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Title

Performing Jeju Scoria: imagined realities and extended vocabularies.

Abstract

This text articulates and contextualizes practice-based research undertaken as part of the international research project, *The Clay Reader: Scoria, Scoria Jeju Scoria*. It explores the notion and actualities of remote investigation through imagined interpretation and responses to a material and its land of origin. The material Scoria is explored and viewed through an alternative lens, that of film, which in turn engenders extended approaches to clay through performative investigation of the artist, material and processes. This paper presents extended vocabularies that are proffered in response to visual and contextual investigations that contribute to a reading of clay outwith of the vernacular.

Artwork Statement

This artwork is born out of an altered paradigm for creativity based upon an imagined connectedness to Jeju Island explored through the material Scoria. In the absence of physical place the material substance of Jeju Island, 'Scoria', provides a conduit for exploration and expression. Connection and interpretation are explored and expressed through a filmic layering of history, myth, folklore, metaphor and anthropocenic application - emanating from the material Scoria and its ubiquitous value within the society and environment of Jeju Island. The medium of clay 'Scoria' is expressed through the lens of film where the material moves beyond documentation and the nature of clay as static is expanded through the integration of film, which aims to construct an extended visual language derived from material performativity. The artwork explores clay/scoria as multi-media performance and explores and implements clay as a critical and conceptual tool engendered through extended approaches to medium and process.

Keywords

Jeju, Scoria, Clay, Film, Performance, Research, extended vocabularies.

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1: Synopsis

As new ways of working emerge and are now becoming normalized as a result of the Covid19 pandemic, alternative solutions for research are being considered and implemented. This is the case with this international research project that was to take place in The Republic of Korea on the Island of Jeju in August 2020. In respect of travel limitations the research project continued remotely and was executed within the UK in November 2020. Three Kilos of Jeju Scoria/Clay was shipped to the participants to enable the research.

2: Reading material (Scoria/Clay)

Jeju scoria/clay consists of volcanic and non-volcanic debris. It has a low viscosity and is problematic to use as a form of ceramic artistic expression due to its inherent difficult qualities both as a raw material and within the kiln. As an artist and researcher my interests reside outside of formal approaches to the medium of clay/ceramic, therefore, the problematic qualities associated with Scoria were somewhat extraneous to this exploration and development. Initial investigation into the material within a moulded process proved impossible and demonstrated the difficulties associated with the material as a form of creative expression. This primary exploration of material proved positive in terms of the development of ideas and a reading of Scoria beyond a making/firing paradigm. My reading of scoria is explored in this text and presents a reading of material within an extended clay/ceramic vocabulary.ⁱ

3: Navigating the remote

The Clay Reader: Scoria, Scoria Jeju Scoria international research project was to take place in The Republic of Korea on the Island of Jeju in August 2020. In respect of travel limitations due to the Covid19 pandemic the research project continued remotely and was executed within the UK in November 2020. This actuality has presented a new paradigm for research and investigation with regards to researching Scoria and interpreting Jeju at a distance, a term that I refer to as 'navigating the remote'. To research a material and place from a remote perspective holds significance in terms of navigating several absences including geographical and cultural experiences. Originally the project was to be embedded in the land and culture of Jeju through residency and hence situational creative responses – in the absence of situation an interpretiveⁱⁱ approach becomes paramount. Methods for interpretation are limited within a 'lockdown'ⁱⁱⁱ situation with the Internet becoming the primary portal for exploration and navigation. Information available with regards to Jeju was biased towards tourism, prominent events including the 4.3 incident and varied perspectives regarding the Haenyeo culture. Academic research was limited due to much of the information being only available in Korean language. These parameters to some extent directed the research through a remote exploration and contextualisation of Scoria.

4: Jeju Imagined

References within the practical research and subsequent artwork are constructed from an imagined perspective. I was able to reference Korea through memory (having visited twice before) and also include a tea bowl^{iv} as a point of both reference and departure, beyond those references the work relies on and is constructed from interpretation. Imagining Jeju from both a physical and cultural distance appears problematic but also engenders freedom in terms of a wider interpretation. Within the artwork several layers of interpretation are applied to provide an imagined reading of Jeju.

Metaphor is employed predominately in the artwork and is expressed through the use of various objects and visualisations including the use of the tangerine

(gamgyul), a prominent fruit grown in Jeju, which, is both physically and culturally embedded in the society and history of the Island. The tangerine is presented within the artwork as a component of classical still life composition, as a reference point to the oldest tree in Jeju^v and as a reference to nourishment and as a cultural symbol. Included within the shipment of Scoria were food items from Jeju including tangerine crisps and tangerine tea, testament to the extended use and its ubiquitous presence as a food source. Fruit has appeared in art and literature within a long historical view, its reference to nourishment, sustenance and life are all present, from ancient cave art, to classical painting and contemporary art.^{vi} Interpretation can also be significant in terms of cultural and spiritual representation.

