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Bachelor in Design

Millions Of Vases Without Any Flowers

An artistic and theoretical research into the decoration and form
of the ceramic vessel

MESTRADO EM ARTE E CIÊNCIA DO VIDRO E DA CERÂMICA

Universidade NOVA de Lisboa | Universidade de Lisboa

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Abstract

This thesis investigates ceramic vessels as functional objects, as surfaces for decoration, and as works of art in their own right. Through historical analysis, it traces the shifting meanings of decoration: from a marker of wealth and status, to a narrative tool in antiquity, to a rejected element in modernist aesthetics. Postmodernism reintroduced decoration as a meaningful visual language, allowing artists to reclaim ceramics as a medium for cultural and personal expression.

Alongside surface treatment and ornament, the thesis explores the vessel's interior and its capacity for containment. The interior space of vessels has historically shaped both function and meaning, influencing perceptions of volume, enclosure, and relational dynamics between inside and outside. This aspect of ceramics is examined through historical and contemporary examples, highlighting how openings, volume, and internal architecture contribute to a vessel's identity beyond surface decoration.

My own practice operates within this broader context, using the vessel as both foundation and framework, accommodating elements of traditional ornamentation and sculptural experimentation. I decorate my vases by building up shapes in clay and applying Terra Sigillata with meticulous burnishing, merging surface and form so that decoration is not an additional layer but an intrinsic quality of the object. In this thesis, I question the very notion of "decoration" and examine the shifting boundary between ornament and sculpture: when does an embellishment remain decorative, and when does it transform the object into something sculptural?

Ultimately, this research reflects on ceramic decoration as both a historical practice and a contemporary artistic medium, situating my work within this evolving dialogue. The pieces created during this process, and presented in the accompanying exhibition, are the culmination of both artistic exploration and critical reflection undertaken throughout this thesis.

Keywords: ceramics, vessel, decoration, art, Terra Sigillata

Resumo

Esta tese investiga os vasos cerâmicos enquanto objetos funcionais, como superfícies para decoração e como obras de arte autônomas. Através da análise histórica, traça os significados mutáveis da decoração: desde um indicador de riqueza e estatuto, a uma ferramenta narrativa na antiguidade, até um elemento rejeitado na estética modernista. O pós-modernismo reintroduziu a decoração como uma linguagem visual significativa, permitindo aos artistas reivindicar a cerâmica como um meio de expressão cultural e pessoal.

Para além do tratamento da superfície e do ornamento, a tese explora o interior do vaso e a sua capacidade de contenção. O espaço interior dos vasos moldou historicamente tanto a função como o significado, influenciando a percepção de volume, de encerramento e das dinâmicas relacionais entre interior e exterior. Este aspeto da cerâmica é examinado através de exemplos históricos e contemporâneos, evidenciando como aberturas, volume e arquitetura interna contribuem para a identidade de um vaso para além da decoração superficial.

A minha prática insere-se neste contexto mais amplo, utilizando o vaso como base e estrutura, integrando elementos de ornamentação tradicional e experimentação escultórica. Decoro os meus vasos através da construção de formas em argila e da aplicação de Terra Sigillata com polimento meticuloso, fundindo superfície e forma de modo que a decoração não seja uma camada adicional, mas uma qualidade intrínseca do objeto. Nesta tese, questiono a própria noção de "decoração" e examino os limites fluidos entre ornamento e escultura: quando um adorno permanece decorativo e quando transforma o objeto numa forma escultórica?

Em última análise, esta investigação reflete sobre a decoração cerâmica tanto como prática histórica como meio artístico contemporâneo, situando o meu trabalho neste diálogo em evolução. As peças criadas ao longo deste processo, e apresentadas na exposição acompanhante, são o culminar da exploração artística e da reflexão crítica desenvolvidas ao longo desta tese.

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Introduction

When I left the Netherlands—where I had previously studied Advertising—to move to Lisbon and study ceramics (and glass), I had no intention of making ceramic vessels, let alone of creating “artworks.” My initial plan was simple: learn the craft, master it, and start a business selling ceramic utensils or glass jewelry. Once I got my hands on the material, however, I quickly forgot about this commercial plan and became drawn to the many possibilities a vase could offer.

During my first week, I started making a coiled vase. The first attempt was rough, the second only slightly better, but by the third and fourth, I could see the vases gradually improving. To hide the imperfections of the uneven surfaces, I sculpted little hearts, stars, and teddy bears onto my vases. At the time, I wasn’t thinking about decoration in any deeper sense—these small additions were simply a way to cover flaws and provide a starting point for glazing later. Until recently, I had mainly associated art with drawing and painting, so for me these vases were not objects in their own right but canvases, much like a painter’s canvas, yet without the confrontation of an empty white sheet. None of the vases were made with a predetermined glazing plan in mind; instead, the shape of the vessel would lead me to ideas, and I would pick up a bisque-fired vase, mix a glaze or underglaze, and begin drawing on its surface.

Now, more than two years later, I have not stopped making vases, and I feel that I could make a million more without growing bored or uninspired. My approach has changed, but it still carries traces of my early days in ceramics. The vase remains the foundation of my work and the starting point for what comes next. Over time, however, my continuous engagement with the vessel led me to think more deeply about its meaning and its relationship to decoration. This desire to understand the vessel beyond my own intuitive use of it became the starting point for this research.

Through my practice, I have come to realize that the ceramic vessel carries deep significance in human history. On one hand, it has practical importance—it was an essential tool for survival, used to store water, food, and other necessities. The vessel always contains something, even if today it is only the shape of the air inside. On the other hand, decoration has turned vessels into artifacts of lost civilizations. Through the patterns and images painted or carved onto clay, we can glimpse the lives of people from another time—their stories, beliefs, and daily existence preserved on these surfaces. When engaging with ceramic practice, and especially with vessels, one inevitably becomes part of a long timeline of human making that began thousands of years ago.

Since I began writing this thesis, my work has continued to evolve alongside it. There has been a shift in aesthetics, and what began as a conceptual way of working rooted in plastic aesthetics has gradually transformed into a more derivative process. Each vessel I create is influenced partly by external sources, but more strongly by the vessel that came before it. My practice has become a continuous chain of visual and material responses. For example, when I made a vessel that reminded me of a musical instrument, it sparked an exploration of the relationship between the ceramic vessel and sound. When I began adding cylinders in a specific order, this led to an association with a weapon, and the following piece became a response to that idea.

My practice functions as a form of visual thinking, and the joy I take in making these pieces is quite profound. It is a deep satisfaction that keeps me returning to the studio, curious, as each vessel reveals something new. The research within this thesis has helped me to reflect on and

contextualize my work, and has deepened the insights that emerged through studio-based practice.

Methodology

For this thesis I used a hybrid research methodology to reflect its dual focus: it combines theoretical and historical research with studio-based, artistic inquiry. With the aim to further deepen the meaning of my own practice and to examine the ceramic vessel not only as a functional and aesthetic object, but as something that has significant meaning across time and cultures.

The research began with an investigation into the ancient history of the ceramic vessel. This was essential in order to fully grasp its longstanding importance in human civilization, and to ground my own work in that historical continuity. Traditional techniques such as slip painting, currently known in the field of fine arts as Terra Sigillata, and smoke firing (reduction firing), which I have incorporated into my recent practice, carry with them a legacy of material and symbolic knowledge. Exploring this history played an important role in my choice of form and surface treatment of the vessels.

Alongside form, decoration emerged as a key area of investigation. Having always decorated my vases—though less evidently in recent works—I wanted to understand whether decoration has historically been seen as mostly aesthetic, or if it has often held deeper symbolic, narrative, or cultural significance. This led to an inquiry into the evolving meanings of ceramic ornamentation over time.

From there, the research transitioned into Modern and Postmodern periods, particularly the rejection of decoration in Modernism, and how this resulted in the marginalization of ceramics as a serious art form. Because ceramics has traditionally been closely tied to ornamentation, this shift had profound consequences for how decorated vessels are viewed in contemporary discourse. Postmodernism's reintroduction of decoration, and its embrace of personal narrative and material expressiveness, created fertile ground for the reevaluation of ceramic vessels.

The next chapters of this research focus on the blurred boundaries between decoration and sculpture. What, in fact, constitutes as decoration? At what point does surface treatment shift from being "decorative" to becoming integral to the object's sculptural identity? These questions directly inform the reading of my own work, in which some pieces might clearly be labeled as decorated, while others resist that categorization much more.

Throughout this research, I have studied the work of both modern and contemporary artists such as Magdalene Odundo, Anne Kraus, Ai Weiwei, Betty Woodman and others, to understand how their practices have contributed to the (re)definition of the ceramic vessel, and to broader conversations around surface, meaning, and identity.

In addition to visual analysis, the theoretical component of this thesis draws upon literature on ceramics, decoration and art theory. Key references include E.H. Gombrich's *The Sense of Order* (1979), which offers a psychological and historical view of ornament; Philip Rawson's *Ceramics* (1984), which delves into the symbolic and formal depth of the vessel; and the writing of Garth Clark, who has been a very important figure in elevating ceramics within contemporary art discourse.

Chapter One: History and meaning of (decorated) Vessels

1.1 The Crucial Role of the Vessel in Everyday Life

To understand why the vessel has served as a canvas for intricate artworks for so long, we must look at the origins of ceramic vessels. Ceramic pots were initially created out of necessity, primarily for storing vital resources such as water and food.¹ Their forms naturally evolved to suit practical needs: closed at the bottom and open at the top, not too big or heavy to be able to carry, and equipped with a flat base for stability. Depending on their shape, vessels could serve different functions, such as storing water, food, oils, ashes, flowers, or being used for cooking over an open fire. Until recently vessels were assumed to have come up with the rise of agriculture but it was the hunter gatherers who were the first potters. The earliest known ceramic vessels, dating to around 20,000 years ago, were discovered in a cave in China. They were produced during the Last Glacial Maximum, the coldest point during the last Ice Age, predating the agricultural revolution by thousands of years.²

Beyond mere functionality, ceramic vessels quickly took on cultural significance, playing a crucial role in rituals, trade, and identity. In many ancient societies, vessels were more than just storage containers; they were used in religious ceremonies, burial rites, and as offerings to the gods. Like in ancient Egypt where pottery was placed in tombs to accompany the deceased into the afterlife.³

In ancient Greece, ceramic vessels became closely tied to social and artistic life.⁴ The deep-rooted significance of pottery is reflected in the elaborate designs painted on Greek *amphorae*, *kylixes* and *kraters*, which depicted mythological tales but also scenes of daily life, from athletic competitions to *banquets*.

Because pottery was often so lavishly decorated one could say that, historically wise, it reflected a culture's wealth and prosperity. In early or struggling societies, resources were primarily allocated for survival, leaving little room for ornamentation. However, as societies grew wealthier and more organized, they invested more in decoration, which became a cultural marker of prosperity and specialization. For example, In China, the finely crafted Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) porcelain reflected not only the empire's economic power but also its technological innovation. Garth Clark, an art critic who has published many books about contemporary ceramic arts, states that ornamentation can therefore be seen as a symbol of societal stability, wealth, and sophistication.⁵

Herbert Read (1893-1968), a famed British art critic, claimed in his book *The meaning of Art* (1931) that, of all the arts, pottery is the surest guide to a nation's character.⁶ Although less relevant in contemporary discourse today, historically there is some merit to this. Read based this on the idea

¹ Philips Rawson, *Ceramics* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 3.

² Xiaohong Wu et al. *Early pottery at 20,000 years ago in Xianrendong Cave, China*, *Science*, 2012, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.1218643>.

³ Joralyn Glenn, *Preparations for a good burial: Funerary art in Glencairn's ancient Egyptian gallery*, *Glencairn Museum*, 2023. <https://www.glencairnmuseum.org/newsletter/2019/6/3/preparations-for-a-good-burial-funerary-art-in-glencairns-ancient-egyptian-gallery> (Accessed: 28 September 2025).

⁴ Rawson, *Ceramics*, 176.

⁵ Smithsonian American Art Museum, "The Decorative Impulse: Panel Discussion," March 28, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0isp3H1Dumo>. 44:00

⁶ Herbert Edward Read, *The Meaning of Art*, (Penguin Books 1949), 33.

that pottery is often made without conscious artistic ambition, widespread across cultures, and typically created by ordinary people. These characteristics are for example visible in traditional Nigerian pottery. There, vessels serve both practical and ceremonial functions—used for storing food, liquids, clothing, or personal items, as well as in rituals and communal life. What stands out, not just in Nigerian but in many African pottery traditions is the repetition of form. Often, potters specialize in a single type of vessel, refining the same shape over years—such as a brewing pot or a cooking pot. This process of repetition and refinement leads to forms that are so functionally resolved that they no longer require improvement. As the famous potter Micheal Cardew (1903-1983) observed it; it is precisely this stripping away of the unnecessary that gives such pots their power—not making them less expressive, but more. The result is pottery that may seem simple, but carries deep cultural resonance, shaped by generations of embodied knowledge and use.⁷

1.2 Functional Decoration

Some forms of decoration originated from practical functionality rather than purely aesthetic or narrative purposes. A good example are once again found in Nigerian vessels, that of the Nupe people, which were thus studied by Micheal Cardew. The Nupe people, residing primarily in Nigeria's central region along the Niger River, are renowned for their rich cultural heritage and artisanal craftsmanship in various crafts, including woodcarving, weaving, and pottery. Cardew moved to Nigeria in the 1950s, driven by a desire to explore indigenous pottery techniques and collaborate with local artisans. He founded the Abuja Pottery Training Center, where he worked closely with Nigerian potters⁸. The pottery of the Nupe people are famous for its elegant forms and intricate surface designs. And while the surface of these vessels may appear decorative, Cardew observed that they actually serve a practical purpose⁹. The engraved patterns enhance grip, making the pots easier to handle, especially during everyday use. This is particularly beneficial in hot or humid climates, where a smooth surface could become slippery. Additionally, the engraved lines increase the surface area of the pot, influencing heat absorption or dissipation depending on the conditions (See figure 1). This principle is not exclusive to ceramics but applies to many materials—similar to why heat sinks or radiators often have ribbed or grooved surfaces to improve heat transfer.

