

Laura J Potter

## An incomplete archive of unfinished ideas

In an attempt to explain why I am making this work I have decided to write an unedited text. I'm not going to describe each idea – something I would normally do – but instead try to document the thoughts that led to the work as it stands.

I like to box things and put labels on the outside. It makes me feel organised. It's a psychological sticking-plaster over my anxieties around mess and disorder.

The Crafts Study Centre is a space full of boxes, and the boxes contain 'documents' that trace the lives and works of important craftspeople. It is an archive; it is a place of safe-keeping for the past, and it does not discriminate in the same way that a collection or retrospective publication might. The archive does not hold preserve just the 'good', the 'valuable' or the 'exemplar', it preserves everything because the archive is not given to subjectivity. It stores evidence of life, ~~whether~~ regardless of qualitative judgment. The CSS has personal photographs, receipts, invoices, shopping lists; private fragments ~~are as~~ might be as important as major works to someone engaged in some kind of research. In an archive, you keep everything, because you never know when someone might find it useful.

In the CSS there are some documents that are described as 'spoilt' or ~~m~~ mistakes in some way. There are tests and experiments; the things you make on the way to making the 'good' work. There is a small box (like a shoe box) containing test-glazed pots by Lucie Rie. It is rough and unglamorous. Rummaging through the tissue paper and unwrapping the tiny vessels feels like you are rifling through LR's handbag, ~~mak~~ or reading her diary. It feels like you are handling things that were never meant to be seen, let alone shown or revered (studied?).

And so it is this box and its contents that bring me to the idea of my own 'archived' work; the issue of containment and control over how future generations might engage with what I have made.

Note: I will never be Lucie Rie and I am not trying to pretend that my work will ever warrant the level of preservation and scholarship that her practice ~~deserves~~ enjoys. But in a way that's part of the point: I don't expect my work to be archived in the Crafts Study Centre or its equivalent, and so I am doing archiving it myself, or at least some of it. I am archiving the bits that will never be written about because they ~~are remain as~~ are fragments of ideas, which I can't or won't continue. They are my equivalents to LR's test glazes, because these are test ideas. They have informed or stimulated other ideas, but in themselves they remain unfinished. ~~(incomplete, unresolved In fact there are many words to describe their state of these ideas, unfinished, incomplete, unresolved, mistaken, aimless, exhausted, forgotten – Why are these ideas not resolved?~~

For various reasons, these ideas have stopped, or rather I have stopped ~~think~~ working on them. They all present me with problems of one sort or another, but because they are still hanging around it is difficult to stop thinking about them. But there are a lot of other things to think about right now, and these ideas are

just taking up valuable head-space. I'm going to 'finish' them all, by putting them all in neat little boxes with numbers and labels so they can be archived and forgotten: not for negative, but for positive reasons.

I am not going to explain what's in these boxes. I was going to ~~write~~ ~~show~~ include short texts describing the ideas behind each boxed collection of fragments: a kind of catalogue of unfinished ideas. But I decided that if these pieces are to be archived – by me, for the purpose of future study of my practice – then perhaps it is better to ~~leave~~ show them unexplained. I will just tidy them up and categorise them so as to be clear about their status (unfinished works). Otherwise they might be archived as “paint tests” or “chain making” or “wax modeling” when in fact my craft isn't really defined by its engagement with materials *per se*, but with the ideas that drive a material engagement in the first place. I like the idea that someone might be interested enough in these bits of ideas to try to unravel what they are about: to use them as a resource for exploring what I make. For now though, the short explanations will be kept separate from the boxes, as a piece of 'finished' work in their own right (a catalogue of the incomplete archive). My hope is that once these half-formed ideas are boxed and put away tidily, I ~~might~~ can move on to new ideas, without the nagging sensation that there's something else I am supposed to do first. I don't know ~~what~~ how Lucie Rie would feel about her test-glazes being archived for posterity, nor ~~how~~ Edward Johnston about his 'spoilt' calligraphy works. But it feels appropriate somehow, to archive the tests, experiments, accidents and mistakes of practice, rather than ~~the~~ things that are ~~perfection~~ and complete.

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