

<Where I End, Where We Begin>

24-25 MA Designer Maker

Danni Wang

24013412



Contextual Research

Purpose:

To fully understand our ancestors and find my true identity

Inspiration:

Tombs are the most direct research objects, allowing us to directly connect with and understand our ancestors.



Kneeling Tomb Figurine

Kneeling

These are the clay figurines commonly found in tombs, which inspired me. They are usually **used to accompany and serve the dead**, and these **kneeling postures** show respect and silence, which is also the attitude towards ancestors in our traditional culture.

Contextual Research

Sketch

I drew their outlines, trying to identify any specific features.

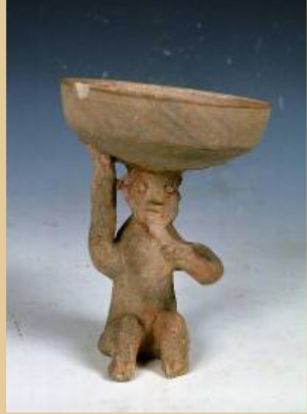
Their kneeling positions were similar, but their gestures were different.

That is, **they used gestures to convey their intentions, so I chose to emphasize this aspect.**



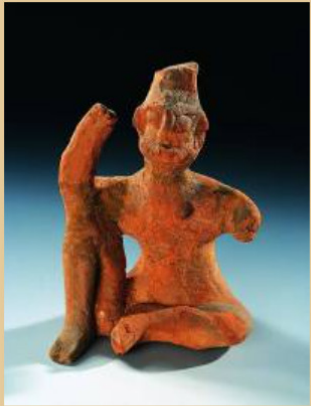
Outline of Kneeling Tomb Figurine

Contextual Research



二 手扶头顶灯盘 (M3020: 36)

图三 手扶头顶灯盘 (M3020: 35)

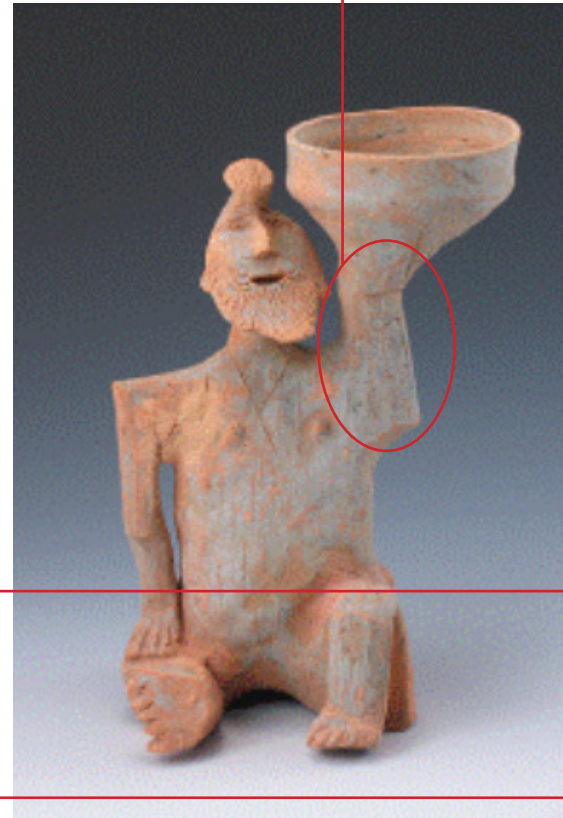


四 手扶头顶灯盘 (M3029: 64)

图五 手扶头顶灯盘 (M4016: 24)