From a different perspective, functional requirements may attribute to decoration on vessels, as they naturally create visual contrasts in the shape. Franz Boaz writes about this in his book *Primitive art* (1922).¹⁰ We see a lot of examples from pottery where the neck of a vessel or the handles, are often the decorated part. They are a natural difference from the rest of the vessel and this brought upon an intervention to the otherwise smooth or plain surface of the vessel. Look for example at the pottery vessels from costa rica in figure 2, As Franz Boaz observed:

We conclude that a fundamental, esthetic, formal interest is essential; and also that art, in its simplest forms, is not necessarily expressive of purposive action, but is rather based upon our reactions to forms that develop through mastery of technique.¹¹

⁷ Jane Perryman, *Smoke Firing*, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), 14

⁸ Christopher Benfey, "Michael Cardew: The Potter as Great Modern Artist," *The New Republic*, May 11, 2021, <https://newrepublic.com/article/113282/michael-cardew-potter-great-modern-artist>.

⁹ Smithsonian American Art Museum, Clark, "The Decorative Impulse: Panel Discussion," 50:00.

¹⁰ Franz Boas, *Primitive Art*, (Dover Publications; 1955). 57.

¹¹ Boas, *Primitive art*, 57



Figure 1. Nupe Vessel from Nigeria, ceramic and pigment, 1900 - 1950,. The Laura T. Magnuson Endowment, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/61532/vessel>



Figure 2, Pre-Columbian Pottery Olla Jar, Costa Rica, Gresgent city auction gallery, https://www.crescentcityauctiongallery.com/auction-lot/pre-columbian-pottery-olla-jar-costa-rica-with_41A4698B89

1.3 Chinese Porcelain: Uniting the imaginative reality with the pot's physical presence

In East Asian ceramics, particularly Chinese porcelain from the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) dynasties, the vessel was never just a surface for decoration—it was an integral part of the artwork itself. In his book *Ceramics* (1984), Philips Rawson uses the concept of pictorial space to explain how Chinese ceramic decoration interacts with the form of the vessel rather than simply resting upon it.¹²

Pictorial space refers to the illusion of depth within a two-dimensional artwork, achieved through techniques that manipulate composition, perspective, and spatial organization. In Western art, particularly since the Renaissance, pictorial space has been structured using linear perspective, where objects recede toward a vanishing point to create a realistic sense of depth confined within the artwork's boundaries.

Chinese pictorial space, however, functions differently. Rather than using a fixed perspective system, Chinese artists employ layered compositions, shifting viewpoints, and open-ended spatial arrangements. Elements are often arranged in a way that suggests continuity beyond the physical edges of the artwork. This approach is particularly evident in ceramic decoration, where painted imagery does not conform to an enclosed space but instead interacts with the vessel's three-dimensional form.

On a Chinese vessel, painted scenes do not merely sit on the surface—they flow with the pot's curvature, sometimes even vanishing over the edges, implying that the imagery continues beyond what is visible. A dragon painted on a jar, for example, does not remain confined within a framed section; instead, it coils around the surface, its body shifting with the vessel's shape creating a sense of movement that exists beyond the static form.

¹² Rawson, *Ceramics*, 183.

Rawson describes this as more than just a visual technique—it influences how these pots were perceived and handled. Because the decoration was not bound to a strict frame, it gave the painted subjects a kind of independent presence, allowing them to exist in a way that felt spatially real. He explains that this approach does not attempt to create a self-contained illusionistic world within the decoration. Instead, it acknowledges and embraces the physicality of the pot, merging the imaginative reality of the painted imagery with the tangible presence of the ceramic form itself. “For it brings intimately together the imaginative reality of the painted figure and the actual reality of the world which the pot inhabits as an object.”¹³

1.4 Narrative in Ceramic Decoration

Decorated ceramics also serve another realm; they have long been vehicles for storytelling, with the most prominent examples found in the vase paintings of ancient Greece and the majolica vessels of the Italian Renaissance. I should note that it is with 'singular' decoration, not sequential, that defining it as 'decoration' becomes more complex. In historical context, however, the reference to decoration is often used and I will continue to do so, but I will further explore the term 'decoration' and its implications in Chapter 4.

Greek narrative ceramics, reaching a peak of sophistication between 520 and 300 BCE, showcased scenes of reality and myth, much like literature and theatre. The scenes depicted on these vessels actively tell a story, sometimes even incorporating text as seen in figure 4. In some cases, words emerge directly from the characters' mouths like speech bubbles, similar to the comic books of today.¹⁴ This to make sure the viewer can know exactly what is going on in the image.

The intricate drawings on these vessels were made possible by the refined clay slip used in their production, now known as Terra Sigillata. Unlike glazes, the refined slip that was used was very high in alumina, due to the high kaolin content from the local clay. Therefore they were able to make detailed imagery that would not flow during firing. This technique enabled ancient Greek wares to achieve their remarkably complex visual storytelling. And even though these decorated pots were actually used in greek society, “they were meant to be read as the primary function”.¹⁵ as observed by Paul Greenlagh.

It was only during the Renaissance that narrative ceramics truly experienced a revival. Plates and vessels were once again adorned with elaborate depictions of religious tales, often accompanied by text. These painted scenes carried the weight and visual depth of oil paintings, a transformation made possible by the newly invented majolica technique which involves applying a tin-based glaze that creates a smooth, opaque white surface. This base layer functions as a primed canvas, allowing painters to work with colored pigments that fuse into the glaze during firing, resulting in richly



Figure 3. Plate depicting Jupiter and Semele, Urbino Majolica, School of Xanto, 1535-1540, Musée de Sevres, Paris. Photo by the author.

¹³ Rawson, *Ceramics*, 187.

¹⁴ Paul Greenhalgh, *Ceramic, Art and Civilisation*, (Bloomsbury Publishing 2020), consulted online, chap 1.11

¹⁵ Greenhalgh, *Ceramic, Art and Civilisation*, chapter 1.11

detailed and vibrant imagery as seen in figure 3.

The shape of the pot was recognized as more than just a functional object; it served as a medium for narrative, conveying stories and ideas. Even when these vessels were put to practical use, their imagery was intended to be “read” and interpreted by viewers. The invention and refinement of techniques such as Terra Sigillata and majolica glaze aligned naturally with this narrative impulse: they allowed vessels to carry not only contents but meaning.

Ceramics, as a material, has ensured the survival of these narratives. Fired clay outlasts its makers, and much of what we know about the ancient Greek world comes from the images left on their pots. There is something powerful in this endurance: objects once handled and used in daily life have become some of the most important storytellers of history. Which remind us that vessels are never just containers, they hold memory, culture and knowledge, preserving moments long after its original context has faded.



Figure 4. The Exekias Amphora, Exekias, 540-530 BC, The British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1836-0224-127

Chapter two: The fall and rise of decoration; Modernism and Postmodernism

2.1 Socialist ideals in Modernism and the Arts and Crafts movement

By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, ceramics became highly politicized, serving as a platform for political commentary and social critique. Mugs, plates, and jugs were used to spread revolutionary messages, carrying political symbols like the insignia of the French Revolution. But also the act of decorating a pot, or choosing not to, became a political decision. During the Industrial Revolution, two opposing artistic movements emerged: the Arts and Crafts Movement (which later influenced Art Nouveau) and Modernism.

Before exploring the role of ceramics within these movements, it is essential to examine their foundations. Despite standing in stark contrast to one another—Arts and Crafts embracing ornamentation, figuration, and decoration, while Modernism sought to strip all this away in favor of simplicity and clean lines—both were, interestingly enough, rooted in the same ideological soil: Socialism.

For the Arts and Crafts movement was a direct response to the industrial revolution. The movement rejected mass production and the industrial division of labor. They favored traditional handcrafted objects and honored the skill of the maker. William Morris (1834–1896), one of the ‘fathers’ of the movement and a Marxist, was inspired by medieval styles using flora and fauna in a patterned style. Morris strove to unite all the arts within the decoration of the home. A close friend to Morris was ceramist William De Morgan (1839-1917) who applied these ideals in his work.¹⁶

Despite their socialist ideals and stance against the Capitalism of the Industrial Revolution, The Arts and crafts movement ended up being loved by just the people they were against. The labor-intensive nature of handcrafted work made it expensive, making them very popular with the



Figure 5. William De Morgan, late 19th century, England. (C.265-1915, C.261-1915, C.268-1915). Victoria and Albert Museum, London https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/william-de-morgan-an-introduction?srsId=AfmBOop8dCQwSZ2vAsZqTfOT5jTrFPQmbdR3R_c0zkkZao-qOuq88eY

¹⁶ “William De Morgan – an Introduction · V&A,” Victoria and Albert Museum, n.d., https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/william-de-morgan-an-introduction?srsId=AfmBOorUDguwe1Bbz1kqtUjL8F_JOOkTU6jsAhHk-RTZt-lbahWMrmiU.

Bourgeoise, rather than the working class. Even Morris himself acknowledged this irony, describing his creations as "bibelots for the filthy rich."¹⁷

From the arts and crafts movement then came Art Nouveau. Which sought to make an artwork out of any objects rather than just sculpture and painting. It envisioned a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or "total work of art," where even the most utilitarian objects, like ashtrays or cutlery, were designed with artistic intention and decorative detail. Much as what Morris wanted as well, however art nouveau was already fully adopted by the rich.

In total contrast, Modernism embraced industry and the efficiencies of mass production. It sought to strip away unnecessary ornamentation in favor of simplicity and utility, aligning its values with accessibility and functionality. Now that the arts and crafts movement started catering the rich, Modernism positioned itself in stark opposition to the bourgeoisie and their embrace of Art Nouveau's ornate decadence.

Someone that heavily influenced the Modernist movement was Adolf Loos (1870–1933). For him, ornament meant regression, something that culture needed to outgrow. His essay, 'Ornament and Crime' (1908), compares excessive decoration with cultural stagnation, advocating instead for the purity of form and the stripping away of the superfluous.¹⁸

In another text he wrote called *the poor little rich man* (1900), he describes someone trapped within the perfection of a fully designed space, feeling like a "corpse living within his own monument."¹⁹ His idea: too much design can overwhelm, rather than liberate the individual. Although 'the poor little rich man' feels anti bourgeois, his attack on decoration and ornamentation reveals deeper Eurocentric biases. Particularly in his view that decoration is linked to primitivism and regression.

2.2 Ceramics' Position within Modernisms philosophy

Modernism and ceramics have had a successful yet uneasy relationship. While there are notable examples of modernist ceramics, such as the work of Lucie Rie—whose refined forms, experimental glazes, and precise surface details combined modernist restraint with the intimacy of the handmade—ceramics as a field has long been closely tied to decoration. Because Modernism largely rejected decoration in favor of abstraction and functionalism, this created tension between modernist ideals and ceramic practice. In its early years, Modernism sought to strip art of excess, embracing efficient, mass-produced designs that avoided costly craftsmanship. This ideology posed a particular challenge for ceramics, and especially pottery: once stripped of its handcrafted and decorative qualities, it risked being reduced to nothing more than a "mere" utensil.

*The vessel posed a different kind of problem. It was too complex, loaded with too much meaning, was too domestic, evoked too many associations both in the past and present. It was simply too messy for Modernism to deal with as an art form.*²⁰

¹⁷ Mark Del Vecchio and Garth Clark, *Postmodern Ceramics*, n.d. (Thames & Hudson, 2001), sec. introduction: Meaning and Memory: The Roots of Postmodern Ceramics, 1960-1980.

