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Clay to shards: The role of making in Albert Yonathan Setyawan's artistic practices

Keywords

contemporary ceramic
materiality
making
artist-maker
bodily experience
clay impulses
ceramic clues

Abstract

The use of clay and ceramic mediums in contemporary art has received considerable attention in relation to their materiality. Materiality is generally understood within a given cultural perspective, referring to the perception of the physical qualities of an object that are related to its purpose, meaning and value in society. This representational possibility has attracted the interest of many artists to the mediums of clay and ceramic. However, material culture cannot fully explain material phenomena or their relationship to humans. The only way to understand a material is to be directly involved in making with it, as physical interaction with the material provides a deeper understanding and connection that cannot be achieved through cultural interpretation alone. Albert Yonathan Setyawan, an Indonesian artist based in Japan, is renowned for his predominantly clay and ceramic works. He creates palm-sized objects that are

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replicated innumerable times and installed in symmetrical patterns. Setyawan's works exhibit spiritual dimensions through the use of repetition, order, meditation and transformational qualities. This article applies a phenomenological approach to understanding Setyawan's practice through an examination of these objects and his experience with his materials. This article likewise discusses how making activity intercedes in the relationship between human artists and their materials. It also explores the way that making has contributed to Setyawan's artist-maker sensitivity and knowledge of both material properties and the logics of specific forms and methods, as well as the metaphorical possibilities that shape the aesthetic qualities and concept of a given work. Interestingly, Setyawan's practice is linked to various aspects of past human activity. The article concludes that an artist's making influences attitudes, ways of thinking and the understanding of practices and the environment. In Setyawan's practice, materials and making become active ways of engaging with the world and with the self.

Introduction

Albert Yonathan Setyawan (b. 1983, Bandung, Indonesia) studied ceramics in the Fine Art Department, Faculty of Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology, Indonesia. He earned his doctoral degree at Kyoto Seika University, Japan in 2020. He has participated in several major exhibitions, including in the Indonesia Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013), SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from South East Asia 1980s to Now at Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan (2017), Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale (2018), Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia (2019), Indian Ocean Craft Triennale (2024) and The 11th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (2024). Setyawan's works are in the collections of Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia; POLA Museum Annex, Tokyo, Japan; Museum of Modern Ceramic Art, Gifu, Japan; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; and Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park, Shiga, Japan. Apart from ceramics as a primary medium, Setyawan also creates drawings, printmaking, performances and multimedia installations. His solo exhibition *Capturing Silence* (2023) at the Jogja National Museum, Jogjakarta traces Setyawan's creative journey for nearly fifteen years. This self-curated survey exhibition features 93 works, including objects, installations, drawings and video performances.

Setyawan is known for the palm-sized, handcrafted ceramic objects he creates, repeating them in large numbers using slip-casting techniques, depending on the specifics of the composition idea, space and exhibition location. He generally arranges the objects in a symmetrical configuration on the floor or wall. Setyawan handles all of the steps of the process by himself, including modelling, making the mould, casting and firing. Setyawan's educational background is in ceramics, and he is active in the contemporary art scene. Acknowledgment of his work as a contemporary artist has

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been demonstrated in his participation in major exhibitions with other artists from different backgrounds representing contemporary Indonesian art.

This article applies a phenomenological approach to understand Setyawan's practice and work based on experiences with objects and interactions with materials.

In phenomenology we want to understand the thing, the work itself; we, for instance, want to 'do phenomenology' by studying artworks very carefully as phenomena, as things of physical substance that we encounter not only because we have bodies, but also in our bodies.

(Parry 2011: 5)

Our consciousness of ourselves, others and objects is grounded in our experience of the world, and this experience, in turn, is rooted in our bodies.

In ceramic/clay medium-based practices, objects are extensively influenced by the artist-maker's experience with the given material. A material culture perspective has tended to dominate most assessments of artists' material contexts. However, the perspective examines the materiality of an object and is not concerned with the material itself. A preferred approach to understanding a material is through direct contact/interaction with it, which, in art, can be found in the activity of making (Ingold 2013: 6).

This influence can be explored through the observation of the artistic journey, including statements, the relationship between works in a certain period and the possibilities of their representation. Setyawan's practice shows a substantial connection between the representation of spirituality, repetitive and geometric presentation methods, a semi-manual approach to production and the nature of the materials. These relationships shape the distinctiveness of Setyawan's practice.

This article examines the complex relationship between materials and humans interceded through making. It demonstrates the ways in which making experiences fostered Setyawan's personal sensitivity and understanding, not only of material properties but also of the logics of specific forms and methods, along with the metaphorical possibilities of these. This sensitivity and understanding form the personal knowledge of the artist-maker, which can only be gained through direct experience. This implicit knowledge is accessible to the observer in direct encounters with the work as a perceptual object. Through understanding the ways in which an artist-maker engages with material, we, as observers, can understand how the bodily experience of making resonates with us in an enactive perception of the art object (Boden 2000).