Tomb Figurine

Raising hands-a pious and solemn posture



Hold the lantern plate figurine with one hand



Hold the lamp panel above your head with your hand

Kneeling

Sketch

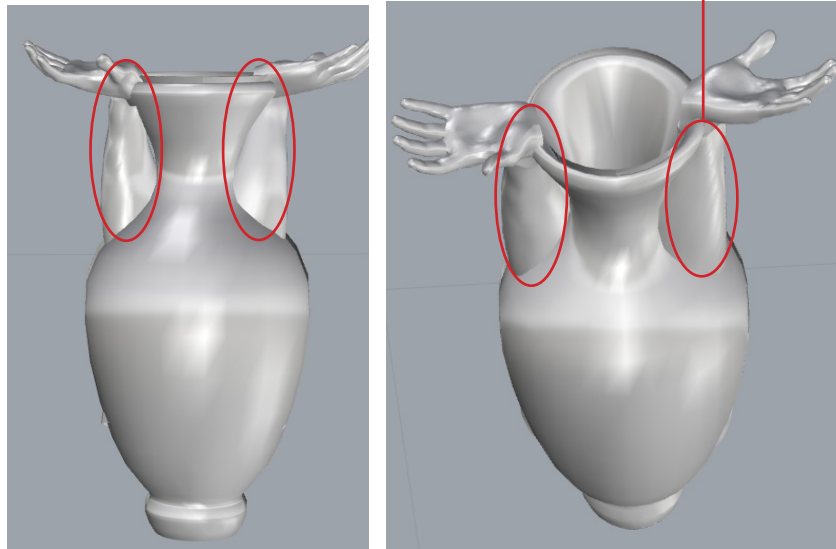
The shape of the vessel is a high-level summary of the figurine, and **the bottom retains the characteristics of the kneeling posture.**

The **raised hands here imitate the posture of this pottery figurine** , he is holding and showing the objects in his hands.

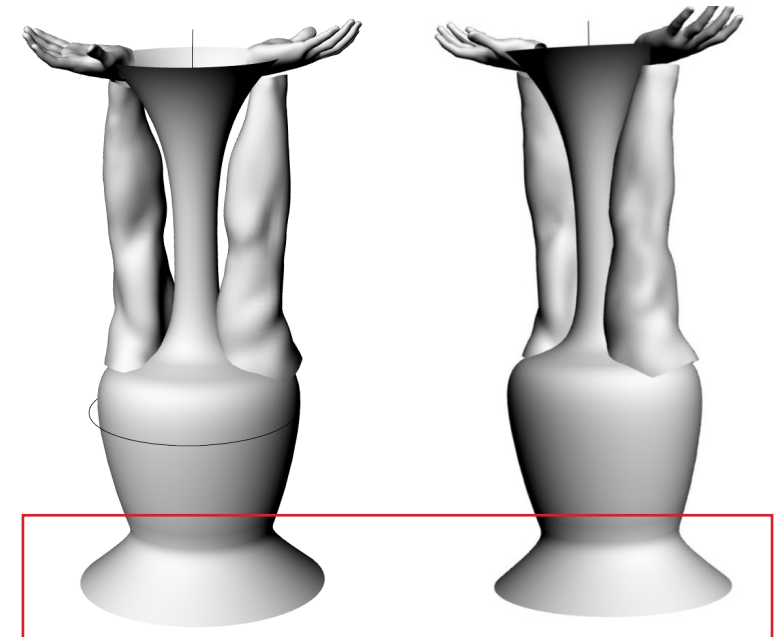
Raised hands



Tomb Figurine



Sketch 1: Modeling diagram (under adjustment)



Sketch 2: Simplify the characteristics of the kneeling posture and put it on the pottery design (under adjustment)

