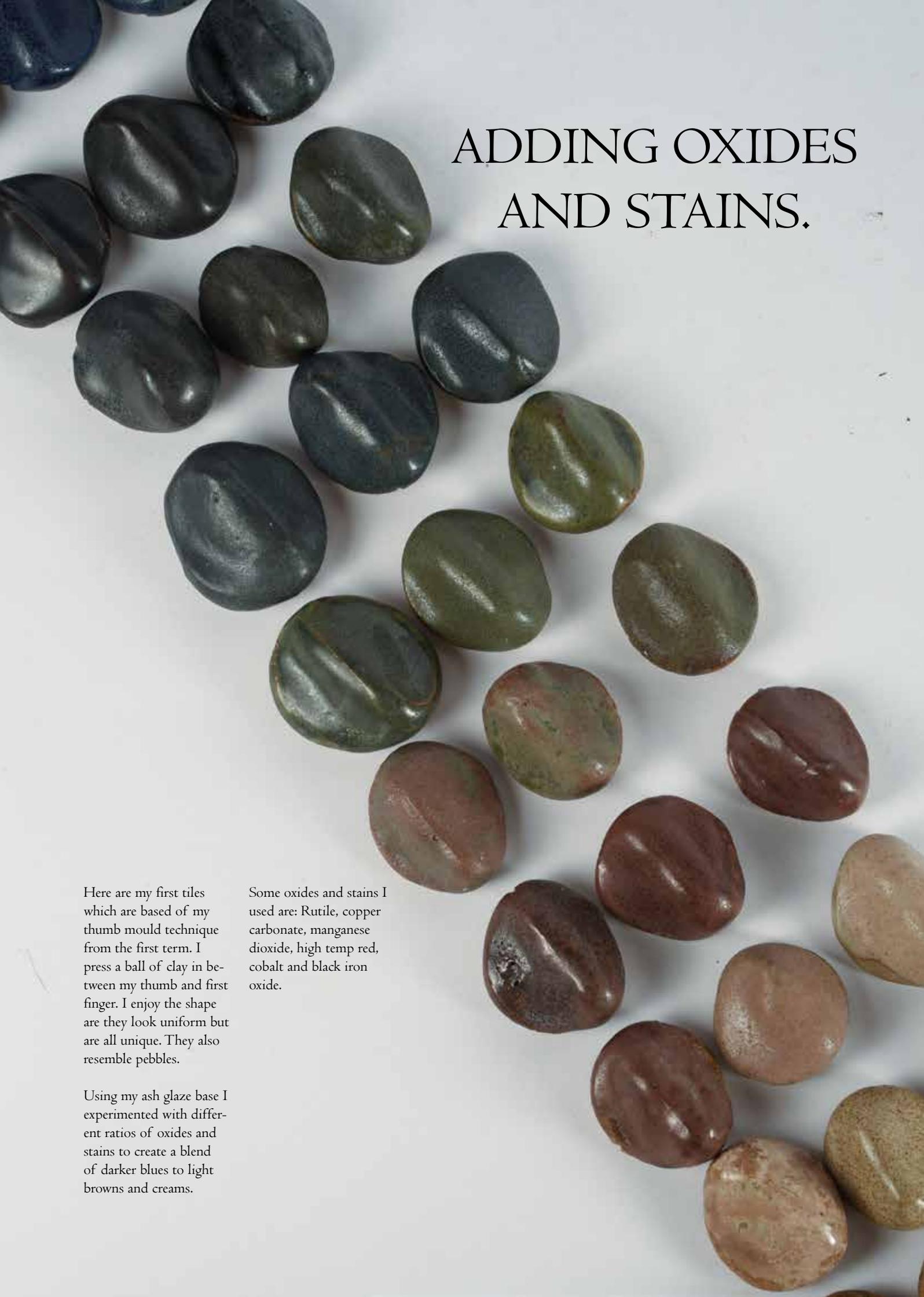
POTASH

FELDSPAR

CHINA

CLAY





ADDING OXIDES AND STAINS.

