



Ingrid Murphy

The Language of Clay



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Seen and unseen





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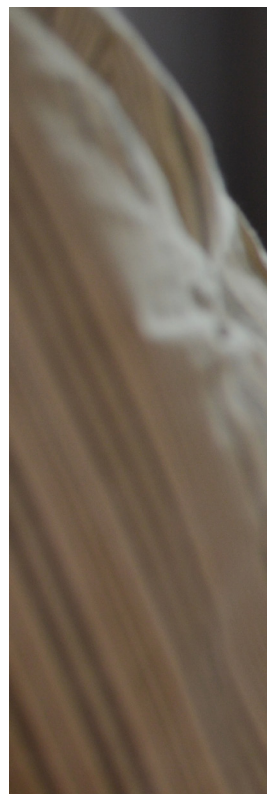
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Seen and unseen

Ingrid's work is playful, it is fun and it is surprising. More than this, it invites us to interact with it in ways that we're unused to with ceramics. It's not functional in the familiar sense that a jug, plate or wash basin might be, but it is designed to function. Ingrid's work engages us on sensorial and cerebral levels, prodding us to join in its investigations.


An extension of her curious mind, Ingrid's ceramic practice uses numerous creative avenues to channel her investigations. Investigations into the material qualities of clay, into the aesthetics of ceramic and into the versatility of this medium as a vehicle for new technologies and for communication. Communication is central to her work and, thus, Ingrid is a great collaborator.

Conversation and shared learning are important to her. Working in an academic environment, and at the forefront of creative research, Ingrid naturally draws others into her work. Long-term collaboration with colleague Jon Pigott has brought Ingrid beyond the black box of technology, their shared creative vision helping to interweave their disparate skills. Working with fellow researchers at FabLab Cardiff expands and enriches Ingrid's explorations in scanning, 3D Printing, Augmented and Virtual Reality, as well as physical computing. Hers is a practice that is continually developing and moving. Finding a solution to one challenge raises questions that lead her to the next.









New found knowledge is there to share, Ingrid believes. Open Source is a mutual resource that illustrates our inter-connectivity, particularly for new technologies. That Ingrid incorporates this so fluidly into her ceramic practice contributes to keeping her work fresh. This hand-made crafting of technology can be both amusing and provoking. Take her series of flat-backs for example, here are pastoral scenes that we've been familiar with for centuries. Yet what do they reveal about our social history and society now? By implanting back stories into the characters and transplanting faces from our past with faces of her current day, Ingrid gives new resonance to these mantelpiece icons. They're personal.

Interested in peoples' stories and social history, Ingrid likes to connect her pieces of work to places, times or people. The Irish tradition of burying the head of Jesus, broken from a figurine, in order to bring good weather to a particular place on a particular day is personal heritage that, for Ingrid, deserves re-telling. She shares this through her own unique interpretation in her piece *I.O.T. Jesus*.

Ingrid will often combine original and found objects with her ceramic making. Such objects bring their own history to the work, which can inform the whole piece. In her *Sounds of the Pink City*, Ingrid has collected used terracotta chai cups from Jaipur. They already have the hand of the maker and the hand of the user on them and now they bring us the sounds of the city from which they originated and give us a material sense of that place.

Connectivity and communication are at the heart of Ingrid's interactive works, works informed by her home, academic and transient environments. What firmly roots her myriad projects and ever-evolving lines of enquiry is, crucially, the value she personally holds in people and in society.

Ceri Jones

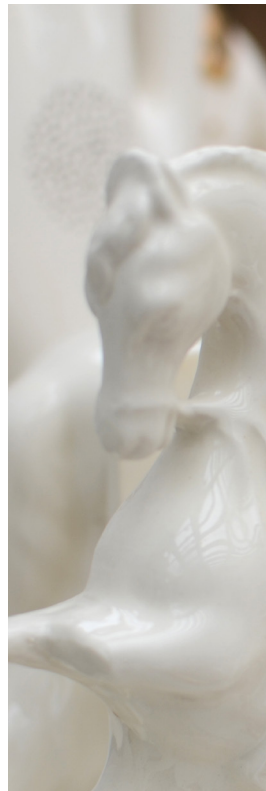
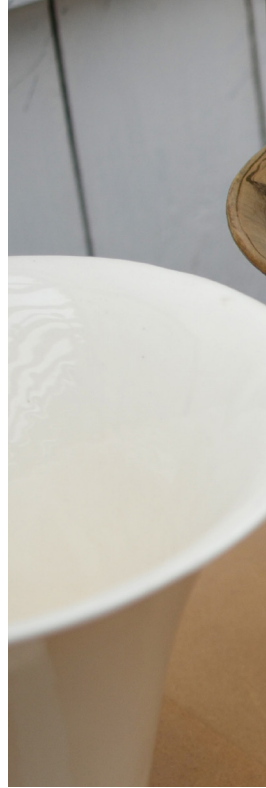