Kneeling

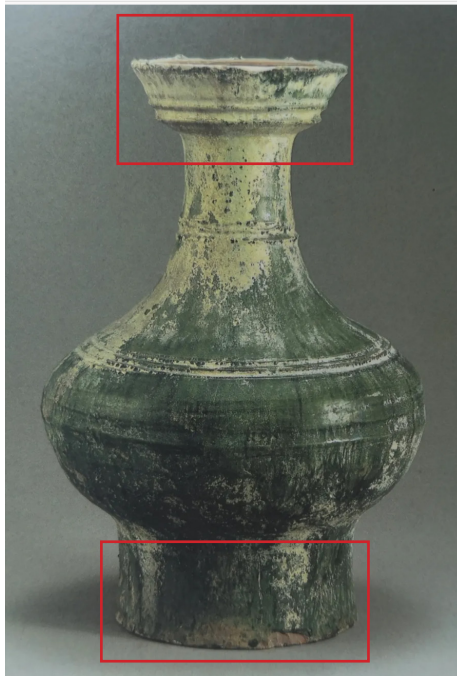
Sketch

Reflection and Adjustment

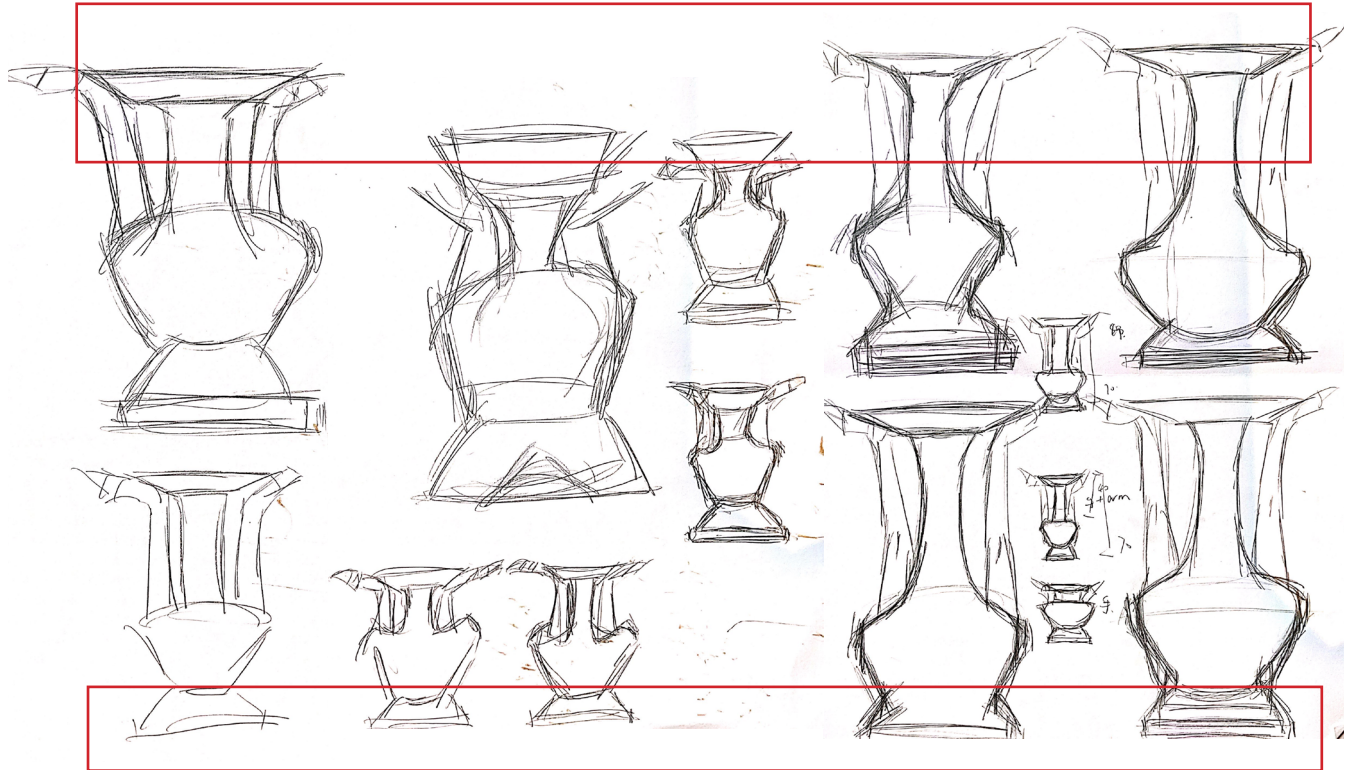
Vessel styling reference



Tomb Figurine



Eastern Han Dynasty Green-Glazed Pottery Pitcher with Flared Mouth



Sketch

Vessel Introduction + Why Choose It:

