



The CRG 2024 curriculum was designed and written by
Rachel Kurdynowska.

Term 1 / Production & Gathering
Term 2 / Collective Testing
Term 3 / Glaze Dissection
Term 4 / Reflective Making

The intention of this course was, and is, to provide a better knowledge and understanding of ceramic materials. The structure of the year - production & gathering, followed by testing materials, glaze research, and evaluation-through-making, was designed to build a natural accumulation of advanced material knowledge alongside nurtured confidence, enabling more advanced testing.

The shape of a concertina, opening large and becoming small is a good visual metaphor for my approach in teaching such a course. During our 40 weeks together we have mixed raw powders to make clays & slips, gathered & processed wild material, shared individual lines of creativity, discussed documentation, experienced Lowestoft history with local historian Ivan Bunn, analysed ceramic materials through repeat firing & testing, studied recipe books & continually shared results... This intensive and expansive filling up of experience and possibility almost as a bombardment, has ironically aided focus as something to push up against or as a way of seeing a clear path of individual methodology.

Beneath the curriculum, which held emphasis on clay, creativity, location and community, was a carefully considered format that would also provide a space for sharing, thinking and focusing on ones own practice as part of a group. Therefore the curriculum of making, testing, and listening to ceramic materials, has also been reflected in the connections, friendships and regard formed within the relationships of everybody in the group. The space has grown because of this, which in turn has aided our ability to discuss, dissect and better understand the ceramic materials we've been exploring. This collective holding has also offered the rare chance to think out-loud unedited through ideas and experiments on a regular basis within a safe space of collective enquiry. These meandering conversations providing important threads of contemplation between sessions. (An example of which can be read following this text.) The process of talking through one's individual practice in trusted company has been a source of momentum in our last term of the course.

It's the strength of community that has materialised during this project that will push this group of CRG graduates into a new year of clay exploration and investigation. Chiming the new with the old as we return to Happisburgh, respectfully redepositing gathered materials that have not been used. This ritual will mark the beginning of our second year together, which will run without a curriculum.



Alice
It's just that weird thing of wondering, will it make any sense?

Rachel
No, but it doesn't matter. That's not the point. We're not sharing stuff that's supposed to be a finished outcome. We're communicating something, but we can choose what it is that we want to communicate. And really, I think we're just going to be sharing our year together. So, it could be that we just show chaos and that could be really nice.

Rollo
It would be interesting having our CRG work. And then also having some of our own personal work in the room as a demonstration of what we've been doing at the same time. Then people can see if there has been an influence between one and the other.

Nessie
I think we're all fascinated by each other's processes and how we produce things. It's amazing isn't it, we're all one brain but we're coming at it from different angles.

Rachel
I think that's a really nice idea to have a stream of what's been happening alongside. Which could even be writing or drawings.

Nessie
I think clay is an amazing way of recording things as well, isn't it? I always thought I'd be drawing first and then producing a clay form of some sort, but actually it's the other way around. It's more about my emotions going right into the clay. Even when you're drawing, you're drawing through that pencil, aren't you? And you're making a mark. But with clay, you're literally grabbing it and shaping it.

Lise
What I find, which is very odd, is the things that I've been making out of clay. I find they're not related to the paintings or the visual work at all, but then after they've been fired, I take them out and have them sitting around a bit, and I think, oh that relates to that. But it wasn't a conscious thing, it's a backwards thing in a way. I've tried to make clay objects based on some of my paintings, small paintings and that doesn't work at all. It's a dead thing to do. It's pointless.

Nessie
But I knew, when I first saw your work and I didn't know you were here, and I knew you from your work, your painting work, I knew those were your ceramics.

Lise
I supposed we can't avoid whatever the thing is in our hands and in our brain.

Matthew
A lot of my work is literally between the idea of order and chaos. All kinds of chance and system, and I'm almost contradicting myself in anything I'm doing. I'm interested in the way we've collected all these wild materials and then we've done experiments with them and they're almost unrepeatable. I mean, they're experiments, but they're sort of part of a creative practise. But now we've gone more into the scientific of how we breakdown materials into their constituent elements. We go one way to the wild play and then we come back to the kind of industrial chemistry of the thing. And I'm interested in the two sides, the way they don't really fit but of course they connect because we're in an industrialised society, but they're sort of quite uncomfortable with each other.

Rachel
In terms of the beginning of this year. That that was kind of the intention. That's the carrot. You know, it's an exciting way of stepping in. I'd never intended to get involved with the scientific or chemistry side of things, but it's kind of inevitable. If I'd advertised the year like that, I would have got a completely different audience and starting with that, it's likely to have shut people's brains off. It shuts my brain off.

