

## **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 try 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 gave new viewpoints. At this point I have a few creative directions under consideration.

### **Content and Technique**

**Family** - narrative shallow relief of 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.

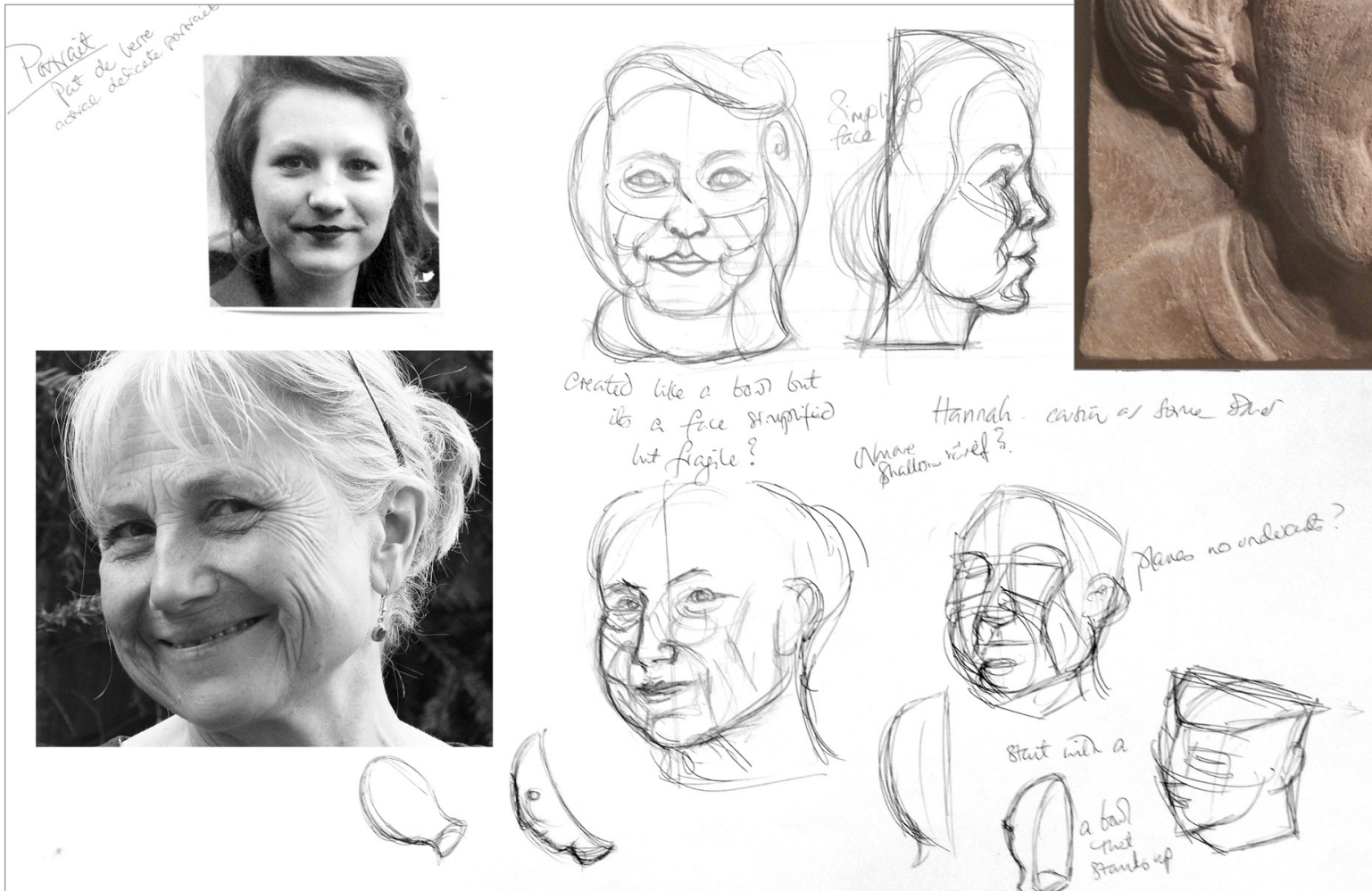
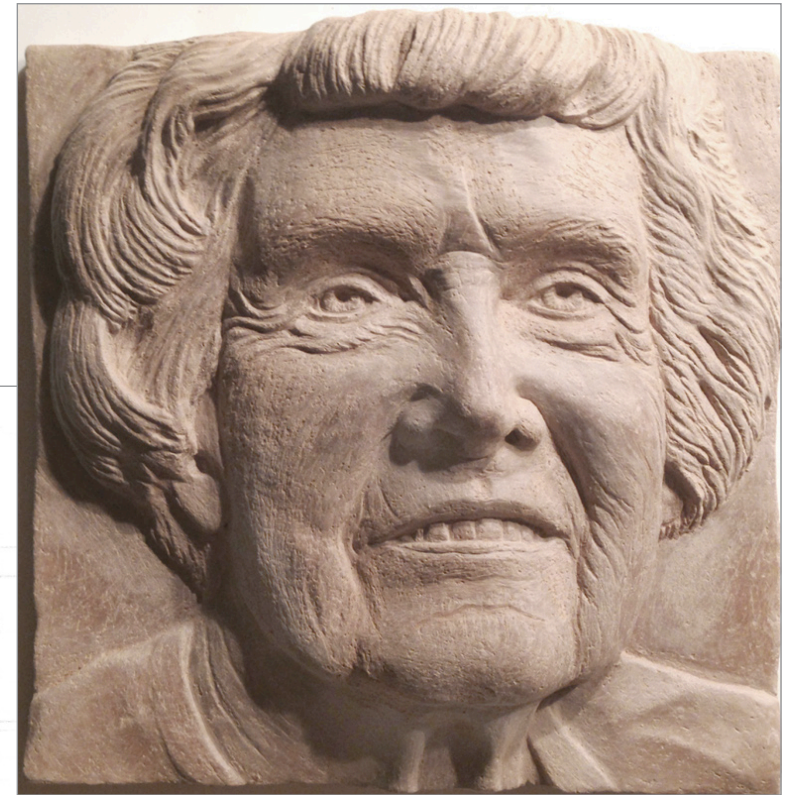
### **Strategies**