Pankou pots (pottery pitcher with flared mouth) are the most common vessels found in ancestral tombs, dating back to the same period as tomb servants. Pankou pots are often found in both large tombs of nobles and small tombs of commoners.

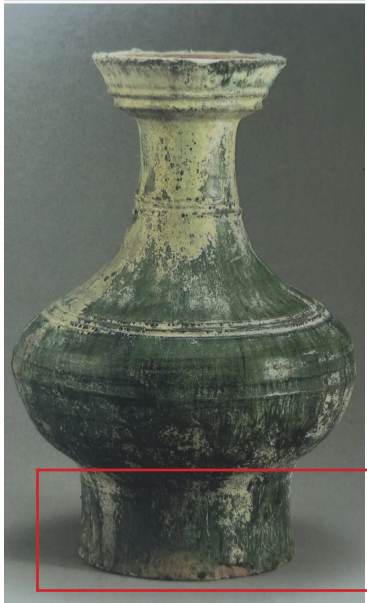
Sketch

Final 3D modeling

Body cross section: Oval

Exaggeratedly elongated arms

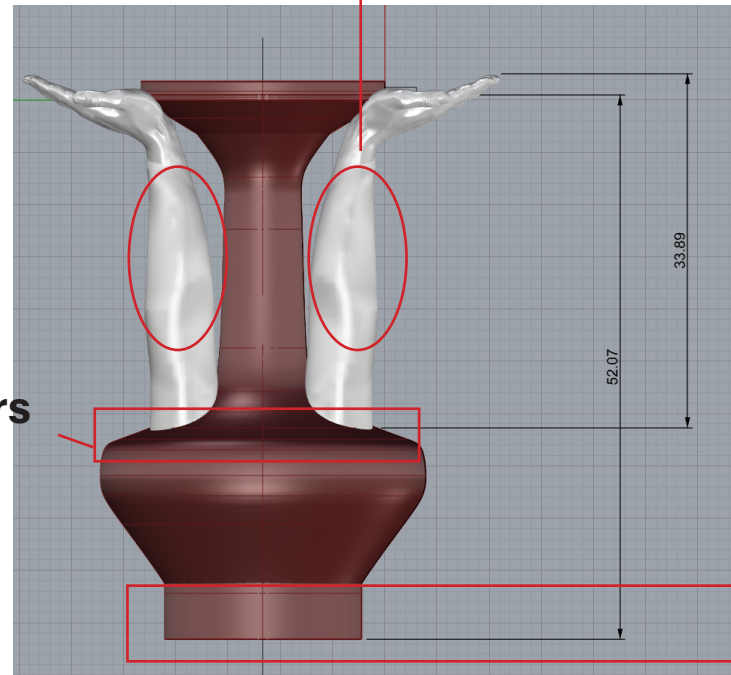
Flat shoulders



Eastern Han Dynasty Green-Glazed Pottery Pitcher with Flared Mouth

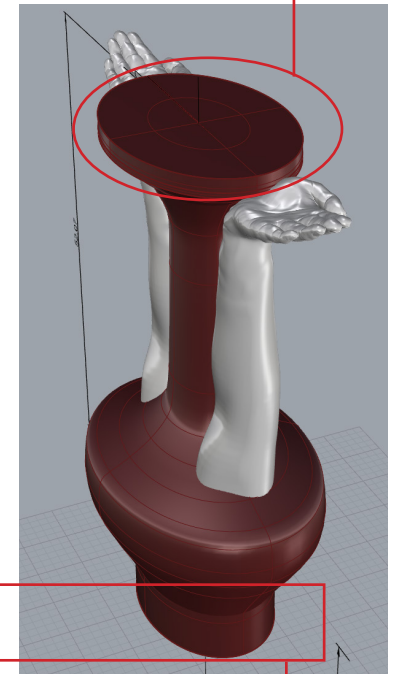


Tomb Figurine



Sketch 3: Modeling diagram

Simplify the characteristics of the kneeling posture and put it on the pottery design



