

## ***IMPRESSIBLE, CHANGEABLE, UNRULY***

Foregrounding the inherent kinship between material and gesture, earth and body, *IMPRESSIBLE, CHANGEABLE, UNRULY* sustains a feeling of waywardness. Leaning, warping, flexing and slouching, the artworks disrupt the habitual controlling impulses of hierarchical subject-object relations by celebrating the unpredictable capriciousness of clay. Making light work of the conventions of sculpture and painting, the ceramics teeter between formalism and informalism. Loosely embodying familiar structures, such as squares, coils, rolls and slabs, the artworks are foremost aesthetically informed by the bodily language of their material.

Continuing the methodological approach developed throughout my PhD studies, my making process remains propositional. Anthropologist Tim Ingold, writing on material intimacies in art and craft practices, proposes that “materials think in us, and we think through them.”<sup>1</sup> In touching a material, we “bring the movements of our own being into correspondence with the movements of the materials.”<sup>2</sup> As I handle a slab of clay, I make suggestions or offers through physical gestures, such as grabbing, slapping, rolling, or folding. Observing and responding to what happens once set into motion, the process remains open to contingency and the materials' tendencies. In turn, the clay is free to enjoy itself in an immediate way, following through on its capacity to vary and be changeable. Through this making process, opportunities arise that begin new ways of encountering the material world and ourselves.

The artworks in *IMPRESSIBLE, CHANGEABLE, UNRULY* comprise eleven clays from Aotearoa and Australia. Each clay is variable in temperament and responds differently to firing processes. Hence, each work is also a technical experiment in how material parts hold together as assembled forms. Left bare, colour and texture are not applied to the surface but emerge forth from within the body of the material. Every gesture (mark, crack, or warp) traces a material relation between clays and how they have responded to my hand, tool, and environmental conditions.

Expanding my exploration of inside/outside, the supporting materials comprising *IMPRESSIBLE, CHANGEABLE, UNRULY* are all subject to a similar treatment to that of the clay. The fortified bronze hooks (holding the *Wall tiles*) and the tōtara tabletop have also been made by hand, using repurposed materials from Waihi and Tāmaki Makaurau. The terracotta bricks (forming the wonky table legs) are remnants from my parents' dismantled fireplace in Taranaki. Generating and degenerating material relations are important for my practice; I often incorporate broken fragments of bisque-fired work within new ceramic artworks, sometimes pressing them into a *Wall tile* or *Wall object* as surface disruptions

<sup>1</sup> Tim Ingold, “An Ecology of Materials,” in *Power of Material/Politics of Materiality* (Zürich-Berlin: diaphanes, 2014), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2013), 6–7.

within an image. Material leftovers become composts for thinking about forever fluctuating possibilities, like raw clay, loose and shifting, open and variable.

For me, a measure of a successful artwork is the degree to which it evokes a feeling of possibility about the present (which otherwise might be described as its openness). Artist Paul Chan, writing on *What Art Is and Where it Belongs*, proposes that works of art illuminate their “interdependence precisely in their irreconcilability.”<sup>3</sup> *IMPRESSIBLE, CHANGEABLE, UNRULY* explores how an artwork might conceptually ‘incomplete’ itself so that its “parts do not make a whole,” which Chan describes as its capacity for “freedom.”<sup>4</sup> The collaged squares of surface texture on the more painterly *Wall tiles* are one such example. In other artworks, such as the *Standing painting* objects on the tabletop, intestine-like coiled lengths of clay are layered upon themselves, accumulating into bodily stacks. Some are adorned with hollow circular forms held in place with white straps. In general, the inner workings of an artwork (its parts and joins) are intentionally exposed and foregrounded as conceptual content.

I am interested in the persistent interplay between surface and form, whereby images pass through the more object-like works and then, in the *Wall tiles*, are embedded like marked skin. Withholding the feeling of recognising something but not quite, associations restlessly hover. At first look, they are incisive and direct in colour, form, mark, and gesture. Yet the clay pushes back against representational clarity or objective meaning. Fired on the threshold of just coming into itself, the artworks continually stir into geological accumulations and soft images. The painterly *Wall tiles* collage components into landscapes that do not settle into a typical horizon view. Their marks are materially sympathetic to the textures of the earth, to the stratifications of a clay bank, for example, but carry a novel strangeness that is unfamiliar.

The hand-built ceramics exhibit the marks of their making. Seemingly speaking to the memory of the process, expressive form-making gestures are imprinted within their forms. Resisting words and suggestively inviting touch, they offer a language of bodily expression that is their own. Spatial dynamics build inside compositions and between artworks, contributing to an internally referential ceramic vocabulary. Joyful and strange, they perch in objecthood, foregrounding an uncanny excess about an experience that negates immediate comprehension. Reaching beyond their composition, each is sympathetic to the family of things to which it might belong. Reverberating with associations, some persistent and others fleeting, the artworks offer poetry beyond the grasp and directness of experience that does not settle. As poetic contemplations, they are open to their outside.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Chan, “What Art Is and Where It Belongs,” E-Flux, November 2009, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61356/what-art-is-and-where-it-belongs/>.

<sup>4</sup> Chan, “What Art Is and Where It Belongs.”