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.

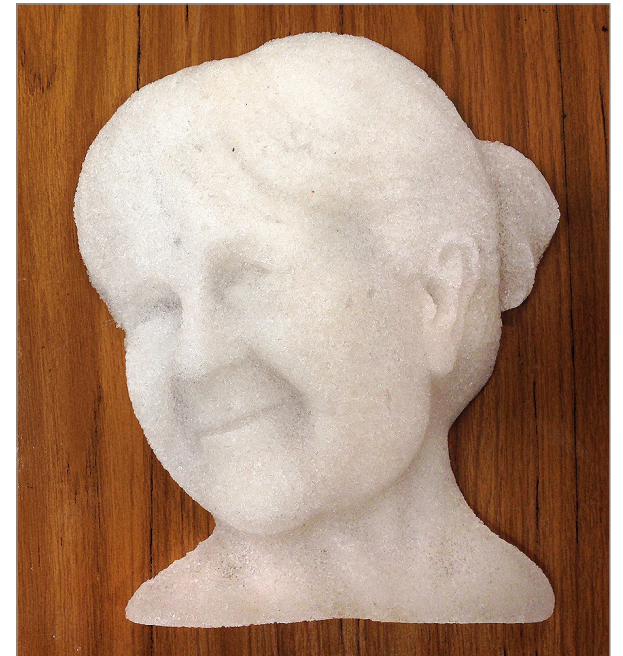
## Family portraits

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.



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.

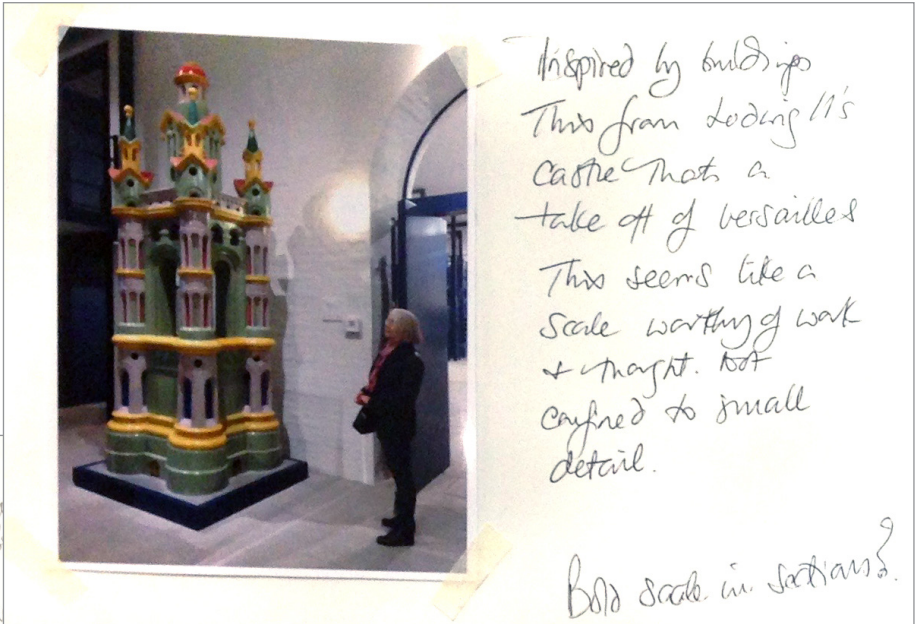
Left: A billet glass cast.