Kneeling

Production

1. Arm section

Method Two: Use alginate to mold the middle arm and hand - Second attempt



Removing plaster from the solidified alginate



Partially missing arm in plaster cast



Use liquid plaster to repair the missing parts bit by bit and smooth out some depressions on the surface



Result:

The second time I used alginate to cast the hand and arm, it was more complete than the first time. However, a small portion of the fingers was missing.

Reflection:

The plastic film used for the alginate casting wasn't supportive enough, causing the alginate to leak out and still not cover the upper arm.

The alginate solidified quickly, leaving me with insufficient time to adjust the hand's position.

Because the fingers touched the plastic film during the casting, the liquid plaster leaked out during the plaster pouring, resulting in the missing fingertips.

Production

1. Arm section

Model of arm plaster cast



Four parts of a plaster cast of an arm

Production

1. Arm section

First attempt at slip casting of a plaster arm model failed



The clay arm using Arm B's plaster model was pulled in two.



Due to the shrinking properties of plaster, the actual hand size was slightly smaller than expected. It's also considered that the ceramic version will shrink further after firing.

Results of the first slip casting:

Arm B's slip was left in place for 30 minutes, and opened after 1 hour. Upon opening, the plaster and slip were stuck together, and the clay arm was pulled in two.

Arm A's slip casting resulted in severe slip leakage.

Reflections on the failure:

The main problem with **arm B** was that it wasn't completely dry, resulting in insufficient water absorption by the plaster, preventing the clay arm from forming properly.

Solution: Place the plaster mold in a drying oven to continue drying.

When making **arm A's** plaster model, the model and fingers stuck together. A scraper was used when removing it, causing the plaster model for the palm and fingers to not close completely, resulting in slip leakage.

Production

1. Arm section

Plaster model - Slip casting



Assemble plaster models, slip casting.



It took three hours for the hand to regain some support after being removed.

Note:

Removing the slip casting is difficult.

Solution:

Use a thin-tube spray gun to apply air to try to separate the clay from the plaster mould, then push the clay outwards.

Note:

The plaster cast of the hand is quite complex, and the structures between the plaster pieces cannot fit perfectly, inevitably leaving gaps during assembly. This causes the slip to flow into the gaps between the plaster pieces.

Solution:

Note that you should try to seal the gaps between the plaster pieces with soft clay, wait for the slip to dry, and carefully remove any excess after opening the model.

Production

1. Arm section

Method Three: Handbuilding



Gesturing with hands, referring to coil-building.



Sculpting the palm is very difficult.

I sculpted the ceramic hand according to my own hand shape.

Due to the limitations of coil-building technology, the palm and fingers, after being quickly separated, had a glove-like effect. Then I tried my best to further define the fingers.

Production

1. Arm section

Method Three: Handbuilding



The vessel opening was meticulously crafted, preserving the finger marks inside the vessel.



The placement of the hands. Due to their handmade nature, the two hands are slightly asymmetrical, but I've preserved this texture.

Production

2. Vessel section

Method One: Plaster casting



The three parts of the plaster model that makes up the vessel

Production

2. Vessel section

Method Two: Slip casting



I left the slip in the plaster vessel overnight, and when I opened it again, the humidity was just right.

Reflection:

Upon closer inspection of the slip casting vessel's surface, some fine, layered lines were observed. This is because I poured the slip in stages, resulting in uneven absorption of the slip by the plaster. Pouring all the slip at once and tilting the plaster vessel at a certain angle would have yielded much better results.