Here are my first tiles which are based of my thumb mould technique from the first term. I press a ball of clay in between my thumb and first finger. I enjoy the shape are they look uniform but are all unique. They also resemble pebbles.

Using my ash glaze base I experimented with different ratios of oxides and stains to create a blend of darker blues to light browns and creams.

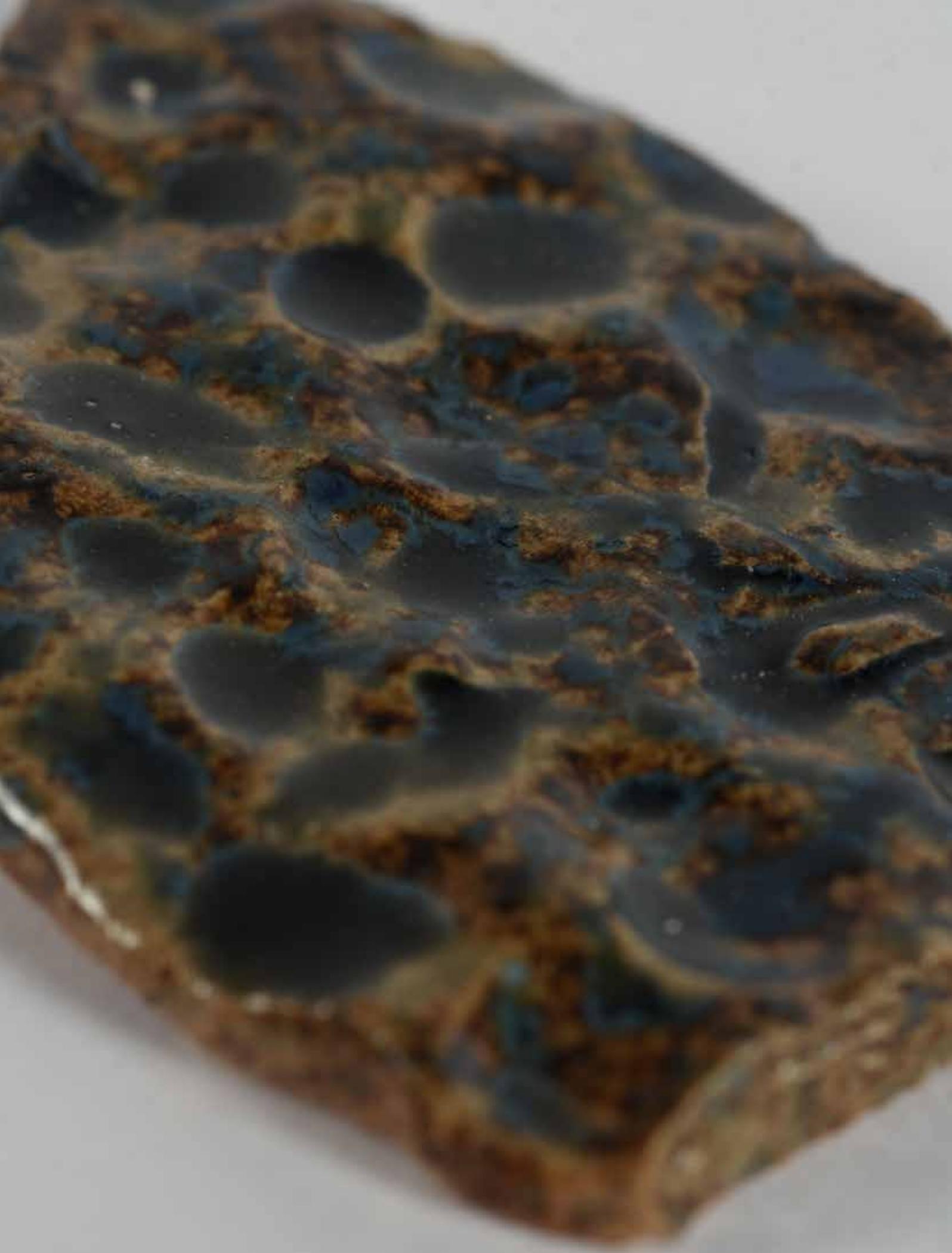
Some oxides and stains I used are: Rutile, copper carbonate, manganese dioxide, high temp red, cobalt and black iron oxide.

