President’s report

Into May already and the sun sets very early in the sky. With winter coming on, we have decided to stick in some ceiling insulation at the rooms. As those who pot through the winter will know, the place can get a bit cold. Hopefully the insulation will help. Installation will require that the rooms are closed for a good 6 days – May 20 to 25 inclusive. Apologies in advance for any inconvenience.

We have also just painted the roof. Thanks very much to Mauritza Basson, Scott Gordon, Craig Williams, Tim Frank and Rosemary O’Hara for two days spent much exposed to the wind applying silvery bituminous stuff. There are a few holes up in the tin, so the roof won’t last forever. We’ll probably need a new one within the next ten years.

Thanks also to everyone involved in an extremely successful anagama firing. And especially to Shige, who put in many long hours before and during the firing. And to Alan Ross, who organises everything, splits most of the wood, does amazing write-ups for the newsletter and ensures that everything runs smoothly.

A note about purchasing clay. The club stocks a range of clays, which members can purchase. But we don’t really run a regular shop. If we supply people with clay on demand, it creates too much work for those who already do a lot for the club. So if you want to buy clay, can you please come along on a Tuesday when someone will be there to help you.

We have finalised the dates for our annual exhibition at the Academy of Fine Arts. It’ll run from 19 August to 5 September. The guest potter and selector is Sue Newitt from Nelson. Sue makes beautiful thrown domestic ware. Check her out here: http://www.nelsonpotters.co.nz/profile/sue-newitt. We also have a range of possibilities for workshops during the year. So far, Chris Weaver is confirmed for the 30 and 31st of October. And there’s a club raku coming up this month.

Remember the special meeting to elect a new president and vice president on Wednesday 19 May.

Gwyn

Potters Diary: Upcoming events in May/June 2010 at WPA

16 May: Working Bee at WPA, 10 am till finished.
19 May: Extraordinary General Meeting of WPA - from 5:30pm at the WPA rooms
20-25 May: Rooms closure
23 May: Raku Firing
12-13 June: Workshop sgraffitto and slip making (Vivian Rodriguez)
19 August: Ceramicus 2010 Opening, exhibition running till 5th September

Regular events

Pottery classes Mon, Tues, Thurs 7–9pm; Wed 3.30–5.30pm; Sat 9.45–11.45am
Club Day every Tuesday, 10am–2pm, bring something to share for lunch
DCA class Fridays, 9.30am – 1pm

New members

Welcome to the new members: Ilse Bester, Rod Graham, Beryl Walker, Michelle Watson

Upcoming events

WORKING BEE, Sunday 16 May 2010, from 10am until all is done

Yes! It’s that time of the year again. The time we all get together at the rooms and have a fantastic time cleaning out the clay trap, washing away the dust and grime, smashing forgotten and neglected pots, meeting new members and making merry.

ELECTIONS

This notice invites members to attend a meeting on Wednesday 19 May 2010 from 5.30pm at the rooms at 130 Grant Road, Thorndon. The purpose of the meeting is to elect a new President and a new Vice President and a new committee member because of recent and upcoming resignations.
ROOMS CLOSURE
We are planning to install insulation in the ceiling in May – to keep the place a little warmer in winter and to keep the rain from deafening everyone. The rooms will be closed from early on Thursday 20 May until late Tuesday 25 May, if all goes to plan. If you are keen on helping out with installation of a whole lot of polystyrene sheets, get in touch with Gwyn: gwynwilliams@gmx.com.

RAKU! RAKU! NOTE DATE CORRECTION
The next RAKU firing will be at the Rooms Sunday 23 May 2010, 9am - 3pm.
Club provides glazes and tuition so if you have never tried firing your pots Raku style then come along and have a creative day.
Just bring bisqued pots and something for a shared lunch.