Between mind and matter

Material-based practices begin from the perspective that the mind is the centre of a human being, able to control the body and its surroundings. It is reflected in various dichotomies of two terms,

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including mind and matter, form and content, head and hand, making and knowing, and techne and episteme (Dormer 1986; Lehmann 2012; Risatti 2007; Sennet 2008). However, according to Boden (2000), the appreciation of art, especially in craft-based disciplines, attracts us to think and emote, as is fundamentally promoted by engaging in some bodily action. This concept aligns with Ingold's idea that direct contact with the material in the making influences our comprehension more than cultural or intellectual interpretation. Thus, making is the most significant example of how enactive perception of bodily awareness is embedded in us.

His practices are in accordance with Setyawan's statement: 'So, as a result of the extensive and intensive engagement with the process, the objects it produces can also record not only traces of the physical involvement of the body but also the state of mind of the maker' (2019: n.pag.).

This reflects Setyawan's artistic practice, which largely makes use of clay and ceramic materials. The statement emphasizes the relationship between the artist's involvement in the making process and his consciousness, believing in the coexistence of tangible materials and abstraction, of body and mind, and of making and thinking. This consciousness is rooted in Setyawan's formal ceramic education at the Faculty of Art and Design of Bandung Institute of Technology (FSRD ITB), which is known for its conceptual approach to instruction (Ichsan 2018a; Soemantri 2000).

In contemporary art, ceramic-based practices captivate due to the materiality of their work. In this context, materiality refers to the physical condition or the qualities of ceramics, such as shiny, smooth, hard, rough, fragile and porous, as well as the qualities of clay, i.e., soft, plastic and malleable. The understanding of the materiality is greatly influenced by the perspective of material culture, which examines the relationship between the physical qualities of objects and something abstract, such as goals, meanings, values and habits in society (Prown 1982). Indeed, clay and ceramic materials have an exceptionally close relationship with human existence. As a potter and writer, Staubach stated, 'The story of our relationship with clay is the story of material culture' (2005: 246). Material culture uncovers the representational potential of ceramic objects that attract the attention of artists of various backgrounds, leading to the breakdown of boundaries among craftspeople, makers, sculptors and artists (Lilley 2017).

However, material culture and material science cannot fully explain material phenomena. The perspective of material culture rests only on the abstract analysis of objects that have been made; therefore, the materiality of the object is actually studied, not the material itself (Ingold 2007). However, the empirical approach of materials science can only approach materials as something 'innocent', unable to reach their relationship with humans (Ploszajski 2021). Materials can only be understood through direct involvement by experiencing them in a participatory way, expressing their transformative capabilities in a certain time and space (Rubel 2015). This direct involvement falls within the discipline of art, in the activity of making (Adamson 2007; Ingold 2013). In Setyawan's practice, engagement with the material forms part of a lived experience

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that we partake of and in which we are directly involved. This forms the affectivity approach, by contrast with rationality, where material images go beyond the relation between subject and object (Setyawan 2023b).

Materiality and making in ceramic-based practices can be understood in terms of the two inseparable materials of clay and ceramics. To comprehend how they entangle us, I refer to 'clay impulses' and 'ceramic clues'. Clay impulses are largely based on physical interaction with clay, forming a personal understanding that generally involves the making process. Meanwhile, ceramic clues are derived from our daily experience with ceramic objects. The first set is related to clay as an experiential material, while the second relates to our understanding of ceramics as cultural objects (Ichsan 2018b). For artists without training in ceramics, the primary source of inspiration draws on ceramic clues. That is, it comes from interpreting and understanding ceramic objects from the perspective of material culture. However, for artists like Setyawan, clay impulses and ceramic clues cannot be separated. This article shows that the separation between mind and matter or that between practical and conceptual knowledge is entirely insignificant. We can see how mindfulness in the making of ceramics expands our understanding of clay materials and ceramic objects. We can observe the entanglement between mind and matter at play in some of the following distinctive characteristics of Setyawan's practice.

Objects to experiences

When we touch clay, we are connected to our primal feelings, as this material precedes us and, in some sense, is related to our origin. The shaping of clay is an experience of something amorphous or of shaping something into a form, going from nothing to something. Because this material has no preconditions or pre-images, touching clay only awakens the desire to shape it. I refer to this urge and feeling a clay impulse. According to this understanding, clay is an active agent with respect to humans. 'It is unclear why the interaction with clay always awakens bodily feelings' (Setyawan 2023a: n.pag.).

A ceramicist's direct involvement with clay begins with the most basic shaping techniques, namely pinching and coiling. In the pinching technique, a shape is formed through the continuous and constant movements of forefinger and thumb. This process leaves rhythmic imprints on the surface of the clay, which can be considered the authentic mark of the artist. In this technique, the shape is not entirely a projection of the artist's ideas but is the result of a perfectly controlled rhythmic pattern of movements (Ingold 2013). In 2007, Setyawan used this basic technique to create cylindrical installations of terracotta, among his early artworks. He used the same technique to form clay vessels in his durational works in *Mandala Studies #1* (2012), *Metaphor of the Human Condition: Meditation on Silence – The Dissolving Bowl* (2015) (see Figure 1) and *Metaphor of the Human Condition* (2016).