¹⁸ Del Vecchio and Clark, *Postmodern Ceramics*, sec. introduction

¹⁹ Adolf Loos, *The poor little rich man*, (Neues Wiener Tagblatt, 1900) <https://ccafurniture.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/loos.pdf>

²⁰ Del Vecchio and Clark, *Postmodern Ceramics*, sec. introduction

As Garth Clark argues in *Postmodern Ceramics* (2001), ceramics were largely excluded from the modernist movement. Modernism, as the dominant artistic ideology of its time, pushed ceramics into the margins, forcing it into the hands of anti-modernists like Bernard Leach (1887-1979), who in turn positioned it outside the realm of fine art. Leach, a major figure in studio pottery, rejected Modernist detachment from craft and instead insisted that ceramics should remain accessible to everyone, reflecting a socialist ethos. In *A Potter's Outlook* (1928), Leach questioned the direction of ceramic art, writing:

What have the artist potters been doing all this while? Working by hand to please ourselves as artists first [...] we have been supported by collectors, purists, cranks or 'arty' people, rather than by the normal man or woman [...] Consequently, most of our pots have been still-born: they have not had the breath of reality in them: it has been a game.²¹

There is some merit to the argument that ceramics, particularly vessels, should not be categorized strictly as "art." Their deep historical significance is rooted in their functionality, their accessibility to all social classes, and their place in everyday life rather than in the exclusive space of fine art. The moment a ceramic vessel is elevated to "art," it risks becoming an exclusive commodity, accessible only to those who can afford it.

However, Leach himself was not immune to this contradiction. While he championed ceramics as an art for the common man, his own success and recognition led to his works becoming highly valuable. Ironically, the very pieces that were meant to be used by the "normal man or woman" became expensive collector's items—objects too precious to fulfill their original purpose, just like the early works from the arts and Crafts Movement and Modernism.

It should also be acknowledged that ceramics, despite its durability, remains an inherently fragile medium. When a celebrated artist creates an object intended to be held and touched by the viewer, there is always the risk of breakage. A single slip, and the piece may shatter beyond repair.

Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), one of the artists I most admire, consistently sought to make art that was part of life itself, rather than confined to the white walls of galleries and museums. For this reason, he created works that invited physical interaction, such as his *Play Sculpture* (c. 1965–1980), or the natural stone slide he designed for the Venice Biennale in 1986. While Noguchi did work with ceramics, when producing works meant to be played upon and engaged with by the public, he chose instead to employ sturdier materials and larger dimensions.

Currently, *Play Sculpture* is on display at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (until October 2025). What makes this installation work is that the museum allows the work to be climbed and played on by children and the public. Such an invitation is rare in the context of an institution that normally emphasizes preservation and untouchability. To deny this interaction would contradict Noguchi's philosophy, for whom the integration of art into daily, lived experience was central. It should be noted though, that the work on view is not the original from the last century, but a 2017 replica produced by



Figure 6, *Play Sculpture*, Isamu Noguchi, 1965-1980, Replica from 2017) <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/isamu-noguchi-in-de-rijksmuseumtuinen>

²¹ Isabella Smith, "Wheel of Fortune – the Life and Achievements of Bernard Leach," *Apollo Magazine*, August 5, 2020, <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/bernard-leach-centenary/>.

the Noguchi Foundation in New York.²²

Ceramics may be too fragile to both function as public art and as 'fine art' at the same time. Reproduction offers a possible solution yet reproduction carries its own implications—often lowering the perceived uniqueness and value of the object, shifting it from the realm of "art" into that of "design".

Paul Greenhalgh, in *Ceramic, art and civilization* (2001) provides another layer to this discussion by framing ceramics within the larger historical context of reproduction. He argues that ceramics have always existed in the realm of mass production, long before industrialization. Unlike other artistic disciplines that emphasize singularity, ceramics inherently carries the DNA of reproducibility.

"While strictly speaking every pot up to the Modern period is uniquely made, in many respects, the speed and skill of the makers, coupled to the need for uniformity in most areas of production, means that each pot is a three-dimensional print, a thing produced in quantity with its *raison d'être* in dissemination. [...] While our industrial age has given us the ability to exactly reproduce goods in all materials – reproduction was at the philosophical core of 20th-century culture and impacted on all areas of artistic production – ceramic effectively had this characteristic five thousand years ago."²³

If Modernism embraced industrialization and mass production, then the inherent reproducibility of ceramics should have aligned well with its values. Yet, as Clark argues, ceramics—particularly the vessel—was largely excluded from Modernist discourse. This suggests that Modernism's issue with ceramics was not simply about mass production but rather its historical and cultural baggage—its associations with decoration, domesticity, and tradition. Modernism selectively embraced industrialization—favoring materials that symbolized modernity while rejecting those tied to tradition. Even though ceramics had long been mass-produced, its historical continuity and cultural specificity made it resistant to Modernist ideals of abstraction and universality. This exclusion ultimately set the stage for Postmodernism, when artists began to re-engage with ceramics and specially embraced its tradition in figuration.

2.3 Postmodernism— Decoration back in style.

One of the most significant contributions of Postmodernism to ceramics was lifting the long-standing ban on decorated surfaces. Decoration came back in style as people recognized decoration as a meaningful language. Unlike Modernism, Postmodernism embraced pattern, narrative, and historical references. Clark states, in the same work mentioned above, that in doing so, it liberated ceramics from its marginalization and allowed it to reclaim its deep connection to decoration and visual storytelling. No longer constrained by the fear of being seen as "low art," ceramics flourished in its full complexity, incorporating humor, historical literacy, and references to the decorative arts. Clark also points out that this shift took place alongside a broader cultural change where appropriation was introduced and normalized; just as Modernism responded to the industrial age, Postmodernism developed in response to the electronic age. This shift was accompanied by the rise of mass media and image culture, particularly television, which shaped a

²² Mascha Bruinen, *Klautekunst*, De volkskrant, 25 of august, 34.

²³ Greenhalgh, *Ceramic, Art and Civilization*, chap 1.10

generation accustomed to processing visual information quickly. Within this context, appropriation and the mixing of visual references became common and widely accepted.²⁴

One artist who created ceramic works filled with visual and literal information is Anne Kraus (1956-2003). She used ceramic to convey a narrative as much as in ancient Greece and the Renaissance. She took domestic items like cups and teapots to paint personal and sometimes heavy images, accompanied by small texts, as can be seen in figure 7.

She catches viewers of guard, not expecting these works to carry such weighty content. Furthermore, the viewer is drawn deeper into the narrative because in order to read the vessels, one has to hold them close, bringing them into one's personal space'. Comprehending the work becomes an act of intimacy and even vulnerability. By the time one discovers where the piece is headed, it's too late to back out.²⁵

Narrative ceramics, especially when incorporated into domestic objects, create an inherently intimate experience. However, the same that happened to Bernard leach and the early ideals of Modernism and the arts and crafts movement, commodification steps in and changes order. As her recognition grew, her teapots were no longer held, no longer brought close to the eye and hand. Instead, they became objects to be viewed from behind glass—preserved, admired, but no longer touched.



Figure 7. Anne Kraus, Teapot , 1995, Chazen museum of art, <https://chazen.wisc.edu/collection/26055/the-rainbow-in-the-fountain-teapot/?cp=4&countries=>

²⁴ Del Vecchio and Clark, *Postmodern Ceramics*, sec. introduction

²⁵ Garth Clark et al, *Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Ceramics: The Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio Collection*, 2012, 192, <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB09185482>.

Anne Kraus' ceramics are undoubtedly works of art, yet they are almost always discussed alongside the term 'decoration.' The only apparent reason for this is that her imagery is painted onto a domestic object—a teapot, for example. If the same images were made on paper or canvas, they wouldn't have the connotation of decoration. But by choosing a perfectly formed, functional teapot (as seen in figure 7) as her surface, she 'decorated' it with her art—transforming what could just have been an object, maybe a piece of design, into an artwork.

Chapter three: Filling the surface

3.1 Repetitive patterns

In the postmodern era, the question of whether a vessel is 'decorated' is not so simple. To some, the term might feel reductive—perhaps even offensive—while to others, it just describes a working method. For me, I have always thought of decorating as adding to, or covering something that already exists independently. Decoration allows me to establish a sense of ownership over objects and spaces, I decorate my apartment for the same reason. This is especially felt when making ceramics, vases in my case. Without decoration, a vase can be understood mainly through its function, whereas decoration creates the possibility for it to be read as more than a utilitarian object. Whether my works are "decorated" will be discussed in later chapters of this thesis, but some of them certainly follow basic decoration habits with symmetry, sequence and flower motifs.



Figure 8, Cloud vase, 2024, Raku fired earthenware, photo by the author.

E.H. Gombrich writes about the tendency to create patterns in his book 'The sense of order' (1979); he describes decoration, that as in repetitive patterns, as our way to stand out against the "pleasing medley of the natural environment"²⁶. The contrast of the natural (disorder) and the artificial (order) is what grabs our attention. This doesn't mean that order does not exist in nature, take a sea urchin or a maize cob, but it always draws our attention. However, what initially grabs our attention can also lead us to assume that everything has already been seen at a glance. With order comes predictability. Gombrich comes back to this in defense of decoration's symmetrical patterns by saying that if surfaces were full of novelty they would overload our system and with repeating pattern we can focus on the larger forms.²⁷

The *Clouds Vase* (Figure 8) is a good example of decoration through familiar patterns and images. The clouds are arranged within square frames that, in turn, cover the round surface of the vase in an orderly way. In Figure 9, Wolfgang von Wersin's table of ornamental relations shows how a basic ornamental form can generate variations through systematic transformation. The *Clouds Vase* could easily be situated within Wersin's "cross-linked sequence," where motifs are repeated and connected across a surface. When I made this vase, I did not consciously think of historical

²⁶ E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Phaidon 1979), 5.

²⁷ E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, 5

Table demonstrating the internal affinity between different ornaments and the relation of a basic ornamental form to possible variations.

Note: The ornaments shown as variations (in the three lower rows) are merely examples of many possible variants of the same order.

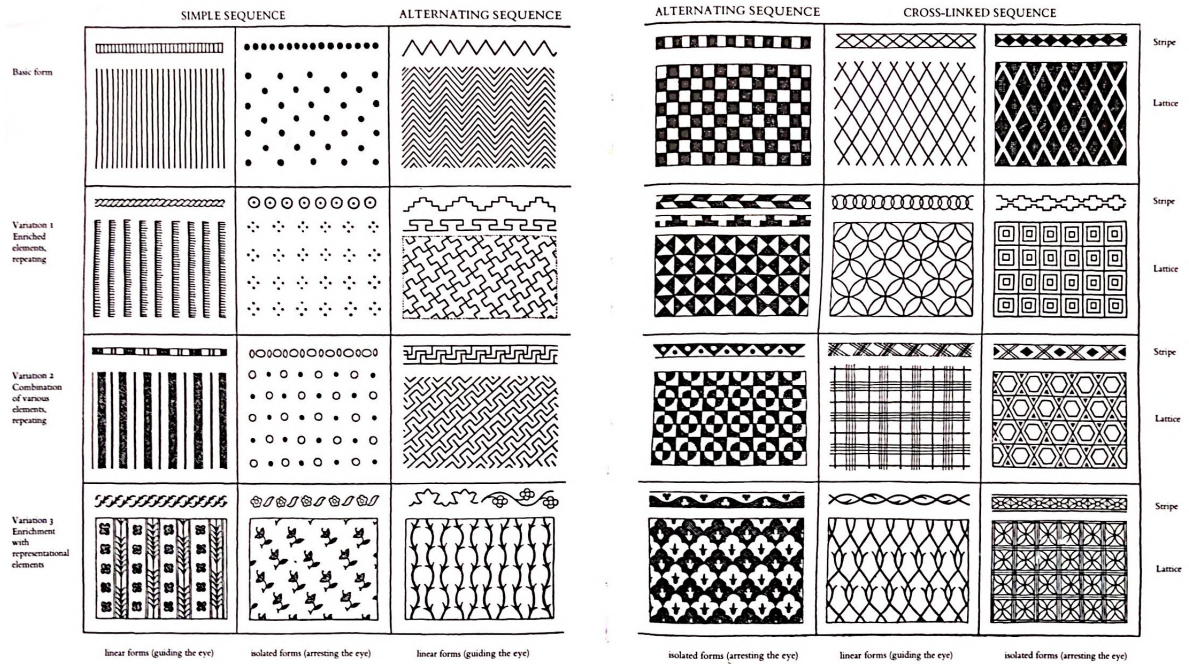


Figure 9, table from Wolfgang von Wersin, 1953, as cited in E.H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, 1979, 76.

systems of decoration, though it is possible that such patterns lingered in my subconscious. At the same time, decoration as such operates within a limited spectrum—its fundamental categories are finite, which explains why ornament from different cultures often appears strikingly similar. Wersin's taxonomy, with its twenty-four genera and species of ornament, reminiscent of the Linnaean system, demonstrates this recurring foundation across cultures and traditions.²⁸ In the case of the *Clouds Vase*, the focus is not on its pattern but on adapting the Raku firing technique in a different way. Raku is traditionally associated with unpredictability, where cracks and glaze effects emerge spontaneously. However, I aimed to introduce a sense of control by aligning the borders of my lines, the elements that formed the pattern, with the contrast between glazed and unglazed surfaces. This way, rather than relying on chance, the firing process accentuated the lines, making them a more deliberate part of the design.



Figure 10, Plastic vase #1, glazed earthenware, 2024, Photo and edit by the author.



Figure 11, Plastic vase #2, glazed earthenware, 2024, Photo and edit by the author.

