

## Settle

The word 'Settle' has many meanings for me in the context of my work as a functional potter.

There would be no pottery without clay. I work with a medium that is (often) formed by the act of settling. The weathering of igneous rock creates small mineral particles that are washed away by water and wind and settle in bodies of water to form sedimentary deposits, some of which are fine enough to be called clay. The varieties of clay are numerous and range widely in colour and texture depending in part on the original rock formation.

'Settle' also means to establish a home. Functional pottery belongs in the home. It needs to be filled with food or flowers, picked up and held and brought to our lips, often daily, to fulfill its use. Part of making a home is choosing the objects we want to have around us, the objects that will add beauty, comfort and focus to our daily rituals.

'Settle' also implies community: a settlement, or neighbourhood where we belong, where we choose to put down roots and share a life with others. Searching for and finding that place is a common human motivation.

I also like the way 'settle' describes my interest in making pots that fit into each other in sets, or nesting groups. The way a cup sits in a saucer, or a small bowl fits into a larger one is a very satisfying detail.

To settle is also to make a decision or resolution. I remember a talk given by an English potter, Micki Schloessing, early in my clay career, in which she said that she had consciously committed to being a potter. I knew at that moment that is what I should do. I had had many years of making art of various media, but clay was new to me. Right then, I 'settled' on clay as my medium, vowing to stick with it even if I was tempted to move on to something else. Luckily, after 14 years, I have not yet had my vow tested!

Finally, to settle means to calm, to make quiet or orderly. The last hundred years have been a time of rapid change and growth. For example, there is much discussion about how segmented and interrupted our days have become, and how our attention spans are becoming shorter and shorter as a result of digital technology and mass media.

In modern art history, the shock of the new has been a dominant theme; for at least a century artists have made work that pushes boundaries and expectations. From Marcel Duchamp to Damien Hirst, viewers have been 'unsettled' and challenged in provocative ways, often only able to fully appreciate artworks by reading critical essays, or artist statements or having a knowledge of art history.

While I admire and enjoy the intellectual rigour of the best of the art world, I think there is also a place for the visceral pleasure a finely made, well-designed functional object can inspire. In a lecture at a ceramics conference in 2013, Micheal Simons, an American sculptor, spoke of encountering a lidded container made by the revered potter, Byron

Temple. Simons was at an opening at an art gallery for a highly anticipated and edgy show, and as he was leaving, he noticed, tucked away in a corner, a plinth with Temple's box on it. He described the quiet and profound thrill he got from seeing this small pot as breathtaking, in contrast to the cerebral experience he had just had.

No words are needed to explain the aesthetic pleasure one gets from seeing and using craft objects. Using beautiful, handmade pieces can help us create calm moments in our day and provide respite from the distractions of our busy lives. They help us focus on the present, pay attention to the fine details, to slow down and to 'settle'.