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Figure 1: Metaphor of the Human Condition: Meditation on Silence – The Dissolving Bowl (2015), single channel digital video, 1 hour 5 minutes 51 seconds. © Albert Yonathan Setyawan and Mizuma Gallery.

Setyawan's other works have mainly used the slip-casting technique, which is identical to the industrial manufacturing process used to reproduce a set form in large quantities.

Pinching and slip-casting have different methods and purposes. However, both are intertwined in Setyawan's artistic practice, which is where the rhythm and regularity aspects of his works originate. The pinch technique affects Setyawan's consciousness, hands and body, making constant movements that are repeated hundreds of times. The intent and the body unite as mindfulness in these repetitive actions. Thus, it is no wonder that Setyawan refers to the repetitive forms and actions as meditative. Repetition is embedded in his artistic practices, and it transcends the maker's connection with the material, evolving into an attitude. As Setyawan admits, 'I think that if you engage in a series of repetitive acts, and you keep doing it, letting yourself fall into the process, you'll end up discovering something deeper than our material existence' (Jones 2017: n.pag.). These repetitive acts tend to occur not only when moulding the same object, but also when arranging them one by one in the form of particular configurations. It is no longer important whether the acts produce a purpose or are the result of one; the purpose is the acts themselves. Therefore, for Setyawan, the context of making is not limited to the moment of making objects, as it also includes the process of assembling ceramic objects in particular configurations (Figure 2).

When using the pinching technique, the maker is intensely involved with the clay material through manipulation using the hands. The hands provide access to our surroundings. We also experience touch when we hold, move and use ceramic objects in our daily life. This experience refers to what is called a ceramic clue. The tactile quality of ceramics is rooted in our deep connection to ceramic objects and past tactile experiences. Whether or not the ceramic objects are meant to

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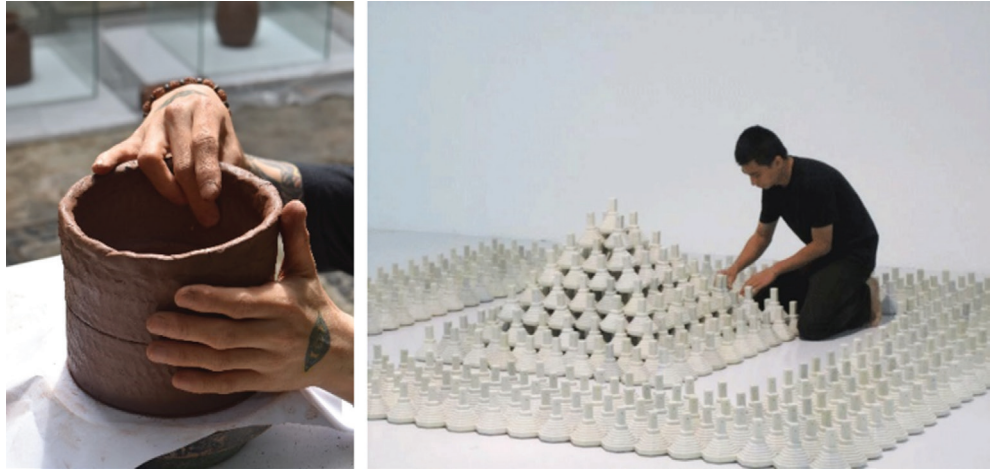


Figure 2: *The repetitive in pinching technique (left) and repetitive in Setyawan's performance in 2012 (right).* © Albert Yonathan Setyawan and Mizuma Gallery.

be touched, we can inherently feel an experience of touch (Elkins 2002; Kemske 2007). Setyawan's ceramic objects are the size of a fist. This measurement imprints an intensity and intimacy that indicate a lack of distance between the subject and the object. In addition, there is a precise distance to see these objects in detail. The 'ideal' distance at which we see these objects is more or less the same as the distance when Setyawan makes them. When we perceive them, the methods and processes of making these objects appear in our minds because of our imagination and/or memory. The size and tactility make Setyawan's ceramic objects feel intimate to everyone. This intimate quality in the individual objects of Setyawan's ceramics becomes a distinctive personal experience as their perception becomes unfamiliar when arranged in large quantities. When these objects are arranged to form a specific configuration, the ideal viewing distance also changes; therefore, the individual objects become vague if we want to perceive the configuration as a whole. However, if we want to perceive them as individual objects, the configuration of objects as a whole becomes blurry.

