



Kia ora! Welcome to our latest round up of all things ceramics in Aotearoa.



Neil Grant 1938-2024: An Appreciation

The master craftsman is seldom a household name. Neil was known and respected among older New Zealand potters but didn't hit the headlines in the 'arts' media. He was an 'old school' ceramicist. Craftsman first and last. Always aspiring to emulate his own masters, most of them without a name in any history books, from Ancient China, more recent Japan, talented journeymen from Medieval England or France. It was their work he loved, what they achieved with their hands, with a knowledge of glazes, how a kiln works, how you work a kiln, how you turn a design in the mind into something people can handle with pleasure, even love.

He remembered, with pride and amusement, the days in 1965 in Christchurch, where he watched the hands of Shōji Hamada when working as the Master's 'electric boy', kicking a converted Bernard Leach pottery wheel, then finding kilns available to fire Hamada's pots. Neil's eyes were on the hands, not the man, watching the way the clay was handled, watching for the magic of movement that might one day be his own.

Neil was born in Napier in 1938. When the family shifted to Auckland, he attended Mount Roskill Grammar School, but with a further shift to Taranaki he

went to Stratford Technical High School. In 1957 he enrolled at the Canterbury University School of Fine Arts at Ilam, graduating in 1960 with a Diploma in Sculpture. It was at Ilam that he learned to appreciate the value of drawing, a passion and a necessary skill he later conveyed to his students. He also learned to work in three dimensions, with his hands, being inspired by the clay forms and glazes he saw at the Luke Adams Pottery in Sydenham, and by the Bernard Leach pottery he bought, with what little money he had, from an antique shop on Papanui Road.

In 1961, now married, he continued his education at the Auckland Secondary Teachers' Training College, where he took up pottery under the supervision of Peter Smith. His bible became Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book*, first published in 1940, that gave rise to Neil's first Papa Rock glazed bottles and bowls. On graduation Neil was appointed art teacher at Mount Albert Grammar School. He became a member of the Auckland Studio Potters and a Foundation member of the New Zealand Society of Potters, taking part in their annual exhibitions from 1962. Encouraged by his association with Hamada, Neil developed his brushed decoration with oxides and slip painting. His infatuation with the ceramics of Japan and China was now fully established. As his public profile increased, Neil showed his talent for teaching and public demonstrations. He was always ready to share his knowledge and skills with others.

In the early 1970s he felt confident to branch out into larger ceramic sculptures with the piece pots he exhibited in the New Vision Gallery in Auckland, the first major gallery to feature his work, and which Neil supplied with a rich range of domestic ware over many years.

Neil had a great love of the forms of the natural world, plant forms in particular, inspiring his 'wavy-line' ceramics and the nikau vases of the early 1970s which were displayed in the CSA Gallery and Brooke Gifford Gallery in Christchurch, to critical acclaim. Yet this more innovative work was accompanied by an intense study of celadon glazes and more traditional Eastern techniques, such as fluting and chatter-tooling. However, it was with the Chün/tenmoku work from the late 1970s that Neil made a unique contribution, merging self-motivated creativity with ancient traditions, an extension of Anglo-Orientalism.

Neil also serviced commissions, such as the mural that decorated the entrance to the Dunedin Public Hospital in 1984, celebrating the city and harbour.

From 1977 Neil worked as the tutor in ceramics at the Dunedin School of Art within the Otago Polytechnic complex, retiring in 2015. But wait a minute, wasn't he in the studio every day for years after that, except when laid up with illness? Neil never really retired. His home became a museum of his work from youth to old age. And he became a living repository of knowledge and experience.

Indeed, it is arguable that the best came last. The poured glaze, 'criss-cross' plates and lidded boxes, each a unique design, were his crowning glory. But what about the copper-red porcelain bottle of 2010, or the copper-red bowl of 2015-16?

It was in the 1990s that I first became acquainted with Neil, whilst visiting the studios in which he worked so amicably with Lawrence Ewing. They made a team quite unique to the Dunedin School of Art. In 2005 I became, for the next twelve years, tutor in art history in the Distance Learning Diploma Course in Ceramics within the Dunedin School of Art. Neil and I worked alongside each other. We communicated more by grunts and nods, smiles and raised eyebrows, somehow understanding each other, sharing a love of crafted clay and porcelain. It was a privilege I valued.

Like the best of creative craftsmen, Neil was obsessed. He had the pleasure of seeing the elements of his craft come together often enough to make him smile: fluted bowls and teapots, chün/tenmoku plates, poured-glaze criss-cross bowls.

