

# New Work by JANE PERRYMAN



## "Containing Time"

by LINDA THEOPHILUS

In preparation for her forthcoming exhibition in Gotland, Sweden Jane Perryman invited me to see the sequence of bowls that form part of her new installation 'Containing Time.' Fifty two bowls of differing sizes, bone white, cream, soft black sat in conversation on the sunlit floor of her yoga studio, an appropriate location as Perryman has long acknowledged the relationship between her making and her practice of Iyengar Yoga:-

*The Sanskrit word for yoga means 'union of body and mind', which could be translated in ceramic terms as balance or unity between form and surface, between inside and outside. Jane Perryman, Naked Clay 2004*

The sequence of bowls made over the past two years marks a re-start for Perryman; a new way of using her skill, her eloquence, with the limited palette of materials, methods and forms that she has mastered over twenty years. She came to her signature working methods slowly, discarding more elaborate techniques of glazing and slip-casting, to focus on hand-building and smoke firing. She has described her approach as "a few things well-explored".

Using press moulds and slab building, she is known for individual sculptural pieces, often of two parts: a flat gently curved rectangular form paired with or supporting a generous round-bottom bowl, the surfaces of both unglazed, burnished and marked by smoke. Of this work she wrote:

*I like the way the firing marks penetrate deeply into the burnished clay surface, giving depth of feeling; I like the tactile element which invites handling and caressing ... Underpinning the work are universal opposing forces of symmetry/asymmetry; of inside/outside; of curved/flat; of masculine/feminine.*

*Jane Perryman, Naked Clay, 2004*

In her new work, she restricts herself to only wide-open bowls, hemispheres of different sizes. She has continued to use press moulds, which provide a point of fixture, of certainty, well suited to the making of series or sequences,

But chance too is essential to Perryman.

Although the smoke firing she prefers has "50% unpredictability", each time of using brings more control – and therefore less surprise. She speaks of feeling "stuck" and describes the first steps of the new work as "waking up the senses", a return to careful observation through the body, reconnecting with the unspoken. In the dark month of November, she began a disciplined weekly routine that extended throughout a year. Walking alone, or with her companionable dog, working in her kitchen or travelling for work or pleasure, she responded to what caught her eye, stopping to look closely, to observe "with a child's wonder at what is in front of you", reaching to touch, to handle, to collect material – plants, seeds, minerals. She wrote immediate notes about the experience. Back in the studio she used frottage and photography, distilled the writings into blank verse and mixed the material with clay from which she would make a bowl –

*Thirty Spokes meet in the hub  
But the empty space between them is the essence of the wheel  
Pots are formed from clay  
But the empty space within it is the essence of the pot  
Walls with windows and doors form the house  
But the empty space within it is the essence of the house*

As we continued over several weeks to discuss the development of the new work, Perryman talked further of her influences: of this

opposite -

**Containing Time** installation 26 cm high

photo Douglas Atfield

right -

**Conversation** 34 cm high photo Douglas Atfield

below -

**Vessels** 20 cm diameter photo Douglas Atfield

verse by Lao Tzu, of BKS Iyengar, and the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh. We discussed mindfulness, time, memory - and chance.

It is the introduction of the found material that has brought her new excitement and a re-engagement with ceramics - material as diverse as copper wire, catkins, olive stones, juniper and rapeseed pods. These either burn away during the firings or remain within the walls of the bowl. The effects are unknown, spontaneous and random - the resulting pits and gouges, the hollows and piercings mark the bowls with texture, catching shadows and sometimes allowing glimpses into the pots' interiors. For these bowls are doubly "empty": they are hollow, double skinned, the inner cavity often far shallower than the outer form, the two skins closed by a sharp equator that catches the light, or is smoked to a circle of grey/black. They appear heavy, solid - but surprise with their lightness, when handled.