The experience of Setyawan's artwork activates our sense of tactility and of the body. The viewer experiences his body's activity in observing the configuration of Setyawan's work. This bodily experience begins when Setyawan's ceramic objects impinge on our perception. The object appears to

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change in the view of the observer, which is greatly influenced by the position, point of view and situation in the environment. As Merleau-Ponty wrote, we understand our surroundings through bodily perceptions:

it is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world: I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of inspection of them, and in that sense I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body.

(1945: 94–95)

In accordance with this, James J. Gibson stated that:

One sees the environment not with the eyes but with the eyes-in-the-head-on-the-body-resting-on-the-ground. Vision does not have a seat in the body in the way that the mind has been thought to be seated in the brain. The perceptual capacities of the organism do not lie in discrete anatomical parts of the body but lie in systems with nested functions.

(1986: 205)

According to Gibson, the living environment can be divided into three parts, namely medium, surface and substance. For human beings, the medium is the air that allows us to move freely, breathe, see, smell, hear and touch. Substance is anything with a fairly solid and heterogeneous character relative to the medium. Clay, ceramic and various other materials are classifiable as substance (Gibson 1986: 17). Surface is everything that covers the substance and is an intermediary term between medium and substance. The surface is the part we can perceive, which may change because our perceptions of the surface are influenced by the medium, where light, distance and point of view strongly affect the environment.

All our perceptions capture phenomena that occur on the surface, such as, for example, shadows on the surfaces of the walls and ceramics, the shapes and contours of objects, the light reflected by the surface of glazed ceramics and the light absorbed by the surface of terracotta. Drawing on this perspective, we assume that a substance that is a part of Setyawan's artworks is the wall where the ceramic objects are installed and arranged. The surface of this wall changes, as the lighting on the ceramic objects creates shadows. In Setyawan's works, shadows are especially important, affecting our perception of the configuration of objects as a whole. Shadows expose the quality of contours and objects' depths. Shadows connect all objects. They also cause the objects to float and to move when the observer moves. In addition, shadows can alter the nature of fixed objects.

This phenomenon is strongly felt in *Helios* (2017) (Figure 3), an installation of 1853 porcelain objects on a wall that is six or seven metres in height, and *Infinitude* (2022), which consists of 2517

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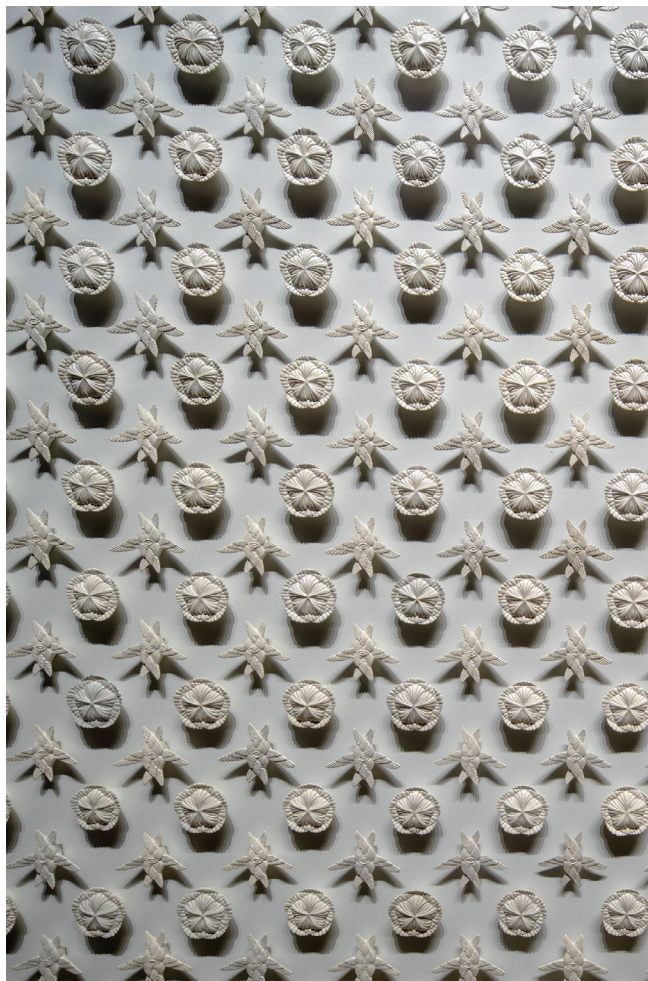


Figure 3: Detail from Helios (2017), ceramic, 700 cm × 600 cm × 4.5 cm (1853 pieces). Photograph: Sancaka Candraditya. © Albert Yonathan Setyawan and Mizuma Gallery.

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terracotta objects that occupy 22.6–3.25 metres of the entire wall. Both works were designed to fill a gallery wall. Setyawan considers this wall to be an integral part of his work, not merely a place to display it. He takes into account the relationship between objects, the scale of the observer's body and the place.

