

Nadine Bell and her Marine-Inspired Pieces

Nadine's passion for clay ran alongside her career as a massage therapist, but a move back to her native country enabled her to set up her studio in rural France, where she had more time and space to explore her ideas using different materials, and to experiment with firing techniques. She explains:

I worked for twenty years as a masseuse, using my hands to help people explore the links between bodies, minds and individual wellbeing. This enabled me to neatly transition into expressing myself through ceramics, and allowing me to discover wonderful similarities when exploring the joy and creativity of clay with its memory and texture.

Nadine wanted to investigate the relationship between fragility and permanence, and looked to the sea for her inspiration. She chose a simple aquatic animal that has been around for more than 543 million years, and 5,500 species are known to exist. Sea sponges display every colour imaginable with delicate, glass-like structures, and Nadine took on the challenge to emulate these ancient creatures, using liquid clay and fibreglass tissue,



Nadine Bell's fascination with ancient sea sponges prompted an exploration into creating a delicate surface using fibreglass tissue.

which she chose for its delicacy, fine texture and ethereal finish. She says: 'It has the potential for sculptural exploration, but combining organic subtlety.'

Making the Marine Structures

Nadine starts by hand building an enclosed form in porcelain paperclay to serve as a base for her marine-inspired pieces. She then paints two layers of paperclay slip on to a double layer of fibreglass tissue, which is supported on a block of plaster. While the surface is still tacky, a woven nylon mesh is placed carefully over the surface and a layer of cobalt oxide or powdered commercial stain is sifted on the mesh using a tea strainer to create a speckled layer; then the mesh is peeled away to reveal a ripple pattern. The tissue is cut into 3cm or 4cm strips and then into small or larger squares depending on the scale of component she wants. These are carefully scrunched individually into the required shape, taking care not to damage the decorated surface. The fragments are attached very closely together on to the porcelain structure, using the paperclay slip, gradually assembling an undulating fragile surface.

She is drawn to the concept of the traditional Japanese aesthetics wabi-sabi, and is inspired by the thought of finding beauty in every aspect of imperfection in nature, combined with her love for the unknown. She explains: 'This philosophy nurtures all that is authentic by acknowledging three simple realities: nothing lasts, nothing is finished, nothing is perfect.'