

# Gallery and Studio Tour

organised by  
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## Glebe

Down a small lane in Glebe, there's a studio where Art blooms!



**Sheila Myers** greeted us at the door.

Sheila has been creating works of art in this studio since 1985, when the Inner City Clay Workers' co-operative began. She and the other talented women members have made their own success, producing works at the same time as running their own gallery.





Julia Gillard and Margaret Olley, Noel Pearson and Peter Costello, and other notables, live in the studio!





We wandered around wide-eyed, overcome with admiration for art objects, crammed on shelves, reaching for the roof!



On the shelves are creatures great and small





And other objects ...



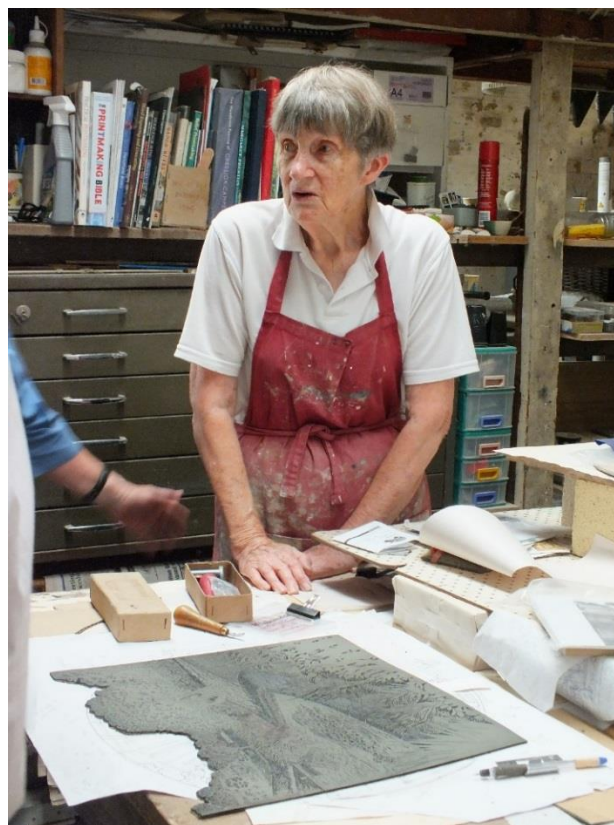






### **Sheila's specialty: linocuts**

The unimpressive black slab on the table is a chunk of ordinary linoleum that Sheila has worked on with a fine cutter to remove "negative" shapes so that only "positive" shapes remain.





When the black slab is inked and an impression made on paper, Art magic happens!



Here is another of Sheila's linocuts:



From the back lane studio we went to the main street shop, the **Inner City Clay Workers' Gallery**.



Inside we met Sheila again.





We were fooled by the realism of some items.

These Liquorice Allsorts looked so real we touched them to check!



But the cakes and tea were real. We enjoyed the hospitality offered by our hosts.





















**Barbara Mason**, a member of the studio for 25 years, with two of her creations

## Blacktown—Ilona Ede's studio

In an unpretentious room, close to the railway tracks, we learnt the fundamentals and secrets of pottery and ceramics.



How is it all done?

**Tanya Peck, Jess, Kasey and Sandra** let us into the secrets of ceramic artistry. There are two basic methods of working with clay:

1. Throwing
2. Hand Building

### Throwing

A potter uses a wheel to spin the clay, shaping it with her hands.

### Hand Building

A potter moulds shapes from clay with bare hands, without the help of the potter's wheel. However, instruments like rolling pins, cylinders, cones and other objects may be used in the process of creation.



## Preparing the clay

Clay, straight from the earth, contains tiny pockets of air. These air bubbles must be removed before any object is constructed. If bubbles remain, the object can explode when fired in the kiln.

The process of removing air bubbles from clay is called Wedging.

"A procedure for preparing clay or a clay body by hand: the lump of clay is repeatedly thrown down on a work bench; between each operation the lump is turned and sometimes cut through and rejoined in a different orientation. The object is to disperse the water more uniformly, to remove lamination and to remove air." (Wikipedia)

A further process called Kneading is also used to soften the clay into the consistency the artists wants.

## Throwing on a potter's wheel

The following pictures show examples of Throwing on a potter's wheel:

**Kasey**, a junior potter, at work...



**Jess**, a senior potter, at work...



The potter can add decorative elements to a thrown pot.





## Hand Building

In just two hours, **Tanya Peck** taught more about making pottery than we could have learnt from reading a dozen books. Tanya's **show-tell method**, spliced with gentle humour, had us watching her every move and noting her every word.

She began by describing the preparation of clay, given earlier in this report, and then demonstrated Wedging and Kneading. Taking a large chunk of raw clay, she crushed, flattened and rolled it mercilessly. Then she folded it back into a lump and punished it again. And again. We could almost hear the clay begging for mercy!



Watching the process reminded us of a verse from Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Kyayyam*:

*For I remember stopping by the way  
To watch a Potter thumping his wet clay;  
And with its all-obliterated Tongue  
It murmured—"Gently, Brother, gently, pray!"*



Tanya emphasized the importance of preparing the clay till it is of the right consistency throughout its mass. "Not taking pains at the beginning can cause pain at the end," she said. "Your art-work might explode in the kiln, damaging the work of others. You'll lose your art-work and your friends."

Tanya continued by explaining the three methods used in Hand Building.

- Pinching
- Slabbing
- Coiling

In Pinching, the object starts as a small ball of clay. It is then pinched and shaped by using fingers and palms. The artist can make use of almost any instrument that strikes his or her fancy.

Made by pinching





A fork is handy!

Can you guess what implement was used to make this animal's tail?



If you said, "garlic press" you were right!

Even a pine cone can be used to make impressions!





## Slabbing

In Slabbing the clay is flattened by hand and then rolled with a rolling pin. A knife is then used to trim off unwanted bits.



Flattening the clay



Rolling the clay to form a slab



Cutting surplus pieces from the slab



A slab tray near completion

## Coil Construction

In Coiling, the clay is first rolled by hand into a long sausage shape. Consistent thickness is essential. Then, on a flat surface, the long sausage is coiled into a hollow cylinder. The cylinder is the foundation stage of a bowl or cup.

Stage 1—Rolling the Clay to make a Coil



Stage 2—The Coil mounted on a slab base



Stage 3—More clay added to make a smooth bowl



## The Finishing Process

When the Throwing or Hand Building is complete, a small art object emerges.

But it is in raw clay. More work has to be done.





Tanya with Sandra demonstrating embedding patterns in the clay

A ceramicist may:

**Embed** patterns with different coloured clay (see photo above)

Apply **colour** to enhance the beauty of the object.

**Glaze** the object to make it water proof and scratch resistant.

When the art object is ready, it is fired in a kiln (electric oven) for about 12 hours at a temperature of 1300 degrees Celsius. Some objects are fired twice.

The electricity bill soars!

## Finished Items

Coloured, glazed and fired





## Conclusion

### A lesson in pricing:

when you see a ceramic object for sale at a fancy price, think of the cost of the electricity used to fire it. Then add the cost of raw materials, and the value of the hours of the artist's skilled labour. Finally, throw in a generous figure for the artist's creativity!

### A test!

Now, a test. Yes, a test to check if you have paid attention to the theory!

In the following picture, which items were made by Hand Building and which by Throwing? Is there any item made by Coiling?





**Congratulations** on getting the right answer!

The items with flat sides, including the ashtrays to the extreme right, were made by Hand Building.

Most of the bowls were made by throwing on a potter's wheel.

There is no item made by Coiling.



Pinch Purr--fect!



The  end