

ARTM68 - Experimentation in Glass and Ceramics

Upon arriving in Sunderland in October after a year of travel, preparing my house and garden for a long absence and saying a final goodbye to a best friend after her short illness, I had not given much thought to what I would create in the MA program. All I focused upon initially was settling into academic life, living in one room, finding my way around the studios, the department protocols etc. Not a particularly focused way of starting an intense academic year.

It is in my nature to have a go at something new and to experiment and this is what I have done. Rather than focus my attention on one medium or a specific theme, I have allowed my new environment, the different clays with alternative firing opportunities and glass to draw and divide my attention. It has been engaging, but at times frustrating. However I now have new skills to use.

Back home I focused almost entirely upon my own work with minimal attention to contemporary trends or artists. Researching for the critical studies essay, visiting ceramic collections in London and York as well as attending an excellent lecture by Julian Stair have all created a broader perspective. Being sick and doing nothing for three weeks but think, write the essay and reflect on my experience so far has also given new viewpoints. At this point I have a few creative directions under consideration.

Content and Technique

Family - narrative shallow relief individual or collective portraits in both ceramics and clay

Sunderland - the architectural mix of styles and conditions of buildings. This can also be offset and defined by the people who use these spaces. Glass elements could be included.

Flocks and shoals of birds and fish - chiefly glass panels in order to explore translucent overlapping.

Vessels - I have very much enjoyed Edmund de Waal's writings on pots, and Julian Stair's referencing of ritual ceramics. Heavily grogged clay assists in the creation of large strong forms and this interests me as a method of exploring sculptural works.

Strategies

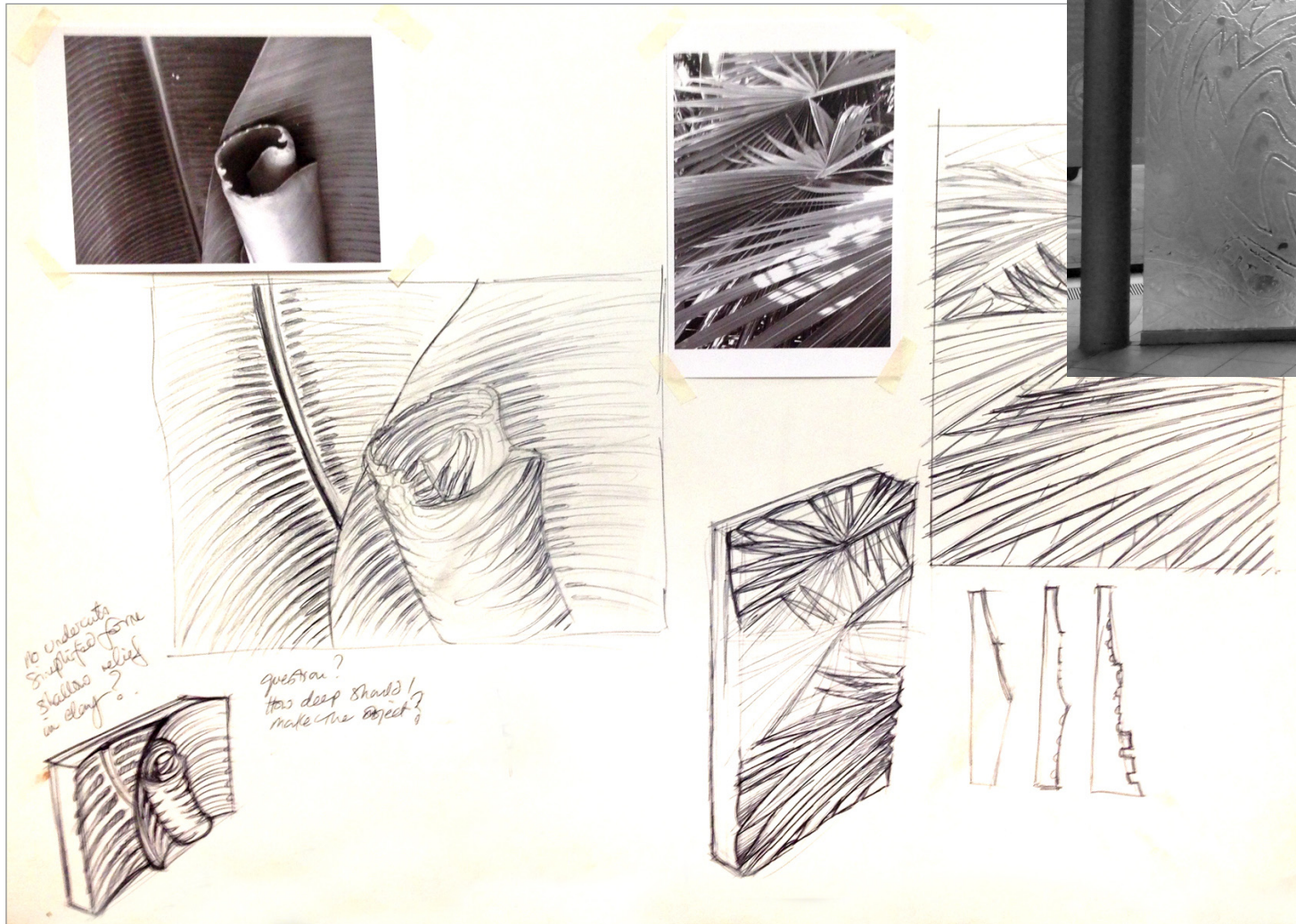
My choices for how to proceed will develop from a review of these experiments and an understanding of my past working practice. The marriage of ideas and feelings about the subject, coupled with opportunities to build and develop new and existing skills, will need to be considered. I am most excited about creating when I am trying to develop a form that matches an idea or feeling whilst in the act of making.