Above: Created using the pate de verre method.

## Frank Caws Sunderland Buildings

If one looks above several modernist shop fronts on Fawcett Street in Sunderland, the Elephant Tea Rooms, Corder House, and Sydenham House built by Frank Caws in the Hindu or Venetian Gothic styles of the late 1800s will delight the eye. This inspired me to create a pot sporting some of the features of his architecture.

However the design was just not working and it has been reduced to a commentary on Sunderland decay. I have not given up on this idea. But rather than being a pot, the final sculpture would be an illustration of the facades and back streets inspired by Frank Caws architecture and the ceramic illustrations of Jack Earl.



**Jack Earl**  
There was a little city, and few men lived within it, and there came a great king against it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man and he by his wisdom delivered the city, yet no man remembered that same poor man.

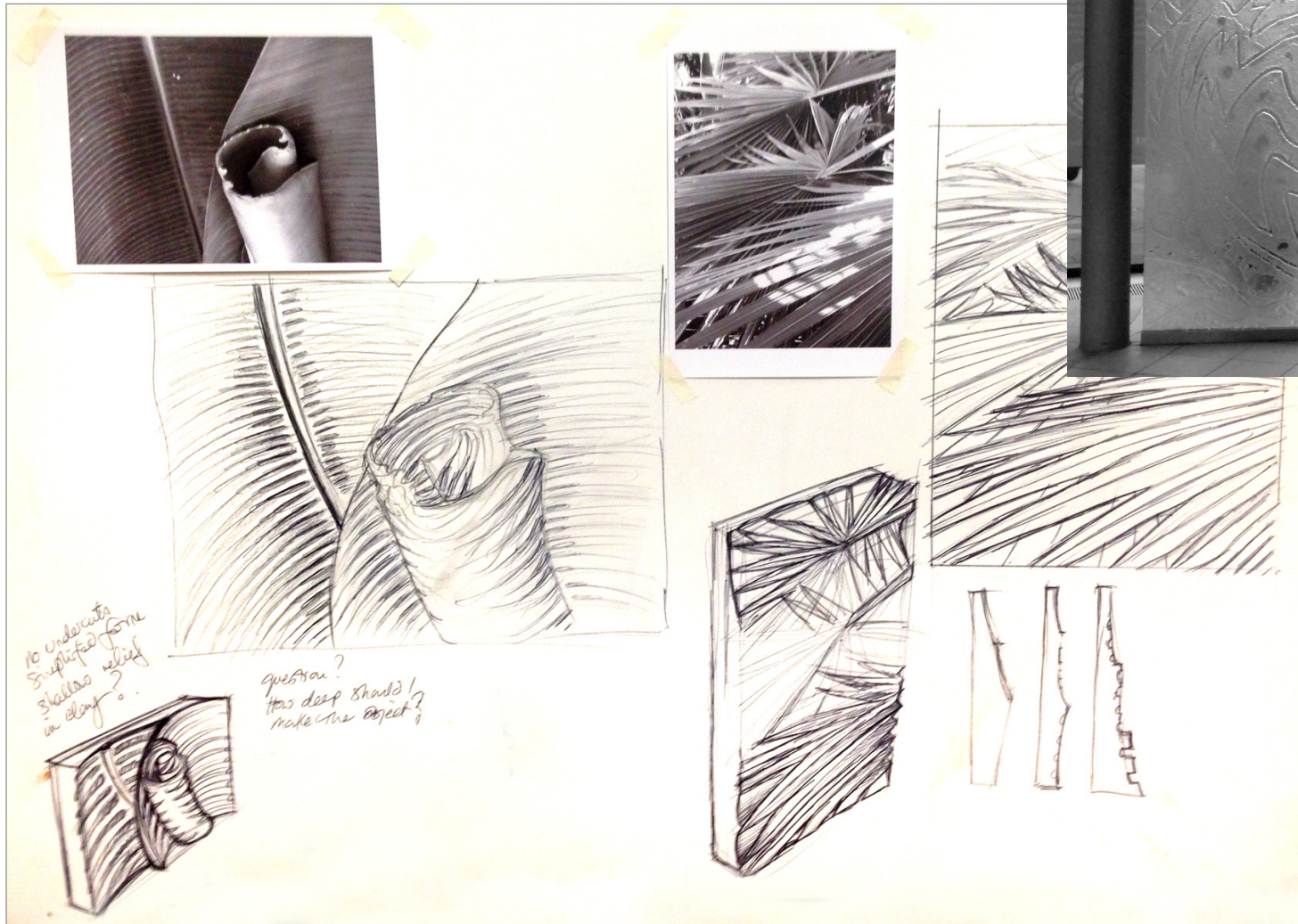
© 1984, white earthenware and oil paint, Smithsonian American Art Museum