Here are some test pieces with layered glaze mixtures and just wood ash (mixed with water) which create the green textures.

I experimented with brushing on randomly to create a natural effect.

The glazes pool in the crevices made by my thumb prints on slabs of wild clay.















Test bowls.











A trio of teacups and jugs. With bisc fired pieces and wood ash.





Cup set, Petra Grog.



Jugs in cream (with splatters of ash glaze), cobalt and green. I added bisc fired pieces underneath the glaze to create a textured effect on the cobalt jug.





Tea set with cascading rocks motif.







Two thrown plates with bis crackle motifs, cream and cobalt.





Mini jug that was made with just Lewes clay, unfortunately it cracked at stoneware firing which meant it was essential to mix the clay with modelling clay to ensure I have usable tableware.

How does making with clay, and the sense of touch, offer people unique therapeutic benefits?

This essay aims to promote and explore the use of clay in therapeutic settings, as well as therapeutic benefits while making as a ceramist. In this sense, it is a tool that can be used in therapy as well as a therapeutic tool in itself. I will discuss how touch is fundamental to our understanding of the world and is therefore arguably essential to our expression in the world. This is for self-expression, understanding our own feelings, as well as being able to communicate this with others. Clay is an accessible, forgiving and innately human material and thus is the ideal bridge between healing and making.

When one thinks of therapy, the first thing that often comes to mind is patient and practitioner sitting opposite one another and talking. While talking therapies hold value, in this essay I will explore the unique healing benefits of making with clay, which is an act based on touch. This method of therapy is particularly useful for people who have experienced trauma and may feel 'stuck' emotionally. It is a method that allows one to release and explore these feelings in a non-verbal way. If someone shuts down, sometimes finding the right words can be impossible. Expressing oneself creatively is the foundation of all making therefore arguably an intrinsic universal human necessity. This is seen in our first communication and understanding of the world as a child; we learn about the world through touch before understanding and expressing verbally. We also use non-verbal cues, communicating through our bodies. This connection with touch and an 'inner self' is often lost in adulthood as we become reliant on what we see, say, and hear. We grow out of exploring our feelings in a 'childlike' manner. For example, painting or making something creatively with no focus on skill or outcome. We are often expected to be better equipped and to just get on with things. However, as Mehrabian suggests, we communicate 55% non-verbally, 38% vocally and only 7% with our words. As we can see, most communication stems from our bodies.

Clay as a medium offers tactile playfulness and thus reignites this nostalgic and intuitive bodily experience. It creates an important space to reconnect with oneself. Furthermore, as humans, we have a natural connection with clay through an earthly bond with the material. As Souter-Anderson argues, "clay as the Earth is fundamental; it is primordial in concept, existing at the very beginning of life."⁽²⁾ It is organic and found all over the world, therefore it is universal matter. It is weathered just like we are weathered with emotions. You move clay, and it moves you. Clay is accessible to everyone, as it requires little skill or understanding to create something from it. It can be moulded and guided by our hands and because of this, offer whatever you need to create your truth. As it is a material explored through touch, it holds the ability to bring about self-affirmation, self-expression, and emotional release.

Part I: Touch.

Understanding the world through touch is fundamental.