Production

2. Vessel section

Method Three: Handbuilding

Handmade vessel 1



Flat-shouldered vessel



The lower half of the cut vessel



The upper part of the cut vessel

Error in production: Collapse when using coil-building to build a vessel

The shoulder section of the vessel was very flat, posing a risk of collapse. I'd been warned of this, but in a hurry to finish it, I continued coil-building throughout the day. This left me with only an hour and a half at noon for the vessel to dry and solidify. That afternoon, as I was working on the final opening of the vessel, the shoulder collapsed. I quickly supported it, but unfortunately, I couldn't hold it together.

I had to use a metal rope to cut the vessel in half at the neck. I reassembled the two halves once the lower halves were more solid.

Reflection:

Clay is a material with distinct characteristics. I should fully respect its characteristics and make it the right material for the job.

Production

2. Vessel section

Method Three: Handbuilding

Handmade vessel 2



Wait until the neck is dry enough before coil-building.



Preserve traces of hand coil-building

Reflection:

My original intention was to finish Handmade Vessel 1 as quickly as possible that day, but I made some mistakes in my haste. I'm reflecting on these mistakes.

First, I focused on the production process and the timing of coil-building.

Second, I focused on the overall shape and adjustments during the process.

Coil-building is a gradual, cumulative process, and the placement of each clay strip influences the overall shape.

Thus, I reshaped the neck of Handmade Vessel 2. Vessel 1's neck was too thick, obstructing the space for the arms later. Vessel 2 tapered it, carefully tightening each coil of clay inward.

Why is it important to preserve traces of handcrafting?

The marks of fingers—the fingerprints of artisans from thousand years ago—my personal 'archaeological evidence'—my identity.



Terracotta Army excavated from the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor



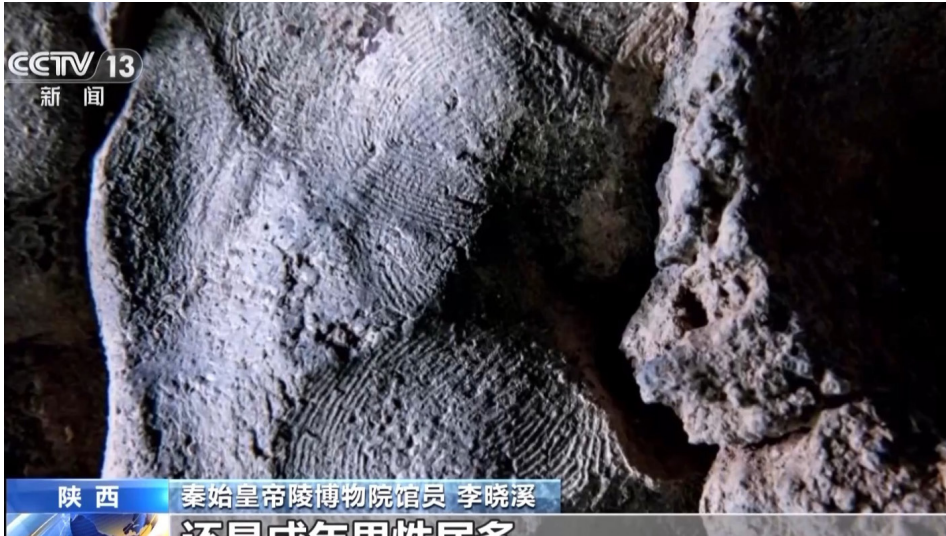
Fingerprints left by artisans a thousand years ago discovered on the Terracotta Army

I was inspired by a **news report: archaeologists discovered the fingerprints of the artisans who made the terracotta warriors**. In that instant, the barrier of over two thousand years was broken, and the existence of a specific 'person' was confirmed. This perfectly aligns with my keywords: **Pressing, connection with ancestors**. Fingerprints/traces are the most primitive and authentic biological information, a touch that transcends time and space.