Shared Experience

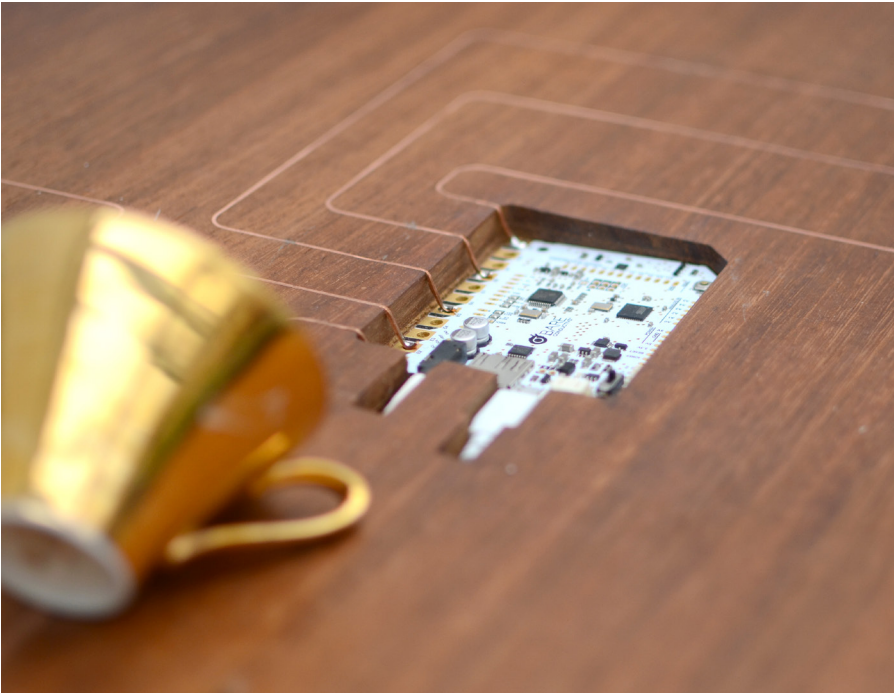
Ingrid Murphy plays with the conventions of ceramic practice. Her works invite shared experience rather than purely aesthetic contemplation. There are echoes of our everyday encounters with tableware, whereby we are in touch with familiar ceramic forms during our conversations and activities in everyday life – transactional objects. Murphy's surrealist versions in narrative installations often activate their presence and their purpose through sound. There is an atmosphere of experiment and speculation whereby slipcast ceramic forms and found objects are corralled into an uncanny homeliness.

The interaction of people and things is at the heart of Murphy's method: 'It's all about connections', which extend from visual culture to technological networks to the sciences and global geo-political environments. The form her works take also reference histories of ceramics, an important building block in constructing a dialogue with the visitor. It is particularly noticeable with the figurines modelled on historical examples as Murphy's work generally avoids the actual presence of the human form. Museums and their collections as repositories of cultural identities map onto family connectivity. She describes the important relationship with her father, who resists formalised cultural knowledge but has always engaged with Murphy's work and life with instinctive humour. The almost rebel banter of her Irish heritage and a fugitive Catholicism infuse the work.