Touch is arguably the most fundamental sense to help understand and create a connection with our world. This is especially relevant in creative and 3D art practises, where an object is not just visually un-

derstood, but touched, caressed, and held. As Classen argues, "touch is the least susceptible to deception and hence the one in which we tend to put the most trust" (19). Is there a truth in what we feel with our hands that is unique to the sense of touch? People often seek truth from what they observe visually. But, if you go further than this and explore through touch you experience an entirely new catalogue of understanding: temperature, pressure, pain, pleasure, and movement. It ignites an entire range of nerve receptors. As Crocker explains through Merleau-Ponty's ideas; our body is key to our experience and interpretation of the world, it is why we have a world to experience at all. In this sense we can argue towards Dupuis & Thorn's ideas of our body as a home – "the idea of 'home' recalls a protective material environment, combining a sense of permanence, security, and continuity, with a space that is full of emotional significance and meaning". (Crocker et al) Extending touch is to share and open our private and protected individual world. Through touch, we receive comfort and love, through that of a parent, a friend, an animal, or a lover. We can also have our worlds intruded through touch in acts of violence. As Classen argues, "in the bubble of privacy that people maintain around themselves, touch perhaps represents the most direct invasion".⁽¹⁸⁾ In this sense, we can be deeply affected by touch, and it can deeply impact or change our worldview and sense of self. Additionally, our lived experience is further understood through the language of touch. We may say we have been 'touched' or 'moved' after feeling emotionally stirred. These are both words describing physical movement, but in this context express emotional movement. When deep feelings occur, it seems to connect to something deeper and more visceral than words can explain. We must refer to the power of touch and physicality to express our inner thoughts. (Paterson, 3).

Touch as a sense is multi-faceted and inextricably linked to other sensations we use to navigate through the world. Paterson describes touch as "a synergetic interaction of the somatic sense sometimes referred to as haptic"⁽⁴⁾; as opposed to 'optic' meaning visual understanding. We communicate and understand touch not just through vision but also through proprioception, which is "the body's position felt as muscular tensions", kinaesthesia "the sense of the movement of body and limb's" and vestibular sense "a sense of balance derived from information in the inner ear" (Paterson,⁴). We have different channels of understanding that communicate and work together to aid us in experiencing touch. It is an entire entity of experience and thus a powerful one. But, if a significant percentage of our experience, truth and understanding comes from touch, why as we age in society do we tend to retreat from this primary sense? As Classen suggests "touch is exploratory", but the older we get we fall back on 'safer' options like sight. As children, we explored nature through touch, climbing, running, learning. Relishing in the tactility of the various textures, temperatures, and consistencies of what surrounds us. As adults, we appreciate nature from afar (Classen). However, even in sight, Classen argues there is "the landscape of touch". Our eyes also experience tactile sensations, meaning that "visual excellence" when admiring a painting is not enough. It must have "tactile values that reach out and touch, even embrace, the viewer" (276).

Seen for example in this 'Ritual Vessel' by Jennifer Amon (see Fig.2). She uses pinch and coil techniques, which she describes as "ancient", to produce these vessels organically by leaning into the slow and rhythmic process of hand building. Though this is a 3D object meant to also be touched and utilised, visually it is tactile; you see

To further understand how touch can be healing we can look at how interconnected the mind and body are to one another. Somatic symptoms (relating to the body) can be affected by psychological symptoms of the mind. Somatization is the experience of physical symptoms without any obvious medical reason. Its commonly found in people with anxiety and depression, as Lipowski suggests it is more of “a tendency to experience and communicate psychological distress in the form of physical symptoms and to seek medical help... rather than a cognitive mode”(161) meaning using words or thinking. If a person has a physical ailment, it can be acknowledged through tactile visuals; a broken leg is understood as the leg will appear broken, and you can touch the injury. Because of this visibility, it is easier to gain immediate understanding and thus immediate help. But often the complexities of emotional distress are invisible and are not helped by the difficulty in being able to verbalise this inward trauma. But this is not to say that physical symptoms are diminished as just a cry for help, psychological distress can affect our physicality and change our perception and imagination. Van Der Kolk argues that pain can be held physically – with the stiffness of the body, lacking a natural flow of gestures or facial expressions as well as constrained conversation. (Van Der Kolk, 26) Trauma leads us to “the edge of comprehension”(Van Der Kolk, 43) which means it is incredibly difficult to verbally communicate the remaining terror and pain you feel inside. Birdwhistell writes on this also, stating that “Feelings and memories get locked in the joints, muscles and ligaments, often from as far back as childhood”. When something holds great emotional value, it seems to be linked to our physicality. As such, touch can be a tool to access and face experiences that have no voice but are instead made up of sensations. Suffering from the repercussions of a past traumatic event can mean you get stuck in a fight or flight response, and touch allows a person to feel their body in the here and now. The focus becomes on the here and now, not in our head which is filled with memories (Berendson). Van der Kolk goes further to say traumatised people lose this power of imagination; meaning they lose the ability to make their minds play (20). This frozen state of survival, which is difficult to comprehend and express verbally could therefore be argued that it is more effective to access it physically.