Matthew
It's like Lise said, we all approach these things very differently and we kind of help ourselves to understand and find the parts that chime inside, don't we.

Lise
I like the unpredictability of it all. So, when you open, I mean, I've had this kiln for a few months. I've fired it very few times because I never have enough stuff to fill it. It takes ages but you know, you open it, think oh bloody hell, that is a disaster. And then oh, that's come out quite nicely and I enjoy that very much, I don't mind if it doesn't work. Then there's certain things I do like, which I'll repeat, you know. But I'll always put something in that might be a bit dodgy.

Nessie
I feel like it's opening up a genie's bottle sometimes. You open up that kiln and you don't know what's going to come out, whether it's going to be good or not. It's so exciting. You can't wait to look inside, and then, oh shit.

Matthew
Yeah, there is a lot of that.

Peter
But it is motive you know. The one end of it you're making one-off pieces that speak to themselves and they're about the material, and the other end is tableware or something like that. But then somewhere in the middle is an interest in editioning something. And or, in terms of where the work might be situated in the world or what interests you about making work. And the other part of it is the orthodox materials around the corner there that we're learning about, and then you're swapping out whitening for wood ash, where you introduce wild ingredients to see how that might mess up or bring something new out of say kaolin or something like that, I think that's really fascinating. Or just on a really practical level where you're finding these combinations that you can sustain without ever killing that kind of genie's bottle.

Matthew
Yeah that's really well said.

Lise
You've got to have some sort of organised system as well.

Rachel
In terms of recording and thinking about going and collecting wild materials and using chalk and stuff, then having this delayed period of time taking things out of the kiln, maybe that's a recording in itself that the ceramics themselves are doing, which is kind of interesting.

Tamlin
I quite like what you just said about editions because I always work in series. I've just never thought of that word before, which is really interesting. The idea that you'd commit before you start, to maybe doing 1 of 10 or 1 of 20, and that you take a particular wild material or something, like you say, that's kind of going to mess up and keep that genie feeling. That you do that for a certain period and then that's kind of done. And if you do revisit it, you revisit it in a different way.

Peter
But it's like repeat work. I don't use found materials so much now but I've got them all stored and was really interested in an editions gesture of collecting. Or when you pour coffee, you're doing that and it's subject to all these bits of interference and muscle memory or slippage. You know there's lots of things that exist outside of how you commodify editioning that are super interesting. Like when you were demonstrating pulling a handle.

Matthew
By repetition in a process.

Nathalie
It was either the week after we had that initial discussion on this when you said something about muscle memory and I then remembered about how you record muscle memory in different ways, like it's not written down anywhere, but my

body knows the weight of a kilogramme of clay or a pound of clay. So when you take it off a wire and put it on the scale and it's exactly it.

Peter
You've done that here as well Nat. I've seen a few times where you're portioning things out and you're thinking oh yeah.

Nathalie
I think people have it with things that you do on repeat, like a dressmaker might be able to measure out a metre without measuring it.

Nessie
It's like my creatures, the things that come out in my sculptures, they literally are just memories of seeing animal movement. If I thought about it, then they wouldn't come out. It's that squidding of the clay and it just forms itself. To achieve the way that animal moves is by letting myself not think about what I'm doing. It's a bit like painting isn't it, and things come out that I'm not even expecting. You know, like, sometimes I'm doing a sight hound but then it might end up as a deer or something else.

Alice
But that's from years of looking and observing those features. In terms of muscle memory because you know what it looks like, you've looked at it so many times.

Rollo
I find it interesting that you all remember visually. Because you're all talking about how you've got pictorial ideas and you're seeing all of these things as you're making.

Alice
Yeah because you've got Aphantasia

Nessie
Do you not visualise?

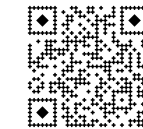
Rollo
No, it's pitch black in my head. That's why I don't write, because it doesn't aid my brain at all. I think it's just personal isn't it.

Alice
But you've got a good memory though.

Rollo
I just find it interesting that you guys rely on that so much. I think mines all factual based. When I think about a person I almost get a list of facts about what they look like. But I can't see it, so it's like, I don't know but I do know what they look like. I think that applies to making as well. I make as a desire to be able to get to the end result to visualise it.

Edited transcription from CRG, Term 4 - Week 1
A discussion on how to record and communicate material research.

The full audio recording can be listened to here:



With magical thanks to Ned and James of Helgate Pottery & CRG 2024 Participants: Alice Lee, Anne-lise Horsley, Matthew Richardson, Nathalie Hammond, Nessie Stonebridge, Peter Nencini, Rollo Timothy George, Tamlin Lundberg, not forgetting Viv Allen.