HEAD’S UP!! - THIS YEAR’S ANNUAL EXHIBITION CERAMICUS10
Opens Thursday night, 19 August & closes Sunday, 5 September.
This is earlier than previous years so receiving day will be Sunday, 15 August from 10 am to 4 pm. We have secured Gallery 3 at Academy Galleries for 17 days (longer than usual) and we will run alongside the Academy’s exhibition ‘Artists as Activists’ that should attract good public interest. So here is an excellent opportunity to showcase our work to the public. Let’s make it a cracker!
Entry forms will be sent out with the June newsletter.

Newsletter by email?
If you would like to receive the WPA newsletter by email instead of hardcopy please send your email address to Vera at davvee@paradise.net.nz. Receiving the newsletter by email will help the club with economics and the environment?
Cheers 😊

First aid kit
The first aid kit is stored in the cupboards near the entrance to the library but it is only to be used for accidents and injuries that happen at the rooms, not for general medical problems that happen elsewhere – members are encouraged to use their own first aid kits for these.

Anagama update

Anagama Wicket Removal
Fully rested after its 96½ hours of heated exertion the anagama kiln’s wicket (door) was removed on Sunday 28 March and the kiln unloaded. The speed of unloading the kiln was in marked contrast to the meticulous and time consuming care that Shige Ohashi, the Firing Master, took in deciding the placement of each individual piece. He worked uncomplainingly for 8 days loading the kiln, generally putting in 12-13 hour days.
The kiln functioned extremely well, even without the use of a pyrometer, with all cones being down at the front by 5:00 am and at the back by 8:00 am on Friday 19 March, the third day of the firing. There appeared to have been a fairly even distribution of pine ash throughout the kiln.
Two types of wadding were use labelled “soft” and “hard” by Shige. The soft wadding was used on kiln furniture and the hard on the pieces themselves. The recipes for the technically inclined are:
Soft – Alumina Hydrate (1 part), China Clay (1 part) and flour (1 part); and
Hard – Alumina Hydrate (8 parts), China Clay (2 parts) Ball Clay (1 part) and Grog (medium) (1 part).

The shift leaders for the firing, apart from Shige and me, were Murray McGaughran, Gwyn Williams, Andy Hope and Roger Pearce.

Side stoking through one rear port started at 6:00 am on the Saturday, it having been decided that starting side stoking earlier in the piece would probably contribute little to the eventual outcome. The chimney dampers were closed throughout the firing and were partially open during the cooling phase. We estimate that in excess of 43 cubic metres of wood were used.

Embers did not appear to have been raked from the kiln during the firing. This observation is not based on conversations with the shift leaders, rather on the lack of charcoal and ash found outside the kiln when the wicket was removed. Some pots were dislodged probably because of overly enthusiastic stoking. Shige had deliberately extended the length of the firebox (by having the wicket protrude beyond the front wall of the kiln) in an attempt to avoid this happening. Another reason was that he wanted to create sufficient space for a large bed of embers to be maintained. He also wisely refrained from loading pots as far forward as was possible.

As the pots were removed they were photographed by Ron Knox before being placed on pallets for viewing and later removal by their proud and eager creators. Based on past experience the practice of erecting a barrier to separate the potters from their creations until all pieces had been extracted from the kiln continued. This practice was instituted to avoid the melees that had accompanied some of the previous firings resulting in some pieces being damaged.

While there were the usual disappointments most participants seemed happy and in some cases ecstatic with the results. As Shige observed, if 30% of the pots in an anagama firing are acceptable, then the firing can be deemed to have been a success.

In his thoughts on the anagama firing that he penned and sent to participants before the firing he remarked on expectations:

“Do not expect a good result on your piece before the firing. Such expectation will disappoint you. The results on your piece will never be like what you expect. Please expect the unexpected. Please try to find a beautiful face on your piece after the firing. Your piece had been standing in the massive flame for 100 hours long. It must give us good hints for the next firing.”

Shige’s contribution was tangibly acknowledged and Graeme and June Houston’s unfailing support applauded.

The day had started with less than inspiring weather. It improved as the barbeque was lit and the sausages and other food and refreshments circulated amongst the 25 -30 people who were present for the unloading. We also briefly enjoyed the plaintive sound of Paula Weir playing a flute she had committed to the firing.

