

10

Ceramic artists working with natural materials

I thank the contributors to this chapter who very generously give an insight into the making of their work.

Fiona Byrne-Sutton

My large press-moulded vessels are physical, expressive of geological processes and electric-fired to 1160–1180°C (2120–2156°F) over 24 hours. These vessels, constructed from black earthstone, are embedded with clays I dig up near the principal rivers of Scotland. Iron oxide is also central to my work as the clays are usually saturated with iron oxide in one of its forms – black, ochre or red. These clays fire orange or deep brown so my work is a tale of orange and black, a colour combination with an ancient ceramic pedigree. However, within this there are big variations in vitrification temperature and also in the quantities of iron oxide present. It is not unusual to find iron-saturated clay marbled in alongside light-coloured clay. Some of the clays are very plastic and free of grit as in Clackmannanshire's high-firing Forth River and glacier boulder clay, which is marbled iron ochre and white before firing. Further downstream in Grangemouth, also on the Forth River, black iron oxide is the main mineral. The clay is much shorter, i.e. not very plastic, and it vitrifies to a glassy sheen around 1150°C (2102°F).

LEFT: Fiona Byrne-Sutton, *Clackmannanshire Slab Bowl* (detail), 2010. Clackmananshire glacier boulder clay from Gartenkeir Farm, black earthstone, 55 × 19 cm (21½ × 7½ in.). Photo: Michael Wolchover.

RIGHT: Fiona Byrne-Sutton, *Clackmannanshire Glacier Boulder Clay Slip Bowl* (from above), 2012. Black earthstone, 55 × 19 cm (21½ × 7½ in.). Photo: Amy Copeman.



Natural glazes

My bowls map out the geopoetics of place. They celebrate the Scottish land through each clay's properties, be it with coloured slips or by combining a low-vitrification clay with a higher-firing one. Thus in the *Grangemouth Forth River Bowl*, a very thick layer of unsieved leatherhard grey clay has been rolled into higher-maturing black earthstone and electric-fired at 1160°C (2120°F) over 24 hours. The melting Grangemouth clay has shrunk faster than the clay underneath, resulting in an attractive brown sheen and expressive cracks and fissures. The *Clackmannanshire Slab Bowl* is embedded with slabs of marbled clay from Gartenkeir Farm near Alloa. The *Clackmannanshire Forth River Bowl* features sieved slip from the same farm but dug higher up a slope. This is paler due to the preponderance of light clay over iron ochre at that point. Local flora is pressed in and painted over with red iron oxide, which fires to an attractive glassy grey sheen on black clay. These vessels, which have no obvious function, use the vocabulary of domestic ceramic craft – the bowl, the pouring cut in the lip, the rectangular handle incision in the vessel wall – to make statements about form and space.

I am attempting to develop an unsentimental craft that corresponds with the difficult times we live in, while not passing judgment. The bowls' round circle is an archetypal form. Measuring 55 cm (21½) across and 19 cm (7½) high, I intend my bowls to create an immense space for reflection. When the indigenous clays, and themes such as the plants and house motif come together on black, they set off a reverberation which pricks – a slight disturbance of consciousness which unsettles, asking questions of the viewer.

Fiona Byrne-Sutton, 2012



Fiona Byrne-Sutton,
*Clackmannanshire Glacier
Boulder Clay Slip Bowl*
(in profile), 2012. Black
earthstone, 55 × 19 cm
(21½ × 7½ in.).



ABOVE: Fiona Byrne-Sutton,
*Grangemouth Forth
River Valley Bowl*, 2012.
Grangemouth clay, 55 × 19
cm (21½ × 7½ in.).



RIGHT: Fiona Byrne-Sutton,
*Grangemouth Forth River
Valley Bowl* (detail), 2012.
Grangemouth clay, 55 × 19
cm (21½ × 7½ in.).
Photos: Amy Copeman.