Setyawan's works invite observers to experience the ways in which objects fundamentally depend on our perceptions, which are in turn influenced by the ambience. As the observers move, the objects

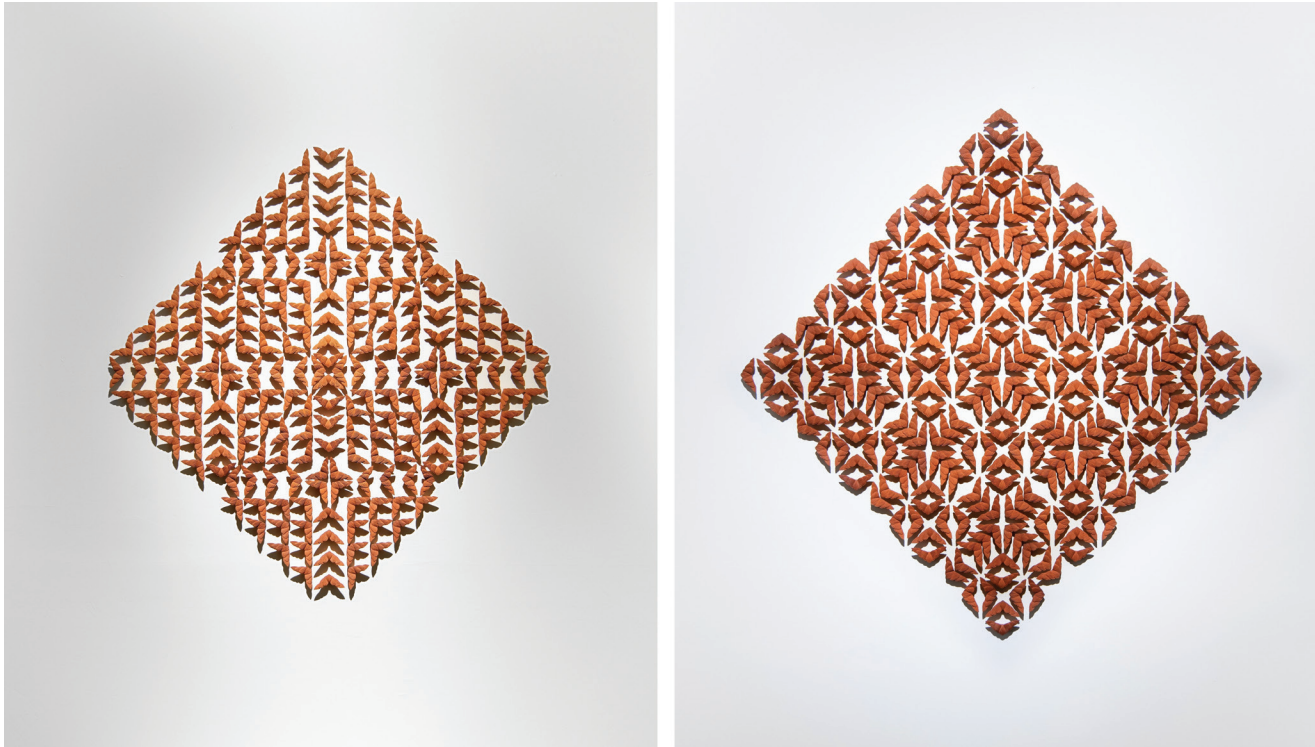


Figure 4: Gnostic Nexus I (2020), terracotta, 134 cm × 134 cm × 4 cm (208 pieces) and Gnostic Nexus III (2020), terracotta, 139 cm × 139 cm × 3 cm (260 pieces). Photograph: Sancaka Candraditya. © Albert Yonathan Setyawan and Mizuma Gallery.

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change, the shadows move and the distance between objects changes, so that the contours of each object also change. As we approach, the gaps between objects widen, some objects become vivid and others become blurry. Some visitors report that they felt disoriented seeing Setyawan's work. Our feelings towards objects also change as intimate objects slowly become unfamiliar and vice versa. As a result, our perceptions of actual objects are not constant. No similar objects appear in our vision, and everything changes and becomes different at certain moments. We can observe these subtle changes thanks to the repeated shapes of objects in orderly arrangements, the intimate details of