Imagined realities in the artwork are expressed through the inclusion of footage from live cams^{vii} from various locations around the island, these act as a physical grounding to place and markers of reference. The connection to place is expressed through various layers within the work embracing both factual and fictional representations. This multi-layered narrative engages with both our visual and cerebral interpretations and aims to present an imagined holistic representation of Jeju – through the lens of the artist.

5: Performing (Scoria/Clay)

Performance is embedded within the work of this research project through performing both the body and material. Scoria/Clay is performed throughout the film, where the elements create reference to Jeju through visual and oral application.

Performing the physical body: this element is central to the research and is evidenced in the film through artist performance. Moving and still image are utilized to explore the ubiquitous use of Scoria in the beauty product industry most notably as a purifying facemask. Internet research demonstrates the global phenomenon of Jeju volcanic scoria in this context. The connection between body and earth is visualized through the application of raw Scoria to my face both within a darkened space and in front of a clay/brick wall. The

application in the darkened space seeks to amplify both the body and application of material without external reference points. In contrast the images presented with the clay/brick wall draw in reference through association to material and crucially for myself as an artist working with clay to engender a connectedness to an imagined Jeju.

Clay and body can be referenced within a long history from the earliest civilizations and most notably with the fashioning of clay figures that performed societal tasks for example as fertility objects or deities. Within a contemporary context artists Alexandra Engelfriet and Philip Lee *Clay Play* (2014)^{viii}, both investigate clay and body within their practice where a connectedness to earth (clay) is explored, the application of Scoria to my face is contextualized within this framework.

Performing the material body: clay is often referred to as a 'body' and the connectedness to physical body is one form of expression within this artwork. A clay body refers to the material clay and its constituent elements. Reference to body can also be found within objects created from clay, most notable is the vessel where descriptive language will express the neck and belly of a form. The material body in the context of this research is performed in various ways that contribute to the narrative within the artwork.

Earth to Earth – Ashes to Ashes: the material Scoria arrived in a handmade ceramic container, which is reminiscent of a container that is used to hold the ashes of a human body. Garcia and Haruna state, "In the 21st century, death ritual worldwide has slowly phased out the ancient role of ceramics. The use of urns for cremains (mortuary ash) is still prevalent, but western culture has often opted for brass over clay."^{ix} The significance of the ceramic container in this context is articulated within the research as part of the film captures the slowed- down return of the ashes to the container, a metaphor for the return to earth. Clay, death and our relationship to the earth has been explored widely within the ceramic field and is perhaps exemplified in a contemporary form by the recent work and exhibition *Quietus*^x by Julian Stair. His research over a decade explores the vessel, death and the human body, the results of

which demonstrate the 'interconnect' between the strands of investigation. Within the practical element of this research *Performing Jeju Scoria* explores the performative qualities of the material scoria within a birth to death narrative.

Visual and Oral language: words are used within the artwork both in written and spoken form. They are presented both in English and Korean in an attempt to connect the work both to Jeju and the UK. Spoken word is taken from Korean poetry and juxtaposed with visual elements within the film, this seeks to support the positioning and contextualisation of the work. The spoken word is overlaid and purposefully attempts to decentre the viewer - this forms part of an imagined interpretation of Jeju and draws on past visits to Korea where I found myself decentered by the Korean language both in its spoken and written form. Written word within the artwork is presented through both digital text and painted scoria, which acknowledges the history of painted language found within the artwork of South East Asian cultures.

6: Scoria/Clay through a lens

Clay and film has moved beyond an emergent phenomenon and has become commonplace within the exhibition/presentation of clay/ceramic. Its representation is varied from documentation of process to the conceptualization of the medium and to an extended vocabulary. Whilst our encounter with film in a ceramic/clay context has become more commonplace its contextualisation within the field is still in its infancy and is pivotal to my ongoing research over the last eighteen years^{xi}.

This research project is interesting, in that the requirements of the – Covid19 paradigm change – stipulated that the work is to be presented through the format of film. Whilst this may be seen as a 'work-around' in terms of submission due to the pandemic, from my perspective it is an opportunity to explore clay/film based upon the remit of the research project and to explore this in terms of my own research.

To view clay through another lens is imbued with various interpretation and reading of the material and content/context.

The performance of clay, that is to indicate that an event or alteration of the material occurs over a constructed time element and in reference to this research is presented through video, constitutes a significant other within the constructs of familiar ceramic discourse. The absence of the physical ceramic form, presented through representation suggests that clay has become somewhat dematerialised within the familiar taxonomies of ceramic discourse. If the physical form has become dematerialised how then might a medium such as film/video be interpreted within the discipline of ceramics? Film can be acknowledged as a visual representation of the time-based activity that has taken place within the constructed artwork. Whilst this may be considered as fundamentally documental representation, the reinterpretation through the medium of video expands upon the initial event introducing a visual experience that is somewhat unfamiliar within ceramic constructs. Frank Popper offers his views upon the wider significance of video and especially video that expands beyond the notion of documentary:

'In video recordings, the search for dematerialised forms of art, the visual and social perception of the environment, the identification of primordial energies, forces and forms in natural space, and the body as the producer and vehicle of language are highlighted. Video recordings have fixed on tape an image of a living situation, one which is not only documentary but a part of the creative moment, implying a visual and temporal extension of the phenomenon observed'.^{xii} (Popper 1999)

Popper contends that video has the opportunity to extend the visual and temporal elements of a living situation. This notion has particular significance to ceramics, especially, when the situation occurs over time and is also resonant within this research.

