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PRACTICE

Black Glazes
Public Artworks
Venice Biennale
Northern Potters

PROFILES

Niek Hoogland
Joanna Howells
Ángel Garraza
Masimba Hwati

Kate Malone



Nature and Nurture

POTTER – EMMA CLEGG is enthralled by new departures in Kate Malone's work.

PHOTOGRAPHY – MATTHEW HOLLOW AND STEPHEN BRAYNE



At the end of our interview Kate Malone tells me that really she is more interested in finding out what I have to say about her work than in telling me about it. Quite a challenge, given that I have a pile of catalogues and past articles describing and documenting her ideas, work and motivation and that she already runs a successful small-scale factory of ideas, interpretation, technology development, manufacturing, commerce and marketing.

For almost twenty years since her graduation from the Royal College of Art in 1986 Malone has been producing ceramics. Although her work is still characterised by the distinctive bold style shown in earlier and often-used forms such as her pineapples and gourds, her recent works have a shiny confidence and quirky finesse where the pot form seems to become more and more disguised, or more subtly blended with the adopted imagery. Malone says she feels that the pots she is making now can be interpreted as those of a forty year-old, as opposed to a thirty-something or twenty-something.

Throughout her career she has used T material clay with multiple-fired earthenware glazes and stoneware crystalline glazes, the latter an unmistakable Malone trademark. Her use of crystalline, an unpredictable glaze that is incredibly difficult to control, has developed, quite literally, into a fine art. She explains that stoneware crystalline is perfect for her work when a piece has very fine elements as the clarity of the glaze enhances every detail, whereas earthenware is better for less intricate forms. Despite the size and/or boldness of her pieces they are in perfect artistic balance, with the often anarchic surface decoration always meticulously weighed, modelled and applied. Her work is time-intensive and she openly recognises the contribution and importance of her two part-time assistants, without whom the timescale of projects would become unfeasible.

The pieces are hand-formed by press moulding and coiling, with surface detail invariably hand-modelled with fingers rather than tools. This means that the finished pieces do not display their making origins in the way that many thrown pots, for example, use their throwing marks as a definition of form. These modern, spirited shapes are multi-layered, using artifice and disguise, assisted by the shiny and crystallised surfaces, to create a new form where the spirit rises out of the clay. Malone mentions the influence of the fashion designers Zandra Rhodes and the late Jean Muir and how she sees her pots as being 'dressed up' in the same way as those women's creations. Despite her fascina-

THIS PAGE INSET: Kate Malone with *The Wall of a Thousand Stories*, her installation at Brighton and Hove Library (Photo: Mark Baines) ■ TOP LEFT: *Lady Gourd Jug*, crystalline-glazed stoneware, 2005, H30cm ■ BOTTOM LEFT: *Compact Open Pine Cone Vase*, green crystalline-glazed stoneware, 2005, H25cm ■ OPPOSITE PAGE: *Blackwell White Room Vase*, cream/pale honey crystalline-glazed stoneware, 2005, H31cm.





tion with natural forms and textures, she explains that she is essentially an urban person who 'clothes' her pots with flamboyant shapes, colours and glazed textures.

PROVOCATION

A body of her work is still blatantly provocative, such as her *Garlic Bud* forms with breast-shaped (or garlic-shaped) additions; her *Tutti Frutti* range with a mass of armour-like pink and yellow pebble-glazed protrusions; and her *Bubble* and *Atomic* pots, including strong simple vase forms with oversized globes added to the surface. Refreshingly, the provocation has always exploded with fun and been full of humour, rather than being raw and angst-ridden.

Malone works from both her London studio and home in Hackney and her French home in Provence, a 500 year-old house and pottery in the heart of a medieval village. Sheltered by a calcined cliff riddled with tunnels and troglodyte caves, the house is built at the top of a steep hill. The bottom floor of the house, one of seven floors, is a series of caves with raw-cut stone walls that keep a cool temperature in the intense Provençal summer heat making it possible for Malone to work for weeks on a piece uninterrupted. The current phase of her work attributes much to the natural discoveries she has made in Provence: natural hedgerows, pine cones (found in proliferation and used as kindling), magnolia seeds (used to inspire pots whose decoration she describes as 'chaotic pairs of ears') and bubble shapes observed in the river where she swims (that have given birth to her *Bubble* range). *Dream Hedgerow*, using her familiar vase form with a substantial and wavy sausage-like rim, carries immaculate detail in the hedge visualisation

THIS PAGE LEFT: *Contignac Seed Head Curvy Lady*, hand-coiled, crystalline-glazed stoneware, 2003, H30cm ■ RIGHT: *Clover Flower*, crystalline-glazed stoneware, 2005, H19cm ■ OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: *Mother Pumpkin*, *Tall Pine Cone Lidded Box* and *Mandalai Pine Cone Lidded Box*, gas, wood and salt-glazed, 2005, H max. 47cm ■ BOTTOM: *A Blackberry Teapot*, crystalline-glazed stoneware, 2005, H22cm.





that encloses the pot's body, with leaves and berries and flower heads melding into a mass of fine textures which clothe the pot but also grow naturally from it.

