

ALL PART OF THE PROCESS

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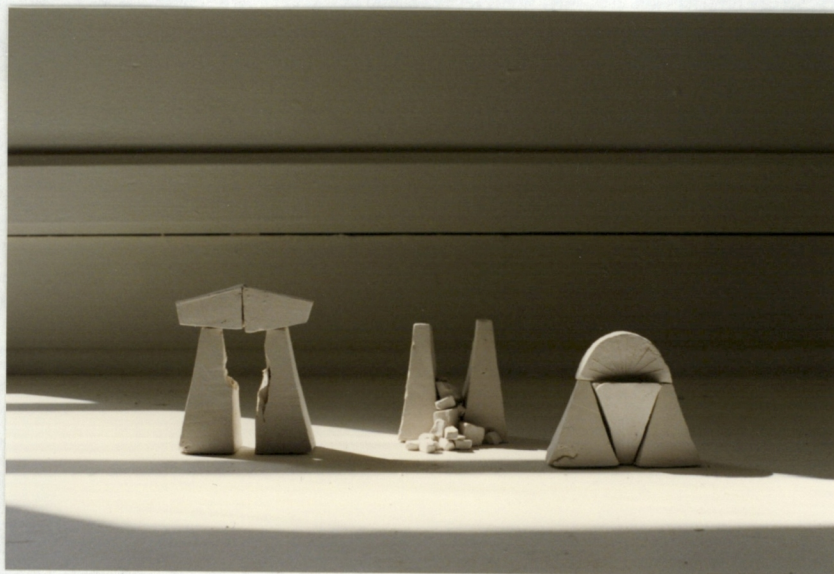
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INTRODUCTION

This report is a record of twelve months work. It describes a series of physical, mental and creative processes which have culminated in the work represented here. I have dealt with these processes sequentially to illustrate my work practice, from the work's inception through the making and finishing followed by a reflection upon the finished pieces and the recognition of influences and references. In the section "the work" these processes are dealt with in relation to individual pieces.

THE WORK CONTRACT

The following are my aims as stated in my work contract in early 1990; My primary goal for 1990 is to create a body of work incorporating ten or so major ceramic pieces for an outdoor exhibition. The theme for this exhibition will be the interplay between man and the natural environment. Sculptural works up to two metres high combining architectural and naturalistic elements will reflect a variety of related sub themes. These include "the interdependence between man and nature, man's impact upon the environment, the awesome power of natural forces cycles of change, decay and regeneration, the transience of civilizations and progress (in human terms). The exhibition will be site specific and will reflect upon the venue in both physical and temporal terms. Most of these aims have been achieved. Some divergence has occurred with respect to the themes and concepts manifested in the final pieces and this will be explained later. Similarly working methods and techniques have diversified and these subjects will also be dealt with.

CONCEPTS

My overall aim in any piece of work I make is to provide visual stimulation and to induce or provoke a response. This is the case in these works. Several factors contribute to the arresting presence of these pieces: their size form and texture, the behaviour of the material and contrasts of texture and surface all play a part in capturing the viewers attention. The positioning of individual units into groups and their orientation feed the suspicion that these objects may have a purpose and adds to their enigmatic quality. Enigma and mystery are qualities I enjoy. It is enough that people wonder what these objects are, why they are here, are they old or new, are they dissolving into the earth or emerging from it, why are they positioned thus? The two main elements of my work, nature and artifice, can work well in combination to stimulate such questing. Time is a concept which has been developing in my work. It is represented as the passing of time in the eroded surfaces of the pieces, in the stratification and in the orientation of certain pieces to take advantage of shadows as the day progresses as well as the more obvious connection in the sundial pieces. Decay and regeneration are concepts which are also utilised. Other more recent conceptual developments encompass ideas of enclosure (buildings and caves) shelter, protection and passage. In my work, fairly broad concepts are kept in mind initially and these are allowed to develop into more specific themes and personal responses as the work progresses and on its completion.

WORKING METHOD

This years work has followed a fairly typical pattern and approximately corresponds with the intentions laid out in the work contract: small works, research and preliminary activities in the first six months with the making and resolution of large works in the second half of the year.