²⁸ E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, 74

Just like Gombrich stated that with repeating pattern we can focus on larger form; The pattern provided a foundation that allowed me to shift the focus toward material transformation. The ‘innovation’ lay not in the motif itself but in how the process was manipulated to create a different effect. The same applies to my *Plastic Vases*, I felt comfortable using a basic sequential pattern and floral motifs because the goal was to explore material qualities, specifically, making the vase resemble plastic (See figure 10 and 11).

3.2 The curved canvas

In many ways, a vessel is an expanded and, maybe even improved, version of a canvas, exceeding the limitations of a flat surface. While a sheet of paper or a stretched canvas confines imagery within its rigid, rectangular borders, a vessel offers a continuous, flowing surface that allows for a more dynamic interaction between form and imagery.

Beyond its durability—lasting significantly longer than paper or canvas—the vessel’s three-dimensionality invites the artist to engage with its shape. Its curved surface is not just a passive background but an active participant in the composition. The round edges can shape and distort drawings, lending actual volume to forms that would otherwise remain flat. The vessel’s circular form enables images to extend beyond a single viewpoint, wrapping around and connecting across the surface, creating a seamless narrative rather than an isolated image.

Additionally, the shape of the vessel introduces a natural interplay between revelation and concealment. Unlike a canvas, where all imagery is immediately visible, a vessel invites movement—requiring the viewer to turn it in their hands or move around it to fully grasp the whole composition. Some elements are highlighted at first glance, while others remain hidden, only to be discovered later. This interaction between form and decoration allows the vessel to hold multiple perspectives within a single object, enriching its storytelling potential as I talked about in chapter 1.4.

Honey Bunny, in Figure 12 demonstrates how I used the curved surface to shape how the bunnies were ‘falling off’ or ‘hanging off’ the wall of the vessel. As a scene in motion that has been paused for eternity. The curve allowed me to compose how the bunnies were ‘coming through the surface of the vessel’ in a playful way.



Figure 12, Honey bunny, Reduction fired earthenware, 2024, Photo by the author.

Garth Clark adds to the argument of the vase as the improved canvas with the concept of ‘implied space’²⁹. This highlights how pottery exists in real, three-dimensional space, unlike drawings or paintings, which are confined to representational space. Pottery remains deeply tied to daily life, and its implied space reflects how we use and relate to it. When we interact with a pot, whether by placing it on a table, filling it with flowers, or simply just observing it, we engage with its shape and volume. Just like Anne Kraus intended her ceramics to be held closely. The connection

²⁹ Clark et al., *Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Ceramics: The Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio Collection*, 41.

between the practical and symbolic transforms the vessel into something that links the tangible world with the stories and meanings we place upon it.

3.3 Unfolding stages of transformation

In ceramics, when working with glaze, transformation unfolds in separate stages. The form must be complete before the surface can speak. Glaze is applied only after firing has fixed the three-dimensional structure in place. I cannot rely on glaze to “save” a misshapen vase, as glaze functions as a two-dimensional language laid onto an already completed three-dimensional body. In my early works, where I would simply pick up a bisque-fired vase and start painting on it, I was fully working within this separation of the process.

Works such as the pixelated vases shown in Figure 13 are grounded in this separated way of working. These pieces move through three stages of transformation, which can be divided into three distinct elements: the vase, the adornments, and the coating layer. Each layer stands apart from the others. The vase is formed first as a standalone object. Once the vase is finished, characters and fruits are added, existing within their own visual and thematic space. It is only the shared material that connects them to the vessel. Finally, the coating layer—the glaze—is applied. In this case, a checkerboard pattern covers both the vase and its adornments. The glaze unifies the piece into one and we are only reminded of the separated working process when we take a closer look and see the small misalignments, where the glazed pattern does not respond with the shape underneath.



Figure 13, Pixelated vases, Glazed earthenware, 2023, Photo for the Binómio project for XVI Biennial international de ceramics artística de Aveiro 2023.

To come back to *Sense and Order*, E.H. Gombrich describes decoration as a two-step process—framing and filling³⁰. Framing refers to constructing the field to be ornamented, while filling is the actual act of decoration within that space. In my work, like with the pixelated vases, this process would extend into three steps: framing, framing/filling, and then filling. The first frame is building the vase itself, which I "fill" by adding shapes to it, like fruits and characters in this case. However, these additions also serve as a secondary frame, creating new surfaces for the final stage of filling, which I did through glazing. In my pixelated vases, especially the red one, the glaze filling does not conform to the frame. Instead, I applied the square sequence without precision and taking into account the geometry of the underlying shapes, leading to chaotic points where squares merge into triangles. However, this lack of conformity is naturally absorbed within the checkerboard pattern itself, like Gombrich's states "*the chequerboard makes the phantom visible because it neither contradicts nor fully confirms our visual forecast*"³¹. Because of the high contrast and repetitive nature of the checkerboard, our perception wavers between different interpretations. Sometimes, the squares seem to shift, flicker, or even create subtle "phantom" shapes that aren't really there.

When we look at Eun-Ha Peak's work in Figure 14, we find a strong example of Gombrich's counter-concept to framing and filling: that of *linking*.³² Gombrich illustrates this idea through lace or wrought iron, where the decorative element also serves as structure. Peak's bowl demonstrates how ceramics, too, can embody this principle. Although this particular example is made from polymer clay, it could have easily been made from ceramic. The vessel is constructed entirely from repeated smiley-head motifs, which both decorate and sustain its form. The bowl could not exist without these elements; they are not an applied embellishment but the very architecture of the piece.



Figure 14, Eun-Ha Peak, Polymer clay, 2021, Uploaded on Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/eunhapaek/>

³⁰ Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, 75.

³¹ Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, 131.

³² Gombrich, *The Sense of order*, 75.

Chapter four: Form and function

4.1 Potential to function, intended as art

Ceramics as an art form occupies a unique space at the intersection of function and art. At its simplest, a ceramic object—such as a water jug—serves a practical purpose. The moment I create a ceramic water jug, I've made an object defined by its function. If I choose to paint decorations on it, the water jug remains functional but now might serve more as a piece of design or art. When I go further, adding three-dimensional characters or abstract features that distort its ability to pour or hold water (easily), the object crosses a threshold from utility to artistry, no longer confined by the practical demands of a water jug.

Betty Woodman is an example of an artist whose work illustrates the evolving relationship between form and function. While she began her career creating functional ceramic objects, her later works became increasingly sculptural. Yet, many of her pieces retain the essence of functional objects like vases, cups, or pots. These vessels have the potential to be functional. Technically, they could still serve their original purpose, but they are valued and intended as art (see figure 15). The same thing goes for Allison Britton, a British ceramist, and what she described as prose and poetry in an article from 1982;

Pots with double presence is thus about making vessels that both are vessels and that are about vessels at the same time. In other contexts, Britton has used the terms 'prose' and 'poetry' to describe this distinction. The prose consists of the narratives about everyday actions, while the poetry has to do with the artistic and contemplate. The double presence arises at the point where these two aspects interact and tension occurs.³³



Figure 15. Betty Woodman, *The Ming sisters*, 2003, The Met, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/493597>

³³ Clark et al, *Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Ceramics: The Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio Collection*, 122.

This tension between form and function—the vessel as both a practical object and a site of artistic expression—is not unique to contemporary Western artists like Woodman or Britton. It is a question that resonates across cultures, though its framing often shifts with context. In the West, artists frequently explore this duality as a form of play or critique, intentionally distorting its utility, as I do myself. Yet in other cultural contexts, such as traditional African ceramics, the distinction between art and function is not necessarily foregrounded in the same way.

Take, for example, the Nigerian Nupe vessels, where decoration is not just ornamental but deeply tied to function: carved and patterned surfaces help grip and keep the water inside cooler. These vessels are not seen by their makers as artworks destined for display but as essential objects of daily life, embedded within social and cultural contexts. Yet this raises an important question: what exactly is “art”? In the West, the label is often tied to context—whether an object is placed within a gallery or museum, carries a high monetary value, or is declared as such by its maker. By contrast, for the Nupe people, vessels remain firmly rooted in functionality, their artistry inseparable from their role in daily life.

When British potter Michael Cardew arrived in Nigeria in the 1950s and established the Abuja Pottery Training Centre, he shifted a paradigm. Traditional Nigerian vessels were reframed as “art,” now valued for the Western market and no longer meant for practical use. Cardew taught Nigerian potters, among them the now-celebrated Ladi Kwali (1925–1984), to use the wheel and experiment with glazes, encouraging her to merge traditional hand-built forms she had mastered since childhood with Western techniques³⁴. As a result, some of her vessels, once lightweight and utilitarian, became heavier and impractical, yet they captivated Western audiences. Her works now reside in museums and private collections and became widely recognized.

The Abuja Training Centre can be seen as a form of cultural imposition, rooted in colonial attitudes of that time that redefined African pottery through a Western lens. Vessels once central to Nigerian domestic life were transformed into commodities tailored for European buyers. Yet, within this context, Ladi Kwali became an internationally recognized artist, as did Magdalene Odundo, who apprenticed at the Abuja Centre after being encouraged by Cardew. Odundo’s vessels draw inspiration from utilitarian African forms but assert themselves as sculptural works in their own right.

Although Cardew’s work in Nigeria has been widely critiqued for its colonial imposition, a deeper issue lies in how African artists have long been marginalized by Western frameworks. As highlighted in an article on contemporary South African ceramics in *Ceramics Now*³⁵, ceramic works by Black South African artists have often been classified as functional or ethnographic—valued primarily as cultural artifacts rather than as expressions of contemporary artistic innovation. This framing risks reducing African artists to cultural preservationists rather than recognizing them as active contributors to global artistic discourse. As scholar Ronnie Watts observes of South African ceramic vessels, “The fine arts were framed through a Eurocentric lens, dismissing indigenous artistic traditions as ethnographic rather than innovative or expressive.”³⁶

³⁴ “The Abuja Pottery & Michael Cardew: A Colonial Review,” The Art Wanderer, n.d., <https://theartwanderer.co.uk/abuja-pottery-michael-cardew-colonial-review/>.

³⁵ Monica Monaia, “Shaping Visibility: Reflecting on Representation in South African Ceramics,” *Ceramics Now*, June 17, 2025, <https://www.ceramicsnow.org/articles/shaping-visibility-reflecting-on-representation-in-south-african-ceramics/>.

³⁶ Ronnie Watts, *A Contextual History of South African Ceramics of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries* (Doctoral dissertation, 2020) Cited in; Monaia, *Shaping visibility: Reflecting on Representation in South African Ceramics*

To conclude, the domestic and functional, aspect of ceramics is on one hand that what makes it so intimate and interesting. Yet on the other hand that what has historically contributed to its marginalization of non western artists who seek to present their work as a form of art within an art world dominated by Western frameworks.

4.2 The vase

As Philips Rawson discusses in *ceramics*;

*It is not at all surprising that so many wares by recent potters working under the impress of a pure aesthetic theory are 'vases' ; for vases are meant, generally speaking, only to be looked at, not used in the hands, perhaps not even to contain flowers.*³⁷

Within Pottery, I've found that vases are the most natural starting point for a piece that can balance between being functional and being an artwork. Unlike more utilitarian forms, like teapots or oven trays, vases often have a simple, open form that can easily evolve into an artwork. The vase can be transformed, even into a more sculptural piece, without losing its identity. Vases rarely have the handles, lids, or complex curves that would complicate their function, which makes them an ideal shape within ceramics to transform extensively, while still remaining a vase. Whether through two-or three-dimensional ornamentation, the vase offers a space to gently explore the boundaries of form and function.

Lévi-Strauss' in *The jealous potter* (1988) describes the potter as a demiurge—a creator who imposes order on chaos.³⁸ Clay begins as pure formlessness, holding infinite possibilities, but shaping it into a vessel means selecting one path and discarding all others. This act of creation is "jealous" because it is both protective and restrictive, guarding a single vision while denying every other potential form. Pottery is unique among art forms in this sense: the transformation is immediate and intimate. There is no buffer between material and maker; the hand meets clay directly, and the form emerges from this closeness. Clay itself confronts the maker with its sheer shapelessness. In shaping it, the potter doesn't just create an object but imposes a kind of discipline—one that the vessel then carries forward. Once complete, the container begins to shape and define whatever it holds, extending this chain of constraint from material to object, and finally, to its contents.

In my recent works I am exploring the boundary between a vase and sculpture quite extensively—so much so that I could, at this point, simply choose to close the open top, letting the vase slip entirely into the realm of sculpture. Why I don't do this is because I want the vessels origin to be present, although the vessel is already present when creating a container. Perhaps I, too, am a jealous potter, holding my creations to this label, guarding them from shedding their name. Maybe these vessels long to become sculptures, while I insist they remain vases. Maybe its' a soft kind of possessiveness yet still righteous, as they are my creations.

From the start, I have called my works "vases," even as they have evolved. The term "vessel" might feel more accurate now, reflecting the abstraction in some pieces. Yet the transition has been so gradual—one moment I am making something that clearly qualifies as a vase, the next I am working on a piece that stretches far beyond it. While writing this thesis, I considered referring

³⁷ Rawson, *Ceramics*, 2.

³⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter* (University of Chicago Press, 1988). 177-178.

to these works as vessels, but ultimately decided to keep the term 'vases'. Not only because I find it humorous to label something so strange and abstract with such a simple, familiar word, but also because the term speaks to the core of the piece. Most of them begin as a simple round vessel, fit to hold flowers or to sit on a table in a home. In chapter 5.3 I will come back to this notion.

In the broader sense of ceramic work, the container—whether called a vessel or something else—is always present. Ceramics as a medium inherently creates 'a container'; even when abstraction takes over, the logic of containment remains. In slab-built ceramics, the act of assembling panels inevitably encloses a void. In sculpture made from a solid block of clay, technical needs demands hollowing out the interior, creating an inner space, a vessel within. There are exceptions of course, ceramic tiles being the real outlier, but those also exist in a completely different realm. Ceramics is, more often than not, a vessel. What shifts is only our perception: whether we name it a sculpture, a 'piece', a portrait or 'untitled work'.

We can see the exemplification of this if we take a look at *The Machine* from figures 16 and 17. Every component of the sculpture is essentially a container: the square structure, the fruits rolling out, each holds space within itself. I constructed this piece in the same way I approach my vases: starting with a primary form, in this case a square vessel, and building outward from it. In an abstract way, the process could even be seen as a kind of decoration—beginning with a cube and "adorning" it with additional forms. The language of vessels is deeply embedded in the work, even when it tries to disguise itself as something else.



Figure 16, *The machine*, 2024, Glazed earthenware, View from the exhibition Rinkeli Ränkeli at MONO Lisboa, 2025. Photo taken by Kim da Motta



Figure 17, *The machine*, 2024, Glazed earthenware, View from the exhibition *Rinkeli Ränkeli* at MONO Lisboa, 2025. Photo taken by Kim da Motta

4.3 The coil build vase

All the vases I have made during this master's program were built with coils. The coil-building technique has a slowness to it that allows me to add shapes freely and alter the form as it grows. This is a very different practice from wheel-thrown ceramics. The wheel pulls clay into symmetry with a speed that is needed to make wares for functional use. The precision and balance of the shape feel so natural that any adornment risks becoming an interruption—an attempt to alter something that was already complete.

Coil-built vases, however, often have little or big imperfections as they do not depend the symmetrical order that makes for wheel throwing. Their surfaces reveal irregularities that I can choose to emphasize or conceal. I often wonder how my practice might have unfolded had I spend all my time in learning how to throw on the wheel instead. Perhaps, rather probably, I would not have developed the instinct to build outward, to add things beyond the given form. It was precisely the imperfections of coil-building that sparked my impulse to cover and to transform, the initial shape of the vase.

Figure 18 illustrate the stages of my working process. I begin by constructing a complete vase, which serves as the foundation for all subsequent interventions. Onto this surface, I 'draw' with a metal scratching tool, marking areas where new forms might emerge, much like sketching on a canvas. From there, I build up the surface with small coils, applied one by one. Although I work with a general sketch and a mental image of the composition, the placement of coils often develops intuitively.



Figure 18, process of platform vase #2, 2025, Photo and edit by the author.

The vase in Figure 19 however was created without a general idea in mind. Once the vase was created it unexpectedly recalled the image of a spinning toy, which in turn inspired the addition of bunny legs to its surface as if they were in a spinning motion on a Carnival ride. While my formula usually begins with a symmetrical vessel as the basis, the piece in Figure 20 evolved differently. I started with the familiar circular symmetrical walls, but after reaching a height of around ten centimeters, I allowed the form to shift. In this process, the coil itself became a kind of pencil, enabling me to sketch the shape of clay. Eventually, I re-centered the form at the top, finishing with the traditional neck of a vase. The addition of tubular elements concluded the composition.



Figure 19, process of Untitled vase, 2025, Photo and edit by the author.

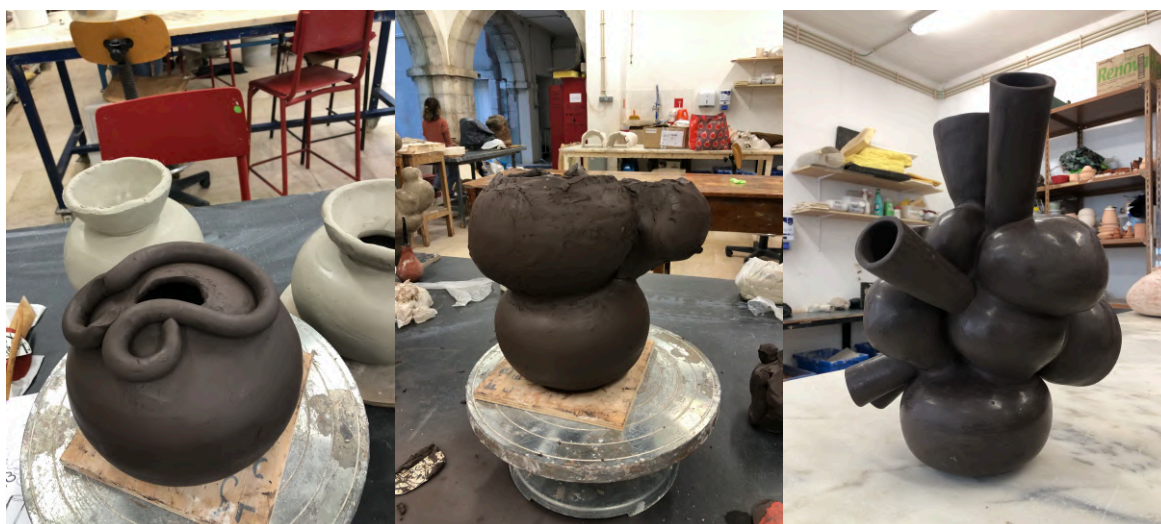


Figure 20, process of Untitled vase, 2025, Photo and edit by author.

It's true that when I work with coils, the shape often begins to take on a life of its own. Maybe it's partly due to a lack of technical control, but whenever I try to coil-build a vase with a specific form in mind, the result almost always turns out different from what I had envisioned. Interestingly, the Pueblo potters—who never adopted the potter's wheel and rely solely on coiling—speak of letting the clay determine its own shape, rather than consciously directing it.

For them, this approach is not about skill or limitation, but about deep respect for the material. Clay is seen as having its own soul, its own will. It is a gift from Mother Nature, and they often describe the act of collecting clay as "picking clay," as one would pick flowers. From their philosophy, the form of the pot emerges naturally, and only then do they choose its decoration, a painted design—one that responds directly to the shape that has revealed itself.³⁹

I can deeply resonate with this, as I often surprise myself with what I have just created, something has 'revealed' itself that I had not envisioned beforehand. It is a unique quality of the material, undeniably present, though one may choose—if indeed one has the choice—whether or not to embrace it.

³⁹ Perryman, smoke fired, 21.

When talking about vessels that are coil build in a very much controlled way, we can come back to look at the vessels from the Gwari tribe in Nigeria. Their pots are almost identical and, as mentioned earlier; perfected throughout the years in their simplicity as observed by Micheal Cardew. They use a shallow calabash and place some clay into it, they beat it into a hollow shape by hand while walking backwards around the pot. The wall is pulled up and from there on thick coils are added while the maker walks around the pot in circles. It takes about 30 minutes to make a 46 cm high pot like this.⁴⁰

While the Gwari tribe is a good example of fastness and precision, the coil technique allows for time and patience in the making of a vessel. Magdalene Odundo, a Ceramist originally from Kenya whose work is represented in various museums and galleries, uses this exact hand building technique, the combination of pinching, pulling and coils, in her own practice, but instead can takes months to finish one piece, keeping the clay wet at all times.

She builds a relationship with the clay piece through making and time. It seems that *time* is the key difference between hand-building and wheel-throwing. Time changes everything: it creates space to understand and listen to the clay piece you're making, to create a relationship between the maker and the piece that will ultimately affect its outcome.

4.4 Hidden within

Clay is a wonderful thing... ceramics, it's almost... it enables us to live within and without the form because you know that it's hollow. You're not actually hollowing and chipping away, you're actually making, embracing, you're enclosing, but at the same time you know that it contains. It's very important, it's very powerful because what is contained inside is manifested by the outside form.⁴¹

Unlike glass, ceramic is opaque, it refuses to reveal its contents. Yet, its hollowness suggests potential: what could be hidden within, shaped within? As Magdalene Odundo suggests; the interior of a vessel manifests through its exterior. This interplay raises the question of whether the form should reveal or obscure the interiority it contains.



Figure 21, Magdalene Odundo, *Untitled*, 1994, terracotta, private collection <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/magdalene-odundo/>

In my own practice, this tension between inside and outside form is always coming back to me. The neck of a vessel, for instance, might narrow so much that the interior becomes inaccessible, unseen, even to me. This creates a certain dynamic: the interior might matter deeply in the making process, yet remains deliberately hidden in the final object. As I work, I find myself asking: how much attention should the unseen interior receive? Is it enough for it to simply exist, or does its presence demand an equal investment of care and time, even if no one will ever see it? If I were to honor its essential purpose, to contain, and the significance of that throughout history I feel that I should. As Rawson discusses in *Ceramics*; the inner space is exactly what differentiates ceramics with sculpture, the latter being his definition of sculpture where material is removed until

⁴⁰ Perryman, *Smoke fired*, 15.

⁴¹, Magdalene Odundo, *3 Works: Magdalene Odundo on Form*. YouTube, uploaded by Gardiner Museum, 17 September 2020, 11:28

the work is 'created'.⁴² However, I usually find myself leaving little attention to the inner space, time management playing an important role in this. Yet this is precisely the advantage ceramics offers: what remains unseen can remain unknown. In a way, the irregularities inside the vessel cease to exist, hidden from both view and perception.

Odundo is aware of the viewer's perspective of only being able to look a little into the dark void. As we look at the vessel in figure 21, the mouth of the vessel is playing with this 'hiddenness' and the view of the spectator. The expanding opening is as Odundo puts it "allowing you in but at the same time it's throwing you out"⁴³. We know, without actually seeing, that the interior walls are smooth and carefully finished. This certainty comes not only from the fact that interior space is a central concept in Odundo's work, but also from the perfection of the outer surface and the vessel's lightness⁴⁴, which implies thin walls. Together, these qualities indicate that the inside, too, must be meticulously refined.

This hidden space has also been explored in the work of Ai Weiwei. The *Ghost Gu* vases (2006) from Figure 22 were inspired by Ming dynasty (1368–1644) porcelain vessels, which featured 'secret' decorations visible only upon close inspection, meant for the eyes of the emperor only.⁴⁵ Weiwei takes this concept further. In his *Ghost Gu* series, all surface decoration is placed inside the vessel, visible only up close from above. Considering that these are works of immense value and usually placed behind a glass wall in a museum, the secrecy is amplified, reinforcing Weiwei's deliberate reference to the exclusivity of the Ming dynasty.



Figure 22. Ai Weiwei, *Ghost Gu*, 2007, Lisson gallery, https://www.lissongallery.com/artists/ai-weiwei/artworks/moon-chests?image_id=3585

⁴² Rawson, *Ceramics*, 192-197.

⁴³ Odundo, Magdalene. *3 Works: Magdalene Odundo on Form*, 17:58

⁴⁴ Odundo, Magdalene. *3 Works: Magdalene Odundo on Form*, 45:33

⁴⁵ Ai Weiwei et al, *Ai Weiwei: Dropping the Urn: Ceramic Works, 5000 BCE -- 2010 CE* (Office for Discourse Engineering, 2010). 101.

The interior space of the vessel, and its inherent secrecy, also parallels the human body and soul. Returning to Magdalene Odundo: as she herself observes, we already describe the parts of a vessel in bodily terms—the neck, the belly, the shoulders. The interior of a vessel, she says, is a sacred, protected space—just like our inner world, invisible to the rest of society.⁴⁶ Many of her works embody this philosophy not only conceptually but also physically. The “belly” of certain vessels even reveals a small bump, resembling a bellybutton. She explains this connection between clay and us humans as the following;

Clay is a fundamental material that has nurtured and sustained life on earth for all time,...I cannot think of any living creature that does not rely on earth (clay) in some way. It is an extension of our human existence and historically the first material to be used to mould and shape objects for function and spiritual purposes.⁴⁷

This parallel between the vessel and ourselves can be seen vastly throughout history and in different cultures, vessels have always had anthropomorphic features. Peruvian ceremonial effigy jars, for instance, present stylized human forms, while Egyptian Canopic jars represented the gods to store and safeguard vital organs in the afterlife. In figure 23 we see a Colombian Burial Urn meant to hold remains of the deceased. Gombrich observes that anthropomorphized vessels often have served as protective features against evil, citing the “efficacy of eyes, limbs or claws as protection.”⁴⁸ This universal tendency is underscored by the fact that anthropomorphic vessels have been found in cultures that had no contact with one another. These examples reflect a universal sensibility: that vessels, through their capacity to contain, embody presence and identity. Gombrich states;

...but if there was no possible contact between cultures which used similar decorative motifs’ we must turn to psychology or the structural analysis of forms and ask ourselves if inner connections of a psychological or logical nature do not allow us to understand such frequent and simultaneous occurrences which cannot possibly be the result of the simple play of probabilities.⁴⁹

Philips Rawson observes that there is often a great seriousness to anthropomorphic pottery and gives us the concept of ‘potter’s space’ That is, the independent presence of a pot that defines and contains its own space.⁵⁰ Anthropomorphic Painted decoration of a pot has an attitude of addressing the spectator. “It looks at him in the posture of another man.”⁵¹ The pot occupies the same space as us but according to Rawson; it is not of this world and rooted in another order of existence;

It discloses and perhaps explains one of the most deeply hidden, pervasive and often very tenuous intuitions about ceramic containers that people have, but can scarcely lift into their consciousness: that the very act of containing creates a special kind of cell or focus in space which is extra-ordinary, maybe even timeless.⁵²

⁴⁶ Khadra Ahmed, “Magdalene Odundo’s Earthly Vessels,” Foyer, March 15, 2024, <https://readfoyer.com/article/magdalene-odundos-earthly-vessels>.

