Stage 1 Review

Beginning this Part I had the tentative idea of a collection of vessels. Wanting to gather information to support this, and to identify alternative possibilities, I did an extensive review of coursework to date. At the same time I noted further research possibilities.

This process is recorded on my blog, and in the first 34 pages of my sketchbook.

The working title for my final piece became An exploration of materials and space. I expected it would still look like a collection of vessels, but the title made clearer that my interest in continuing to explore my materials, their properties individually and in combination, and to consider the parts as a whole installation.

Could resin be dribbled over paper shaped as a vessel? (p1-1f 21 March 2015, sketchbook page 4 10 January 2016).

Composition practice, plus ideas mixing resin and plaster. (sketchbook page 9 10 January 2016)

The plastic “horsehair” of p2-73 (28 July 2015) claims space and adds drama. (Sketchbook page 14 10 January 2016)

I noted effects of interest - corrugations in polymorph p3-27, which became p3-33 (6 September 2015), sketchbook page 24 18 January 2016)

How could dribbling resin over distorted organza be extended? p3-46 23 September 2015, sketchbook page 26 25 January 2016

I was keen to bring forward techniques and materials from all parts of the course. What could be used together? Were there materials that could be combined to create tension and distortion? What joining methods could be used? It still needed to make sense as a collection - not just a jumble. Sketchbook page 20 18 January 2016.

Could a collection be cast vessels and the forms they were cast from? p4-128 25 December 2015, sketchbook page 33 25 January 2016.
Stage 2 Research

Research was ongoing throughout work on Part 5. My sketchbook is full of examples.

Gillian Lowndes was critical to my thinking and approach. My initial research notes were posted 26 February 2016.

The photograph of her work Cup on Base fascinated me. The sense of precariousness, the mix of materials and textures, animating wires, fragility...

I was also struck by videos in the Ceramic Points of View series (a collaboration between The National Electronic and Video Archive of the Crafts and the Victoria and Albert museum), in which a range of artists respond to this piece. Video was a channel I wanted to use to present individual pieces and my collection as a whole.

Looking at Lowndes’s work also suggested ways to see and record my own vessels. On the right is my line sketch of vessel 5-10, drawn in the style of an untitled 1990s sketch by Gillian Lowndes.

Eva Hesse has been of research interest through much of Mixed Media for Textiles. Her work inspired joining sample p2-4 (7 June 2015, second post) and p2-6 (11 June 2015) and I wrote a research post on her in that context (7 June 2015, first post). I discussed Hesse in the context of deterioration of materials in wrapping samples (22 July 2015).

In this Part I was disturbed by Hesse’s work Repetition 19 III. The impact of a collection of repeated forms, their slight differences showing the trace of the hands that made them, made me question the entire basis of my own collection (6 March 2016). The power and the theoretical underpinning of Hesse’s work made me wonder if I had chosen the less satisfying path with my eclectic mix.

I came across the work of Claire Falkenstein late in the assignment and was very excited about her work (research post 11 March 2016). She was experimental in her materials, her forms and her techniques. Falkenstein developed a vocabulary of forms and approach that fed her creativity through a long life. In a video of an exhibition of Falkenstein’s work there was a sense of unity and conversation between very different pieces, much more in keeping with my own approach and collection than the minimalism of Hesse. The video was influential on my own attempts to video, with group views moving in to individual detail. It also inspired my second photo shoot of the collection (12 March 2016), in which I attempted a clean, uncluttered, white background putting all the focus on the vessels, attempting a gallery-like presentation.

A piece by June Schwarcz inspired sample p5-4. As noted in my sketchbook page 34, I was also interested in her discussion of inside, outside, and the hidden.

I have mentioned the major direct influences, but many more artists research informed my general approach, or led me to question myself. I hadn’t appreciated how much variety could be found in collections of vessels.
Stage 3 Sample-making and Stage 4 Recording Outcomes

Somewhat daunted by the amount of exciting potential identified during the Review stage, I chose an initial focus on resin in combination with other materials (26 January 2016).

Resin combined with crumpled, printed paper produced a light, apparently fragile but quite strong vessel, p5-3 31 January 2016. The paper was print p4-32 (27 October 2015), on 50 gsm bank layout paper.

The form responds well to internal lighting. The combination of crumpling exercises from Part 1 and printing from Part 4, stabilized and glazed with resin, suggests rich possibilities for future exploration.

Inspired by the shapes and process of June Schwarcz's enamelled work, p4-5 (31 January 2016) I used synthetic organza with heat distortion (from Part 1) providing a crumpling effect.

The dynamic impact of the plastic threads was previously identified in p2-73 (28 July 2015). Resin over distorted organza was used in p3-46 23 September 2015.

This vessel was the subject of my first attempts to record using video (5 February 2016). Two styles of presentation were trialled. I sought and received helpful feedback from my tutor and fellow students.
Resin combined with fine plastic "horsehair" in a variant of basket-weaving produced a large, open vessel shape with exciting, dynamic lines - p5-5 31 January 2016.