The radio is a significant companion, a constant presence in her early family life and a continuing habit for her and her father. This invisible processing and presence of sound characterises key works such as *Sounds of the Pink City*. This is the name given to the Indian city of Jaipur, entirely painted in pink terracotta, the venue for the exhibition and symposium *Breaking Ground* in which Murphy recently participated. It takes the form of a map of Jaipur's centre etched into a table top, with Indian recycled clay teacups gold lusted and placed at key street intersections. When the cups are touched, the particular indigenous cacophony of Jaipur recorded on each spot leaps to the ears of the visitor, an aural trigger to ask how we fix ourselves in time and space. The visual and the tactile are important but 'sound comes first'. Communication is achieved sensorily but also through the material, through clay's 'historicity' and the recycling of forms. As Murphy explains, 'These objects have lived that life' and 'these things have absorbed their energy' inherent in the material. This combined exploration of cultural history, sensory engagement and the social life of things gives each of Murphy's works their *raison d'être*: 'Everything will be recycled or potentially re-formed, carrying within it its history and therefore its value to the future'.

Although Murphy takes some twenty thousand photographs a year, it is through mapping sound that she orientates herself and locates the local culture and language. She applies this to several exhibited projects including *Ceramaphone* and *Space Plates*. But objecthood is an equal source of inquiry – she is less concerned to be original in formal invention than to research the effects of juxtaposition and appropriation in things: ‘alteration, modification or an augmentation that might allow them to shift to an altered state’.

If this sounds like consciousness-raising, it is a representation of Murphy’s concerns about how we are currently co-habiting on this planet. The idea of possession in a migratory and economically challenging world is contested: we lose people and things, few possess homes. In this respect, the installations are a representation of how we connect, an experience not a solution. One may question how Murphy reaches her audience: she requires visitors to come to the museum; to have a smartphone to activate the codes embedded in the works; to appreciate history, other cultures and uncanny forms. Murphy acknowledges that her work is ‘hugely romantic and idealistic’, but it is her experience of teaching and learning over decades which induces a conviction that communication and connection are the job of creative individuals and their cultural institutions. It would be wrong to dissociate Murphy’s intensive career as an educator, researcher and consultant from her personal creativity in ceramics: the ideas, values and discourses are intrinsic to all she does. With wit and humility she seeks collaborative engagement on her chosen theme: ‘How we embrace the future’.

Martina Margetts
October 2018

Martina Margetts is a writer and curator on craft and design.











In conversation with Ingrid Murphy

Talking with Ingrid, curator Ceri Jones unpicks some of the thinking and impetus driving Ingrid's making.

CJ: You work at a frenetic pace. Does your pace inform the work or does the work demand the pace?

IM: I don't work in a linear way; there could be many stages in a piece, so I work across a series at any one time. For instance if I scan something, it needs to be 3D printed to make a mould and then cast in clay before firing 3 or 4 times. If the piece involves electronics, they have to be designed and custom made to fit, so everything, in a sense, has to be done strategically, it's a very fractured process. So the nature of the work demands the pace, however I also don't have a lot of time, I have a job that demands a lot of me, so when I get time in the studio or in the VR (virtual reality) studio then it tends to be frenetic.

CJ: Your making crosses academic and home studio environments. Do academic findings inform your studio practice?

IM: Interestingly, I suppose the majority of my life has been spent teaching so each project has elements concerned with my own learning. Working

with new technologies and processes enables me to teach them.

Academic life is a fantastic stimulus for creative practice. It also means that I have access to fantastic tools because the university is very well equipped, a lot of my work is made in the FabLab. Nowadays our students use digital fabrication, so I need to be well versed in it myself. These shifting needs of making culture means that I have to be able to teach at an appropriate level and my skillset has to be continuously updated. These days, I think I'd find it very hard to be a sole practitioner in the studio full-time; I would miss the stimulus of teaching. Immersed in a creative environment means you're open to new ideas all the time. I frequently work on transdisciplinary projects to explore how the techniques I'm using might impact on another field, and vice versa, that's fascinating; it also means you're not working in a vacuum.

CJ: Your work is both playful and full of enquiry. Do you start a new piece with a question in mind?

IM: This body of work, the seen and the unseen, explores the multiplicity of experiences we can



elicit from an object. We know what we see when we look at an object, but what can we experience of the unseen elements of the object? How can we use other senses? How can we use the material characteristics of ceramics itself, the conductivity of the gold or the translucency of the bone china? How can embedded content change our experience? For me, there's an absolute love of the domestic object. People know these domestic objects, these plates, these chai cups, whatever they might be, they're not objects of gravitas. To use them to push our understanding of ceramics or clay as a material is integral to my line of enquiry. Frequently they are playful, humour can communicate well with people. And it's story telling, the objects have their stories and technology allows them to speak or to add a different voice. Commonplace objects allowing us to engage with complex subjects.