⁴⁷ Ahmed, “Magdalene Odundo’s Earthly Vessels.”

⁴⁸ Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, 171.

⁴⁹ Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, 259.

⁵⁰ Rawson, *Ceramics*, 192.

⁵¹ Rawson, *Ceramics*, 193

⁵² Rawson, *Ceramics*, 193.

In contemporary discourse, the anthropomorphized vessel remains a living practice. Beyond Magdalene Odundo's work, the Japanese artist Akio Takamori has created slab-built vessels that allow him to draw on the inner surfaces before sealing them together. These drawings are only partially visible from above, a gesture that plays with concealment and revelation. His vessels, often given anthropomorphic qualities, echo the intimacy of the body itself (see figure 24).

Takamori explains:

I am mostly interested in the fact that vessels create a space which mentally affects me as 'containers'. Containers give us strong notions of holding, containing, hiding and protection... For example, each person contains his own personality, atmosphere, feelings.⁵³

I share the idea that the universal impulse, or intuition, to decorate containers with anthropomorphic qualities lies in a deeper recognition of the vessel as an analogue for the body, a form that holds, conceals, protects, and reveals. Although I have never given my vases explicit facial features or limbs, I can understand why one might feel an almost inexplicable urge to do so.



Figure 23, *Colombian Burial Urn in the Form of a Female Figure*, 500–1500, Los Angeles County Museum, the Muñoz Kramer Collection <https://unframed.lacma.org/2015/01/26/collection-burial-urn-form-female-figure>

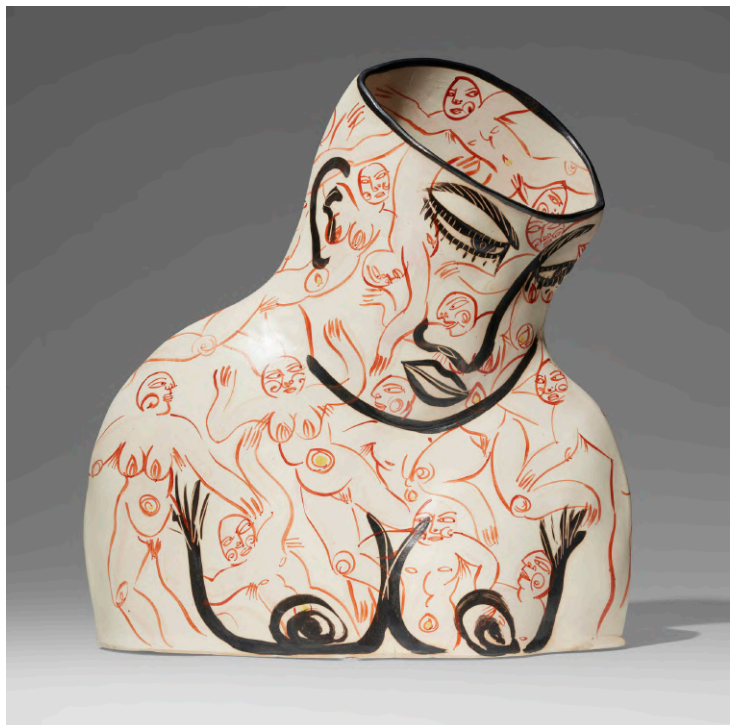


Figure 24, Akio Takamori, *portrait of Ms. S.* 1986, glazed porcelain, Private collection, <https://www.ragoarts.com/auctions/2024/10/post-war-contemporary-ceramics/296>

⁵³ Clark et al., *Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Ceramics: The Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio Collection*, 239

Chapter five: Themes, concepts and surface

5.1 Plastic bunnies

Throughout my work, there has been a strong theme that I have used in most of my vases, even if just a little. There is always a pair of bunny ears or something related to plastic appearing somewhere. I established this habit when I began working with ceramics. I kept a sketchbook where I would draw the outline of a vase and then decorate it with pencils. These sketches often featured bunnies, hearts, and stars. I would then repeat the same process in clay, though I never strictly followed the drawings, always adapting to the inspiration that came during the building of the vase.



figure 25, Sketches from 2022/2023, Photo and edit by the author.

Looking back at these sketches, as some are seen in figure 25, and my early vases, they seem silly and naive, but at the time, I had put thought into them—I just didn't yet have the tools to execute my ideas. What intrigued me most about combining the traditional vase with this plastic characters was the idea of ceramic's legacy.

Alongside tools and artifacts, ceramic vessels have been unearthed as remnants of past civilizations, objects that carry their stories through form and decoration. Today, however, with plastic waste defining our era, it is likely that what we leave behind for future civilizations will not be pottery, but polymers. Greenhalgh highlights this relationship between plastic and ceramics in his book *Ceramic, Art and Civilization*, even describing ceramics as the “*plastic of the ancient world*”.⁵⁴ He notes that its affordability and flexibility have made it a defining material across cultures and time.

⁵⁴ Greenhalgh, *Ceramic, Art and Civilization*, chap 1.10

Like plastic today, ceramic waste was a significant byproduct of its production, with entire landscapes of discarded shards found in places such as Keramikos, Rome, and Jingdezhen⁵⁵. These pottery dumps serve as historical records, revealing the evolution of human civilization through its material culture. In a similar way, plastic will inevitably serve as an archaeological marker of our time.

My ceramic vases, infused with this artificial aesthetic, was a reflection on that idea. However, unlike ceramics, plastic is not designed for permanence, it is mass-produced, thrown away and forgotten. The vase in figure 26 embodies this idea well, it's a similar take as the *Honey Bunny* vase, where I play with the curving of the vase, but much more static. The toy-like characters framing its sides are slip-cast from a mold made from an actual plastic toy. Their dimensions remain identical, their materiality shifts, from disposable polymer to enduring ceramic. They are stacked repetitively atop one another, resembling the relentless cycle of plastic production, a reflection of mass manufacturing. Greenhalgh adds to this idea that ceramics, despite their handcrafted origins, have long been an art of reproduction. Even before industrialization, ceramicists relied on repetition and uniformity to create works efficiently.⁵⁶



Figure 26, Untitled Vase, 2024, Glazed earthenware, View from the exhibition *The paths we cross* at Galeria da Faculdade de Belas-Artes, 2024.

I have also tried to embody the plastic feel in a more literal manner with my *plastic* vases from figures 10 and 11. I sculpted the surface of the vase in puffy flower pockets, trying to create the illusion of an air filled floatable toy. I then used a glossy opaque glaze on top that most closely evoked the surface of a floatable toy, like an artificial version of *tromp l'oeil* ceramics. The puffed features borrow their logic from the inflatable: air-filled plastic forms, but instead are made from a thick layer of clay.

The use of clay also lends itself to exploring the contrast between tactility and the digital world. Ceramics, or clay, is physically present, grounded, and always carries the imprint of touch. The digital world, by contrast, is intangible, existing only on a flat screen that is constantly changing. The two mediums may seem like polar opposites, but that tension offers an interesting angle to work with in clay. Although I haven't explored this in depth, I did make two vase with this concept in mind. It emerged alongside the bunny theme as I revisited nostalgic games from my childhood. In one of those games, a small creature had to jump onto clouds to reach the next 'level.' Translating this into clay, I built the first vase in bulging layers to represent the different levels, with added cloud-like platforms for the bunny-eared characters to climb. The soft, baby-like color I applied with Terra Sigillata provided a final contrast to the digital origins of the idea (see figures 27 and 28).

⁵⁵ Greenhalgh, *Ceramic, Art and Civilization*, chap 1.10

⁵⁶ Greenhalgh, *Ceramic, Art and Civilization*, chap 1.10



Figure 27, Platform vase #1, 2025, earthenware, Photo by Jill Vincentie.



Figure 28, Platform vase #2, 2025, Reduction fired stoneware, Photo by Isabelle Prado.

5.2 The flocculation impulse

In most of my vessels and the ones above, every sphere I added grew directly from the surface itself. Hand-coiling bound me to the slow rhythm of accretion: rolling, pressing, smoothing—the piece expanding gradually, layer by layer. The shape emerged from the vessel's own surface in an intimate and patient process. Yet I could never be certain how each addition would sit in relation to the whole. More than once, after thirty minutes of careful coiling, I discovered that a form was a misfit, disrupting the composition. At these moments I had to undo the whole work that was just done, accepting the loss of time while also recognizing the gain in practice and skill.

When I shifted to using molds and cylinders, like for the *Untitled* vase from figure 29, my process changed tempo and opened up another kind of freedom. Unlike the continuous accretion of coils, the mold process is always divided: I first build the vessel as usual, then separately produce a batch of bubbles or cylinders. Only afterward do I begin composing. I try them in different constellations, shifting their positions until something clicks and a structure emerges. They gather, cluster, and “precipitate” onto the vessel's surface.

As viewers interpret artworks, they are invited to guess, infer, and fill in gaps that may be intentional or accidental. These additions create points of personal connection between the viewer and the work—what might be called “reading commitments,” interpretive keys that shape the understanding and appreciation of what is seen. My vases, where contrasting forms emerge yet remain autonomous, invite this free contribution. They suggest an *etymology of form*: a sense of origins and encounters. When looking at my body of work as a timeline, this etymology

becomes even clearer: each vase directly inspires the next, morphing into one another. I too, was often surprised by the shapes that emerged and by the connotations they carried for me.

The viewer is invited to question what draws these shapes towards the dominant form, the vase. In works such as my floor for the *Cumulus* project for the Ceramic Bienal de Aveiro 2025 (see figure 30), this attraction becomes more visible, here my process begins to echo the natural, or technically provoked, phenomenon of flocculation. The separate clay “bubbles” wait, suspended in their own interval of time, until I bring them together and the fragments become one. Like colloidal particles in clay slip, they unite into a fragile structure after agitation ceases, drawn by the attraction of negative face charges and positive edge charges. They maintain their individuality, so we do not call this a dissolution but a suspension.⁵⁷ Flocculation marks the beginning of aging in the emulsion or suspension.

In ceramics, the term flocculation often describes the visible gelling of a glaze or clay slurry that would otherwise remain fluid. By adding a flocculant—vinegar, Epsom salts, or calcium chloride—what was thin and runny becomes thickened, even thixotropic: able to stay suspended, applied in heavier layers, or resist dripping.⁵⁸ This phenomenon has its counterforce: deflocculation, a process I am perhaps even more familiar with, as it is central to preparing clay slip for plaster molds and for making Terra Sigillata, the clay slip that I use on the surface on my works. Whereas flocculation gathers and thickens, deflocculation disperses and separates. In Terra Sigillata preparation, a deflocculant is added so that the smallest particles repel one another and remain in suspension. When applied, this produces the smoothest and most polished of surfaces. My vases



Figure 29, *Untitled Vase*, 2025, Reduction fired earthenware, Photo by the author.



Figure 30, *Process of my Cumulus contribution*, 2025. Photo by the author.

⁵⁷ Tony Hansen, “Flocculation,” n.d., <https://digitalfire.com/glossary/flocculation>.

⁵⁸ Tony Hansen, “Flocculation,”

are born from these two opposing forces: flocculation in the growth of form, and deflocculation in the refinement of surface. In opposites; one gathers mass, the other disperses it; one builds weight, the other creates lightness.

5.3 Cylinders, openings, and the question of decoration

Although most of my earlier works are round and bubbly, the more recent works are marked by the presence of cylinders and round, speaker-like openings. My interest in cylinders began with the vase in Figure 31. Unlike my usual practice of constructing vases symmetrically, that piece lacked order in its overall shape, which led me to imagine it with several openings scattered across the surface. The aesthetic of the cylinders appealed to me, and since then they have become recurring elements in my work.

Like the bubble moulds, cylinders lend themselves well to being produced in batches and then assembled in playful compositions around the vase. These attachments, which both emphasize and interrupt the idea of interior space, often generate unexpected associations. The vase from figure 29 is one good example of an association with another object that revealed itself to me during the building. I first constructed the body as a standalone form, the classic vase that is the core of most of my works. From there, I produced batches of moulds and cylinders, which I added to the surface to create a large, “flocculated” piece. While I experimented with their composition, I suddenly saw the shape of a weapon or cannon in it. I completed it with this suggestion in mind, though still striving to maintain a degree of ambiguity.



Figure 31, Untitled Vase, Stoneware, 2025. Photo by Jill vincentie.

