

**'First we eat, then we do everything else.'**

M.F.K. Fisher

**Melbourne Design Week 2019**  
*How can design shape the future?*

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**Exhibition Proposal**

# Background

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In reflecting on the future direction of our society we recognise that even as we rely more heavily on technology, the basic needs of food, shelter and connection remain unchanged. The hyperconnectivity of our current digital age has brought about an ironic predicament, instead of feeling intergrated within a global community, there's been a marked increase of loneliness and social isolation<sup>1 2</sup>.

The anthropology of food shows us that eating is not only fundamental for pleasure, survival and nutrition but is also an essential medium for social connectivity and plays an important role in shaping individual and cultural expression. Our emotional response to food is rooted deep within our memories.

The preparation and sharing of food has always necessitated design, specifically ceramics. Early ceramic design spoke of basic survival needs by allowing food to be broken down into more digestible protein-rich forms, whilst also being utilised for serving and storage. As technological developments progressed, the mass production of ceramics became ubiquitous, with fabricated objects showing minimal signs of their origins.

The recent cultural swing back to hand made and DIY speaks of a longing for a more elemental sensory experience. Global trends suggest that technological change is causing reconsideration of our core values and that connection and meaning are becoming more important. Increasingly we now desire more than beauty and function from our objects, we want tactile engagement and tangible associations. Handmade objects offer meaning, they embody a terrior; telling a story of place, material and of the maker. In tandem, the concurrent slow food movement also evidences this shift towards conscientious consumerism.

Instead of looking toward future materials and technologies we want to contemplate our long and intimate history with ceramic design, food and communal eating within the domestic dining setting.

<sup>1</sup> "Is Loneliness a Health Epidemic?", By Eric Klinenberg, Feb. 9, 2018 New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/09/opinion/sunday/loneliness-health.html>

<sup>2</sup> "U.K. Appoints a Minister for Loneliness", By Ceylan Yeginsu, Jan. 17, 2018 New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/world/europe/uk-britain-loneliness.html?module=inline>

# Proposal

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Using the dining room as a thematic focus, we will investigate the symbiotic relationship between design and food. We propose to stage a domestic dining setting in a gallery for 3 weeks featuring the work of 8 local ceramic designers. These designers have diverse practices and make a range of homewares, both decorative and functional.

Our exhibition will open and close with ceremonial dinner parties, the first open to the public and the second for the makers and guests from Melbourne Design Week. In parallel to architectural focuses on communal dwelling, the dinner parties will emphasize the importance of communal eating and reference the historic role of feasting. We will contextualize the fundamental role of ceramic materials in the dining experience by using an ancient cooking technique which utilized clay in one of its earliest food preparation roles; baking food encased in clay. This method of cooking first originated in China, known as 'Beggars Chicken', and was subsequently discovered in various guises around the world. This process of preparing, serving and eating food baked in clay is quite unique, so the first dinner will be filmed and projected onto the back wall for the duration of the show.

The dining setting will display a curated selection of ceramic work, and the clay baked food will be the centerpiece running down the length of the table. Clay wrapped foods will be designed and sculpted by us into abstract and textural forms that highlight the materials earthy origins, referencing rocky terrains found in nature. Guests will be provided with tools to break open the handmade exterior to reveal the edible interior, which will remain a mystery until this act of destruction. All food will be sourced, locally, ethically and sustainably from small-batch farmers and artisanal producers.

This exhibition aims to incorporate the past/present/future, invite self-inquiry on how food is served and shared, and what that says about the design of our everyday lives.

As part of the discussion about the role of the individual and the handmade in design, all visitors to the exhibition will be offered an opportunity to participate by decorating their own ceramic cup which they can collect at the end of the exhibition. This activity will encourage the audience to directly engage and connect with the themes of our exhibition. The majority of work featured in the show will be available for purchase.

# Inspirations

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The curators; Jia Jia Chen and Claire Lehmann both studied ceramics at university and met at a ceramic studio in North Melbourne where they soon realised their shared love of food, eating and design.

**Jia Jia** has long held a deep interest in the connection between dining and memory, and how sharing food can nourish the soul. She has designed several food events and her thematic, immersive dinners focus on the sensory, they recontextualise eating, creating a sense of spectacle in homage to ancient feasting.

**Claire's** ceramic lighting stems from an obsession with luminosity and how lighting as a material is diffused and distributed in space through object design. Her focus lies in the presence (and absence) of light and its effects on mood, feeling and environment.

The curators' influences for this exhibition are Peter Greenaway, 1980's sci-fi set design, 1970's interior design, Gordon Matta Clark's FOOD, the writings of M.F.K Fisher, food history, and the food design of Marije Vogelzang.



## Gallery space and key dates

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The exhibition will run from March 14th to April 4th at:  
**Long Division Gallery**, Schoolhouse Studios, 81 Rupert St, Collingwood VIC 3067.

- The exhibition will close with a party on Thursday the 4th of April.
- The first dinner party will be held on Saturday March 16th (*ticketed event open to the public*).
- The second dinner on Saturday March 30th (*free event for makers and Melbourne Design week guests*).
- 150 ceramic cups will be pre-made, available for purchase and ready for decoration by viewers, these will be finished by us and ready for collection in the final week.

The dining setting will be refreshed and remain open for viewing, alongside ceramics cups for decoration and a film documenting the feast, from 9am – 3pm Monday to Saturday.