My current work is the result of a development of ideas originating in 1987. This work is most obviously characterised by an increase in size and with that, a divergence of concepts and technique. In 1987 I began making small, intimate sculptures combining artificial and natural elements as part of a set project in my Bachelor of Arts(Visual) in ceramics. After hosing, tearing, stretching, cracking and generally torturing the clay, I became fascinated by the variety of effects that were possible. Many works evolved around a particular texture or feature. These works were no larger than fifteen centimetres high and drew the viewer into their miniaturised worlds. An increase in size in 1988 (up to one metre high) allowed me to introduce to the work elements from my surroundings in full size. This made the work something potentially real, *actual* rather than *representative* or imaginary. I used architectural mouldings to give the impression that the work was a fragment of something larger. I also explored the use of internal spaces. At the beginning of the PG1 course I did a series of small works (two of which were exhibited in the national ceramics award). In these I was attempting to achieve more movement than was previously expressed in my work. On a small scale it is possible to achieve a fragility and activity which in larger pieces is technically difficult. These early works were made as small sculptures rather than as macquette. I also tried using impressions of real objects as an indicator of scale but most of these works were unresolved sculpturally.

At the end of the first semester I entered the Queen Beatrix Floriade sculpture competition. After submitting a proposal (details of the proposal are in the section "The work") I received funding to complete the work. This was a very timely opportunity as it allowed me to commence work on a larger scale. Accompanying the proposal were macquette, photos of macquettes to give a sense of scale and photos of mock ups in some of the proposed sites. About twenty macquettes were made and three of these were submitted. When the proposal was accepted I commenced building moulds for the work. In simple terms the work was made in two units, each constructed using a rammed earth method of packing fairly dry clay into a mould then firing them. This method allowed me to make large solid objects which could then be carved or eroded (full construction details are given in the next section).

At this time I decided to research sundials in order to find out how to calibrate the face or dial itself. As an offshoot of this I found myself fascinated by some of the history and diversity of man's attempts to record and observe the passing of time. To find out more about construction methods I visited the University of Canberra School of Architectural Design and obtained some information about rammed earth, adobe and concrete construction. I was referred to Steve Burroughs, a professional rammed earth architect, and gained further information. In my search for information I stumbled across a book called Ceramic Houses in which adobe and rammed earth houses were being fired from the inside. This gave me the ambition to make works

which the viewer could occupy or at least be surrounded by. This has been realised in some of the work completed.

After the Floriade piece was completed I decided to base my second semesters work on some of the ideas and forms touched upon at that time. All of these works were made using the same two units and concepts include those previously mentioned. This second semester has been a time of making, trying variations of surface, texture and colour and juxtaposing the units in different ways to create new work. Some drawing was done during this time but I found it of little use in the production of my work. I tend to use small works and macquettes to develop my ideas with drawing being used as a type of shorthand for ideas and technical challenges.

CONSTRUCTION AND FIRING

As stated, all works are made from the same two basic units, the arch and the base. They are cast in wooden moulds.

A Moist clay is tipped into the top of the mould and compacted with a length of steel pipe in layers about thirty cm thick.

The trapdoor in the base is to release a sandbag placed in the mould before assembly. This leaves the base hollow and speeds drying.

B The mould sits with the wide top uppermost. The missing side forms a rectangular block for stability. After filling, the mould is turned upside-down and the piece is removed by releasing clamps and removing one side. For the tiled faces of the arch forms, the arch mould is set up as pictured and slip (runny clay) is poured in to a depth of one to four cm. Controlled cracking of the slab is achieved by scoring it when the clay is still wet, smoothing over (or applying other textures) and allowing it to crack along these weaknesses during drying. The pieces are later glued to the face of the work using tile adhesive.

After removing the mould (while the clay is still quite damp) the pieces are carved. Techniques employed include eroding with water, trowelling and smoothing of surfaces and carving with a crowbar or pick. The development of each piece occurs mainly at this time. Chance plays a part in my work and I respond to changes as they occur. Glazes and other treatments are done at this stage including hollowing out, drilling holes for pins and perforating arch forms to speed drying.

FIRING

Because of the size and weight of these works, I had to build a kiln to facilitate firing them.

C The left hand wall of the double brick base was removed for each firing. The pieces were lifted in with a forklift.

D The top of the kiln consisted of two ceramic fibre boxes in steel mesh frames. These were stacked onto the base to enclose the work. Four LPG burners were used and the pieces were fired to 1200 C (bottom of kiln) and 1000 C (top of kiln) in about twelve hours when dry. During firing is another time when transformation can occur.