*While Art is Pause, life flows rapidly, then is extinguished ... [the artist] must choose the object for Art from the flow of life and raise it above Space and Time ... Art detaches the object of its contemplation from the rapid flow of phenomena, and that object which, in the dull and uniform current was only an invisible molecule becomes the infinite Plurality that submerges and overwhelms life.*

*Albert Camus, Art in Communion from Youthful Writings*

This quotation by Camus seems to me to offer an insight into this work.

The contradiction inherent in the title - the impossibility of holding time itself, - is underscored by its making, the immediacy of a moment of observation, of a small act of collecting, is fired to permanence in the kiln. But time is essentially linked to physical motion - the daily spinning of the earth, its rotation around the sun. And here Perryman's choice of form suits her subject very well, the round-bottomed bowls signalling instability and the potential for rocking movement, that will return to stillness without breaking

For Perryman this is an entirely new way of developing and presenting her work. Although in the past she has made paintings that refer to her ceramic forms, these are made after the making. On this occasion, the final work is made up of the whole process from the immediate on-site note-taking to the waxed and burnished bowls, from images of the collected materials to an ambient soundtrack. The use of frottage provides a very direct record of the collected material - the





Conversation 26 cm high photo Douglas Atfield

Forthcoming Solo Exhibition

**Containing Time**, 21 June – 1 August 2016  
 Workshops 29, 30, 31 July - Korsbarsgarden Gotland Sweden  
<http://www.korsbarsgarden.se/>  
 Address: Sundre Västergårde 135, 623 30 Burgsvik, Sweden  
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**Statement** - My work investigates abstract form through the vessel, inspired by the traditional handbuilding, burnishing and smoke firing pottery techniques of Africa and India. This has developed into sculptural ideas which allude to the timeless vessel form as well as referencing contemporary urban architecture. The sculptural work explores tension and balance where two forms are placed together as well as the ambiguity of weight through internal space (all work is double walled and hollow). The composite pieces are not static and invite interaction through repositioning their elements into new compositions.

Recently I have connected the different strands of my professional practise, creating a multimedia installation called *Containing Time* incorporating ceramics, text, photography, frottage and sound. It represents a new approach to ceramics.

A frottage is made from the material, a close up photograph is taken and a ceramic bowl made from clay mixed with the material. This vessel is pivotal to the concept, it symbolises my change of approach. In the past I have explored the vessel purely as abstract form and now it becomes a vehicle for different meanings. It contains objective themes of time, place and material as well as a subjective expression of poetry, drawing, photography and sound.



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real material is placed under paper and rubbed over with graphite to abstract and draw out an image. Photography too, even in a digital form, retains a direct link between “real” instance and the image. But Perryman also works with her material, distilling her notes into blank verse, and using the collected material to cause the patterning and texturing of the bowls’ surfaces. The bowls are the result of layers of working – moulding, firing, smoking and firing again, burnishing and waxing. They take time.

When the finished bowls are struck each produces a different note. As a final stage Perryman has worked with composer and partner Kevin Flanagan to layer these “found” sounds into a soundtrack that encompasses the physical elements, and fills the space with extended bell-like notes.

*In a rapidly changing world, time and memory are key concerns for contemporary artists. Though borrowing from existing methodologies, artists depart from personal experience to construct their own spaces of memory. From Time and Narrative in Installation Art in the New Millennium by Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry*

*Containing Time* is then an installation bringing together the texts, the rubbings, the images as well as the bowls with a soundtrack that echoes through the exhibition space. Perryman has created a place of memory. But the resulting sequence of bowls and images form not only a personal diary but a calendar that records both a series of immediate moments and the on-going circling of the seasons. It is Perryman’s openness to chance coupled with her discipline and commitment to the finished object that ultimately make this a very satisfying experience for the viewer – one that allows and requires time.

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is an artist and curator. From 2011 to 2015 she was co-curator of AWARD and then FRESH, for the British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke on Trent, UK. She is an Associate of A Fine Line cultural practice.