The vase in Figure 32 offers a second example. It was not originally intended to resemble anything beyond abstraction, yet during the finishing stages, viewers frequently described it in terms of recognizable objects or beings. To me, it increasingly suggested a kind of musical instrument—one not yet invented. This response, and the comparison between the vessel and instruments of sound, opened up a new curiosity that I intend to pursue further in future work. The work *Loud* (figure 33) engages even more directly with the suggestion of sound. Ceramics have long been used to make instruments, but they require air or movement to produce noise. In this piece, however, there are only exit points, “speakers,” so to speak. The silence they hold is almost unsettling, until one presses an ear against a ‘speaker’ and hears the faint resonance, like that of an empty conch shell. In this way, the work draws attention back to the vessel’s hidden interior space, the invisible volume that defines it as a container.



Figure 32, *Untitled vase*, 2025, Earthenware. Photo by Isabelle Prado.



Figure 33, *Loud*, 2025, Stoneware. Exhiition at AEFBAUL Milhões de vasos sem nenhuma flor, 2025. Photo by the author.



Figure 34, Process of Untitled vase, photo by the author.

It is with these latest works that I begin to question whether the term *decoration* is still relevant at all. There are no patterns, motifs, or imagery that might traditionally constitute decoration, like those discussed in chapter 3.1. Yet even without pattern, there remains an arrangement of shapes that is fixed to a given form. E. H. Gombrich is explicit on this point: for any arrangement of shapes—whether in clay or another medium—to endure, it must be anchored to a support. Where such a support exists, Gombrich speaks of “decoration⁵⁹”:

Whether he decorates a canoe or a house, a weapon or a pot, the craftsman is confronted with a given shape he must adorn. Such adornment always means modification of the original structure, by incising, carving, painting, or covering.⁶⁰



Figure 35, *Ruin in Process*, 2025, stoneware, View of the exhibition: Finding, feeling, forming, 2025 at Galeria Imargem. Photo by the author.

This ‘original structure’ in my case, is the fully formed vase that I often construct at first. Only afterwards do I add shapes that transform the inherent structure. I would not describe the result as a “decorated object,” but rather as a piece constructed through decorating or adorning. The material itself, clay, makes this decorative process possible and easy. Unlike marble, which demands carving from a solid block, clay allows for the attachment of elements that alter the vessel’s original character. In figure 34 we see the same vase as in figure 32 but before the addition of cylinders and the hood. A simple vessel that could have stood as a work itself.



Figure 36, Process of making *Ruin in process*, 2024. Photo by the author.

When we look at Figure 35, we see the work *Ruin in Process*. Just like *The Machine*, it treads somewhat outside my usual working themes. Yet on closer inspection, the viewer can observe the same principles and methods as in my vases are still at play. In Figure 36, the building process reveals that the entire structure originated from a cubic vessel constructed with slabs. From that contained base, I began to add levels, “balconies,” and walls. What began as an enclosed volume gradually unfolded into an architectural sculpture—a form that does not read as a decorative vessel yet emerged directly from that process. This working method—beginning with a container, then building outwards from there—offers both freedom and limitation, the exact fertile intersection from which I am able to create.

⁵⁹ Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, 65.

⁶⁰ Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, 65.

Chapter six: Terra Sigillata and reduction firing

6.1 Terra Sigillata

I first encountered Terra Sigillata two years ago during a project with Professor Marta Castello, which explored the effects of reduction firing on Terra Sigillata surfaces. Since then, I have developed a deep interest in coating my vases with this softly shimmering layer of slip and all vases made during the writing of this thesis have been coated with a layer of Terra Sigillata and some of them have undergone a reduction firing as well.

This term, Terra Sigillata, is predominantly used in contemporary fine arts to describe a highly refined clay slip composed of only the finest clay particles. In archaeological and historical scholarship, however, the same technique is more referred to as levigated slip. It was not until the 1930s that we knew that these shiny coatings from ancient civilizations were Terra Sigillata, and thus actually made from the same composition as the underlying ceramic body. The practice was unknown until Henrich Schumann, a ceramic scientist, presented a method for reproducing terra Sigillata in 1936.⁶¹

The preparation of this slip involves a levigation process, in which a carefully measured deflocculant is added to a clay–water mixture to separate particle sizes. The coarser particles settle to the bottom, allowing the smallest, suspended particles to be extracted from the upper layer of the mixture.

Due to their extremely fine size, these clay particles have a lower sintering temperature. When fired, the areas coated in levigated slip begin to sinter earlier, forming a dense, tightly packed surface layer that reflects light, producing a natural sheen. This gloss is further enhanced by burnishing. Additionally, the sintering can lead to vitrification where the surface becomes impermeable to carbon, facilitating the distinctive black–red contrasts often observed after a reduction firing.

The term Terra Sigillata is mostly linked to the red gloss wares of ancient Rome, as some people refer to them as 'Terra Sigillata wares', and they are a good example of the high gloss this technique can achieve. In the context of the ancient Greek black and red figure wares, we don't use the term Terra Sigillata although a refined slip is indeed used on their surfaces and there has been evidence of levitation tanks at ancient greek pottery production places.⁶² The distinct black surface on these wares is due to a reduction atmosphere that was created during the first and only firing. The reason there is a distinction of color, and even painted illustrations is due to the fact that the black surface is painted with a refined slip and the red surface is only burnished.⁶³ The three step firing process then creates this distinction as follows:

In the first step, an oxidizing atmosphere is created, allowing the vessel and Sigillata coating to sinter and adhere the vase, in this stage the vessel is completely red.

⁶¹ W. G. Lawrence and R. R. West, *Ceramic Science for the Potter* (Gentle Breeze Publishing, 1972), 211.

⁶² Richard Jones, "The Decoration and Firing of Ancient Greek Pottery: A Review of Recent Investigations," *Science Direct*, December 2021, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667136021000078#bib0128>.

⁶³ Jones, "The Decoration and Firing of Ancient Greek Pottery: A Review of Recent Investigations."

In the second stage, a reductive environment is created by adding an organic substance to the kiln (like wood), the kiln is then completely closed off and this combination creates a smoky environment with a lack of oxygen.

As the body of these vessels as well as the terra Sigillata coatings are made from red clay, rich in iron, an ionic exchange happens during the second (reductive) phase of the firing where the carbon monoxide that enters takes one molecule of oxygen from the red ferric oxide converting it into black ferrous oxide. The vase turns completely black now.

In the third phase, oxygen is reintroduced into the kiln and the temperature is gradually raised to the point where the slipped surface vitrifies. On most areas of the vase, this re-oxidation allows the remaining carbon to burn away. However, on the sections coated with a refined slip, the vitrification seals the surface before the oxygen can penetrate. As a result, the carbon remains trapped, and these areas retain their black color.⁶⁴

Although there are many historical examples of vessels with refined slip treatments, the Greek mastery of slip painting and controlled kiln atmospheres makes their work an ideal reference point when it comes to decorated vessels. Their achievement was made possible because the use of a levigated slip is high in alumina and therefore does not flow, and by their perfection of the reduction firing process. This technical mastery enabled the creation of some of the most detailed and narrative imagery ever produced on ceramic vessels

6.2 Terra Sigillata in my work

I find myself especially drawn to the contrast that Terra Sigillata introduces to my work. The earthy, almost tactile colors of the clay, as can be seen in figure 37, contrast with the bunny-eared characters I adorn my vases with and create a dialogue that is intentional but might feel surprising. This contrast, though subtle, offers a dynamic tension I like to seek in my work: a dialogue between the ancient and the contemporary, and the natural versus the artificial.

By using Terra Sigillata, I engage not only in surface decoration but in a deeper, more intimate relationship with the clay itself, as this refined slip is essentially just clay, most of the times made from the same clay as the ceramic body. The Terra Sigillata layer is not just a surface coating; it becomes an integral part of the vessel, blurring the distinction between body and surface.



Figure 37, Untitled vase, 2025, Reduction fired earthenware, Photo by Isabelle Prado.

⁶⁴ Sanchita Balachandran, "Bringing Back the (Ancient) Bodies: The Potters' Sensory Experiences and the Firing of Red, Black and Purple Greek Vases," *Arts* 8, no. 2 (June 4, 2019): 70, <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts8020070>.

This stands in contrast to my pixelated vases, which are first adorned with sculpted shapes before being glazed with a checkerboard pattern. In that process, the glaze forms a kind of second skin, creating a clear separation between the ceramic body and its decorative layer. There, the glaze is used to cover an object completely, merging with its form to become its outer layer, its skin. The ceramic body, in a way, becomes only a support that was build for the glaze to be there. When a fault occurs and the glaze crawls, or when intended; the glaze is no longer fully masking the form. The ceramic body and the glaze become two independent factors with each their own form.



Figure 38, Falling glazes, 2024. Glazed earthenware. Photo by the author.

In the *Falling Glazes Vase* (figure 38), the glaze takes on the role of both material and independent form, shaped not only through its covering of the ceramic body but also by the force of gravity. It establishes its own presence, existing in a space that is neither skin nor surface. The ceramic body, designed to hold the glaze within its edged circles, still asserts itself, remaining fully visible and tangible in its own materiality.

With Terra Sigillata, however, the body and surface remain one—a seamless whole where the clay and the clay slip are essentially one and the same.

The deliberate choice to use Terra Sigillata instead of glaze also has to do with the question of control. Once the clay form is complete, I wait for the right degree of dryness before beginning the slow, precarious process of burnishing. At this stage the vessel is fragile, I have already knocked off parts of the vessel or lost pieces during this stage, yet this fragility still lies within my responsibility. If a fracture occurs, it is my hand that caused it, and the work remains inside the circle of my own control.

The application of Terra Sigillata continues in this register of control. Unlike glaze, it does not flow or melt during firing. When I dip, brush, or spray it onto the surface, it will remain there, fixed. The color may shift in the kiln, but the gesture of its application stays intact. There is a reassuring certainty in this: what I do in the studio persists through the fire. By contrast, glaze is a more unruly partner as I have seen too many surprises come out of the kiln; an oxide that changed its color after the second firing or crawled spots are occurrences I have familiarized myself with.

Glazing is, of course, a science in itself, requiring formulas, testing, and control to reach the desired surface. It demands a patience of repetition, of waiting for the kiln to reveal whether one's calculations were correct. In contrast, burnishing Terra Sigillata is an intimate and tactile ritual, where results are visible with each stroke of the hand. Curiously, I can spend hours polishing clay into a soft sheen, yet struggle with the delayed patience glazing requires. The two processes ask for different kinds of devotion: one immediate and bodily, the other distant and alchemical.

The Terra Sigillata recipe and detailed methods of application are provided in the Appendix.

6.3 The reduction firing

The most interesting results with Terra Sigillata emerge after a reduction firing, a process that can either turn the entire surface deep black or instead leave a contrast between color and darkness. Most of these firings were done in collaboration with Madalena Marques and with the help of Professor Marta Castello. This reduction process happens in two different ways; For a white clay it is necessary that carbon gets trapped in its porous surface, and a low temperature such as 500°C is sufficient. For red iron rich clays another transformation happens to achieve black. The same formula as explained in section 4.3, where red ferric oxides turn into black ferric oxide through an ionic exchange. Yet, my reduction firing process resists an exact scientific description due to various factors. A range of different clays were used during the firings, different types and amount of woods, several different pyrometers were used of which some lacked specificity. And because we were only just starting the reduction firing journey, we experimented with different temperatures and different cooling times and temperatures.

The reason we adjusted the firing temperature is that different clays respond differently under reduction: some achieve a deep black at relatively low temperatures, while others merely brown under the same conditions. Across the eight or nine firings I have conducted so far, the most profound blacks have consistently come from Terra Sigillata prepared with PRAI clay and applied to a white clay body. As a high-fire clay, PRAI remains porous after bisque firing, allowing carbon from the reduction stage to penetrate deeply and darken the surface. Another effective approach has been layering: first applying a base of PRAI Sigillata, then brushing over it with a Terra Sigillata made from red earthenware clay. The Vendas Novas clay, for instance, has finer particles that vitrify during bisque firing, making it resistant to carbonization during reduction. It therefore retains its red tone, while the PRAI beneath turns black—producing the well-known black-and-red contrast, but by an inverse logic compared to ancient Greek pottery. Whereas in Greek wares the unslipped areas remain red and the painted slip turns black, my process produces the reverse effect: the slipped areas remain red while the unslipped surfaces darken to black. A step by step process of one of my reduction firings can be found in the Appendix.

The outcome of the reduction firing is always an anticipated moment; control is never absolute, and a bit of mystery always remains. Unlike a Raku firing, where the outcome is visible during the process, reduction firing happens “behind closed doors”, and those doors remain shut for hours as the kiln slowly cools. The amount of smoke escaping through the small holes is a good indicator of success; it stings the eyes and the smell lingers in my clothes. Almost like a sensory marker, the smoke tells me, even while the work is still hidden inside the warm kiln, whether it has turned out as I hoped. This sensory experience, however, lies at the opposite end of the spectrum from control. And yet, it is precisely scientific control that is usually necessary for success in ceramics. Earlier, I wrote about the satisfaction of control when burnishing a vase or applying Terra Sigillata. There, my hand governs every motion, and the firing, which alters little of the unglazed surface, does not threaten that order. But the reduction firing I so often conduct afterwards is quite the opposite: here, I give myself over to chance.