CJ: Your work functions, though not in the traditional way in which we might expect a jug, for example, to function. What comes first, the function or the form?

IM: It's not so much about the form for me, though the visual aesthetics are quite important. As well as

the material itself there is also the material culture of the object, such as this broken chai cup taken from the streets of Jaipur, it has its own history. I haven't cast it and replicated it, these are the original found objects and what's interesting for me is that these objects have lived in the streets where sounds have occurred, the sounds I re-use in my piece. So the material has its own vibrancy because of its history. Sometimes that's why I specifically use found objects, because you can't replicate the historicity of the material. With these found objects I subvert their function. We don't read a broken chai cup as a functional object any more, when we use it as a touch capacitance sensor, it becomes something else.

CJ: Of the pieces you've made recently, is there one that you've found technically most challenging?

IM: I suppose one of the more technically challenging pieces is IoTouch; this is an Internet of Things enabled bone china hand, essentially a 'smart' object. When you place your hand upon the bone china hand it illuminates, it also triggers its partner hand in a different location to illuminate. So I know in real time when someone is engaging with a piece of my work



in the gallery, it changes the relationship between viewer, object and maker.

The difficult thing was getting the hand cast thin enough for it to be translucent, for the conductivity of the gold to trigger the electronics, and to create housings for the electronics to be able to sit inside the hand and not obscure the translucency of the bone china. And fitting all these components together to make the object physically robust enough for public display and continuous human interaction was quite tricky.

CJ: Connectivity is important to you, would you say it's the single most important influence on your practice?

IM: Absolutely. The ability to communicate through objects is really important for me. To connect people, through objects that we're very familiar with; connect them to a place, connect them to a sound, to a material, to their own memories, their own evocations. I use a lot of old objects, I want people to feel that link with time, that link with history, connect people to their own histories, connect them

to imagined histories. It's definitely about forging connections in any which way I can.

CJ: In some ways Grumpy Dog encapsulates this. Grumpy Dog is a connection to the past and you've been taking him on your travels, is Grumpy Dog a good catalyst for communication?

IM: He's been a fantastic catalyst. Grumpy Dog is an interesting artefact, he's an icon of the first industrial revolution. British people recognise the object from their historical associations and people overseas see the object as either a cultural British icon or a random figurine with a grumpy face and it's fascinating because it allows you to have conversations at a different level than you might otherwise. Objects give you something to speak to and to speak about. He's already accruing a mass of followers on social media.

Most of these ceramic dogs sit and gather dust but now he's emancipated from the mantelpiece, you can scan him and follow his adventures around the world. I have asked other artists to create their own iterations of Grumpy Dog too, which allows them to explore their own associations with this object, their



histories and approaches. So on the one hand he may speak to many things but on the other he can also be a blank, a blank for others to reinterpret and reiterate. And that frown of his still makes me laugh.

CJ: Is it the alchemy of ceramics or the perceived alchemy of technology that most intrigues you?

IM: I don't see much difference, I think they're both interconnected in many ways. One of the really interesting things about working with physical computing is that it demystifies the black box for you, you pull the black box open and you'll see that the processes used in custom made electronics are very similar to those we use in any craft practice; the dexterity of hand and eye in soldering being one such example.

Technology should be subservient to the idea however, it shouldn't exist just because it can. I use specific technologies because they enable something that couldn't happen otherwise. The tyranny of digital enchantment is one of the issues that we have to deal with when we work with new technologies. It's easy to be seduced by their capabilities.

CJ: With such an experimental practice as yours, I imagine that you're not afraid of things going wrong, is that part of it for you, following the path wherever it takes you?

IM: On the journey I'll always find something else. Everything has so many variables in ceramics, so many ways of doing things and so many ways things can go wrong. There's no safe bet, ceramics teaches you that from day one. We live with the fact that things break, things go wrong, and you move on, you have to; you learn to make a lot of back-ups!

To be completely honest, as soon as the idea has been realised then it's kind of done for me, there's another idea waiting to be realised and time is a limited resource.