A
base. mould



↑ trapdoor

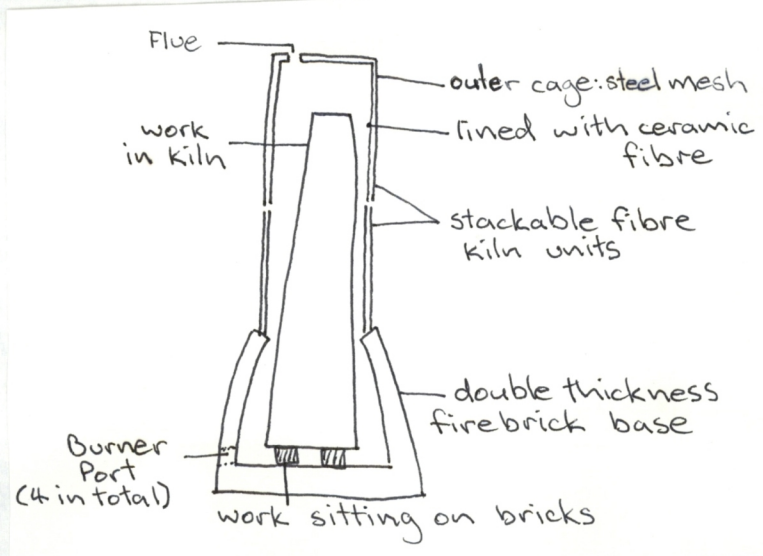
B
arch mould



C
kiln base



D
kiln section



Glazes mature, surface effects can be effected by the path of the flame through the kiln and uneven firing can be used to bend and stress the superheated clay. Arch forms were gas fired in a shorter kiln available for use. On completion the works are assembled using steel pins, mortar and tile adhesive.

THE WORK

Solace (floriade sculpture)

I include here the floriade sculpture proposal, artists statement and construction details.

Floriade sculpture proposal 1990

Dear sir,

Enclosed are three macquettes showing variations in form and treatment, upon which the finished work will be based. Also enclosed are six slides showing a mock up in situ plus macquette photographed to increase their apparent size.

I propose a free standing sculpture incorporating themes of change, cycles the sun the earth and the seasons.

The piece will be calibrated on the northern face (flat side of macquette) and can function as a sundial. The overall form of the piece alludes to trees, flowers and growth. The eroded southern face reflects changes in the earth.

The work will be made of stoneware clay and will be quite durable. The glazed or coloured areas will be permanent however the black may fade to grey with time. Being a rock or earth material, normal erosion and weathering will occur. This gradual change is acceptable as a further indicator of the passing of time. If the work is oriented to work as a sundial, mosses and slime can be promoted to grow on the shady rough side. The will not deteriorate appreciably within ten years.

Site selection: While northern orientation is necessary for the functioning of the sundial, it is desirable rather than imperative that the sundial functions.

Several sites suit the work aesthetically. All sites except site 5 allow northern orientation although I feel that the work would look best in either site 5 or site 4.

Construction costs

Due to the hazards of the ceramic process, I feel that it is necessary to construct at least three full sized works in order to make a final selection for exhibition. To do this I require the following: clays environment..\$500 glaze materials \$100 paving \$100 pipe \$100 perlite \$100 plaster \$50 making the total around \$1000.

Artists statement Solace

This piece is designed to interact with the sun and represents themes of cycles and change.

The light side, facing north, is marked as a sundial. The sun shines directly down the large radiating cracks at each respective hour. A smaller interpretation lies in the centre/top of the piece. The shadow of the upper edge of the central projection indicates local mean time on the face. The length of the shadow cast by the piece itself will lengthen in the winter months and shorten in summer and could act as a sundial in conjunction with the ground plane. The heavy texture and cracks will catch the light and change in appearance as the day passes.

In the form of the piece there is an apparent upward emergence from the ground yet the piece is cracked and crumbling, a cycle of building up and breaking down. The layers in the piece represent building up over a period of time. It was made using rammed earth technique where clay is packed into a mould in layers of varying colour. It is then fired to 1200C parallelling rock formation in nature.

The somewhat landscaped (stone wall) appearance of the base sections and the regularity of the upper cracked part suggest contrivance and unify the piece with its surroundings through the common theme of cultivated nature.

Why solace? There is something refreshing and comforting about natural things, the sun on your back or a vase of flowers. This work is a passive reminder of those things, the earth, time passing and cycles continuing. Hopefully it reflects a positive philosophy, accepting change, as it must and revealing potential for regeneration.