The idea of discovering our emotions and being present in the moment and the current physical sensation is arguably intrinsic to making. We can see this in the way makers and artists describe their creative process. For example, in ceramicist Rachel Woods’s work, her making is part of the experience of life. She says, “we all have cracks, wear areas, and bruises, partnered with fortitude, stamina and resolute areas of our characters.”(Wood) Her pots are very metaphorical, and you can feel the process and humanity when looking at her work. She writes “the impulsive desire to touch, and the inherent emotional need to be touched underpins the technical, creative & emotional foundations of my work”.(Wood) Looking at this pot it is a tactile playground; you want to touch, hold, and run your fingers across the ample colours and textures. For Wood, it is the intuitive process that is then conveyed in a final piece. Therefore, the making of the pot is equally as important as the final fired piece. You can see and understand a journey through her choices in the multitude of textures. This emphasis and importance of touch become stronger when one’s mental health is on the decline. As Berendson writes, “touch experience as an empathetic and positive thing from a trusted source can promote healing”(93). This can be in the confines of therapy, but arguably can be seen in these ceramic artists as well. This trusted

source becomes yourself through the material of clay. You express, explore, and empathise with yourself. This conversation then continues for other people who touch or view the object, stirring perhaps a different felt experience.

When it comes to processing and understanding our emotions, it is easy to bury them but feel the effects physically. This could be through headaches, fatigue or stomach issues which need to be understood as correlated to psychological distress (Lipowski, 161). It is important to note physical symptoms can also stem from physical problems; this is where dutiful and thorough healthcare comes into play. In opposition to this, we can also over-contextualise our feelings verbally or through thought; instead of connecting with our body and simply feeling. For example, people may analyse and conclude their emotions because of external factors and events. But what do you feel at this moment? As we have seen through the emphasis on experiencing truth through touch and a link between our mind and body, exploring and healing through making can be an incredibly useful tool.

Part 2: Clay Therapy.

Clay is a unique and useful tool to aid healing.

Having acknowledged that touch can help us access our emotions in a way that words cannot; therefore, helping a person on their journey to healing. What is then, that makes clay the perfect tool to facilitate this? Firstly, once fired, clay is a resistant and resilient material. It can remain intact for thousands of years, as opposed to perishable materials such as wood or metal. Ceramic pieces equate to our memory and our history; as Souter-Anderson argues, it is a “fundamental form of human activity”(3). Creating with clay encompasses many civilisations all over the world, from past and present, and because of this, ceramics make up a lot of archaeological history and understanding. Without clay, we would not know as much about ourselves. Furthermore, unprocessed clay is also resistant to the environment, it is the very foundation of our earth and therefore linked to our very existence. Perryman argues that “pottery is abstract, unconsciousness, widespread and made by ordinary common people”(Souter-Anderson, 4). It purveys different cultures, and different periods; thus encompasses a universal human experience and identity. In this sense, it is the perfect material to use as a therapeutic tool; it repeats the cycle of gaining insight.