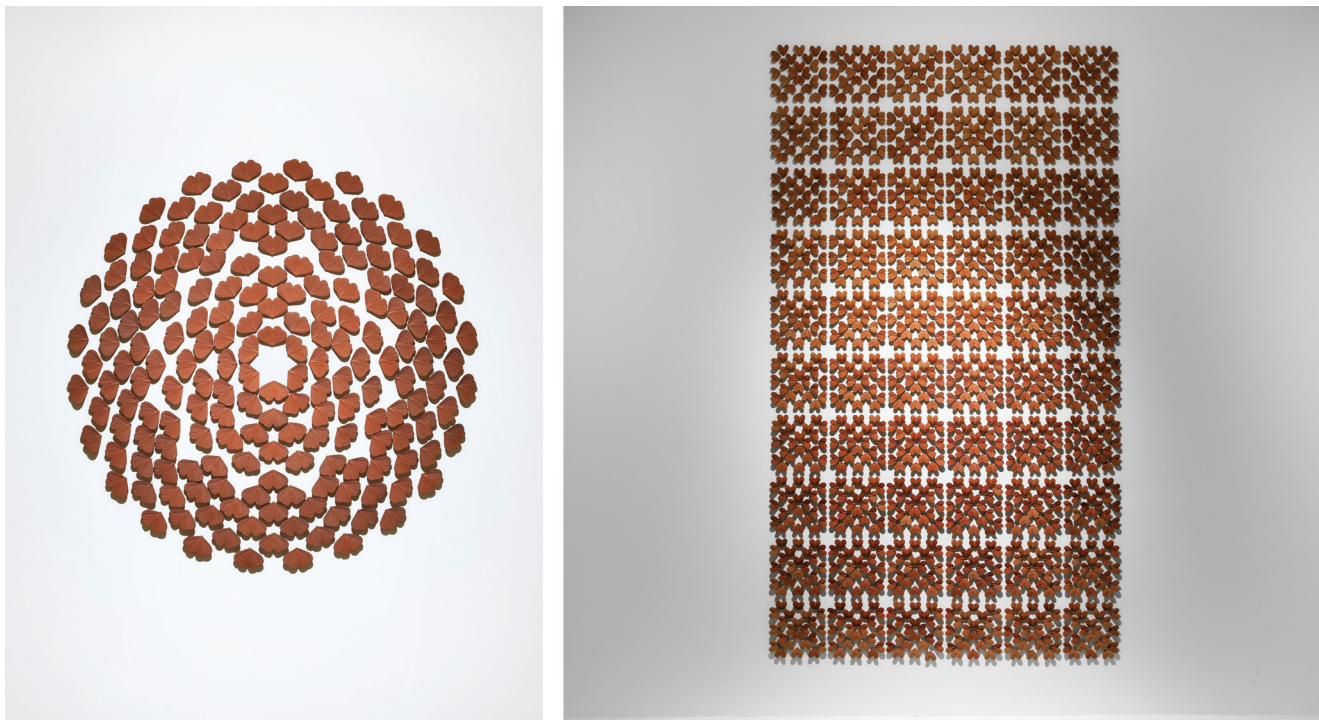


Figure 5: Radial Incantation (2019), terracotta, 132 cm × 3 cm, 186 pieces and Gnosis (2019), terracotta, 301 cm × 168 cm × 3 cm, 1440 pieces. Photograph: Sancaka Candraditya. © Albert Yonathan Setyawan and Mizuma Gallery.

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shapes and the immersive crannies found in Setyawan's artworks. Observing his work depends on our ability to see and feel (sentience).

The arrangement of Setyawan's ceramic objects represents his attempt to identify or explore orderliness in geometric shapes, such as those of the triangle, square, diamond, hexagon and circle. Each individual ceramic object has a sense of centralized direction, left-right and top-bottom, formed with reference to the body's orientation in its position on the ground or earth. Setyawan arranges his artworks according to this perception. In general, object shapes do not have a top-bottom characteristic orientation, so the arrangement is freer to achieve central and spreading effects. It is possible that it is due to the selection of objects that are free from a feeling of gravity; Setyawan's artworks successfully connect the clay material, identical to earth, with something celestial.

Object shapes that have a stronger directional characteristic, such as wing-like shapes, are arranged by Setyawan in possible patterns spreading inward and outward. As a result, we feel the centric and spreading movements at the same time, as can be observed in *Gnostic Nexus I* (2020) and *Gnostic Nexus III* (2020). In both of these works, perceptions of motion and density differ, even though both are composed of the same objects (Figure 4). In some of Setyawan's works, a shape may undergo a complete change because of its place in the arrangement. This can be seen in the moth objects that transform to resemble a flower petal in *Radial Incantation* (2019) and take on a grid-like formation that looks like a tapestry in *Gnosis* (2018) (Figure 5).

Ceramic objects change when they are arranged in various patterns and configurations and when they are combined with other ceramic objects. This shows that orderly repetition and sequence do not in themselves cause an object to become monotonous and static. 'In this way, repetition is best understood in terms of discovery and experimentation; it allows new experiences, affects and expressions to emerge. To repeat is to begin again; to affirm the power of the new and the unforeseeable' (Parr 2010: 225). In Setyawan's words, 'Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but it does change something in the mind which contemplates it' (2019: 9).

Making as a mode of engagement

This section investigates the connection between the distinctive characteristics of Setyawan's practice and the ways that we can understand human existence as part of nature highlighted by engaging with material. Setyawan's transformative and processual attempts to understand the behaviour of the environment appear in repetitive actions and the exploration of changes in limitations of shape and symmetry. This approach arises from clay impulses, where impermanence and transience are natural properties. This impulse emerges from direct and fast shape-changing maker's experiences, in forming plastic clay. The shape and surface of the object may still change in response to

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exposure to water and air during drying. Finally, as in the hot air during the firing process, the clay is transformed into ceramic material.