Ron’s excellent photos of the firing and the pots are available by going to http://picasaweb.google.com/ron.knox and then clicking on the Anagama album. An article on the firing, plus photos, is available on the NZ Society of Potters’ website: www.nzpotters.com.

The 6th firing may have ended but there is an obvious reminder on site of the next firing. It takes the form of a large quantity of pine trees, supplied by Graeme, to be cut, split and stacked during the next few months for use in the anagama and the adjacent Mad Hatters’ kiln in which some of us are involved.

My thanks to all those who gave so unstintingly of their time in making the firing happen. To me it illustrates the communal ethos of the club.

Alan Ross
Anagama Coordinator
Pit firing workshop – 10 April 2010

It was a beautiful sunny Autumn day, when a small, enthusiastic group of potters gathered at the WPA clubrooms to pay homage to the fire goddess! Some bought their own special clay forms for the firing, including some lovely nude sculptures, while others selected pieces from the burnished tiles prepared for this event.

We started by building the brick kiln. Everyone joined in, including young family members. The huge bag of sawdust was (very gratefully) moved to our outdoor venue and our pieces were placed on a bed of sawdust, providing a foundation for the firing. We then carefully sprinkled the sulphates and salt around each piece and the pit was completely filled with dry wood slates and paper. In keeping with tradition, everyone shared in the ritual of ‘fire lighting’.

While the fire blazed, we watched the blue, green, and purple flames begin to emerge from the kiln, which was clearly a good omen. After a while, we agreed to cover the kiln and meet again the next day to remove our work, allowing sufficient cooling time.

The results were very pleasing, with plenty of colour contrasts, highlighted with a little wax and polish.

Over hot drinks and chocolate biscuits, we exchanged phone numbers and made plans for future gatherings and experiments around the pit. Check the newsletter for future events.

Francesca

Zoodoo Clay

Many of you will be familiar with paper clay and it’s amazing properties. Seems you can join the stuff when dry and even after it’s been fired. But have you ever used a self-firing clay?

Following on from my experiments with bicycle-powered electric kilns, I have recently begun developing a whole new type of clay. I’d been somewhat frustrated by my failure to attain stoneware temperatures as efficiently as I’d have hoped just from bicycle power. Even the kiln I installed under the local gym, plugged into a whole bunch of rowing machines, exercycles and whatnot, struggled once things got up to 1250. But then one fine day at the zoo, I had a thought. Why not draw energy from the contents of the kiln (like in a wood-fired set up)? Why rely solely on electricity generated outside?

It hit my like off a fan. Wedge dung into some clay and see what happens. After all, cow dung is often used as a source of cooking fuel in Africa (or so I remembered from school geography). There must be some variety of pooh I could get right here at the zoo and that I could mix with my clay.

Well, my initial experiments in ‘pooh clays’, as my daughter puts it, were a bit of a flop. Giraffe pooh is really dry and when you add water it just turns to mush, and it doesn’t combine well with clay. Orangutan pooh is very low octane – you just don’t get any heat out of it. I wondered about birds, but there’s a problem getting the stuff in big enough quantities. Some pooh loses calorific value quickly, which also makes it unsuitable.

I tried and tried, aided by a friendly zookeeper, but to no avail.

But then I remembered the Nyala – stripy antelopes from South Africa. For some reason, Nyala dung burns fantastically hot and is even a little plastic. Stored in airtight conditions, it just seems to get better. Or you can dry it out and reconstitute it with the same results. Amazing! But there weren’t many Nyala and certainly not enough to serve the clay stocks of WPA. Import Nyala pooh? No, it’d never fly. Annoyed by this latest frustration, I took a great heap of discarded sh@* from a whole bunch of animals and threw it in with the Nyala pooh. And then I dumped a whole lot of clay on top, jumped on it a bit (had a bit of a tanty, basically), and went away on holiday.