Construction: The base section was cut into blocks after casting to improve portability. The faces of the top section were tiled slabs. Colour variation is due to addition of manganese dioxide (darker areas) and temperature difference in kiln. Blocks were mortared together on installation, set onto a concrete slab and supported internally with steel pipe.



Solace 2.4 m

(floriade sculpture)

'Threshold'

This piece will be positioned as a passage from the gallery to the sculpture garden. As such it is on the threshold to my exhibition. The theme of the piece is difficult or restricted passage. The space between the two halves is big enough to allow passage however the unwelcoming rough inner surfaces, the suggestion of closing in (aided by the slight inward curve of the two units) and the confrontation brought about by the dark tones and upright attitude of the piece makes one tentative. The intention is that the work displayed beyond will entice people to pass through to the outside.

Construction

Base units were removed from the mould while still moist. Glaze (manganese dioxide,40% eckalite20% soda bicarb40%) was sprayed onto outer surfaces. Central cavity was carved out with a pick and crowbar. Glaze (copper carb40% borax40% soda bicarb20%) was dribbled down centre gully. During firing the side of one piece blew out due to rapid heating, the effect was quite dramatic and the piece was still sound so the other half was modified to complement it. Colour variation from top to bottom is due to temperature variation and helps unify the piece.



'Split'

This piece also speaks to me of passage, albeit restricted or barred. There is a visual ascent and descent in the work from the dark heavy base up through the central V shape to the light airy top. This, and the shape of the piece, suggest continued upward movement beyond the top of the form or, conversely, down into the dark recesses of the base. The total effect is that the viewer is confronted by the work and is visually led up and over or down and under it. The outer two faces of the work are fairly plain, the horizontal banding leads one around the piece and back to the central crevice.

Construction

A thick wire was laid across the base of the mould before assembly. After construction this was pulled upwards with a forklift to cut the piece in half vertically. The central V was carved out and eroded with water to the texture of a washed out ravine. Banding includes white brick clay, red brick clay and additions of manganese dioxide.



'Split'

'Chamber'

There is a sense of secrecy manifested in this work. This is due to the enclosed formal arrangement of the units, the slight inward lean and the cave like cavity within. It is an enclosure, a hybrid of cave and room. The flat horizontal planes on the inside could be seen as seats suggesting a meeting place where the occupants are forced to confront each other. The individual units are unified by form, their positioning and the geological effects they display.

Construction

The central cavity was hacked out with a pick when the clay was soft. The first unit bent during firing due to uneven heating so I duplicated the firing in order to bend the other units, although one would not submit.



'Sync'

This piece is a development of the floriade sculpture. It is based on sundials and the main theme of the piece is the passing of time. The macquettes pictured are part of the group made for the floriade piece and illustrate how my work develops. The actual pieces have some tiled faces and show a sequential deterioration from tallest to shortest units. It speaks of time in a short period (hours in a day) and in much longer periods (deterioration over years). It can be set up to function as a sundial but this is not necessary.

Construction

Previously described techniques were used including tiling and erosion. Top section is held in position with steel pins.



'Sync' macquettes

The exhibition

The ground will be covered with sand. The work will be displayed within the sculpture garden surrounded mainly by white walls. The area will be bright, stark and bleached, a graveyard of ancient architecture. The individual groups will be unified by form and surface similarities, particularly through the banded layering. The close proximity of the pieces and the surrounding walls will make the exhibition itself a containment.

REFERENCES AND INFLUENCES

One of my main influences is ancient architecture. Enigmatic objects with a history that is often elusive. The understandable part of the history of these objects is 'what has physically happened to them'. The less comprehensible part of their history lies in their possible origins or purpose.

I gain inspiration from natural things such as geological features and enjoy employing the forces of nature in my work.

I see direct references to such ancient monuments as Stonehenge, megaliths and others. There is a shrine-like quality in some of the pieces and this may be an area for development.

CONCLUSION

I am pleased with developments over the past twelve months. While facing new technical challenges and expanding the nature and size of my work, I have arrived at this time with a group of works which should combine successfully in a unified exhibition.

Participation in the floriade sculpture competition gave me some public exposure and feedback. It has led to my future participation in an exhibition at Cuppacumbalong in April 1991. Similarly, exhibiting in a staff/student show in Tamworth and exhibiting work in the National Ceramic Award both represent gains in experience.

I intend to continue making large and small works and hope to develop some of the ideas that have evolved over the past year.