Setyawan's time-based works reflect his desire to understand these transformative experiences. For example, the transformation of clay using water can be seen in *Metaphor of the Human Condition: Meditation on Silence – The Dissolving Bowl* (2015) (Figure 1), *Metaphor of the Human Condition* (2016), *Meditation Practice – Endless Disintegration* (2016) and the *Transitory Nature of Earthly Joy* (2017). Similarly, *Transitory Nature of Earthly Joy: Kakemata Project* (2017–present) (Figure 6) explores changes in clay using seeds, air and water. The form of clay changes as the seeds grow. As Setyawan puts it, 'Some of them altered, changed, and even almost destroyed the shape of the objects' (n.d.: n.pag.).

The theme of transformation is also explored by Setyawan in his performance concerning mandalas and labyrinths. In *Mandala Study #3*, Setyawan changed the configuration from one resembling a temple structure to a mandala pattern. In this work, changes in the configuration of objects could be experienced by audiences. In *Cosmic Labyrinth: The Bells* (2012), both the shape and the configuration of the art objects change. Setyawan transformed bell objects into shards and then modified the reflective symmetrical pattern of the labyrinth into a circular radial and symmetrical pattern. In this performance, breaking bell objects one by one, Setyawan explores one of the possible states of ceramic material. Through the broken objects, Setyawan shows that the materials of ceramic objects are impermanent and transient like clay. The configuration of shards presented in 2012 at Soemardja Gallery, in 2016 at Song Eun Art Space, South Korea, and in 2023 at Jogja National Museum are never the same (Figure 7).

From the perspective of materials science, the bells and the shards have the same material properties. By contrast, from the perspective of material culture, the bells and the shards exhibit different meanings and feelings. However, in relation to art perspective, the artist-maker lens could expand our understanding of the interconnection between materials and our own being and environment. Clay can be transformed due to its amorphous and soluble nature, and Setyawan indicates that ceramic materials transform because of their characteristics as both solid and fragile. The first transformation is caused by seeds, water and air, and the second transformation is caused by human beings. Material and human beings have the same level of influence. Following this means, material influences the artist-maker's attitude; Setyawan's artistic practice demonstrates that nature and humans are agents that influence each other.

Intriguingly, the process and results of making show a very close relationship to ancient human activities. The breaking of pottery is a common ritual activity in several ancient cultures (Adhyatman 1987; Cort 2008; Geertz 1960; Grinsell 1961). It can also be seen in Setyawan's works that elaborate on the relationship between the meaning of a container as a body and a place to live (see Figure 8). Small holes in figures and buildings have the same function as eyes, connecting the outside with the inside, often being compared to windows to the human soul. As Setyawan noted, this gives 'breath'

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Figure 6: Transitory Nature of Earthly Joy (clay, compost soil, various seeds, LED light, glass case, 35 cm × 35 cm × 40 cm each, 2017–present). Photograph: Sancaka Candraditya. © Albert Yonathan Setyawan and Mizuma Gallery.

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Figure 7: Cosmic Labyrinth: The Bells, performance in 2012 (left) and as installed in Capturing Silence exhibition in 2023 (right). Photograph: Anon. (left) and Sancaka Candraditya (right). © Albert Yonathan Setyawan and Mizuma Gallery.

to the objects of his work (Stock 2015). These holes also function as eyes that connect the outside with the inside to reveal and conceal at the same time, positioning the audience simultaneously as seer and seen. This is similar to the eyes on ancient statues, which appear to 'have the ability to look back' (Caroli 2008: 43) allowing the viewer to feel the presence of gods (deities) in the performance of rituals (Eck 1998).

Likewise, the repetitive action in Setyawan's practice closely parallels what is performed by craftsmen, designers, carpenters, builders, smiths, monks and saints in their construction of the patterns and motifs on building components, everyday objects, labyrinth shapes and mandala arrangements. Setyawan's practice is rooted in activities and professions found in many cultures and societies that have existed for a long time. It is fascinating how routine, tedious and repetitive activities provide an optimal experience, stretching the person's capacity and involving an element of novelty and discovery (Csikszentmihalyi 1997).

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Does this indicate that an individual's sentience and bodily ability transcends place and time? It suggests that there may be a universal aspect to the human experience transcending cultural boundaries and periods. This reminds us that our activities and creations are not isolated events but parts of a larger tapestry of human existence. Making is a fundamental activity of discovering and understanding material; it is necessarily an experiential appropriation of the environment. Making involves the prompting of bodily responses and articulating our experiences of being in the world; in this sense, it is a mode of engagement with the world.

