Keynotes: Virginia Scotchie (USA)

Virginia Scotchie

talks with Sue Buckle

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{xtypo_dropcap}V{/xtypo_dropcap}irginia Scotchie’s ceramic artworks blur the lines between vessel and sculpture. Her creative concerns are always underpinned by the endless possibilities and challenges of working with clay.

Sue Buckle: Where did your journey with clay begin?

Virginia Scotchie: I began as a potter making functional work.
It was through this work that I developed a style that projects a sense of volume. Over time my pieces became more sculptural. From domestic ware I moved to reinterpreting familiar domestic objects.

SB: What was the inspiration for combining domestic objects with clay?

VS: Family and home have always been important to me. Ideas spring from my own life. I come from a large family and many of the domestic objects I use in my art are from my own domestic life – both in the past and the present. They are objects or parts of objects I have seen or used in my daily life. They are visually intriguing and combined with clay I hope these apparently humble, familiar objects invite a closer look and trigger a new response. This is one way simple objects can take on new meanings and command a new space.

SB:Describe your work pattern – hours/days/week etc.

VS: I usually go to studio from 11 am until 8 pm. At the moment I look after my two young children two days a week so on those days I go to the studio for six hours in the evening. Every few weeks I take a day or two off.

SB:Describe the work you make in your studio.
VS: At the moment I have three areas I am working in – painting, large-scale sculptures and ceramics. Quite often the line between them is very blurred and each medium informs the others.

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SB:Your forms have been described as sensuous and curvaceous.

VS: I always strived for fullness and volume in my functional work, which I still enjoy making when time permits. I think some of my more abstract forms have a figurative quality which borders on

sensuality.

SB: How important is whimsy or humour in your work?

VS: It’s great if my work makes me laugh and smile. Sometimes after completing a piece I stand back and look at it and chuckle. Colour can also be used to add a layer of playfulness in my work. Humour is a powerful way to engage viewers.

SB:You have said that sketching is often the beginning of an idea. What happens when you take this idea and start working in clay?

VS: I do often begin with sketches before I enter the studio. Of course when translated three dimensionally into clay objects, many things change. I am very fluid in the studio and ideas come to me through working with the clay. Making work leads to new work.

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SB:What engages you about working with clay as your primary material?

VS: Clay is the most abstract of materials to create with. It can become anything and be constructed in countless ways. It’s these endless possibilities and challenges that make working with clay so exciting. I enjoy the directness of touch. I also enjoy exploring many different clays and their properties. I find the various stages that one can work with clay – soft, leathery or hard – a constant challenge; however, the rewards are great when you get it right. And, of course, both the anticipation and the opening of each kiln of glazed, fired work is always exciting no matter how long you have been working with clay!

SB: Developing surfaces for work is always a great challenge for ceramic artists. Your surfaces are strong and uncompromising: sometimes in colour, sometimes in texture and sometimes both.

VS: For sometime I have been using the bronze glaze and textured glaze in combination. I love the juxtaposition of these two very different surfaces on the one form. Colour is also important to me in glazes. Recent work has been in low-fired red clay with sand-blasted surfaces. I love to explore glazes as well as forms. My studio contains hundreds of tests. New commissions and exhibitions provide opportunities for ongoing research.

SB: Do you find being a ceramic artist and a teacher a difficult balance or are there benefits in both?

VS: I love making work and I love teaching. Sometimes the balance is challenging, but most of the time the two flow together quite nicely. My schedule is varied with lectures and workshops, exhibitions and commissions, both in America and overseas. I involve my students in major projects or commissions I have been working on and they learn much from this. Students have even travelled with me on recent projects in Taiwan and China. They either love it or never touch clay again! Clay is not for the weak or lazy!

Commissions like Floating Spheres of Continuity, which I worked on with my graduate students for the Yingge Ceramic Museum’s Sculpture Park, demand not just rigorous working schedules but also practical problem solving at every stage. This is ideal training for any artist. I enjoy the role of mentor and I enjoy working with a team.

Currently I have three graduate students working with me on a commission for a new skyscraper in North Carolina. It’s hard, intense work but fun too! I really can’t imagine either not making work or not teaching. Together with my family, they both are a huge part of my life.

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