

One sentence remains relevant as I pass through different stages of my career - ***“stick to what you love and you will be great at making others love it too”***. These were the wise words spoken to me by my parents who simply just wanted me to live a happy and fulfilled life.

I grew up on a farm in the middle of wheatbelt of Western Australia. No one in my family had any interest in clay and I had no exposure to studio ceramics as a child. The importance and value of handmade objects was never discussed in our house. My brother and I ate from Pyrex plates on our laps every night in front of episodes of Happy Days. However when I look back at my childhood I did develop a strong sense of materiality when it came to clay. On our farm was a small clay dam and around its edges was this lovely, cold sticky clay. I would ride to the dam on my motor bike, sit on my haunches and cover myself in clay. It was a way of keeping cool on those scorching 40 degree weeks in the wheatbelt. I would spend hours building with this wonderful white, creamy stuff. It had such a distinct stench mixed with stagnant water and sheep droppings. Mum smelt me coming long before she could see me through the flyscreen door. They say your sense of smell is the most evocative sense and I am convinced to this day that the moment I walked into my first art room clay area as a scrawny impressionable 12 year old boarder I felt at home because of that nostalgic smell of mouldy clay.

After school I enrolled in a ceramic art and design diploma. After 7 years at Art School I was still unsure whether a career with clay was my calling – was it clay I loved; or the connection with my childhood; or the community at art school who made me feel unique and valued. Maybe it was all three. In hindsight the thought of a career as a ceramic artist was too far removed from what was culturally familiar to me. When I graduated I wasn't even sure what my job titled was - potter, designer maker, ceramist etc.

It wasn't until several years later when I travelled to another country where ceramics was intrinsic to the history and culture of an entire community that I began to seriously value the skills and knowledge I had acquired over those formative years.

From that point on being part of any community that deeply valued clay became my drug of choice.

After several years doing ceramic residencies in cultural hotspots across the world it dawned on me - CLAY is one of the creative wonders of the world – by its very nature it binds people, and I am convinced without

question the international clay community is one of the most generous interwoven fabrics stretching across the globe. It makes the world feel so much smaller, familiar and connected.

I met my husband Richard, a passionate Geologist very early in my career and he unconditionally supported all my early ambitions to pursue a career as a studio ceramist. Canada, USA, China, Finland, where ever I have travelled in the world Richard has shared my experiences and appreciated each remarkably kind and engaging community of makers. We were both fascinated by artists we met in other parts of the world who cleverly cultivated their lives around clay. We began to see Western Australia differently and not such a cultural back water. Through foreigners eyes it was an exotic place that many artist I had met were curious to visit and be inspired by.

Returning to Perth to be closer to family and job opportunities for Rich, prompted us to build a clay studio attached to our house. My head was buzzing with ideas and process from my travels and residencies, and as a consequence the work I made reflected an eclectic mix of styles which at times looked confused and busy. Local audiences were not able to locate my work in their home or feel familiar with it. Sales were slow and my shelves in the studio began to fill with work that seemed Alien to Perth.

Over time I started to identify important signifiers that needed to be present in each piece in order for people to engage and ultimately purchase pieces:

- The purpose or function of the object needed to be very clear.
- The object needed to convey a very high level of craftsmanship that could only be achieved by an artist extremely confident with their material.
- And the object needed to have a familiar link to our local culture. This was an especially strong selling point in Perth due to the influx of relatively inexpensive but beautifully designed objects ubiquitous in home-ware stores across our city. The cool clean lines of so many of these imported objects didn't reflect our culture and although it may have transported us to a funky apartment in Stockholm where we could see it decorating a chic dining room table – the connection to that object was more a fantasy, and these objects had no way of

triggering familiar stories and experiences that we had all lived and breathed.

As time went on it became obvious there was glue holding these three signifiers together. It had been in my work from the very start – **Making each object personally relevant.**

This has become one of my strongest marketing points. The constant in my work over the past 15 years is the obvious reference to my own personal history.

