

SHIFTY

Blue Black

*Formless: A User's Guide*¹ by Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois turned into a god-damn slippery experience: shifting and twisting. To try and contain and define the many facets of *formless* became a hindrance to gaining access to its meaning. The nature of *formless* cannot be defined. I see *Formless* as a living document that continues to develop within oneself as it is not confined to the pages of the book. The manifestation of it in my work gave me a taste for its flavour.

Georges Bataille talks of *formless* in terms of the 'operation', 'task', 'job' and 'description'. The focus is not the meaning of the work but the description of an operation, stating the influences, connections and mechanics of the process and related interests. In fact, I am consumed by the action of doing a job. It is as important, if not more important, than the finished product. The meaning lies in the doing as directed by the materials. In particular, the movement of doing gives me a heightened sense of being in 'the flow' of things. Taking a risk when making something allows for the element of chance. My work evolves from a position that embraces this element.

Bois discusses "base materiality" as posited by Bataille where he concerns himself with "matter" and being involved with "the thing-in-itself" of daily life and with the body's functioning in that life "...it was a question of disconcerting the human spirit and idealism before something base, to the extent that one recognized the helplessness of superior principles."² Material itself with its raw and basic presence brings a

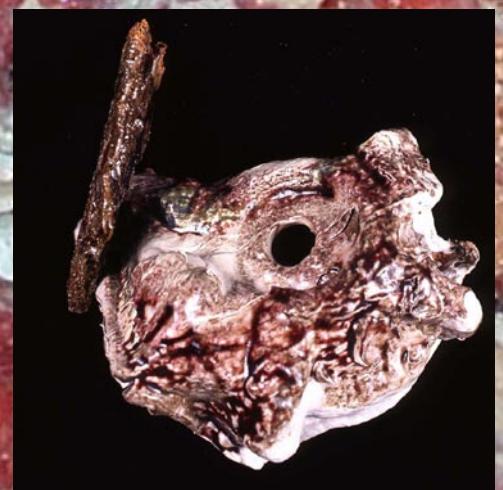
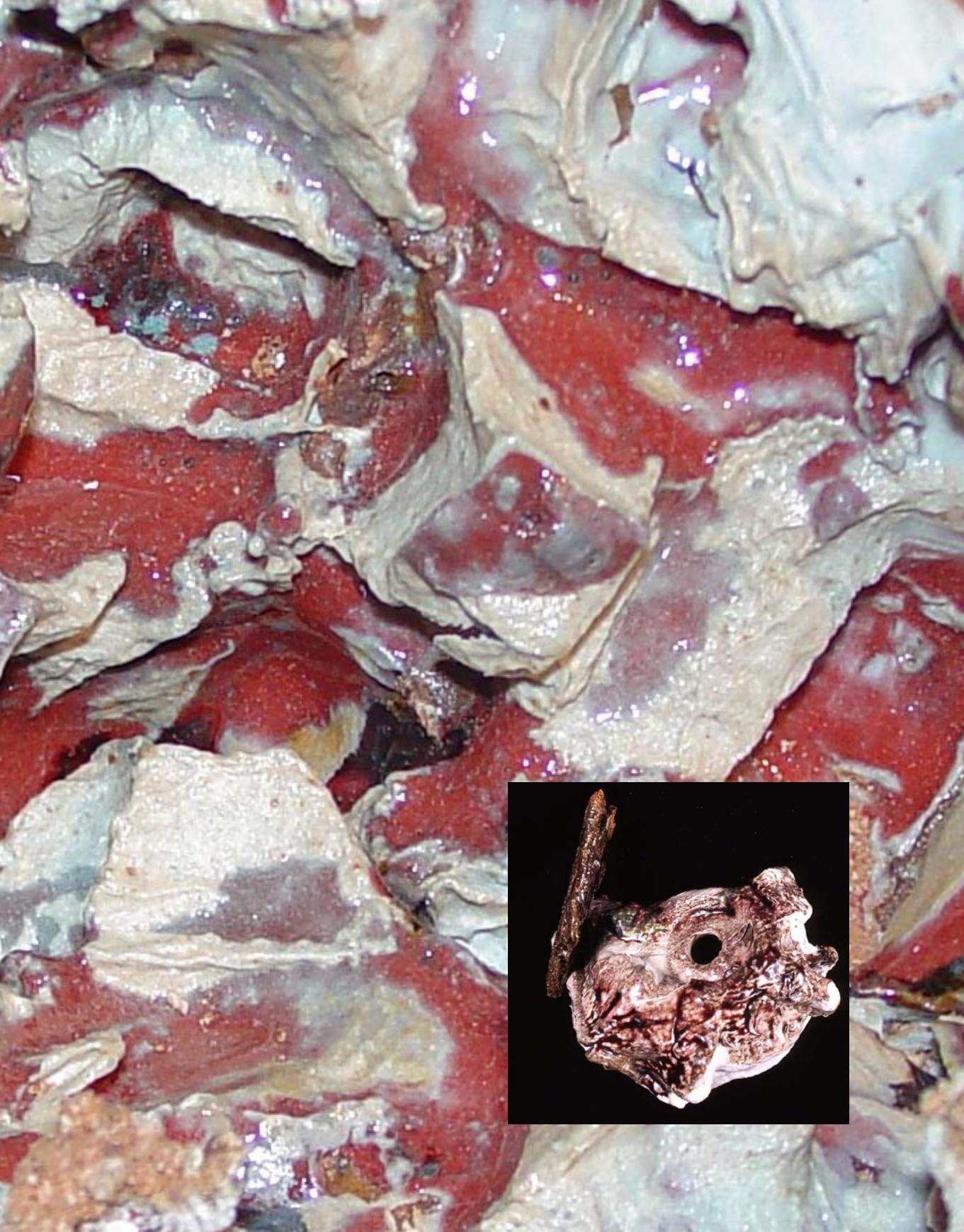
shock factor to an artwork. Bataille's perspective brings everything down to a position lower than culture and form, where everything has its own excrement and is sacred as such, as sacred as god. His notion of the "heterogeneous" relates to "base materiality" in its consideration of all things being equal and consisting of many different parts, a spicy concoction which he calls the "other". The opposite of the heterogeneous is the homogeneous: the monotonous, the regular, the routine, what "should be".

