

Potters Marks

- 1 Nerida Bell
- 2 Mollie Bosworth
- 3 Kevin Boyd
- 4 Jackie Masters
- 5 Anne Mossman
- 6 Danny Murphy
- 7 Nikki Dowdell



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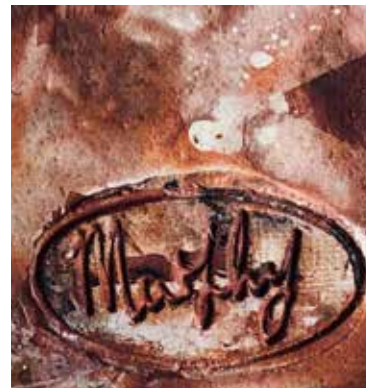
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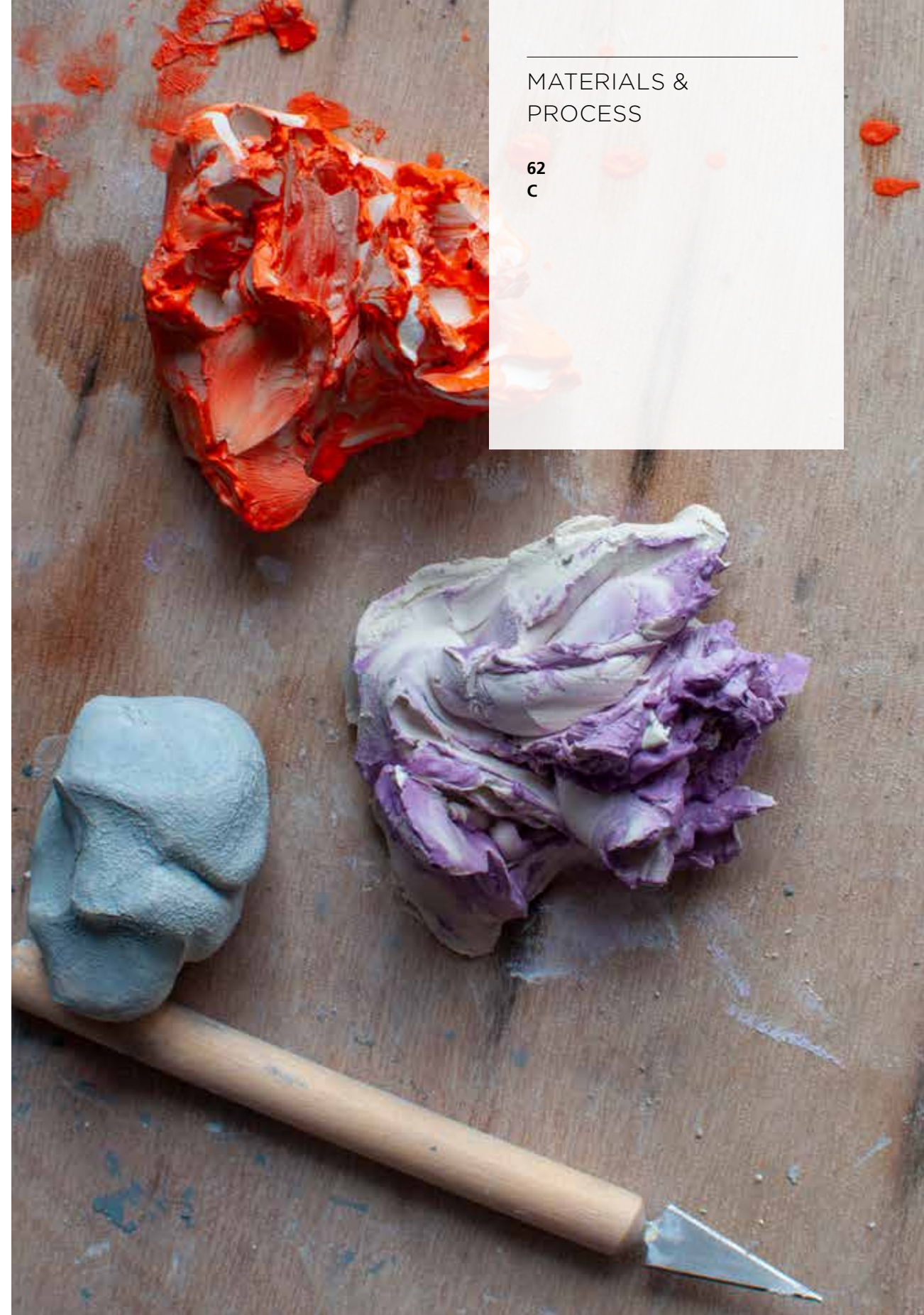
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Nerikomi – a focus on coloured clay, the process and artists

by Anne Mossman

Nerikomi is a Japanese term used to describe the process of colouring and layering clays. It literally means 'kneading', which is a step used in evenly distributing a ceramic stain through a clay body.