Biography

Ingrid's studio practice and academic ventures are tightly bound. Connectivity is a key motivation for Ingrid and this inter-relationship between teaching, research roles and making in her studio is synonymous with how she operates on a daily basis. Explorations in university research projects feed into her teaching, advisory roles feed into her own making; and vice versa. Ingrid's creative practice is holistic and all-encompassing, no new knowledge is wasted and no questions go uninvestigated.

It is no wonder then, that Ingrid is currently the Academic Lead for Transdisciplinarity at Cardiff School of Art & Design. Here, she previously ran the ceramic department until 2013 and the Maker department until 2017, a department that she initiated and established and which has a rich focus on materiality and skills-base. Ingrid also leads the University's newly formed Fab-Cre8 centre for applied research in digital fabrication processes.

In 2015 Ingrid was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship for her contribution to art and design education.

Ingrid divides her time between her home and studio in Wales and her studio in South West France. In her ceramic making, she utilises traditional as well as digital processes to create interactive artifacts. Some of her work is conceived or realised in close collaboration with specialist colleagues, creatives that augment Ingrid's

explorations. Ingrid will often use found objects in her pieces as well as integrating technological components. Mould-making and casting are key processes in her practice, usually with bone china. Crisp white forms with gold lustre detail are currently characteristic of her ceramic compositions. Such detail is often functional, such as to close an electrical circuit.

Born in Ireland in 1969, Ingrid studied at Crawford College of Art and Design in Cork before undergraduate and MA study at Cardiff School of Art and Design. She presents papers at international events around the world, including at NCECA conferences in the U.S., Making Futures, UK and at the Indian Ceramic Triennale in Jaipur.

Ingrid's work is also featured in Breaking Ground 2018, the first iteration of India's Ceramic Triennale, at Jawahar Kala Kendra (JKK). Other, previous exhibitions have included the British Ceramic Biennial Award Show, Sensorial Object at Craft in the Bay in Cardiff, and Centred, Ceramics Ireland Selected Show.

www.ingridmurphy.com







Acknowledgements

Ingrid would personally like to thank Ceri Jones for her vision, guidance and kindness. Jon Pigott for his wisdom and calmness in all things collaborative. For their unrelenting support, general wizardry in making, and their inability to say no to often crazy and time pressed requests: Johnny Segers, Aidan Taylor, Natalia Dias, Martin Lane, Evan Moore and Duncan Ayscough. For their thoughtful words and images: Martina Margetts, Cath Roche, Lauren Heckler and Matthew Otten. And to all the unknown makers spanning time and place whose found objects also appear in this exhibition.

Mission Gallery and Ruthin Craft Centre would like to thank Ingrid Murphy, Ceri Jones, Martina Margetts, Catherine Roche and Lauren Heckler; Mission Gallery exhibition and education staff Amanda Roderick, Matthew Otten, Rhian Wyn Stone, Megan Leigh, Kat Ridgway and Paula Richards; RCC exhibition and education staff Philip Hughes, Jane Gerrard, Sioned Phillips, Julie Wem, Joe Jubb, Einir Wyn Jones; Art Works; Lisa Rostron, Rachel Ellis, Stephen Heaton at Lawn; the Arts Council of Wales.

Also thanks to our Language of Clay partners, Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre, Aberystwyth Ceramics Gallery and Aberystwyth Arts Centre.
www.thelanguageofclay.wales

The Language of Clay is curated by Ceri Jones
www.fieldworking.co.uk

Mission Gallery and Ruthin Craft Centre are revenue funded by the Arts Council of Wales. Ruthin Craft Centre is part of Denbighshire County Council. This publication is also available in Welsh.

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Photography: Matthew Otten
Design: Lawn Creative, Liverpool
Print: Team Impression, Leeds
Translation: Catherine Lowe

Published by: Mission Gallery and Ruthin Craft Centre
Text © The Authors 2018.
ISBN: 978-1-905865-95-6

Mission Gallery
www.missiongallery.co.uk

Ruthin Craft Centre
www.ruthincraftcentre.org.uk



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Ingrid Murphy's interactive practice melds new technologies and appropriated artefacts with traditional ceramic processes, offering a multi-layered, sensory experience of crafted objects that explore themes personal and universal, global and local. In doing so, her work accentuates human connectivity, revealing the socially and culturally charged narratives of ceramic objects.

Catherine Roche
writer