Winter Gardens Tropical Leaves

In the entrance to the Sunderland Museum are 3 etched glass panels created by an artist I can't find a reference to online. I really enjoy the texture of these panels, but unfortunately the museum's donation box is placed right in the middle of it, which obscures the design. I was inspired to attempt a glass panel.

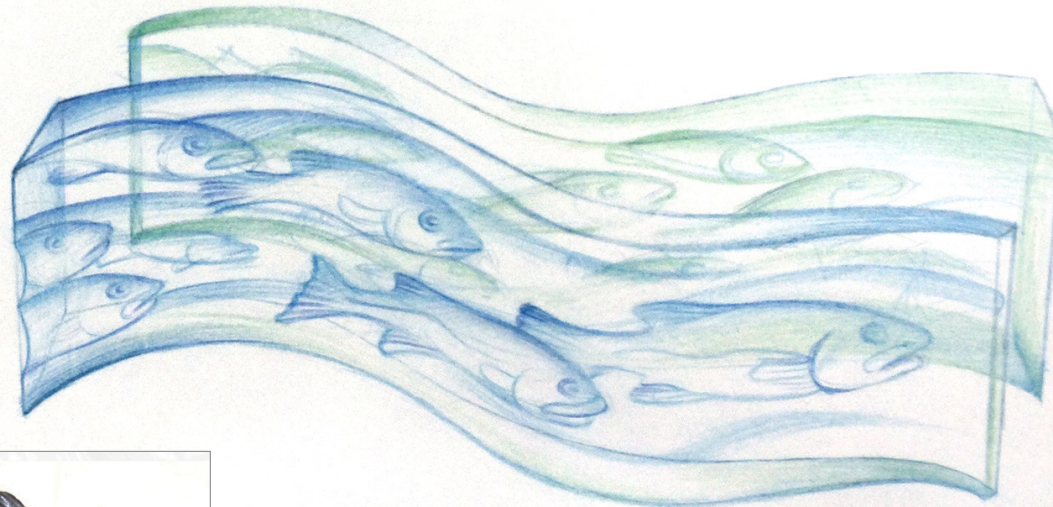
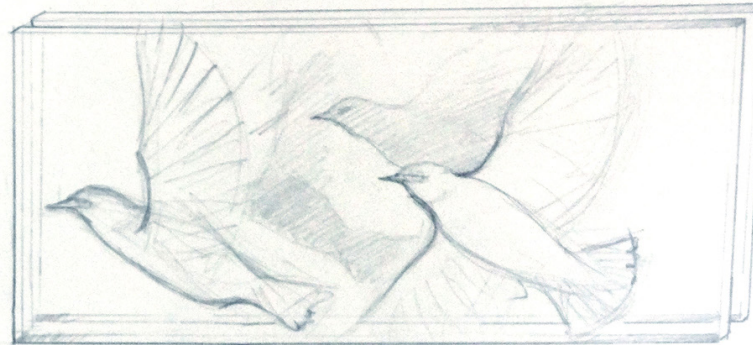
On my first visit to the museum I meandered through the Winter Gardens with my camera. There are some splendid tropical plants growing within the greenhouses. Combining the tropical leaves and the glass panels I created a clay shallow relief, made a plaster cast and Jim Maskrey made a billet cast for me.