Film extends a living situation and is part of the creative moment, especially if we consider this in relation to the material Scoria/Clay, the performer and the medium of film as a connected construct.

7: Extended Vocabularies

The engagement of the singular material clay remains the central occupation for the majority of ceramic practitioners. Use of clay, within contemporary observation, falls into distinct categories, notably unfired and post-fired. Unfired clay operates as a medium that avoids formalised objectification, and thus the strong emphasis of the hand. This is, perhaps, true when the material is used in its formless capacity where significant change occurs regardless of physical human intervention. There are, however, artists that engage unfired clay to construct works that include the forming of the material into objects. This is more often than not with the intervention of other media. The intervention fundamentally contributes to the sustainability of the material in its plastic form or the disintegration of the object. Both routes place material and process as central factors that highlight the organic and temporal nature of clay. This is most certainly true of the work undertaken in this research where material and process are intertwined within performative explorations and presentations.

This temporal nature of clay is explored in this work where the time-based activity of unfired clay is exposed. This work may be understood in terms of the conditions of clay within the context of process art or a continuous performance, where the focus of the work is placed upon the constant change of the material and the actual process above the skill of the hand. Clay/scoria has been performed and performs at the behest of its physical construction and part of its connected ubiquitous position. These elements have been explored through a wider interpretation that aims to present an extended vocabulary for the reading of clay and more specifically scoria within the context of this research. The material

The notion of materiality is, of course, central to the crafts - applied art arena where considerable focus is placed upon individual media.^{xiii} This is intrinsically linked to the physical integration of artist and material^{xiv} and the consequential results of the event. As marked out by Rowley, material, object and process provide tenets for interpretation and contribute to an engendered

space for critical craft theory and debate. Woo similarly advocates significance in relation to the interpretation of material culture and the development of theory around representation and meaning. These observations contribute to the reading and interpretation of scoria as a material and support the wider contextualisation of this research. Process and material hold an authentic position within ceramic discourse, this research aims to relocate them within an extended visual and theoretical vocabulary.

8: Conclusion

This research has been implemented and concluded within so many different parameters. It has contributed not only to an extended investigation and contextualisation of the material Scoria but also developed new knowledge in terms of methodologies and approaches to research within this current global pandemic paradigm. Scoria is presented through the alternative lens of film, which in turn engenders extended approaches to clay through performative investigation of the artist, material and processes. This research aims to present extended vocabularies that are proffered in response to visual and contextual investigations that contribute to a reading of clay beyond an authentic positioning.

ⁱ Andrew Livingstone (2017) Extending vocabularies: distorting the ceramic familiar – clay and the performative 'other' in Livingstone, A & Petrie, K. (eds) *The Ceramics Reader*, London: Bloomsbury. First published Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale, ceramics colloquium proceedings, Seoul, Korea, 2015.

ⁱⁱ See Chapter 3, Starting from Meaning: Contextuality and its Implications in *Interpretive Research Design Concepts and Processes*, Schwartz-Shea, P and Yanow, D, 2011. London; Routledge

ⁱⁱⁱ This research was undertaken during the second Covid19 lockdown in England

^{iv} The tea bowl included in the artwork is made by Kwak Kyung Tae and was purchased from his studio in Icheon, Korea.

^v The Byeonggyul tree is over 250 years old and can be found at 21, Doryeon 6-gil, Jeju Island

^{vi} See Maurizio Cattelan "Comedian" 2019 Art Basel Miami

^{vii} See <http://www.jejuits.go.kr/traffic/cctv.do>

^{viii} See <https://vimeo.com/215816020>

^{ix} Christopher Garcia and Tomaru Haruna (2017) Death and Clay: Cultural and personal Interpretations in Ceramics, in *The Ceramics Reader* (eds) Livingstone, A and Petrie, K. (2017) London: Bloomsbury.

^x See <https://www.julianstair.com/quietus>

^{xi} See Andrew Livingstone, *The authenticity of clay and its redefinition within contemporary practice; ceramic familiarity and the contribution to expansion*, Unpublished PhD thesis 2008, Ulster University.

^{xii} Frank Popper (1999) *Art of the Electronic Age*, Thames and Hudson Ltd: London. See chapter Video Art, pp. 54-77, p.59.

^{xiii} Sue Rowley (Editor.) (1997) *Craft & Contemporary Theory*. Allen & Unwin, p.25, sub quote by Diana Conroy Woo. 'The characteristic insistence of the crafts on the materiality, techniques, structures and processes of making can be central to interpreting material culture, theorising representation and inferring meaning.'

^{xiv} *Ibid.*, p.25. Rowley discusses the fundamental structure of craft discourse where she states 'Craft-centred theories of representation foreground the materiality of the media, the tangibility of the object in which meaning is inscribed, and the process through which the vehicle of representation is made.'