Whether it's :

- A series of sound instruments inspired by my love of music;
- relic cast porcelain bottles reflecting the farm where I grew up; or
- stories told of my childhood through the muses in my work such as my children, Heidi and Harry.

You are the world expert in telling your own personal stories – they are raw, visceral and honest.

In an age where most of our communication with another human is via smart phone, email or face book, we are starved of face to face contact with people. A direct response is to surround ourselves with material things in our homes that reflect what makes us human - objects that tell a story about a time or place, that make us laugh, or tap into our early memories when life was simpler and not so stressful.

In 2005 our lives became a lot more sedentary as our little girl Heidi came into the world. My work became figurative based as I responded to my immediate surroundings and Heidi's new world. As I addressed these signifiers in my work sales picked up, clients started seeking me out to purchase work and with Gallery, Retail and Web presence I was beginning to better understand my market. I was really enjoying making two lines of production – figurative sculpture and utilitarian wares. My income was lumpy and I'd go for several months without a sale and then sell a bunch of work in one week.

Late in 2005 Rich and I moved to an old school in North Fremantle and launched SODA international residency with clay studios and workshop facilities. The venue and its activities became one of my greatest promotional tools. Through the SODA workshop program people across Perth gained a personal insight into how I make, why I make, and where

the future lies with the next body of work. They seem to leave SODA filled with an invigorated enthusiasm and full of ideas and possibilities. The SODA **venue** has become a great form of self-promotion.

There was something intrinsic to the work that I hadn't valued or intentionally pitched as a marketing strategy before - the sheer joy of making, the journey to get to the end product. By inviting people to SODA I was unveiling the potential of clay and the wonderful world that exists around it in the studio.

SODA had also become a great vehicle to connect with the International ceramics community through the International Residency Program. I have hosted artists who have presented opportunities for me to take my work to places in the world I would never have thought relevant to the work I make.

With the philosophy that generosity enhances education - and with the success of SODA, we are expanding to larger premises. In March 2013 SODA will be relocating its studios, onsite accommodation apartments and workshop facility to the former Perth Galleries building next door. SODA is launching a new Wet Clay School, which create a new role at SODA for a permanent qualified emerging Ceramic Artist to administrate and facilitate the school. Sharing knowledge about clay to all ages goes along way towards the promotion of the ceramic arts.

So exactly what is self promotion? Self promotion is not about promoting accomplishments and deeds that have already been done. Self promotion is the art of spreading ideas, concepts, and a greater vision. When you promote ideas, you give people something to get excited about. All of sudden they make a personal connection and feel compelled to support your project. Ultimately we are inherently selfish. We will only invest time promoting a cause that makes us feel good. One's own personal achievements doesn't make another person feel special, in fact it may prompt feelings of inadequacy and jealousy. But investing the time to invite people to share an idea or vision can quite often inspire hope, thought and action.

It has to be followed through with self belief or confidence, not just from you but all the people around you that love you. If you are not enthusiastic and reflect a deep passion and belief in your work it is impossible to convince others to fall in love with what you make and do. A great mentor

of mine once said - “never sell your work cheaply, as it reflect a serious lack of confidence and self belief”. Have confidence in your work, especially if you are receiving positive, honest feedback. If it is not selling, very rarely is it because of the price point – it is more often because you have chosen the wrong market to launch the work or the market needs time to acquire a taste for your product. If the market needs more time use that time wisely - we could all use a little more time to develop and refine the nuances in each series. More time spent on a piece ultimately translates to more detail, more refinement. It reflects more care at which point we can command a higher price.

Over the years I have watched the escalating career of Pipin Drysdale, one of our most successful artists. She was decorated with the Western Australian life time achievement award last year for her commitment to the visual arts.

