

STATE OF CERAMICS | April 20, 2024

Rosanna Martin
Architectural Ceramics Series

Brick Piles and Waste Pits: a future of caretaking

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In Attendance:

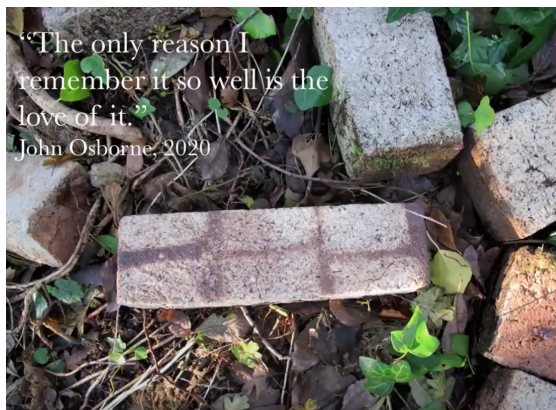
Eamonn Harnett, Georgina Sleaf, Alice Foxen, Alexis Iammarino, Kristin Schimik, Delia Pelli, Stephen Ateser, Min Ji Kim, Guy Marshall-Brown, Del Harrow, Laura Gibbs, Jasmine Baetz, Rashi Jain, David Morrison, Coreen Abbott, Kam Chan, Marnia Johnston, Sally Wetherall, Ester Svensson, Hannah Rose Whittle, Christiana Stoddard, Holly Dawes, Maria Howard, Charley Blackburn, Megan Bartley-Matthews, Iso Marcus, Magdolene Dykstra, Neha Kudchadkar, Kristen Mcgee-Morley, Alexis C. Brunkow, Alexandra Simpson, Carly Slade, Kevin Tracy, Kristen M Walk, Abi Freckleton, Alice Zerini-Le Reste, Joshua G Stein, Lauren Sandler, Anna Ialleggie, Alison Creba, Cat Hart, Sarah Christie, Daniela Tinoco, Amanda Evans, Kate McMinnies, Alandra Crowley, Louise Frances Smith, Kate Roberts, Bea Konar-Steenberg, Holly Chang, Zahra Hooshyar, David Paton, Francis Dot, Caroline Chouler-Tissier, Lynn Stonehouse, Robyn Phelan, Holly Macdonald, Ana Zuleta, Anamaria Teran, Nicole Seisler (A-B Director), Rosanna Martin (Lead Artist), Ellery Ekleberry (A-B Administrative and Marketing Assistant), E.C. Comstock (Summary Writer)

Questions from Lead Artist

- How might the use of industrial waste be integrated into artist practices?
- Can we reframe what our ideas of waste are, towards more responsible and environmentally friendly ways of working? As Jane Bennett states in her book *Vibrant Matter*, "How, for example, would patterns of consumption change if we faced not litter, rubbish, trash or "the recycling", but an accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter?"
- Can caretaking, of materials and what we use (but also of ourselves, each other and our children) be elevated in importance, or become an act of resistance?

Introduction / Context from Lead Artist (summarized by E.C. Comstock)

Rosanna Martin began by presenting images of spilled china clay from extraction processes in Cornwall, and the granite water blasting that produces china clay for a variety of uses. Every 1 ton of china clay produced creates 9 tons of waste. The landscape of Cornwall houses the waste portion of this process. Martin showed the extraction site which closed in 2007 and has filled with water, nearby Martin's current Brickfield project and research site. She described childhood time spent on her grandparent's land by the former Trelank Brickworks near a china clay deposit site on banks of river—she has since researched the ways china clay industry waste became a resource to the brickmaking industry. In 2018, Martin gained permission to lease the former Trelank extraction site, and ran the Groundwork public brickmaking workshop. The experience of digging clay from the banks and firing bricks facilitated communal sharing of histories and connections to the landscape.



Subsequently, she established Brickfield as a community brickworks on this site. During 2020, the project collaborated with John Osborne, who worked at the last industrial brickworks in Cornwall, to record his embodied knowledge. Brickfield produced a publication with Osborne and other artists while salvaging abandoned bricks from the closed Will Renfrie facility, which were later used to build the Brickfield mini beehive kiln. Some of the bricks had been "kissed" (marked by proximity to other bricks,

pictured at left), prompting Martin to ask, if bricks can kiss, what else can they do? Can they become a symbol of nurture and togetherness? Martin conducts research for her PhD at The Brickfield site, which asks, how might I be able to increase the importance of care while folding it into my practice? What does world-making look like in the context of scarcity? If we care-take waste, what can it become? Martin includes Kelsang Gyatso's quote, "As we have been born countless times, it follows that we have had countless mothers..." as well as Thich Nhat Hanh's conception of Interbeing. Martin pulls from Maggie Nelson's simultaneous eclectic maternal cosmology while

defetishizing the maternal while asking how to renegotiate the historical genderedness of caregiving. Martin reflects on being a single-mother and primary caregiver for her son (terms she finds isolating and problematic) and learning to accept help in the process. A brick can lose its purpose when singled out; it serves its true purpose when surrounded by other bricks. We can all imagine we are bricks, thriving by giving and receiving care.

Summary of Discussion (written by E.C. Comstock)

Martin invited participants to share examples of using waste in their practice. Responses ranged from firing crumpled paper to expose kaolin, use of a heat gun to transform found plastic objects, and working with Afghan potters who derive all of their glaze materials from existing objects. One educator observed that recycled materials are used most while making gifts and most in care work education settings, with children and adults with learning disabilities. The group reflected on a lack of knowledge of the source of our materials and their end-of-life cycle as well as the colonialism present in pollution and superfund toxic cleanup sites. A participant described taking students to a cement factory using reclaimed coal as a heat source, in contrast to the practice of brick reuse falling by the wayside in the US, a Netherlands-based participant mentioned a brick factory which extracts clay from rivers as flood prevention and works towards dry stacking bricks without mortar to make brick reuse more possible. There was a brief discussion about *The Brick Journal*, a new publication, and an observation that every piece of submitted writing is tied in some way to a grappling with the Americas existing on indigenous land.

One participant highlighted dissonance by citing Jane Bennett's conception of enchantment included in the select readings, a reverberating wonder possible by opening our aesthetic apprehension, in contrast with Maggie Nelson's assertion that we collectively react to beauty by not caring for it. Martin's response was to encourage magnifying the sense of wonder.

While thinking about ways that the public and students can expand their understanding of extractive processes by visiting pit mines, participants wondered if corporations have a reciprocal curiosity. Martin responded that industry workers associated with her research site initially had interest in the projects that quickly waned. A former stonemason reflected on the requisite love of the material in order to do the work, and the importance of materials having a specific cultural position in the world for making and thinking to unfold on a shared site. The violence of spraying granite to produce china clay was referenced by a participant who described potters as destructively clawing at the earth. Another participant described the violence unfolding on the bodies of brickmakers in India to dispel romanticization of the labor. Neha Kudchakhar offered a question from her research, "Do we hurt the earth the way we do because she is mother?" A chat comment described hard and soft actions being reciprocal in industrial settings across humans and nonhumans, the risk of silicosis being a "flowering" of geology inside the body.

A participant invoked Otobong Nkanga's suggestion that 'caring is a form of resistance,' another mentioned Bruno Latour's concept of a "holobiome," a complex assemblage of living and non-living elements that co-creates the environment, an idea closely linking to Interbeing. The weight of bricks and the weight of care are linked. A participant remarks that in Swedish there are two different words for "to care about something" and "to care for someone," and Martin closes reflecting on care-taking and care-giving being confusingly interchangeable.