When I returned, I found a dry, cracked mass. But underneath, when I dug down into the middle, I found a seam where the clay and the pooh had mixed together well, and I had this fantastic, plastic, highly workable ‘clay’! Fantastic pooh clay! Zoodoo clay! I threw it, fired it by bicycle, and got cone 10 no trouble.

Of course, I don’t have a recipe – who knows what animals contributed what in what proportions, but the Nyala have to be the key. I also got a bit of reduction, which I’d always wanted to avoid – my glazes weren’t what I’d hoped for.

And then there’s the pollution factor from the burning. Still, it’s early days. Watch this space!

Oscar Ratchett

Fusion - NZ Potters convention 2010

Well, they did it, Neil, Marion, Nicole and Josephine. This very small team are to be congratulated for organising the latest NZPotters convention with a hand from the Otago Potters. Every convention has its own flavour, a something to set it apart from the others – be it the legendary cakes at the Roaring 40s, the sense of fun at Crater Clay or the best band at First Light 007. Fusion had hands on. Fusion made the most of two opportunities – one was the sister city relationship with Shanghai to invite a master decorator from Jingdezhen, the other the Polytechnic.
Home to the School of Art, the only place in New Zealand offering a full time course in ceramics, as well as organising the distance Diploma in Ceramic Art, this was the perfect place for a change of format from the usual conference, with two days of Master Classes being offered beforehand.

Potters gathered buzzing on the Wednesday morning eager to start their chosen class. And yes, I even detected a few enthusiasts under 40.

Neil Grant’s class was covering the A-Z of potting, with an emphasis on kiln firing; Vic Greenaway from Australia had his class throwing wonderful pots in Primo porcelain. I chose to do Austrian Kurt Spurey’s class, simply because I didn’t know anything about him. The joy of a master class is to play with the materials provided, which in this case was casting porcelain slip, and see what happens. Kurt showed us how he casts slabs of slip on a plaster bat, cuts or rips them up, joins again, sometimes filling the gaps with coloured slip which gets scraped back when dry. The semi dry slab pieces then get set into a newly poured bit of slip. It looks and sounds easy ... but of course, it’s a matter of having the idea, practise, and get it through the firings. The drying room gradually filled with our mediocre efforts and we were able to get some of our work bisqued.

There was also a seminar for DCA students who were sent in various directions. The classes were relaxed with plenty of time to look in on the other ones. Vic’s throwing skills between two metal kidneys are amazing, and the alteration of shape with a round ended pencil-like tool swift and confident.

The use of a heat gun as well as spraying again with water was an eye opener – never thought the porcelain would stand up to that treatment. Primo porcelain clay and slip were used and demonstrators, students and Paul Pepworth alike are keen to find out how this will perform in the firing. Neil’s class glazed and stacked a salt kiln, but a shelf collapsed, blocking the bung hole, so no salt was thrown in. Ah, all in the line of learning; Neil is a most unflappable person.

Friday morning was time to do our own thing and explore some of Dunedin’s plentiful sights. Even the weather was turned on beautiful and mild for us. In the afternoon there were talks and events at the museum, which were also open to the public, a great way to involve more people and bring ceramics to the public attention. Kurt’s slide show of artists in Europe who work with clay (not necessarily ceramic artists) and discussion on seeing yourself as an artist rather than a potter was another eye opener, and very different from most attitudes on this side of the world.

The eagerly awaited opening of the 51st National Exhibition took place at the Otago Museum, on the Friday night. About a hundred pots selected by Peter Lange were stunningly displayed on custom-made plinths. Statements and photos of their creators gave a deeper insight and made an interesting read. As always, some top potters/ceramic artists were conspicuous by their absence. What would it take for them to enter the National, I wonder.

The weekend was of course full of demonstrations, slide shows, catching up with friends, eating and drinking. The food throughout the five days was supplied by the hospitality course of the Polytech, and very good.

The other demonstrators now joined Kurt and Vic. With Ji-Ming Lin acting as interpreter, Huang Yunpeng showed slides of early Chinese pieces and the factories in Jingdezhen. His demonstration of painting on prepared forms was extremely skilled, beyond what most of us would aspire to in a lifetime.