# Artists

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Our exhibition features the work of 8 prominent Melbourne based ceramists:



Jia Jia Chen



Andre Davidoff



Alison Frith



Kate Jones



Tessy King



Claudia Lau



Claire Lehmann

More TBA

## Jia Jia Chen



Jia Jia Chen is an interdisciplinary ceramicist working across art, design and food. She has completed her Bachelor of Fine arts and Honours in Ceramics at RMIT and will be undertaking and Masters of Contemporary art at VCA in 2019. She was the recipient of the Future Leaders Award at Craft Fresh! and has had several solo and group exhibitions.

Her recent projects include a commission for Speak Percussion; creating bespoke ceramic percussive instruments for a visual/sound theatre piece performed at Artshouse and designing the artwork and visual branding for the Supersense 'festival of the Ecstatic' at the Arts Centre.

Her love food, wine and feasts have led her into the dynamic world of food; from food styling, catering and designing custom ceramic tableware for ceremonial eating.

## Andre Davidoff



Andrei Davidoff is a ceramic artist and sculptor based in Melbourne, Australia. His functional ceramic pieces are predominantly wheel-thrown and are made from local clay in his home studio. Since 2012 Andrei has been working as a studio potter, creating custom designed ceramics for some of Australia's most loved and highly regarded restaurants. He exclusively fits out Vue de Monde, Iki Jime and Estelle.

Andrei completed his Masters in Fine Arts at RMIT University in 2012.

## Chela Edmunds - Takeawei



Chela studied textile design in Melbourne before working as a designer for Vera Wang and DKNY in New York. She fell in love with ceramics and soon after moved back to Melbourne and started Takeawei. Chela has facilitated workshops in Australia and internationally including: the NGV, Guild of Objects, Craft, Melbourne University and Choplet in New York. Her studio in Torquay, Victoria, also hosts international and Australian visiting artist workshops.

Chela has appeared in numerous online and magazine publications including Gallery Magazine, The Design Files, Sight Unseen, Australian Ceramics Journal and Rented Space. Group exhibitions and collaborations include Dress Up - Namaste 2015 - Craft, 1-OK Club - NGV, The Victorian Craft Awards - Finalist 2016 and Out of the Studio.

She has recently opened her flagship store in Fitzroy.

[takeawei.com](http://takeawei.com)

## Alison Frith



Alison Frith is a Melbourne based ceramicist who creates wheel thrown stoneware for the kitchen and home. With a strong focus on functionality, she enjoys making the daily rituals of life special through the objects and vessels we use.

Through a continued investigation of surface, Alison Frith's work explores the relationship between unconventional finishes and contained forms. Volatile crater glazes are countered with smooth satin finishes, creating a dialogue between the controlled and organic.

Alison Frith was the recipient of the Sofitel/Craft Fresh! Emerging Craft Practitioners Award in 2016, one aspect of which is the opportunity to hold a solo exhibition at the Sofitel Melbourne on Collins' Lobby Gallery.

She currently works for Anchor Ceramics.

[alisonfrith.com](http://alisonfrith.com)

## Kate Jones



Kate Jones has completed a Diploma of Art (Ceramics) and a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) with honours at RMIT. She was awarded the Trudie Alfred Bequest in 2013, the Craft Victoria Fresh award in 2014 and the Victorian Craft Award for Ceramics in 2015. Exhibitions include solo shows at Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Craft Victoria Gallery and the Sofitel Hotel, Melbourne.

Kate works at School of Clay and Art (SoCA) as a teacher, researcher and studio manager. Her private studio is based at SoCA.

## Tessy King



Tessy King is a Melbourne based artist who works predominantly with ceramics. She studied Fine Art at RMIT and graduated with First Class Honours in 2016.

The vessel is the object central to her current work through which she examines the point of convergence of sculpture and domestic ware. Within her arts practice more broadly, Tessy considers how meaning is generated through the arrangement of objects and materials in larger installations and playful vignettes.

Recent exhibitions include House Sculptures at Pieces of Eight gallery in 2017. 'Sun Room' at Craft Victoria, 'Contempottery' at Mailbox Art Space, 'Feminographies' at Seventh Gallery and 'Viewing Zone' at C3. Tessy was a finalist in Fresh!, 2016 and The Victorian Craft Awards, 2017.

[tessymking.tumblr.com](http://tessymking.tumblr.com)

## Claudia Lau



Claudia Lau graduated from a Bachelor of Design (Communication Design) at RMIT University in 2017. With an affinity for the disposable yet permanent nature of clay, a ceramics practice was developed as a more tangible platform for design. Drawn to the purity of the craft, she found an appreciation of the labour intensive process, cultivating her awareness towards the finer details and the importance of every step. She has worked as a studio assistant to ceramicist's Leah Jackson and Wingnut & Co.

Claudia has exhibited at Modern Times and is stocked at Shifting Worlds, Monk House Design and Workday Studio.

## Claire Lehmann



Claire is a ceramicist with qualifications in art history, multimedia and ceramics. Originally making tableware, she is now focusing on lighting design, her work reflects an interest in shape, texture, process, weight and material tolerance. Her ceramic work bridges industrial design, fine art and craft.

In 2017 Claire was the recipient of a ceramic scholarship and residency at the European Ceramic Work Centre (EKWC) in Oisterwijk, The Netherlands. Alongside solo exhibitions, she was a finalist in Craft Victoria's Fresh! Awards in 2016's and the 2017 Victorian Craft Award. Recently she has been making bespoke lighting for commercial buildings.

Thanks for reading we look forward to hearing from you.

Jia Jia Chen  
jiajiachenhere@gmail.com  
0401 526 788

Claire Lehmann  
lehmann.cs@gmail.com  
0411 814 719