While experimenting with discarded materials and objects, dirt and clay slip, I intuitively slap various components together. I wrap it all together and once-fire it at 1280°C without being too concerned about the final outcome. In the process of making I involuntarily go to places related to the horrors of darker days and of my 'shadow self' (the dark side of being human). Something vaguely familiar in the suggestion of such places appears when I view my work but before I can grasp it, it appears to become *formless* and thus most elusive.

In conclusion I can say that my making goes beyond a comfort zone and breaks the mould of social order; fronting up to daily life and death with all their anxieties and fear. The spirit of *formless*, as I see it, keeps me honest and has certainly rattled my cage of formality. Through the process of making, a connection is made to the self through an experience of *formless*. A sense of liberation, individual freedom and wonderment contribute to this. With ceramics as the medium there

Opposite image: Blue Black, detail of *Untitled* (glazed and combined with a slipped egg carton bound with string and then fired), ceramics, 2006.

Inset image: Blue Black, *Untitled* (cardboard moulding with a bit of tree attached), ceramics, 2006.



is always also an element of surprise when opening a kiln. The process of making and seeing what one has made acts as a tremendous seduction that entices me to further exploration. Thus, when I look at a body of my completed work I see many different parts of a larger group – heterogeneity – with each piece being a step or increment within the exploratory research process of my practice.

The seven works shown here are from my 2006 exhibition at Segue Gallery, Dunedin, entitled *Other*. They originated from discarded materials and objects that were dipped in clay slip and then once-fired at 1280°C. They can be held in one's hand and this provides an indication of size. They should be seen together as they are heterogeneous parts of a whole that is never complete but always in process.

- 1 Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless; A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).
- 2 Georges Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism" in *Documents* 1, 1930, no.1: 8 as quoted in Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless; A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 54.

Blue Black has been involved with clay for many years. She has exhibited in New Zealand and has worked on four large commissioned projects in Southland. She completed a BFA in 2005 and is currently working with ceramics and drawing towards an MFA with a research topic entitled "Against the Grain". Her recent works, *The Inside Story*, was exhibited at Objectspace in Auckland during October - November 2007.

* All photographs by Motoko Kikkawa and the artist.

Images opposite:

Top left: Blue Black, *Untitled* (originated as willow branches), ceramics, 2006.

Top right: Blue Black, *Foreign Body* (slip mixed with kapok, cabbage tree leaves and bow tie inserted in polystyrene mould), ceramics, 2006.

Middle left: Blue Black, *Untitled* (originated as cabbage tree leaves and seed heads), ceramics, 2006.

Middle right: Blue Black, *Stomach* (scrap of polystyrene inserted into slip mixed with kiln rubbish, kapok and a stick), ceramics, 2006.

Bottom: Blue Black, detail of *Organ* (originated as coconut husks laid together in the kiln during firing), ceramics, 2006.