I studied ceramics at Australian National University, and in 2004 we were fortunate to have Dorothy Feibleman as a visiting lecturer. Dorothy is a nerikomi specialist of international significance. She led the class through intensive days of colouring clay, layering, slicing and joining, and then using the intricately formed pattern slabs to make vessels. I was immediately hooked.

I have found pattern-making by layering and manipulation to be a very accessible and spontaneous way of expression. I am intrigued by the shift of lines and the creation of patterns arising from quite subtle movements of the coloured clay bodies.

My early nerikomi work was characterised by intricate patterns and small delicate vessels, and for a period I slipcast thin pattern pieces into moulds. More recent work has larger gestural swathes of colour loosely layered then hand-formed into large vessels. My influences come from geological formations which have undergone the same shifts and movements, but over eons. I'm originally from New Zealand, a country thrust up by relatively recent violent ruptures in the earth's crust, the scars of which are part of my visual lexicon.

Anne Mossman

Seams of Uncertainty 4

2018, coloured Lumina

porcelain, 1200°C

oxidation, h.20cm

w.20cm

Highly Commended

Siliceous, Ceramic Arts

Queensland, 2018

Photo: Deanne Smith



THE NERIKOMI METHOD

The following steps illustrate a method of generating coloured patterns.



1 Stains are weighed to provide a predictable colour result. This is a light green mix made from yellow and blue. Most of my colour palettes are chosen from a library of test tiles that I have developed over time.



2 The measured stain is put into a well of clay and mixed in with a few drops of water. The stain is mixed in until all the water is taken up and it is no longer sticky.



3 The mixture is then blended by rolling between my hands until seamlessly incorporated. If large batches of coloured clay are required, a blender may be used.



7 The finished stack is further rolled to reduce the thickness of the coloured clay layers. If the stack is rolled too thinly the detail of the pattern can be lost, so it takes trial and error to understand outcomes in pattern making.



8 The top and bottom of the rolled stack is painted with black slip, to maintain pattern definition. The whole stack is then partially folded over on itself which will produce a zig-zag pattern inside the stack.



9 After the stack has been folded a couple of times, it is then rolled for the last time. I find a small hand-roller is an invaluable tool for nerikomi work.



4 The colours used for this vessel are illustrated underneath the fired test tiles. The primary colour ratios and saturation levels are noted on each test tile. As can be seen, fired colours are usually deeper than the raw coloured clay.



5 I roll pieces of coloured clay, and then paint them with a layer of black slip. Thin black lines defining colour changes are a signature of my work. The black slip is made using the same base clay and water. For black slip, a stain saturation level of a minimum of 15% stain to clay is used.



6 A stack is built from layers of rolled coloured clay, including uncoloured white clay. The layers vary in thickness to produce a more varied (and interesting) pattern.



10 I cut the rolled stack through the middle to reveal the pattern produced from the layering, folding, rolling, and the black edging. Revealing the pattern is an exciting part of the process of nerikomi for me, especially as it is somewhat spontaneous and random when free-formed in this way.



11 Each half of the slab stack is up-ended, and then cut into slices using a very thin cutting wire (I use #11 guitar wire). Wooden and cardboard runners are used as gauges to set the required cutting depth.



12 Multiple slices are then arranged to make an agreeable design before being brushed with clean water and gently agitated together to adhere and form the pattern slab.



13 The myriad of joins are compressed with a metal rib run over the slab in multiple directions. Combating cracks is the most difficult technical issue to contend with in nerikomi, so compression of the joins is paramount.



14 The slab is then pinched up and shaped to form a bowl. The slab can be thinned down to form a vessel larger than the original slab without much degradation to the pattern. Further compression of the joins while pinching is important, especially underneath and at the edges.