Process

The relief was created with stoneware and whilst leather hard I created a plaster cast in two parts - an inner soft cast and a hard outer cast. The cast sat in the kiln overnight in which the temperature slowly rose to 800°C. In the morning Jim placed glass at 1100°C into the cast and then it was left for 3 days to slowly cool. The cast was washed and broken off the glass. It awaits cold working.





Fish stamps and Glass panels

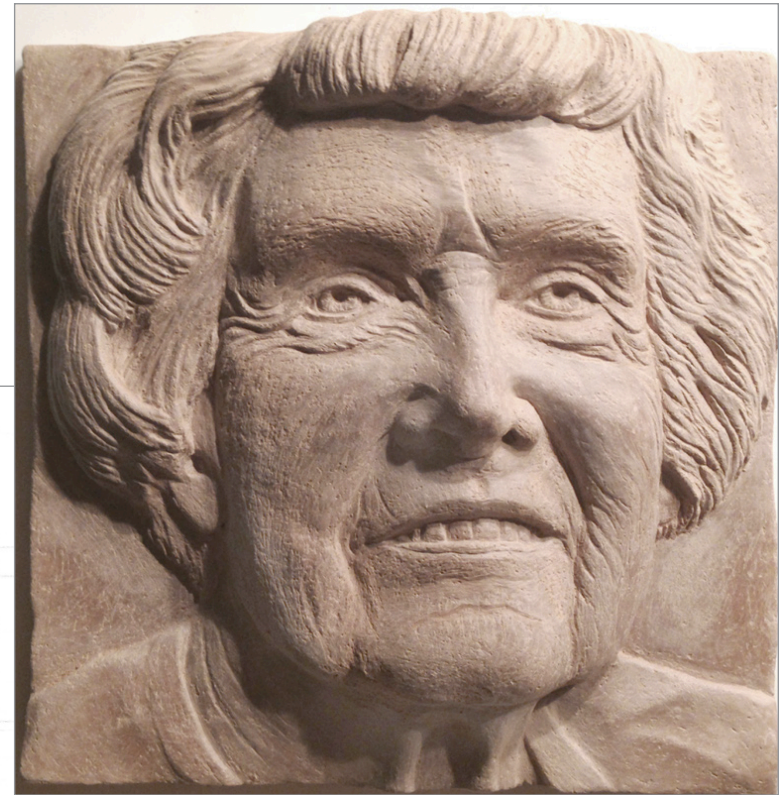
Continuing an interest in pressed stamp design. New fish stamps, based on local River Wear Trout, were made, pressed into clay, bisqued and then pressed into sand for glass casting. This was a test in anticipation of creating larger and multiple glass panels of other animal groupings, such as a flock of starlings.