Neil was generous, sharing what he knew with anyone who showed an interest. He was tolerant of outsiders, like myself, willing to talk, to show, to find time for the rookie. It was through my association with Neil that I learned what it meant to be a 'craftsman', what being an artist entails. In any final analysis, it is the work that counts, the feeling of 'just right', but with the self-knowledge that that can only come through hard work, persistence, close attention to detail and the study of the masters who came before.

I count myself lucky to have known Neil, the People's Potter.

Peter Stupples

Wellington, 13 June 2024

Photograph by Pam McKinlay

Touring Potter in August - Kwak Kyungate



CERAMICS
NEW ZEALAND



KWAK KYUNGTAE NZ TOUR AUGUST 2024

Whangārei - Auckland - Coromandel - Ōtaki - Wellington -
Christchurch - Dunedin - Queenstown

We are looking forward to our touring potter programme with Kwak Kyungtae and Marco Minetti beginning 27 July in Auckland and ending 27 August in Dunedin, with stops all over the country.

Thank you to all those who have registered, the clubs and studios hosting the workshops, and Mac's Mud for helping make this tour possible.

We are still looking for hosts who can help Kwak & Marco out with **accomodation** in **Auckland** and **Dunedin**! Please get in touch if you might be able to help!

Contact us



Ceramics Open Studios 23rd & 24th November 2024

The date has been set for the national ceramics open studios event! This November 23rd/24th ceramicists around the country will open their doors to the public from 10am to 4pm.

More details and the opportunity to register to take part will be available soon.

Regional updates

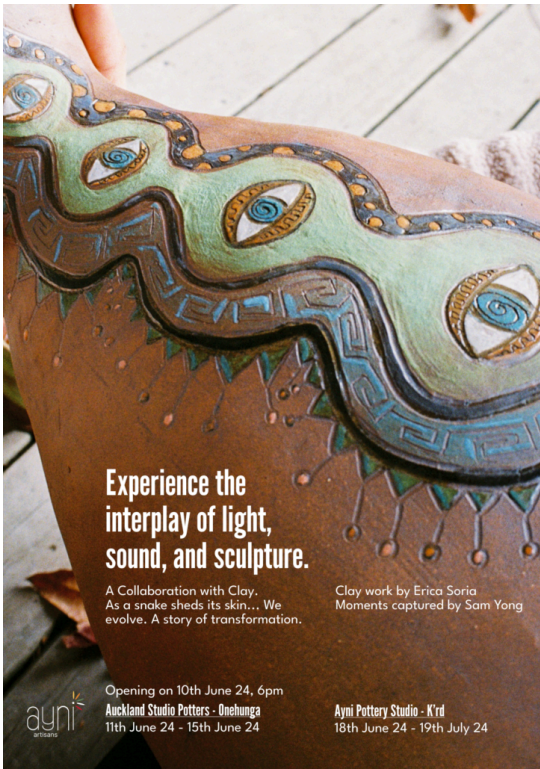


Northland / Te Tai Tokerau updates
The Quarry Arts Annual Fundraiser

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Auckland Tāmaki Makaurau updates

Please check venues for their opening event dates.



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Central North Island Updates

News from Driving Creek including workshop opportunities for the year

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Latest news from Canterbury potters.

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Otago Southland updates

Latest news from Otago Southland

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Ceramics New Zealand Magazine updates



The team at Ceramics NZ Magazine have needed to restructure our publishing schedule for 2024, in order to adapt to Creative New Zealand's new funding structure, and make some much needed changes to support a fairer and more sustainable publishing framework for our magazine staff. This year is proving especially challenging in the field of Arts Publishing - sadly, we have already seen beloved Aotearoa arts journals forced to cease publication.

Ceramics NZ Magazine is working hard to keep publishing new high-quality content for our readers and subscribers. 2024 sees us taking a short hiatus to regroup and secure new funding, as we work towards publishing one extra large volume of Ceramics NZ Magazine in late November of this year. This marks a change from our traditional biannual publishing structure, which we aim to resume in 2025 and 2026. We will be keeping our supporters updated as we confirm publication dates.

Huge thanks to our magazine editor Becky Richards for the time & expertise she has put into reviewing our publishing schedule and ensuring the publication is sustainable in the long-term.

Thanks for reading!

Interested in helping out with this newsletter or other volunteering with CANZ? If you have any news or updates you'd like included in our next newsletter just get in touch at newsletter@ceramicsnz.org or get in touch with your local [regional council member](#).

Huge thanks to Judy Chappell for her editorial assistance with this newsletter!



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