

## Dinner 'Over' Time: The Imprint of Family

### Lilli Robbins

*Medium:* Installation with stoneware, underglaze, Gare glaze, rusted cutlery, round table, tablecloth, stools x4, hanging lamp.

The wear and tear of a childhood home can be so easily overlooked, and often not realised by the family members who inflict this use. "Use of everyday objects" is a concept that I strove to express through my body of work, using clay and mixed media. "Dinner 'Over' Time" symbolises use and wear of my own family dinner table. Research into non-functional ceramics, contemporary unconventionality, and uniqueness of clay media influenced me to create installation that represents memories and use overtime, through forms and effects of deterioration, indentation, breakage, and depletion.

The four imprinted ceramic cushions, rusted stools and cutlery, chipped and broken plates and bowls, and a wilting vase and bouquet centrepiece; signify the personable imprints and wears from my four family members – my mum, dad, sister, and me. I have always been drawn to the traditional purposes of ceramics as ceremonial vessels, particularly Japanese Tea Ceremonies. However, I used traditional household crockery appearances to convey a message that underlies their use, rather than giving them function. I feel these values of 'telling a story' through the properties of clay heavily connects to South Australian ceramicist, Honor Freeman's philosophy of creating objects that "*belie their materiality and purpose*".

Freeman was an extremely valuable artistic influence. She creates realistic ceramic forms of functional items, which highlight similar ideas of deceiving function, and used appearances, connecting to my intent. Particularly the bottom imprints, which defy a cushion's conventionally soft and malleable properties. Each imprint on my four ceramic cushions is one of the most valuable ways I have expressed meaning of use of my family dinner table over time.

These four chairs have their own personal touches, as they have each been imprinted by my four family member's bottoms. Freeman's work similarly connects to creating forms of used everyday objects. For example, "*Everyday Luxury, 2019*" and "*Sunlight & Suds, 2022*" are two ceramic bodies of work that can be interpreted as familiar use of everyday items of soap, sponges, and bathroom towels.

Australian ceramicist, Silk Cartwright, also had pivotal influence on my concept. I was inspired by the way she applies the functional properties of clay, while utilizing the medium's versatility to create trendy and unconventional forms. Her techniques inspired me to look past ceramic vessel's conventional and symmetrical appearances. This heavily relates to my vase, which beholds a unique drooping and dented appearance, demonstrating unconventionality as well as connections to my intended concept of use.

Personally relevant ideas are also emphasised through pattern decoration on the plates and bowls. These designs are inspired by a teacup and saucer set used in my lifetime at home, with similar patterns and tones of cream, brown, and black. Culturally, they connect to my New Zealand family background, as these colours are traditional to a Korowai, which is a traditional woven Māori cloak. Furthermore, these patterns have

been inspired by the New Zealand fern, in combination with Māori Patiki design, which symbolises favourable times, generosity, and abundant hospitality. This inclusion of aspects of Patiki patterns deeply emphasises the meaning behind my family dinner table, as this space also represents a significant place where memories are shared, and generosity and hospitality are served between family members. Similarly, Cartwright expresses her own personal connections and values through her ceramics, such as feminism, traits of her own body parts, and her love for Australian culture, nature, and trends, as a young Australian.

My initial ideas were inspired by current zeitgeist of non-functional, unique forms of clay vessels and sculpture, e.g., "*Melting Point: Movements in Contemporary Clay*" exhibition, January 28, 2018 – May 6, 2018, Los Angeles. This exhibition showcased contemporary use of clay, and explored the medium's versatility, such as including melted, spattered, and realistic forms of clay. It was challenging to showcase this extent of uniqueness throughout the development of my practical concept, as I wanted the layout of my dinner table to be more conventional so the viewer could easily comprehend the concept. However, I feel I have incorporated ideas of loss of function in the broken crockery, and more subtly through the indented cushions.

I have fallen in love with the techniques that come with hand building ceramics, such as the Kirinuki technique, slab work, and pinching. Through focusing on these techniques, I gained more confidence in hand building ceramics and clay sculpture. However, with growth, and improvement, came challenges. For example, I began creating plates with the technique of pinching, but later explored the more effective technique of slab work. I was wrong to assume this was a waste of time, as this is simply a representation of the growth in my skills, which I can reflect on, and apply to future creations. I also faced a combination of conceptual and emotional challenges when doubting the individuality of my objects. However, I successfully overcame this by adopting the mindset that using my hands rather than a throwing wheel to create my pieces is what creates authenticity and individuality to my body of work. Each piece is unique based on the ways my hands bent, the pressure I put on shaping the clay, how hard I smashed the bowls, and which fingers I used to indent the vase.

I feel the somewhat conventional family dinner table layout of my practical may be initially overlooked, which is my intent to somewhat deceive. However, as viewers recognise the details of the rusting cutlery, broken crockery, and bottom imprints, the message of use and deterioration reveals itself. The viewer may recognise common aspects I have incorporated from my family dinner table and relate this to their 'ceremonies' at their own family dinner table. In some ways, I hope viewers look past the hard, durable properties of fired clay, so they can understand the meaning of the bottom imprints I've made into the cushions. In other ways, I hope they can appreciate the incorporation of ceramic crockery in my practical, which also resembles the medium's traditional purposes as tableware.