Dream Hedgerow is one of a new phase of pieces that edges away from colourful flamboyance towards dreamy, sober contemplation. This may not sound very Kate Malone, but their strength, substance, forms and flourishes are unmistakably hers. A new form is the *Pine Cone* series of lidded pots often with zig-zag lid openings, in response to the interior shape of the cone, subtly hidden from normal view. Another pine cone vase form in green stoneware crystalline shows the opening-out of the cones, sensitively exploring the elastic growth movements of a living form. Courtesy of French ceramist Michel Muraour, who lives just ten minutes away in a nearby village, Malone has started to experiment with a gas, wood and salt kiln, to date with five pieces. Produced in the sober brown of a saltglaze firing, Malone is fascinated by the change of surface colour in these new pieces caused by the balance of ash and salt in the kiln, discovering to her own amazement that they describe the form as effectively as a dazzling range of multi-coloured glaze effects. After over twenty years' firing with electricity she describes her new alliance with gas, wood and salt as offering a 'whole new world of surfaces to discover'.



COMMISSIONS

Public commissions have always been integral to Malone's ceramic philosophy and over the past two years she has been working on a large-scale public work at the new Brighton and Hove Library. Opened in April 2005 and called *The Wall of a Thousand Stories*, this interactive piece has been produced by Malone for the children's library, designed to be used by storytellers and school groups to develop children's interest in reading and improvised storytelling. An enormous expanse of wall has been painted blue and decorating it is a sweeping wave of visual symbols, what Malone refers to as 'giant sprigs', in stoneware crystalline glaze, with images from thirty general subject areas such as food, tools, clothes, technology, sport, music, homes, space, toys, theatre, the elements and magic. An adept storyteller herself, Malone's stories are given life by visual spurs and are cherished and extracted by her daughter Scarlett who asks her expectantly, 'have you got a story in your throat?'

The role of her dealer Adrian Sassoon, who has represented her work for over ten years, and his contemporary ceramics specialist Clare Beck, has been much appreciated by Malone. Sassoon introduced her to a new, more traditional, international ceramics audience with a focus on specialist collecting, and, in close consultation with her, constantly ferrets out new opportunities for her work, both creative and commercial. Their alliance has ensured a secure financial base from which she has been able to create a stream of work. Malone's current show at the recently restored Blackwell House in Bowness-on-Windermere in Cumbria, initiated by Sassoon, shows another 'branching out' of her work.

Entitled *Next to Nature* the show has inspired the creation of three new stoneware pieces, exhibited here along with a selection of her other work borrowed from UK collections. The Arts and Crafts style and sense of proportion has always fascinated Malone and here was a perfect opportunity to produce contemporary pieces in response to the style. The elaborate plasterwork frieze on the walls above the pic-



ture rail in the White Drawing Room, designed by architect Baillie Scott, was the starting point for one of the new pieces, *Blackwell White Room Vase*, in which the repeating natural forms of the plasterwork hug and weave their way up her classic vase shape, finished in a plain cream stoneware glaze. Another of her new pieces, *Blackwell Firedogs Vase* uses the metal firedogs in the fireplace of the same room as inspiration for its surface, decorated with rowan berries and leaves. Both of these pay appropriate homage to the Arts and Crafts style; rather more sober and traditional than a Zandra Rhodes, but still enveloping, and celebrating, the energy of Kate Malone. Her work encompasses anarchic plastic fluorescence and dazzling crystalline as well as muted natural forms in saltglaze and creamy glazes in a traditional setting. This is part of the magic of Kate Malone's technique, an ability to embrace the ancient, the natural and the intuitive with the direct, the artificial and the exaggerated. **CR**

Next to Nature is at Blackwell, The Arts and Crafts House, Bowness-on-Windermere, Cumbria, July 23 – September 27. Tel 01539 446139. Malone also has a show in Australia at Michael Carr Gallery, Woollahra, Sydney, see Adrian Sassoon website for details www.adriansassoon.com

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FROM LEFT: *Mother Pumpkin* (detail), crystalline-glazed stoneware, 2005, H24cm
 Compact Open Pine Cone Vase (detail), crystalline-glazed stoneware, 2005, H24cm
 Dream Hedgerow Vase (detail), multiple fired earthenware glazes, 2005, H24cm
 Tall Pine Cone Box (detail), gas, wood and salt-glazed, 2005, H47cm.



Technical Notes

CLAY BODY

I use T material clay. I coil and handbuild, sometimes using moulds from found and made forms.

FIRING

Earthenware biscuit firing is 1180°C, glazes are 1060-1040°C. Stoneware biscuit firing is 1000°C, glazes are 1260°C, with a controlled soak between 1100°C and 1000°C in the cooling process. The controlled crystalline glaze soak varies each time, but an example is 1260°C, cool as fast as possible to 1100°C, hold there for 20 minutes, drop to 1093°C, soak for 15 minutes, drop to 1069°C, soak 20 minutes, drop 1060°C, soak 10 minutes, drop 1000°C, soak a little, rise to 1100°C, and switch off. The gas and wood kiln belongs to and is fired by Michel Muraour, gas fired up to approximately 1220-1260°C, with long strips of pine wood fed into two front fire boxes, gas and wood up to 1300°C, gas off, salt added at 1300°C and reduction depending on Michel's own needs.

GLAZE

Three of the four pieces fired in the gas and wood kiln have been 'naked' clay without glaze: the T material clay reacts well to the salt and reduction. I have been testing glazes in the gas and wood firings very little so far – using the crystalline glazes I already use in the electric firings, specifically the Emmanuel Cooper Alkaline Frit base recipe glazes. As in the electric firings they move/drip a lot, but I have placed them high up on a piece. Copper renders good copper reds.

Emmanuel Cooper Alkaline Frit Base Recipe

Alkaline frit 2962	58
Zinc oxide	23
Flint	17
Bentonite	2