## 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.

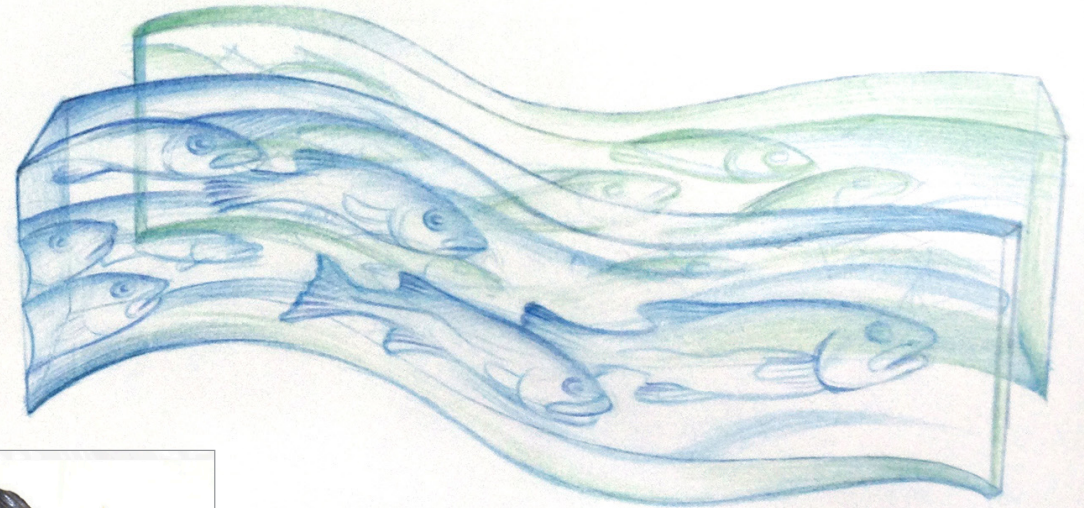
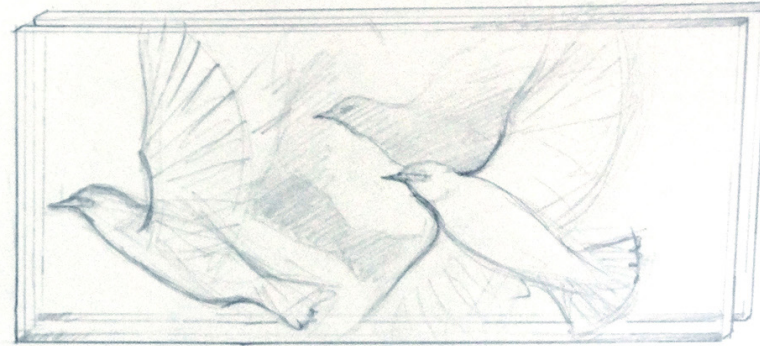
On my first visit to the museum I meandered through the Winter Gardens with my camera. There are some splendid tropical plants growing within the greenhouses. Inspired by the tropical leaves and the glass panels I created a clay shallow relief, made a plaster cast and Jim Maskrey made a billet cast for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





## 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 interests me.