This harmony with our Earth can be seen as heavily disrupted in our current digital and consumerist society; as Fordham writes of Jung’s philosophy: “Man has moved dangerously far from his roots”. (Souter-Anderson,4) This connection with our Earth creates an even deeper mode of healing rather than making objects with, perhaps, more artificial materials. As Takuro Shibata notes in ‘Wild Clay’: “my choice to use wild clays is not to seek out the perfect clay but to learn about their unique characteristics and use them to create a clay body that showcases these characteristics.”(Matt Levy et al, 9) There is a beauty in the organic, and this acceptance of imperfections which can be analysed, explored, and understood can again reflect how as humans we can handle our emotions. Additionally, the language used to describe a specific type of clay is a ‘body’. Our physicality seems to be inextricably linked with the ‘body’ of the

of the Earth.

Discovering the Earth and matter with our own hands can take us back to childhood where “among their [children] early creations are mud pies, they knead the formless matter into just the right shape and in the process recognize the consistency and malleability of various kinds of earth” (Classen, 76). This tactile experience allows us to feel our physicality and place in the world, we create our own little world in our hands. This links back to Dupuis & Thorns’ idea of our body as our home; we can safely extend this home to communicate what we feel inside. As Elbrecht writes: “To touch the clay – this primal material that plays a role in almost all creation myth – reconnects with our learned ways of understanding and dealing with the world, but also with our instincts and with our ability to heal” (15). Clay seems to encompass not only our personal world but the world around us as well. It combines a neutral ground and safe play space to start un-earthing our emotions. There is an unspoken bond and history with clay, which makes it intuitive and non-threatening. You can make your mark by simply pushing your thumb into wet clay. In doing so, you have already created something that is uniquely yours. It is then also in your power to remove this mark and start again by simply moulding the clay back to its original state. The power is in your own touch. Therefore, it is not intimidating. There is an ease to using the material, an instinctual familiarity that allows you to free-form shapes as opposed to other crafts such as metal or wood which require sharp tools to create what you desire. Naturally, as with every craft, there are extensive skills to understand and develop. But one can argue that the initial obstacle in making, that of starting or trying, clay has a distinctive ease and accessibility as opposed to many other crafts. This familiarity and ease further show why clay is a useful tool to use in therapy.

This leads us to clay therapy, a specific sub-section of art therapy that focuses on exploring a patient’s feelings using clay as a communicative tool. On her website, Souter-Anderson (who pioneered a clay therapy training programme) describes clay therapy as “a form of active psychotherapy where unidentified and unexpressed feelings and emotions become visible through the physical manipulation of clay”. (Souter-Anderson) She further describes the essence of her practice as “A Theory of Contact: Physical, Emotional and metaphorical”. (Souter-Anderson) There is a dynamic created between client, therapist, and clay which all together provides the tools and space to explore buried or unknown emotional experiences. There is this idea that contacting clay directly correlates to encountering your emotion. A sense of play means your imagination is being utilised. This could link to Van Der Kolk’s ideas that traumatised people lose the ability to imagine. Souter-Anderson describes this as the “Play space of potential – where thorough touching and playing with the clay, body and mind work together as one” (52). This setting allows space for all our existence to unite as one. This unity then allows for new realisations. But it also the movement, or “massage and hypnosis with neuro-chemical processes [that] may take the creator to altered states of consciousness” (52). Even the language of “creator” brings a sense of power and control back to its maker. This is valuable to someone who has experienced trauma and has felt their world or space invaded by another. This emphasis on the sense of touch goes further when Souter-Anderson explains how sometimes she will work with the clay with her eyes closed; “the more you hold the clay the more you will become accustomed to accepting what is, simply is”. The material allows someone to be present in a non-intimidating manner. This is often an incredibly difficult for someone in a mental health crisis as everything feels so overwhelming, it feels safer to avoid than simply

be. The clay becomes a gateway into being present with how you feel internally. Your body can take over and use the clay to express how it feels or what it wants to say.