Kate Fitzharris made and burnished little moon faces and hands and feet and had bits of singlets, hair, fur etc on display. Small, but intriguing.

Jo Howard continued the theme of porcelain, cast, but using different methods from Kurt. Enjoying the graphic qualities of fabric, she decorated a plaster slab with regular patterns in coloured slips, using little fine tipped squeegee bottles, before pouring slip over the entire slab. When set, she proceeded to cut this up and create bowls over plaster shapes, then adding slab rims. Her work has a crisp freshness to it.

The trade stalls are always popular with the attendees, a break from information overload. A pity there were no potters supplies companies, though Primo Clay and Decapot were represented.

Capital Books from Wellington brought down a van full of art books, and Judy, Vic’s wife, was advertising art tours through Italy including master classes with Vic (www.discoveringitaly.com).
The NZP executive raffled off a mug rack and had designed a very nice May to April calendar featuring New Zealand ceramic artists. An excellent fund raising venture, I bought several to give away.

The gallery space at the Art School had a loose display of former students and tutors’ work. It was interesting trying to work out who had made what and see how far they had come since.

Saturday night, the dinner dance, at the Poly Restaurant. Again, great food and band. Sunday morning, the AGM, the core of these conventions. It can feel like an interruption to the fun, but this is the time when members can and should ask questions and have their input into the affairs of the Society and this should not be hurried through. Lawrence Ewing was elected life member by acclamation. Well deserved. The website is the NZP’s best asset. We also enjoyed a presentation with slides about the Benhar kilns which got some people fired up about making it into a ceramic museum.

The convention finished with the awarding of the John Calver Trophy, traditionally awarded at Potters’ Olympics, and last contested in Gisborne. Marion (the convenor) chose to award it to Nicole Kolig, “for the biggest hissy fit” when the exhibition space lined up became unavailable and it was suggested to have it on scaffolding in the mall! Thanks to Nicole, the 51st National is held in a fitting place, the Otago Museum. And so concluded another great convention. If there were any hitches and panics behind the scenes (as I’m sure there were!) – we didn’t see them. Everything went smoothly. Thank you, Marion, Neil, Nicole and Josephine, you did a wonderful job with smiles on your faces. So much from so few!

Next year – Auckland.

Aimée McLeod

WPA Library reviews

JOURNALS RECEIVED, March/April 2010 - SELECTED CONTENTS. These journals are presently reference only in the Library, and can be borrowed when the next issue arrives. Several journals have gone missing from this box over the last few months – please respect the Library rules, they are for the benefit of all members!

Ceramic Review, no 241, January/February 2010
Penny Simpson: Slip-Decorated Red Earthenware
Andrew Burton’s Brick Sculptures
Claire Loder’s Portrait Heads
The New Ceramics Galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum
Turkey’s Traditional Earthenware Potters
Glazing: Celadon Blues
Making a Teapot
Ceramic Review, no 242, March/April 2010
Jasmin Rowlandson: a move to the country enriches her sculptural work
Workplaces of Well Known UK Potters
Ceramic Art London 2010
Claudia Lis’s Subtly Glazed (Celadon)Functional Forms
Ikuko Iwamoto’s “British Eccentricity”
Wouter Dam’s Colourful Table-Top Pieces
Firing in Peru – with Mango leaves!
Alternatives to Glazing: Coloured Clays
Crystalline Glazes
Ceramics Monthly, volume 58 no 3, March 2010
Green Research in Universities – reducing carbon and maximising efficiency
Glassagama: the Corning Wood-Burning Furnace, for both clay and glass blowing
Steve Reynolds: Off the Wall
Peter Karner: Stoneware with Layered Glazes and Reduction Firing
Pottery Making Illustrated, volume 13 no 2, March/April 2010
From Clay Body to Casting Slip
Handheld Extruders
The Phases of Porcelain
Clay on Clay Stencils
Birds as Inspiration
Soft Slab Teapot
Between the Lines: Grouting for Effect with Tiles
Creating a Mosaic Table
Ceramics Monthly, volume 58 no.2, February 2010
The Industry of Making Pots – A Studio Potter goes into Mass production
Thrown and Altered Porcelain Pots by Deborah Schwartzkopf
Slip-Cast Porcelain Objects, Lit from Behind, by David Scott Smith
Sculptural Constructions – Brandon Reese
From the Rooms