Family portraits

I am interested in developing a project that features my family. The small ceramic portrait of my mother was a first attempt last year. My cousin Nell was kind enough to let me create her portrait in glass, giving me the opportunity to see the difference between the opaque ceramic and translucent glass shallow relief.

My further interest is in creating narrative portraits that express personal interests and relationships. I have also considered making teapots and tea services for each family and to that end have sent them all a questionnaire. The answers are close to how I would have interpreted both a portrait and a tea service. Obviously within the time frame of the MA program this is an ambitious project, and most probably not realistic, but really interests me.



Created like a bowl but
it's a face simplified
but fragile?

Hannah - cousin of same Dad
Always shallow relief?



Plans no undercut?



Start with a
a bowl
that
stands up



An example of a narrative shallow relief that although fictional gives an idea of depth of field.



Process

The shallow relief was modelled in stoneware and a plaster cast made at the almost leather hard stage. A gelflex positive cast was also made in order for further plaster casts to be made.

Left: A billet glass cast.

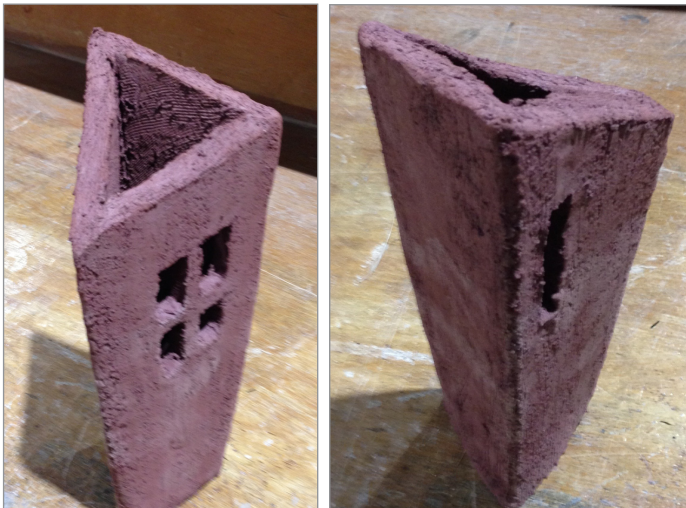
Above: Created using the pate de verre method.

Vessels

I have been looking for a way to build big slab vessels. In the USA and Canada we can buy tar paper. This allows working with large fairly wet clay to create complex forms. As tar paper isn't available, I have been searching for an alternative. This week I bought a bitumen backed waterproof paper from Wickes and have just started experimenting with it.

The exciting part about this method is the spontaneous interaction with the clay supported by the paper. I'm at the experimental stage and my attempts are rather rough and ready.

I am also interested in contrast between textures and surfaces. As I have walked around Sunderland, looking up at roof tops and walls I have observed fine carvings, colourful ceramic tiles and chimneys. Exploring contrasts of refinement and delicacy with bold sweeps and angles of form, and colour.





CONCLUSION

Having reviewed my creativity during this module, I recognize that I have been exploring, experimenting and redefining my creative direction. A state of uncertainty exists about whether to live in the UK or stay in Canada, and the question of whether to return to professional creativity as opposed to enthusiastic amateur has not been addressed. Both these uncertainties I feel are keeping me from making a clear decision about my creative direction.

I can't answer the question of relocating to the UK at this time. But I can approach creativity from the perspective of being an active professional artist. Even if I don't take this path in the long run, imagining myself as a professional changes my perspective of what I intend to create. This requires some thought.

A conversation with Jim Maskrey the other day was very helpful in directing my attention to using my existing skills together with new explorations and experiments. This needs some reflection before we embark on the next module.

In conclusion, although I have identified potential creative areas in this review, I will be giving further thought to taking a more focused approach to my work.