15 The final shaping can be done in a mould where it can be rested to firm up before attaching a rim, handles and foot, if these elements are desired.



16 You may want to trim the rim before attaching a rim coil. The foot can be thrown or handbuilt. The vessel should then be wrapped in plastic and left to dry slowly for 2 weeks. See 'Finishing Techniques' for process details



17 The final fired work

GENERAL TIPS ABOUT COLOURING CLAYS AND FINISHING METHODS

Any clay can be coloured but the best results come from using fine white clays such as porcelain. Colourants can include oxides and carbonates, but stains give the most consistent and stable results that, in their raw state, resemble the fired coloured result. Stains are made from calcined (fired and ground) raw materials.

I mostly work with primary colours and mix up my own palettes but hundreds of colours are available commercially. I make lots of notated test tiles in graded colours so that I can select and then recreate colours for each of my palettes. It's easier to write detailed notes on the test tiles after firing with a marker pen, as long as you have a coding method for when they go into the kiln.

Clay will reach a saturation point where adding more stain will not make for a more intense colour. I typically work at between 0.5% to 8% saturation (stain to clay weight ratio). Most colours will not require more than 15% to achieve the most intense colour.

Making up large batches of coloured clay is easily done in a blender with the resultant slip being dried out on a plaster bat to return it to a usable clay body. You can work from dried out clay for the most accurate results but I am happy with clay straight out of the bag for blending colours.

A coloured clay (and pattern) will last indefinitely if well stored, but I tend to use colour batches up for each project so that I don't have a lot of coloured left-overs needing careful wrapping, labelling, and storing.

I have recently added paper to my clay to minimise the loss from cracking. The paper fibre helps mesh the myriad of joins in a vessel. I add toilet paper at a rate of three single sheets per 800gms of wet clay. It goes into the blender at the same time as the stain.

I use Keane's Lumina midfire porcelain and locally sourced stains. I fire to cone 6 in oxidation.

Colouring of clay has recently become more popular as a result of an increasing range of commercial stains capable of retaining the colour at all firing levels.

FINISHING TECHNIQUES

During the making, patterns are usually indistinct, as can be seen in the illustrations. But, because the pattern goes right through the clay, it can always be cleaned back to fine lines and detail, so it's important not to get distressed about a blurry pattern while you are building a vessel.

At hard/leather-hard I use a damp sponge to clean off any gross slurry and reveal the pattern.

At bone-dry a fine steel wool (grade 00) will give the best pattern definition before it is fired. The flexibility of steel wool is good for getting into corners and curves. I use a tight fitting, comprehensive face mask when sanding and removing bone dry clay. The loose-fitting white masks are not sufficient for protecting your health.

After bisque (1000°C) I submerge vessels in water and sand with wet/dry carborundum paper at various grits (160 to 400) until the pattern definition is perfect and the surface is silky smooth.

After the vitrification firing, I wet and then sand the vessel again using 800 to 1200 grit wet/dry paper. The end result for this unglazed surface is a marble-like touch and sheen.

My surfaces are usually unglazed unless I apply a clear glaze to the interior of a functional piece.

Instagram @annemossman

Please contact Anne for workshop requests.

SPOTLIGHT ON SOME LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL NERIKOMI ARTISTS

Nanna Bayer

I was intrigued by Nanna's journey to nerikomi. She began in a throwing and woodfiring environment where a number of clay bodies were in use. She started using these bodies together and, spurred on by the challenge of such an activity being deemed impossible, she continued testing by mixing in oxides, the only colourants available at the time.

As with many ceramic artists, Nanna was in 'heaven' when a red stain became available, a result of technological advances in ceramic stain production.

Nanna's current work includes functional and sculptural vessels sold and exhibited locally and internationally. She regularly holds nerikomi workshops around Australia.

For a detailed background on Finnish-born artist Nanna Bayer, head to www.australianceramics.com for the online article, *Opposite Poles*, written by Zsolt Faludi in September 2014.

Narumi Ii

Narumi's motivation to experiment with nerikomi was not related to her Japanese heritage. It was a YouTube video on agateware that she chanced upon not long after her first experience with clay in July 2016 on the Gold Coast. At that time she had no idea how to colour clay but her fascination with the simple swirl pattern from the video motivated her to try it. She began experimenting by using some sample ceramic stain packs, and has not stopped colouring clay since. Over the past 18 months her patterned slabs have become more detailed and complex as they have been shaped into increasingly varied forms.