We will have a major clean up of the rooms during the working bee on 16 May. We’ll be throwing out any pots that have not been finished and have gone dry, anything covered in dust, any glaze-fired work that hasn’t been collected after many moons, and anything else that seems to have been forgotten.

Please ensure that all your tools and so on are in your cubby hole. If your stuff won't fit, take it home with you. Things left lying around will also go into the recycling.

Notice for kiln firers

Please be aware that the kilns and kiln shelves are fairly expensive. If you are using the kilns, we expect you to take due care with them and to take all possible steps to avoid damage.

The biggest problem is glaze runs. Small runs are easy to clean, but big ones create a huge mess and can ruin shelves or seriously reduce their usefulness. You must test your glazes before you do a whole kiln load. Test first on tiles, and then on a pot. Use cones. WPA will ask you to pay for any damage you are responsible for.

Keeping up to date

The WPA now runs an online diary. Check this out for the most update information on events. You can also find a number of resources available there too. Website: http://www.wellingtonpotters.famundo.com

Pottery classes at the rooms

Mondays 7-9pm – Ivan Vostinar (started 26 April)
Basic to intermediate 8 week course $145. Enrol through Onslow College (phone 477 1118, email commed@onslow.school.nz)

Tuesdays 7-9pm – Vivian Rodriguez (started 27 April)
Basic to intermediate 8 week course $145. Enrol through Onslow College (phone 477 1118, email commed@onslow.school.nz)

 Thursdays 7-9pm – Rosemary O’Hara
Throwing and hand building for beginners and beyond. 6 week courses run continuously. $100 per course, plus clay and firing costs. Contact Rosemary to enrol: phone 233 0003, email ros eo@klezmer.co.nz.

Saturdays 9.45-11.45am – Anthea Grob and Rosemary O’Hara
Introductory and intermediate class in handbuilding and wheel throwing. 6-week courses run continuously. $100 per course, plus clay and firing costs. Contact Anthea to enrol: anthea@loveit.org.nz.

Clays for sale at WPA

How to buy clay

New clay is kept under lock and key in the storeroom. The rooms manager, president and treasurer have keys. Clay is available for purchase on Tuesdays between 10am and 2pm. Please pay immediately. Note that we can’t give change or receipts.

Abbotts Stoneware: $22
Traditional buff stoneware.

Abbotts Sculptural: $26
Grogged stoneware, suitable for raku or sculptural work. Low shrinkage. Oatmeal buff colour in oxidation, brown in reduction. Firing range: cone 8-10.

Abbotts Red: $22
Fine, plastic earthenware. Orange terracotta colour at maturity. 50mesh. Firing range: cone 03-2 (1100-1150).

Abbotts White: $43
Ultra white, smooth earthenware/mid stoneware made from imported powders mixed with water. Provides ideal surface for under glaze decoration. Compatible with 271D glaze. 80mesh. Firing range: cone 2-8.

PCW (Potters Clay White): $36
A versatile, pale grey-firing (grey in reduction) stoneware body with excellent throwing characteristics. Suits many all applications (including raku firings because of a good thermal shock resistance). 80 mesh. Drying shrinkage 5-8%, total when fired about 16%. Firing range: cone 9-10 (1257-1282 degrees centigrade).

Red Raku (12.5kg): $26
Great for handbuilding. Grog content of about 30%. Pale terracotta colour. Won’t take glaze all that well. Firing range: cone 03-5

Recycled clay: $7 bag
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As a club we try to keep our fees down while still covering costs. If for financial reasons you feel excluded, please contact the President, Gwyn Williams, or the treasurer, Dave Smissen.

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