Here is an example from a clay therapy session which is less about creating a recognisable form but the tactile experience. This can be for expressing tangled emotions or exploring the idea of play. Titled “Let’s Mess!” (See Fig.6) Souter-Anderson notes this is a good idea for issues around Autonomy and control issues, feeling more empowered, revelling and rebelling and bodily functions. The top photo shows a client feeling the clay with their feet; you can envisage the visceral sensation of the clay squeezing through your toes, which I imagine to be grotesque but also pleasurable. This act feels rebellious, you’re getting messy and allowing yourself to let go. This idea of really exploring the clay through instinctual touch likens to Clay Field therapy, a sub-section of this area of art therapy. It has its loose limitations – a rectangular box measuring around 36cm to 42cm and 3cm deep is required to hold 15kg of smooth, non-gritty clay with a bowl of warm water nearby. Here, we can see that temperature, texture and space are all accounted for. It must feel pleasurable, and accessible, rather than cold or rough – which would naturally push you away rather than draw you in. It is important for your senses to feel soothed and comforted in your play, to allow you to feel safe enough to let go and explore. Elbrecht notes that such creative destruction helps us to understand “constant change” and “endings and beginnings”. It teaches us to “survive change; to grasp and handle it”. (Elbrecht) It is a space to truly feel connected to your body and to explore things that usually you would shy away from as an adult. In this sense, it allows freedom; you can play with this primal material and form a new state of mind.

In this photo from a clay field therapy session, you can feel the amount of force and effort that has gone into constructing this mound of clay. The person seems to be pushing and pushing, compacting the clay together messily away from them. There are so many avenues to explore from this simple act of touching clay; are they thinking of something when pushing it away? Is it instinctual? How does it make them feel? If they were to destroy it, would that change how they felt? It’s a multifaceted thing, to have made something there and then, potentially to record it through a photograph or by keeping it. You could fire some of it, creating a new kind of permanence. Or maybe it is simply the experience that matters, and you can reflect on this in hindsight.

Clay as a medium offers a unique space for tactile play, emotional exploration or release and self-affirmation. Exploring the world and who we are through touch gives us an entirely new way of communicating, with ourselves and the outside world. If our body is our home, then we ought to utilise the multifaceted areas of sense that touch allows when working on emotional healing. (Dupuis and Thorn). Touch has its own language, and we use it more than we are aware of. It cannot be pushed aside with intellectualising; our body will tell you how you feel, with somatic symptoms and physical ailments. Traumatized people are stuck, they lose the imagination and connection with their own physicality as a survival and defence response. Feeling trapped and haunted by your emotions can leave someone overwhelmed, leaving you frozen and seemingly impossible to navigate. Being in a safe space, without the pressure of having to explain or defend yourself. Instead, you are offered a ball of clay. It can become whatever you need it to, you do not have to plan, force, or calculate your movements. Instead, you can access your feelings and thoughts that before seemed impossible to comprehend. You become your own healer, through a guide

therapeutic environment, or simply as a maker or someone with an interest in clay. Suddenly, things don't feel so complicated. You are simply being, existing and discovering. Your problems gain clarity, and you no longer feel such emotional weight. As seen in Fig 7 and 8, clay allows a person to physically explore and move past their emotional turmoil. We can connect back to our childhood, feeling at one with nature. Our mind and body connect, and this offers us clarity and a sense of peace. It is a material that unites all of us, it is beneath us and around us, and can help us reconnect with who we are. It is time to build your own history, your own world; and only you have the power to tell that story.

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Images.

- Fig 1. Cornelia Elbrecht, *Work at the Clay Field*. 2019. 10-15 kg of Clay, wooden box, bowl of water and hands. Institute of Sensorimotor Art Therapy & School for Initiatic Art Therapy.
- Fig. 2. Jennifer Amon, *Ritual Vessel*. Hand built from black stoneware clay with porcelain slip and glaze. H 23cms x W 22cms.
- Fig. 3. Rachel Woods, *A piece from her Chaotic Wild collection*, 2013-present.
- Fig. 5. Matt Levy, *Iron-rich clay gathered in south-central North Carolina and used for making commercial clays at STARworks Ceramics*.
- Fig. 6. Dr Lynne Souter-Anderson, *Let's Mess. Clay, hands and feet*.
- Fig. 7. *Client During Clay Field Therapy*, Cornelia Elbrecht. 2019. Clay, water and hands.