The fine plastic and basket-weaving were developed in p5-10 (14 February 2016). Heat distortion of the top part only of the vessel produced an attractive form and the unexpected bonus of dynamic curls in the plastic. This time I chose not to use resin, to provide an alternative view of the materials.

Other samples returned to the use of plaster.

P5-8 (14 February 2016) was a development of p3-47 (26 September 2015). The same materials were used, with a setup contrived to hollow the centre.

The beautiful, delicate fluting of the edges was unexpected and brings a lightness to solid mass. This vessel was the subject of the next video, 19 February 2016.
The final plaster vessels brought back corrugations, seen in cardboard, polymorph and compositmold earlier in the course, with p5-12 combining three of my key materials - plaster, resin and heat-distorted organza.

Stage 5 Sorting

Instead of Sorting the samples based on individual development potential, I focused on identifying which samples had potential to work in combination to explore space and presentation. I chose to maximise my possibilities by including objects made in earlier Parts of the course. (28 February 2016)

Stage 6 Prototype/maquette making - Exploration of space

At the beginning of this Stage I wondered if I had taken the wrong path with my quirky melange of objects. Should I have taken a different path and explored the beauty and detail of not-quite repetition?

A quick simulation suggested possibilities, but it seemed a less risky path (6 March 2016).

An initial round of photographs and sketching attempted to create the dynamic precariousness I saw in Gillian Lowndes's work (6 March 2016).
In the second photo shoot I augmented my set of props and worked with what was intended as a neutral background (12 March 2016).

The example above doesn’t have the dynamic sense of teetering on the edge that I wanted, but the asymmetry is good. In her feedback on Part 4 my tutor suggested moving motifs around the page, not defaulting to the centre, and perhaps this fits.

I edited a photograph later to experiment with grayscale.

This has the advantage of putting the focus on form and texture, removing what could be distracting colour. The result is not unattractive, but it doesn’t have the dynamic qualities I wanted.

I prepared carefully for my third photoshoot, working in my sketchbook to clarify compositions that could work and some I wanted to avoid. Background and props were chosen for texture and to provide variation in height. The work was documented by photograph and a video of a larger group of objects. 15 March 2016.

The photograph is close to what I was looking for. A slight tilt of the top slab would add a diagonal, a sense of off-balance.

I was ambivalent about the video. While it gave a better idea of three dimensional space, unlike the flattening effect of a photograph, it had low technical quality. I felt it was the best I could achieve with my available tools and skills.
The fourth photo shoot (18 March 2016) returned to Part 2 and wrapping, influenced by seeing an installation in progress of Sheila Hick’s work. The results were poor, although improved in an A3 glossy print. Lighting, busy ground, too-even placement of objects... a failure.

The course requirement is to remain experimental and take risks. I had done this to the end. An anticlimax.

Reflection and Tutor Formative Feedback

My Reflections on Part 5 and the course as a whole were posted 27 March 2016 and 28 March 2016 respectively. Although overall pleased and proud of my learning in the course I couldn’t identify what my final piece was. I had unfinished business - not a bad state in ongoing artistic development, but unfortunate at the end of a course. I couldn’t let the ideas go and kept finding more related ideas in exhibitions (1 April 2016, 3 April 2016). Then I had a video call for formative feedback from my tutor, Rebecca Fairley (8 April 2016). The advice was clear - I needed to identify my Final Piece.

My final piece is an installation of a collection of vessels, documented for assessment purposes in video and photographs. I consider it as a prototype for an exhibition where groups of pieces would be shown in clusters in a larger space.

Given this clarification, and Rebecca's comments about video as an important part of the future of distance learning, I decided to take the final risk of investing in new hardware and software. With fledgling skills in hand I set up the installation, with only slight variations as the purpose was documentation of the final work, not an update to it. (14 May 2016, based on installation 15 March 2016.)

The new video will be loaded into the OCA drives for assessment. It has flaws, as is to be expected when using new technology (hardware and software). However the colour, focus and overall clarity is much better than the previous video (15 March 2016). I see the improvement as a successful outcome of the risk taken, rather than focusing on the shortcomings as indicators of failure.

Photographic documentation of the group installation and smaller combinations of pieces is submitted in a separate folder, a selection of images from multiple photography sessions. Test prints are included separately, on both glossy photo paper and watercolour paper. The clarity and sharpness of colour and form on the glossy paper was selected for the final documentation.

The prototype could be developed in a number of ways. Additional works in larger scale could be added. The corrugated plaster and the resined organza would be good candidates for this. I would also explore the inclusion of resin on crumpled paper. My only sample of this introduced a different colour, and in the small groupings used this was distracting. Another possibility would be to develop video and photography work, what is now documentation, and present the outcomes as finished work, alone or in combination with the physical pieces. This would allow the pieces to be seen in different environments - sand dunes or a cactus garden for example.