For Narumi, her nerikomi technique is like painting a canvas – colour choices are made from intuition and not from test tiles. She starts with a choice of major colours, then, through blending and changing saturation levels, she builds her canvas, in a process similar to painting. She seldom repeats a pattern.



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Being new to ceramics, Narumi's work has had limited exposure but she has had some early successes with inclusions, awards and sales in several recent national exhibitions, motivating her to continue.

Instagram @narumi_ceramics

Larissa Warren

In her art practice Larissa has always worked with clay, primarily handbuilding and figurative works. It wasn't until attending my workshop on colouring clay that her attention moved to pattern making and slipcasting.

Using nerikomi techniques, her development included adding a variety of heavily grogged stoneware clays as the basis of the pattern blocks. The results were a more fluid visual image, rather than highly definitive patterns. Allowing for the differences in shrinkage and drying rates of the mixed clays has taken a lot of refining and testing. Mastering her current forms has been all the more impressive, especially as her patterns are confined within thin, slipcast porcelain walls.

Larissa is drawn to artworks that not only value beauty but also make emotional connections. Pippin Drysdale's colour blends, Cody Hoyt's nerikomi slab sculptures and Jennifer Lee's elegant yet simple forms are all influences.

1 Narumi Ii, *Somewhere in My Dream*, 2018
porcelain, satin clear glaze, 1245°C, h.33cm
w.14cm
photo: artist

2 Nanna Bayer
Rainbow Series, 2017
Heaven and Earth
exhibition, Mansfield
Gallery, Sydney

In Larissa's words:

Whatever the media - I've always experimented and pushed the boundaries of that media. I've found that clay has a tremendous flexibility for transferring/expressing emotion. There is a lot of inter-relationship between my ideas and my making processes. The constant conflict between the smooth porcelain and rough textures of the stoneware clays play an important role.

www.ratbagstudios.com

Dorothy Feibleman

Hanging, detail
illuminated installation,
2005, h.100cm w.100cm
Photo: Takayuki Yamasaki
and Dorothy Feibleman

Dorothy Feibleman

Dorothy is internationally recognised for her pioneering work in coloured porcelain starting in 1969, and more recently for the white-on-white translucent nerikomi, expressed in pieces of exquisite delicacy. What is less known is that her life's work has been a dedication to research in the technical aspects of (ceramic) materials, firing methods and tools, and an interest in structural imaging.

Born and educated in the USA, Dorothy spent the next 20 years in the UK and Hungary, and the last 25 years in Japan. She was the youngest member of the Craft Potters Association and was accepted onto the UK Craft Council register at the age of 22. Her most recent success has been



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a collaboration with the Nikko Corporation where her unique white-on-white translucency imaging has materialised in another form – bone china tableware production.

Her work is held in many international museums and collections including the V&A, London, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Museum of Modern Ceramic Art, Gifu. She has an extensive exhibition, award and publication history.

I find Dorothy's vessels absolutely stunning. I admire her life-long dedication to and pioneering in the field of nerikomi.

<http://dorothyfeibleman.com>

Thomas Hoadley

Thomas Hoadley was born and lives in the US where he attained a Master in Science in Ceramics at the Illinois State University. He is widely published, exhibited, and awarded, and is represented in many public collections including the National Museum of American Art and the Museums of Fine Art (Boston and Philadelphia).

This extract, which resonates very strongly with me, is taken directly from Thomas's artist statement:

My initial attraction to the nerikomi technique came from its organic union of pattern and structure. Rather than the former being applied to the latter, as in most decorative pottery traditions, the two are one and the same. The natural world abounds with this sort of union and as a result offers endless inspiration for pattern making.

I find Thomas' patterns breathtaking in their construction and marvel in their placement in the vessels.

1 **Larissa Warren**, *Vase*
2018, Lumina porcelain
slip, raw stoneware clays
sourced from Feeney
Ipswich clay pits, trachyte
and granite, ceramic
stains, cone 10 oxidation
h.16cm, w.12cm
Photo: artist

2 **Thomas Hoadley**
Large Arabesque #1087
2015, coloured porcelain
nerikomi technique
unglazed, cone 6
h.20cm, w.35cm
d.20cm
Photo: Thomas Hoadley