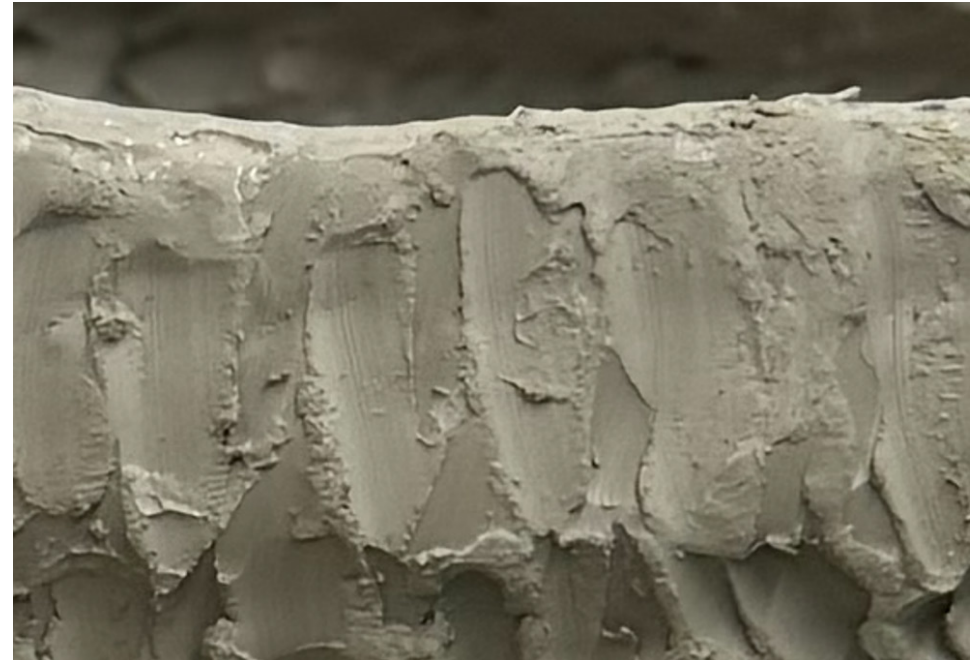
In my work, **all the traces of hand-moulding and scraping on the vessel, as well as the sculpting marks preserved on the arms**, are no longer imperfections to be erased, but rather the core language of the work. **I consider them my personal 'archaeological evidence'!**

Why is it important to preserve traces of handcrafting?

The marks of fingers—the fingerprints of artisans—my personal 'archaeological evidence'—my identity.



News about fingerprints left by artisans a thousand years ago found on the Terracotta Army.



The fingerprints I left while making them.

This achieves my ultimate goal of exploring 'identity' and 'my place in history'! I no longer merely search for an abstract ancestor externally, but rather, through the oldest human act of 'making,' I place myself within a continuous cultural lineage. **I performed the same action as the artisans who made terracotta figurines in the Han Dynasty and the craftsmen who created the terracotta warriors in the Qin Dynasty—shaping clay into form with my hands.**

These **marks of fingers, as archaeological evidence of my existence, connect me**—a contemporary explorer—with countless nameless makers throughout history. In this space-time constructed of clay, we **confirmed each other's identities through the pressure of our fingertips, and defined my own place and significance in the long river of history.**

Production

Work A - Handbuilding - Attaching the vessel to the arm



The vessel and arm that have just been assembled

Align the vessel's shoulder with the outline of the arm. Roughen the contact surfaces and apply plenty of slip. Press down the surrounding clasp to ensure there are no gaps. Do the same for the wrist and vessel opening.

Tip: Poke a small hole in each arm for airflow to speed up drying.

Why choose matte white?

Choice of Glaze: Matte White

I felt that matte white was more suitable for this handmade piece. My work is themed around the connection with ancestors, focusing on burial excavations.