In the end, the making process is a means of engaging in the inner self, as there is a process of self-perception in every activity, forming part of the notion that the human body also forms part of the environment. We consider ourselves to be part of the vast universe, such that the making process becomes a way of understanding ourselves. In ecological visual perception, our process of absorbing information on the environment, or exteroception, is always accompanied by information on ourselves or 'ego reception' (Gibson 1986: 116). This is because our body is always visible from our view, such that environmental and personal information are always instantaneously

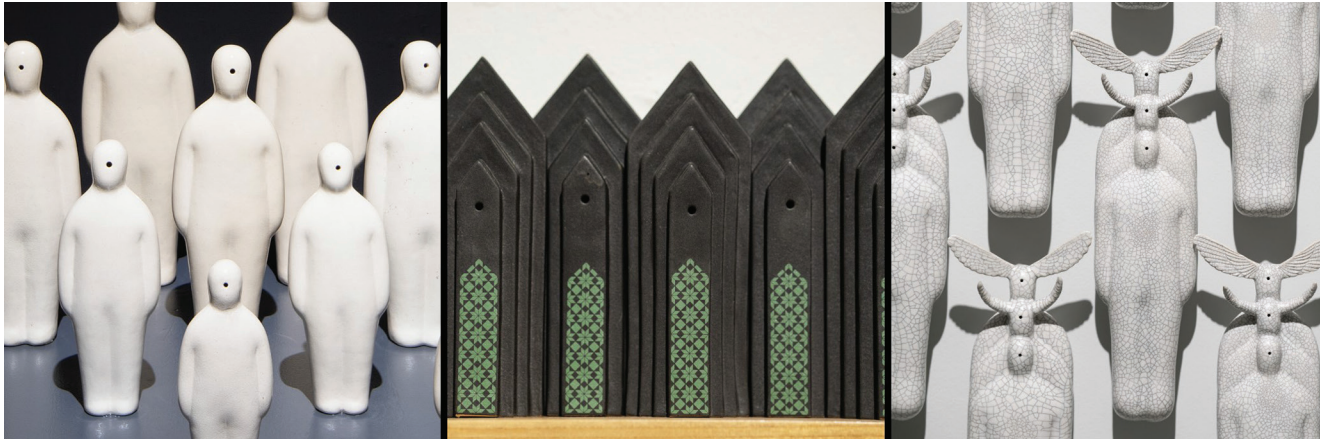


Figure 8: From the left, detail from *Human Nuance* (ceramic, 120 cm × 160 cm × 53 cm, 21 pieces, 2008), *Fortress* (ceramic, wood, 36 cm × 110 cm × 11 cm, 21 pieces, 2010) and *Guardians* (ceramic, 150 cm × 80 cm × 10 cm, 36 pieces). Photograph: Sancaka Candraditya. © Albert Yonathan Setyawan and Mizuma Gallery.

present (Gibson 1986: 239). Thus, we always feel a self-presence in the environment in the performance of any activity. It is crucial to recognize our self-presence in any activity. In the context of Setyawan's artistic practice, a maker is in an operating environment that he or she truly understands and controls.

Understanding and control of our environment can lead to a heightened sense of self-awareness and mindfulness in our actions. Through the recognition of our self-presence in any activity, we can become more closely attuned to our surroundings and the impact of our actions. Setyawan's artistic practice highlights the importance of the connection between self-awareness and environmental awareness, allowing for a deeper and more meaningful creative process. In today's fast-paced world, it is essential to take the time to truly engage with our surroundings to understand our place within them.

Conclusion

In Setyawan's practice, making is not limited to ways of forming but includes repetitive acts in the casting and arranging of ceramic objects. This process explores the possibilities of regular and symmetric monotonous arrangements. This exploration reveals that repetitive actions are meaningful and produce something new and different. Making connects Setyawan with clay impulses and ceramic clues. For Setyawan, these two materials have a very close relationship, in terms of their transformative properties. Thus, in his case, the artist's role can be understood as that of an intermediary or agent who influences each of his materials.

This article reveals the relevance of making in contemporary contexts, including the following: (1) Making is a way of engaging with materials, exploring the self and ultimately establishing a connection with the environment. The maker considers themselves to be part of nature and is in the same position as all of its elements. Making creates a sense of being in tune with the universe. (2) There are correlations among act, intention and the result of making that have existed for a long time in human activities. Thus, making can be an autotelic activity that provides humans with an optimal experience of being (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). (3) Making involves bodily experiences, where the results trigger bodily actions that expand the observers' perceptual awareness. Boden (2000) argues that these bodily responses are based on enactive perception. This offers a new approach to understanding materials-based practices in contemporary art.

Ethical statement

This article was researched and written to the standards of Intellect's Ethical Guidelines: <https://www.intellectbooks.com/ethical-guidelines>. No approvals or subject consent were required.

Conflict of interest statement

Part of this article was first published as a catalogue essay for the *Capturing Silence* (2023) exhibition titled 'Clay to Shards and Everything in Between'. With the permission of the artist and gallery, the author has expanded and deepened the text to reach a wider audience and help provide a new approach to understanding medium-based practices in contemporary art.

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