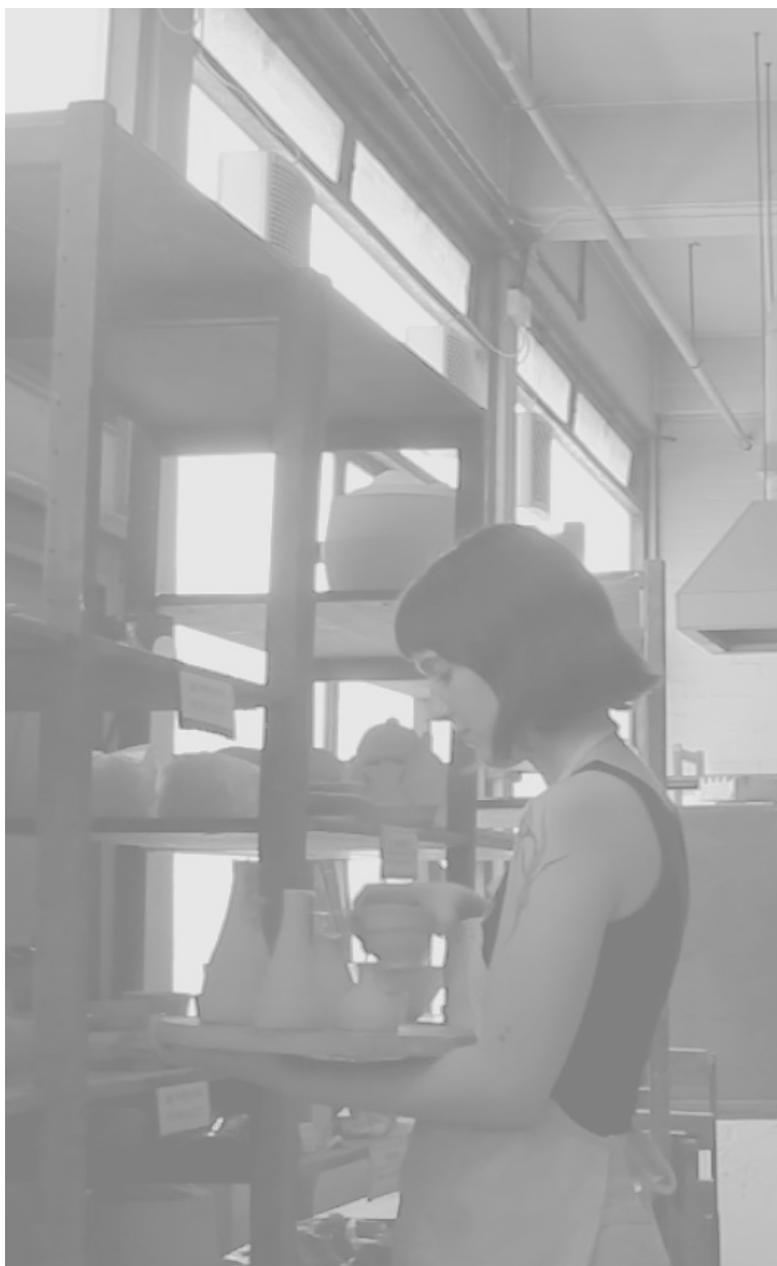
Final thoughts.

This project has been a real emotional journey for me. It is the most invested I've felt about an art project and I've absolutely loved the making process. Ceramics truly offers a healing space that is uniquely soothing. It is frustrating, with things often going wrong, but there is a beauty in this too.

I'm excited to keep going with my research into healing through clay,

With my long term goal of becoming an art therapist one step closer.

It is a project I can imagine continuing to explore for life, with an abundance of possibility using local materials and the never ending possibilities of clay.











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