

**MA Student learning agreement**

<b>Name</b>	Michaela Schoop
<b>MA Course Title</b>	MA Ceramics
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**Brief explanation/ outline of project**

The main focus of my work is on developing a series of sculptural hand-built pieces. They will show variations in different sizes, clays, glazes and decorating techniques. At the same time, I am working on an accompanying range of functional pinch pots. All ceramic pieces are linked by application of strong decorative surface pattern designs and should recognisably form part of a cohesive aesthetic repertoire that I am trying to develop as part of a signature look.

**Context / Rationale**

Never before has Western culture felt the direct impact of an increasingly globalised world confronting them with different and diverse ideas, values and identities, due to the rise and increased reach of media but also an increase of global mobility, be it voluntarily or out of necessity. Thus, individuals and societies have to adapt to new cultural/social/ethnic geographies. Some have embraced intercultural exchanges and championed concepts of multiculturalism as part of a pluralistic society. Others, often the second and third generation newcomers, have developed a form of cultural hybridity, which allows them to make use of both sets of values and possibly develop their own new ones. However, others desperately try to cling on to an idea of a past in which their cultural identity is perceived as clearly defined and unchallenged. Or, to phrase it in a less judgemental way, they try preserve and not lose their own cultural identity.

As a 'Weltbürger' (=citizen of the world) with my own diverse cultural and geographical roots I feel the current climate of rising nationalism in which multiculturalism is losing its positive connotations very disturbing. This concern informs my work, which explores cultural identity and cross-cultural crossover through the use of patterns and decorative traditions used by different peoples (both current and historically) across the world. My research goes beyond pottery to look at patterns used in within other applied arts such as architecture and textiles.

There is a strong link between visual patterns and writing. Patterns often contain within them elements of symbolism which is not far from the visual language used in writing systems based on pictograms. Alphabets are only another step in abstraction and often, as in Islamic culture, are integral to pattern-work. In order to be able to read many of the world's patterns one has to have level knowledge of the belief/cultural system they evolve from. However, even without this knowledge one can base one's appreciation on the purely aesthetical qualities they have. In this sense, patterns are transcendental. Because of this universal appeal similar pattern elements

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have evolved independently in separate communities. Their meanings may be different but the shape of form appeals to more than one group of people. At the same time, other patterns can be found across cultures because historically they have been passed along from people to people and influenced each other's art forms along trade routes.

Form and shape, on the other hand, are much more intuitively understood, especially if they are three-dimensional and non-representative. They seem to appeal to a different aesthetic comprehension than patterns. I think patterns appeal more to a cerebral appreciation whereas the form is more instinctively understood by, to borrow from Freud, the Id. I am combining and juxtaposing the controlled pattern-work from different cultures with amorphous bulbous figures, which are not supposed to be representative. I don't want the forms to have a fixed meaning (thus I am aiming for no fixed up or down sides for positioning) but be understood much more on a sensual level. The visual sweep and flow of lines is just as important as the tactile qualities of the form. I aim to create surreal shapes, which are biomorphic and their surrealist qualities are a juxtaposition to the rational and controlled pattern-work they are decorated with.

I am also researching and referencing different pottery making traditions. The patterns used are only one element of this research which extends to traditional decorating and glazing techniques, such as, for instance, the use of celadon glazes in Chinese pottery or traditional English lead glazes. This, I am hoping will give me another opportunity to blur boundaries when in addition to combining and mixing up surface pattern-work from different cultural backgrounds I also mix decorating and glazing techniques to see how they complement each other or not. Will their cultural identities still come through or will one be subsumed by the other or will they morph into something new?

This project then at its essence querying cultural identities within the context of multiculturalism and international craft culture.

### Key areas of Research / Key Activities

- Research different surface decorating techniques and artists who use them.
- Research the historical use of distinctive different glazes such as Celadon glazed oriental pottery, English lead glazed honeyware and black Pueblo pottery.
- Explore the potential of different clays, for example red, white, black stoneware clays and porcelain, to find the ones that will work best for me, i.e. fire well to stoneware firing temperatures, suitable for handbuilding, let me mimic historical based glaze finishes and combine with my surface decoration techniques.
- Research the patterns used by different ethnic peoples around the world and collect them in a sort of pattern library (in a sketch book or/and electronically, i.e. Pinterest). The patterns I am currently researching are found in Pueblo pottery, geometric Islamic patterns used in architecture, painted Iznik pottery from the Ottoman empire and patterns found in African textiles.
- Producing a range of pinch pots that function as pattern and surface technique test pieces. They will inform the decorations applied to my larger sculptural pieces in which I will combine different clays with of under and on-glaze decorations and different glazes.

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- Make a series of small maquettes of sculptural pieces.
- Develop a range of glazes for these pieces, e.g. fake celadon glaze, clear shiny glaze and lead/honey glaze that will fire to higher stoneware temperatures.

### Intended outcomes of project tended outcomes of project

- Have variety of different sized hand-built sculptural pieces, ranging from small, to medium and big. If possible, I may want to make one extra large figure. I will be using different clays, glazes and decorating techniques but all will be linked by their decoration.
- Have a range of pinch pots that will appeal to a more traditional pottery-buying customer and also have a lower price point but still be discernably part of my overall range as they will be linked to the sculptural pieces by similar surface decorations.
- Present an unglazed sculptural piece as part of my final display onto which I will project different patterns while it is slowly spinning around. I am considering using some moving images along with still ones.
- Have enough completed and recorded comprehensive tests on clays, glazes and decorating techniques in order for me to continue developing more patterned pottery pieces.

Student signature

Date:

26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018