

Tea Ceremony

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My house is filled with interesting ceramics from different cultures, but Japanese ceramics have always caught my eye. Through my research I discovered that Japanese ceramics differ depending on the prefecture that they originate from, which is where I found Oribe ware. Oribe is a town in the Gifu prefecture in Japan, which has its own ceramic style filled with wabi-sabi vessels and bright green glazes. I love the simplicity and harmony between Oribe ware vessels which inspired me to attempt my own version of this style in my folio. My body of work is strongly influenced by a deep cultural and historical background as well as my own contemporary context. This has allowed me to research and learn a lot about Oribe ware and understand its long history (originating in 1605).¹ Many contemporary Oribe ware ceramicists still practice today and were an inspiration to me as well as more traditional artists like Kato Shuntai (1802-1877) whose artistic vessels are very authentic, traditional, and adorned with only a few simple and patterns.

My installation is called Tea Ceremony and my intentions are to portray the peace and serenity captured in a Japanese Tea Ceremony and bring this feeling into my own busy contemporary context. I have always been influenced by and interested in other cultures from having overseas travellers stay and work at my family's farm. Mainly Japanese travellers stayed at our farm, so I have been heavily influenced by their culture and where they came from, and as I got older, I understood more and asked more questions of their culture. I have always loved Japanese ceramics because of their great attention to detail and beautiful form while remaining simplistic. I wanted my body of work to show my viewers a part of Japanese culture that I think has relevance and meaning to all people. This year I have felt so busy and pulled in so many different directions but I have found that my ceramics practice has the ability to re-centre me and provide serenity in a similar way to the tea ceremony that I have made the subject matter of my work. My art is a reminder to people to pause and reflect on the beauty of the simple pleasures in life.

I researched artists such as Makuzu Kosai, Kato Shuntai, and Toru Hatta to gain a better understanding of key techniques and characteristics in Japanese ceramics. Shuntai and Hatta utilised wabi-sabi techniques such as chattering effects of rims, wobbly forms, and uneven glaze application which all gives their work a sense of individuality and a appreciation of the natural environment and materials. I was greatly inspired by their wabi-sabi work and I feel I have achieved this uneven, and handmade effect in my work. Clay is a mouldable form and I love how individual each vessel can be and how the imperfections such as fingerprints and uneven forms gain unique characteristics. I observed and researched a David Collins, a teapot ceramicist, to gain inspiration on the form of his teapots. His work allowed me to build the confidence to add my own individual touches and to make each mark intentional and meaningful.

All of my work is inspired by wabi-sabi style through the irregular shapes and sizes of the tea bowls, wobbly teapot lids and uneven feet on my plates. I love this handmade affect and the thought of each piece being unique to itself. I feel my glazing has complimented the wabi-sabi nature of my vessels through also being uneven and imperfect which I feel has given my body of work a lot of character which reflects my personal style. I wanted my final installation to reflect the Japanese tea ceremony rather than looking as if it is in an exhibition.

The inclusion of a shoji door, scroll with the philosophies of tea and tatami mats and incense helped to create the tea ceremony atmosphere without distracting the viewers from my body of work. I feel this sets the scene for my viewers so they can feel immersed into the peaceful environment of ceremony and understand the meaning of my art more.

I feel my personal art aesthetic has grown dramatically throughout this process. When I started, I was very picky with the structure of my vessels and tried my hardest to make everything perfect. However, the more vessels I made the more I realised the imperfections I was trying to get rid of, actually made my vessels more interesting. A quote by Toru Hatta, "Doing work very meticulously and becoming perfect at your craft actually causes something to be lost in the process. So, for example, when you use clay that is difficult to shape, the work can be more interesting" helped to open my mind to the possibilities and benefits of imperfect vessels. Therefore, I stopped trying to make every vessel perfect and instead, loved the imperfections.

My tea bowls are a clear reflection of my growth. At first, I was trying my hardest to make them perfect and I would be disappointed in myself if two weren't identical. But as I completed more tea bowls, I noticed I loved the shape of each one even though they were different to the others. I now feel it gives my group of work more diversity through the shape and emphasises the handmade nature of each vessel.