The international dissemination of her work and sales have reached an unprecedented level for an artist in her field in WA. Her work reflects all the signifiers that I have discussed:

- The process of analysis, review and revision continues until there is no mistaking the purpose of her elegant still lives - the ultimate decorative display.
- She does not compromise on craftsmanship. Her house is full from floor to ceiling with wonderful pots that have failed her almost impossible test of quality. She employs one of the finest wheel workers in Australia to execute her designs. These days Pip is best described as designer decorator.
- The Australian landscape is forever constant across the surface of her work – as she engages with cultural, social, and political agendas that shape the Australian landscape.

Possibly the thing that is most interesting when talking to Pip about her work is that she rarely mentions clay – it is as though each object has transcended its material. In Perth generally people recognise Pip’s name as an artist not as a ceramic artists. When she discusses her work she very rarely mentions process or hours spent scratching back lines and layer upon layer when glazing. The Falstaffian spirit which imbues her every action is pitched always at maximum intensity, from her explosive laugh to

extravagant generosity – through words she is the master at creating the myths and the magic that encapsulate each piece.

Unlike other cultures, Australian's do find it awkward to self-promote or ask for patronage, and it is not that we are not a society of givers, we are just not a society of askers! It is in Pips nature to ask. She is unique, she has single handily created a Bubble or aura around herself and her pots. It is a great marketing strategy - It's sexy, infectious and real.

As a promotional trailblazer I value having an extrovert of her calibre attracting attention to our medium.

Our home and SODA studios are a physical manifestation of our commitment to the Ceramic Arts. One of my favourite past times when I travel abroad is to collect pots and sculptures. As a result our home and studio is full of sentimental ceramic objects from our travels. For a client who visits my studio there is an immediate connection made of trust and respect as it shows how much I value and appreciate the clay arts. It allows the client to see the connection between what I make and how we live – how they are fundamentally linked. Clay has very relevant connection to our life-style and it's what I love to promote and am passionate about. Time spent in the company of a client is invaluable and worthy of the investment of time. Apart from the feedback, they are your best form of advertising as they blog, facebook or twitter to the universe about their positive experience with you. The more they know about you the more they will share with others the connection they felt to you and the connection they now feel to the piece they purchased from you. Reaching your audience via digital means has never been easier. Our greatest promotional challenge when using the internet is differentiating ourselves from the masses as we all become victims of digital information overload.

I have always relished pushing the boundaries of clay and seeking new ways for a broader audience to experience the ceramics arts. For several years now I have been engaged in the painstaking process of formulating children's book using porcelain characters. It was a way of seeking a new audience for my work. The project is taking forever. In a way I am glad it hasn't happened fast because the story and character development is so much richer and more interesting in response to the way my little family are growing in complexity.

Over recent years I have found it easier to reach the relevant audience for my work, maybe because I have got better at narrowing the audience down. Perhaps it is also because there is a renewed interest in the clay arts

world-wide due to its intimate nature. In its raw state we physically immerse ourselves in it and when it transforms to ceramic we continue to touch it, hold it, caress it, put our lips to it and socialise with it. Perhaps we are re-engaging in its power to make our lives more intimate and real as it teaches us to embrace the bumps, curves, drips and cracks that remind us of how fragile and fallible we all are.

Standing in the shower recently and looking down at the tiles lining the floor, I found myself not making a judgement call on whether I liked or disliked them. Instead my mind focused on process as I my thoughts travelled to the place where they were manufactured and how possibly they were made. Knowing how things are made makes the world so much more interesting, but this is privileged information in a society where there are very few environments where the general public can accidentally witness a man or machine make objects. This has made our art form exotic and the act of making with our hands ironically unique.

Whatever the future holds, there is no greater time than now to “Show the Wizard” - pull down the curtain and unveil the maker behind the magic! Our society is more ready now than ever to embrace the obviously hand-made and there is no greater time than now to use clay to make that reconnection and proudly tell our personal stories through clay.