White:

In ancient traditions, white is also closely linked to funerary rites. My work is inspired by terracotta figurines from tombs, and choosing matte white directly strengthens this dialogue with death, ancestors, and the underworld. It is a solemn commemoration, a silent tribute to ancestors. This aligns with my theme.

Matte:

The matte finish reduces the interference of reflections and better showcases the surface texture (the marks left by my fingers during the creation process). These serve as archaeological evidence of my existence; through the pressure of my fingertips, they confirm each other's identities and define my own place and significance in the long river of history.



The white mourning clothes of filial sons and daughters

Why choose matte white?

The symbolic meaning of white in Chinese cultural beliefs: funerals and ancestors

In Chinese culture, white is associated with death and mourning, as “the West is said to be white,” and people interpret death as “the crane returning to the West,” which is why funerals are called “white events”: (Huang, 2017, p. 187).

In traditional Chinese culture, white is also the color of death. People wear white at funerals; in ancient times, when the emperor passed away, the whole country wore plain white garments in mourning. In modern usage, the term “white events” refers to funerals, and “white consumption” refers to expenditures related to funerals. (Chen & Yan, 2011, p. 1).



The white funeral scene after an ancestor's death

Reference list:

Huang, Y., 2017. The Symbolic Meaning of the Colour White in Chinese Cultural Beliefs. Bachelor's thesis, Baise University.

Chen, J. & Yan, H., 2011. A Comparative Study of the Associative Meanings of “White” in Chinese and English Cultures. *Overseas English*, (3), pp. 1.

Sun, X., 2012. A Folkloric Study on the Colors of Han Nationality Funeral Clothing — A Case Study of the Funeral Clothing Color Custom in Shiping Village, Jinhua City, Zhejiang Province. Master's thesis, Zhejiang Normal University.

Production

Work A - Handbuilding - Spray glaze



Work A: Glazing completed

Work A



Detailed images of handcrafted traces

With the interplay of light and shadow, the handcrafted details of the piece are clearly visible, perfectly fulfilling the requirements of my project.

In this space-time constructed from clay, I confirmed our identities through the pressure of my fingertips and defined my own place and significance in the long river of history.

Production

Work C - Slip casting - Direct glaze firing



The slip casting piece retains air pockets. After two days of rapid drying in the kiln, no cracking occurred!



During the glazing process, part of the hand bent. After inquiring with James, it was learned that this is a normal phenomenon that occurs with taller and longer objects.

Production

Work C - Post-processing - Surface polishing



There are many small pits on the surface of the arm



The surface of the arm is much smoother after polishing

Reflection:

Due to time constraints, I only completed the slip casting and assembly of my last piece before the ceramics studio closed. I dried it in the kiln and then immediately began high-temperature firing, skipping the bisque firing step. Therefore, I didn't have time to polish the surface, which resulted in a significant amount of time spent on post-processing.

I hand-polished it for four days using wet diamond abrasive, and the results were much better than immediately after firing. The small pits on the arm surface were mostly smoothed out, the parting lines on the palm were largely eliminated, and the fine lines left from the slip casting of the vessel body were removed.

Work C



Work C in the exhibition

It will be more than just an object; it will be a field that carries actions and time.

I have created a powerful visual language to answer my research question: my identity exists in the "here and now" as I engage in a creative dialogue with history.

Exhibition setup



Set design reference: Ma Ke-Wuyong <Fashion in Motion> -V&A

When considering the set design, I personally researched several exhibitions.

- **The raw, rustic feel of the soil** was suitable and aligned with the project's theme of communicating with ancestors through exploring burial sites.
- **Strong, single-beam lighting** could focus the visitor's attention. If the works are exhibited as a series in the future, a larger earthen space could be used.
- Using soil, by **creating a distance** between the artworks and the visitors, a space can be constructed that expresses respect for ancestors.

Final Result: <Where I End, Where We Begin>