To make matters more complex, I have a tendency to approach reduction firing, and even glazing, as if I were cooking. I too often step away from following a strict recipe or procedure, instead relying on intuition. In the kitchen this is rewarding; in the kiln, it can be disastrous. Like cooking, it's hard to not give in to the sensory experience where smell, smoke, looks and heat guide my next decisions.

Lévi-Strauss also draws a parallel between firing pottery and cooking, though from the perspective of Native American mythology:

...all the myths about the origin of cooking fire agree on one point (actually they agree with experience too): conquering fire was a difficult achievement for humans, but once they had succeeded, fire was theirs forever. But in their possession and practice of pottery, they are, on the contrary, constantly challenged, for the rivalry between the powers above and the powers below never comes to an end. Small as their part may be in the cosmic struggle, men are contaminated by the spirit of jealousy that animates these contending powers. Consequently, the practice of pottery is subject to countless rituals and fussy, cautionary measures, and this does not fail to affect the craftsmen's moral disposition. ⁶⁵

I recognize what Lévi-Strauss calls the potter's "moral disposition." To work with fire in ceramics is to live in constant tension between precision and surrender. When I burnish a vase or brush on Terra Sigillata, I feel in command; the surface is mine to shape, and I trust that the kiln will not undo what I have carefully ordered. But once I step into the space of reduction firing, that certainty dissolves. I am humbled by the outcomes and give myself over to the effects that emerge — surrendering to the result as if there truly were powers above and below.

⁶⁵ Strauss, the jealous potter, 49.

Conclusion

One day, in the ceramics studio, while working on one of my vases, the lyrics of a song suddenly caught my attention. In *Relicário* by Nando Reis, I heard the line: “*milhões de vasos sem nenhuma flor*”—millions of vases without any flowers. The phrase has stayed with me as a way of thinking about the body of work I have created over the past years. Not because there are millions of them or because I have never placed flowers in my vases, but because these vases were never meant to serve a practical function. They do however cling to their functional form as vessels almost like a safety net, offering me a steady ground from which to create. Just as a painter needs a canvas, I return to the vase: a form deeply embedded in the history of ceramics, and one that provides both constraint and possibility. My vases exist as part of this long tradition, continuing to use the form and surface of vessels as a surface for endless experiments in decoration and beyond.

Decoration has been central to my research, though these most recent works may appear to move away from it. In the wake of Modernism, “decoration” still carries the weight of dismissal, yet in ceramics it has always been inseparable from the medium. From Greek amphorae painted with narrative scenes to Chinese porcelain alive with surface imagery, decoration has shaped not only what ceramics looks like but what it means. What I have come to realize is that decoration is not only a matter of applied patterns, motifs, or imagery—it is also a process of creating, a way of building and transforming form. By engaging with decoration, I acknowledge that the work of art does not exist in isolation. In ceramics, unlike painting or stone, the vessel is always shaped by—and returns to—its identity as a vessel, no matter how much it is transformed.

In my own practice, I have worked with Terra Sigillata as a way of binding form and surface into one. Its burnished sheen maintains the unity of clay, allowing for a polished finish that is still the body of the material itself. By contrast, glaze introduces another layer—a kind of skin—that can both conceal and transform. At times, glaze becomes more than surface, creating its own dimension in relation to the ceramic body. Reduction firing adds yet another dimension, introducing unpredictability and depth of color that cannot be fully controlled. In this interplay between burnished surface, glaze, and reduction, I experience the full spectrum of ceramics: precision, surrender, illusion of control, and inevitable surprise.

Looking ahead, I feel a desire to slow down and give each vase the time and patience it demands. During the course of this master’s program, I often felt pressed for time, wanting to realize every idea sketched in my notebooks. But the diversity of works I have created assures me that ideas will never run out. Each vase can spark a whole series while at the same time carries the inspiration for new directions.

The accompanying exhibition will present eight vases, the last of which was still being built as I finished this thesis. I refer to these as “vases,” even though those moving toward more abstract forms might feel more accurately described as vessels. To honor their beginnings, I stick with the term “vase” for this body of work. With these works I demonstrate that the vase—the vessel, from the classical form to the simplest cubic container—continues to offer limitless possibilities. It is simultaneously an archetype inherited from the past and a constant companion in my practice. My “vases without flowers” thus remain connected to this lineage, yet stand on their own as autonomous works of art.



Figure 39. Timeline of some of the works made during the Master (2022-2025)

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Glossary

- 1 Amphorae: Large storage vessels with two handles, commonly used for transporting wine and oil.
- 2 Kylixes: Shallow drinking cups with two handles, primarily used in Greek symposia.
- 3 Kraters: Wide-mouthed mixing bowls used to dilute wine with water.
- 4 Banquets: large formal meals or feasts, often held for celebrations, ceremonies, or special occasions
- 5 Gesamtkunstwerk: German term for total 'work of art', which combines multiple mediums or experiences into one singular whole.
- 6 Trompe l'oeil: an artist technique meaning "to fool, mislead, or trick the eye."

Appendix

Terra Sigillata recipe and firing methods.

I incorporate Terra Sigillata with two different firing methods: single bisque firing (980°C) and a reduction firing. Because a Terra Sigillata can be applied on unfired, bone dry clay a single firing is only necessary. Optimal results to get a glossy surface on a piece are achieved when the Sigillata is prepared from the same clay as the body, producing a subtle, streak-free sheen whether it is applied by painting, dipping, or spraying. After applying the first layer of Terra Sigillata burnishing is done and then covered with another layer, this I have repeated about 3 times on most of the pieces. On the vases made from a white clay I have used a Terra Sigillata made from high-fire white *PRAI* clay (Sio₂) which yielded a high gloss surface. Although a Terra Sigillata from a different clay can be applied as well to create imagery or effects. In the case of the *Platform* vase #1 from figure 27, a slightly pinkish Sigillata, prepared from a naturally beige clay, was applied by spraying to create a gentle beige sheen. And although a nice arrange of natural colors can be achieved from making Terra Sigillata from different clays, small amounts of metal oxides, such as cobalt, copper, or chromium, can be incorporated into a white Terra Sigillata to produce surface colors not naturally found in clay.

Terra Sigillata can also be combined with a transparent glaze or a partially glazed surface to create a subtle background effect. To date I have only conducted small-scale tests, with further exploration of this approach planned for future work.

The recipe for the Terra Sigillata that I use was provided by Professor Marta Castello, and it has yielded the best results to date:

- 200 grams of dry fine clay or earth powder
- 1 liter of water
- 50 ml of Sodium Hexametaphosphate solution

The Sodium Hexametaphosphate solution is made by dissolving 30 grams of Sodium Hexametaphosphate in 1.5 liters of water, where 50 ml is equivalent to 1 gram.

I combine the fine clay powder, water, and Sodium Hexametaphosphate solution using a mixer. The solution is then left to sit in a transparent plastic container for 24 hours. After this period, a clear distinction between the components allows me to siphon off the thin liquid into another container, which then holds the finished Terra Sigillata. The Sigillata is typically very thin, and the water can be evaporated by simmering it on a stove to get a thicker consistency. A specific gravity of around 1.15 is good to work with. This can be measured with a hydrometer or by weighing 100 ml of Terra Sigillata and see if it aligns with 115 gram in weight.

When adding oxides to a white Terra Sigillata to produce colored terra sigillata you can add between 0.5 to 3 gram of metal oxide to 100 gram liquid terra sigillata (with a gravity of 1.15). Depending on the oxide and the amount; the bigger particle size may interfere with the Terra Sigillata's gloss. In this case the clay powder with added oxides can be ball-milled for four hours and you can add 3% oxide to the dry weight of the clay as a reference point.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Lawrence and West, *Ceramic Science for the Potter*, 212.

The reduction firing process varied a bit each time, as discussed in chapter 6, but the temperatures reached for the reduction firings were mostly between 500°C and 600°C as my vases and its coating of Terra Sigillata are from high temperature PRAI clay. PRAI clay allows for carbonization at these low temperatures when the wares are bisque fired to 980°C due to its open porosity at this temperature. The kiln itself is a simple barrel with Refractory Fiber on the inside, adapted to be sealed off once the desired heat is reached. In the case of *Platform vase #2*, the process unfolded as follows:

The piece was placed on a raised platform inside the barrel kiln, ensuring the flame would not strike it directly. A propane tank fed the burner through the lower opening, which we bricked in to shield against wind. With a pyrometer fixed in the side wall, the temperature was raised to 550 °C —slightly above the target of 500°C, to allow for possible inaccuracies. Meanwhile, wood, was split into two small piles, one for the base and one for the top. Once the temperature reached 550 °C, the flame was extinguished and the burner removed. We waited until the kiln cooled to 400 °C before adding the wood, as introducing it too early could trigger unwanted oxidation flames. At that point, wood was fed into both the bottom opening and the top opening onto a small chicken-wire hanging above the work, avoiding direct contact with the piece. The kiln was sealed again with sheets of refractory fiber, bricks, and whatever heavy objects were at hand. Small leaks of smoke are inevitable but work as an indicator for the amount of smoke that is present in the kiln. From then on, nothing is done but waiting for the slow decline of heat. This is necessary to not introduce air into the hot kiln and reverse the process. Figures 39-44 shows the process in steps.



Appendix figure 1, The bisque fired piece. Photo by the author.



Appendix figure 2, The piece is inside the kiln, temperature is brought up to 600. Photo by the author.



Appendix figure 3, A propane tank is used, Photo by the author.



Appendix figure 4, Wood is used to create the reduction environment (smoke), Photo by the author



Appendix figure 5, After the wood is introduced the kiln is sealed off to keep out oxygen, Photo by the author.



Appendix figure 6, The piece is blackened after the reduction firing, Photo by the author.

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Annex

Exhibition

Milhões de vasos sem nenhuma flor

20 - 24 de outubro 2025 - Galeria FBAUL

Texto e curadoria de Isabelle Prado

A distinção entre obra de arte e objeto funcional é uma discussão que há muito tempo faz parte da arte contemporânea, trazendo reflexões sobre o que constitui uma obra de arte e como ela se insere no conceito de contemporaneidade. É a partir desta tensão entre função e expressão que emerge o trabalho de Irene de Vilder. As peças de Irene de Vilder convidam-nos a habitar este espaço intermédio, onde o quotidiano se transforma em arte e o familiar se torna extraordinário.

Milhões de vasos sem flores, traz 8 peças de cerâmicas de Irene de Vilder, que partem de um paradoxo: O vaso como utilitário e recipiente e sua função também como obra de arte, sem deixar sua essência para traz.

Os seus vasos que além de contentores também são superfícies escultóricas, quase pictóricas, nas quais elementos decorativos são gradualmente incorporados. Cada peça parece responder à anterior, criando um processo orgânico de desenvolvimento visual e material, onde uma obra influencia a próxima numa cadeia contínua.

Os ornamentos não são meras adições. São parte integrante da identidade de cada peça. Esta construção não procura esconder o material, mas revelá-lo. Ao empregar técnicas como *Terra Sigillata* e *Brunimento*. Em sua escolha de não cobrir com vidrados o corpo da obra, ela enfatiza a sua essência, em busca de uma ligação visual e tátil directa com o espectador.

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The distinction between artwork and functional object has long been a recurring discussion in contemporary art, prompting reflections on what constitutes a work of art and how it fits into the concept of contemporaneity. It is from this tension between function and expression that Irene de Vilder's work emerges.

Irene de Vilder's pieces invite us to inhabit this in-between space, where the everyday becomes art and the familiar turns extraordinary.

"Millions of Vases Without Flowers" presents eight ceramic pieces by Irene de Vilder that arise from a paradox: the vase as both a utilitarian container and an artwork, without abandoning its essence. Her vases are more than vessels; they are sculptural, almost pictorial surfaces, in which decorative elements are gradually integrated. Each piece

appears to respond to the previous one, generating an organic process of visual and material development, where one work influences the next in a continuous chain.

The ornaments are not mere additions, they are integral to each piece's identity. This construction does not aim to conceal the material but to reveal it. By using techniques such as terra sigillata and burnishing, and choosing not to glaze the surface, the artist emphasizes the raw essence of the material, establishing a direct visual and tactile connection with the viewer.



Annex figure 1, Photograph of the exhibition at Galeria AEFBAUL October 2025



Annex figure 2, Photograph of the exhibition at Galeria AEFBAUL October 2025



Annex figure 5, Photograph of the exhibition at Galeria AEFBAUL October 2025



Annex figure 4, Photograph of the exhibition at Galeria AEFBAUL October 2025



Annex figure 3, Photograph of the exhibition at Galeria *AEFBAUL* October 2025



Annex figure 6, Photograph of the exhibition at Galeria *AEFBAUL* October 2025



Annex figure 7, Photograph of the exhibition at Galeria AEFBAUL October 2025



Annex figure 8, Photograph of the exhibition at Galeria AEFBAUL October 2025



) Irene Sophie Madeleine de Vilder

Millions of vases without flowers

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