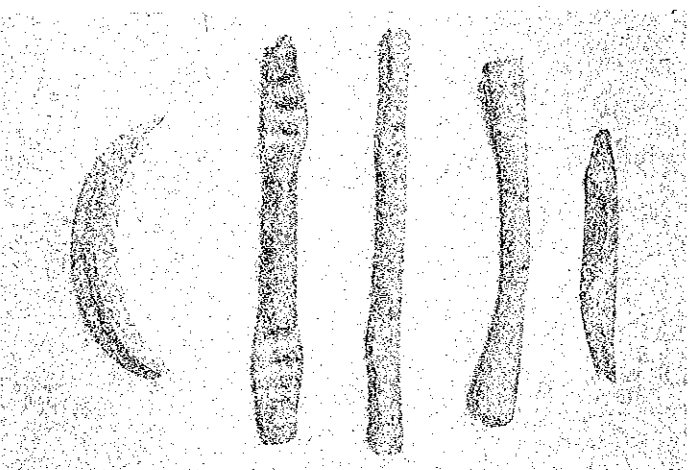
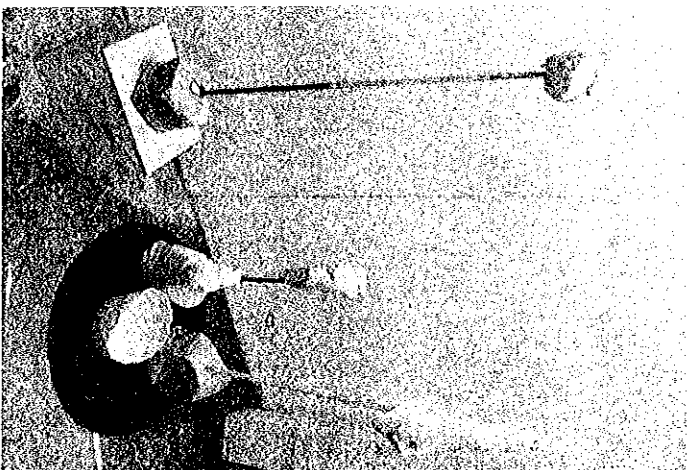
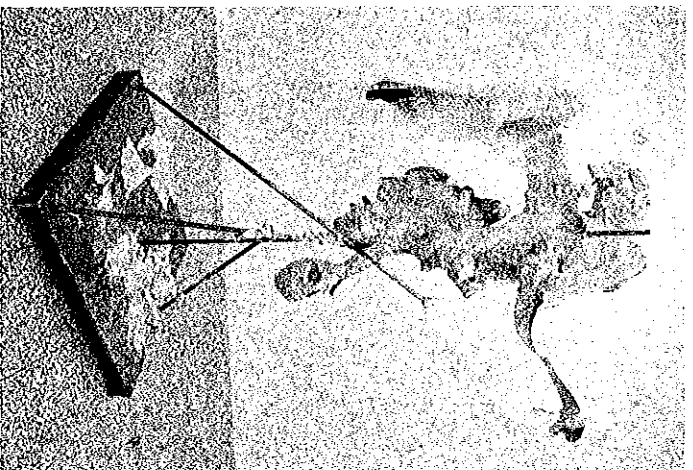
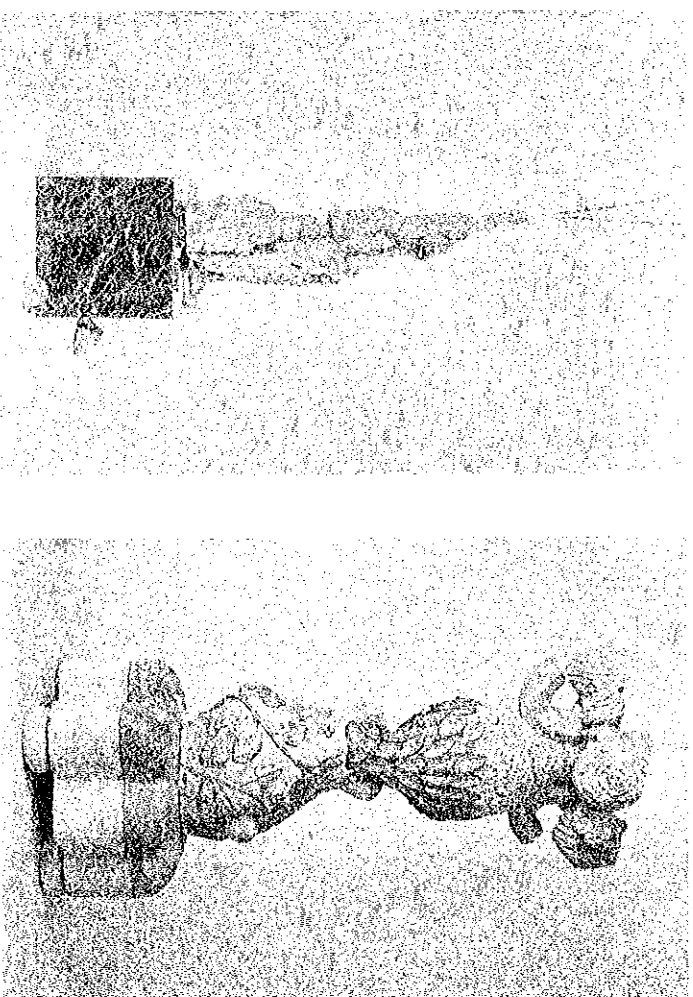
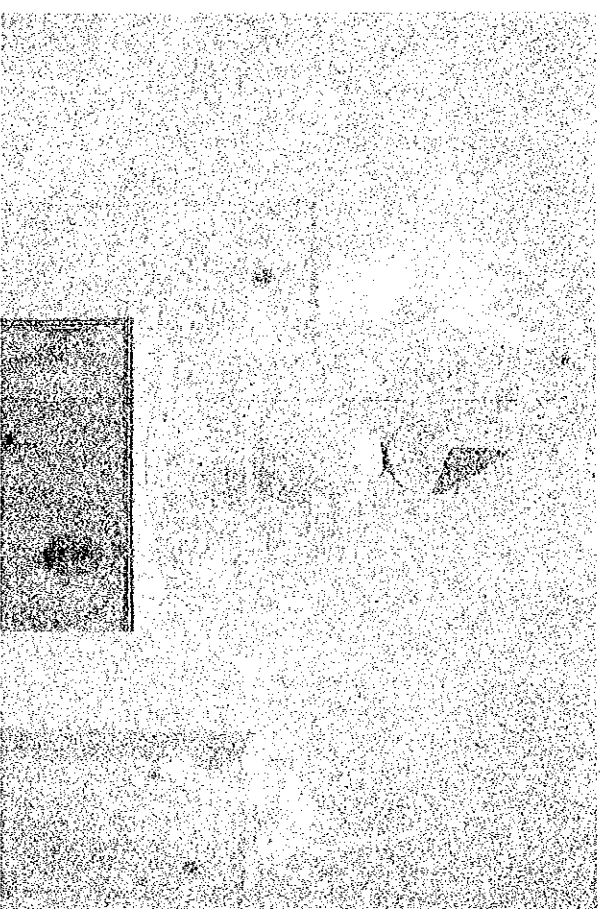
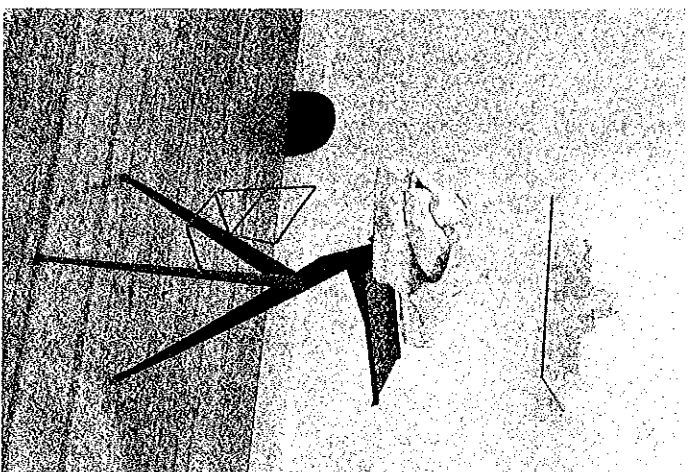


FIGURE AND GROUND

9TH MARCH - 7TH APRIL 2012



From top, left to right:
 Mishla Hollnbeck, *Untitled (Grease Burner)*, 2011, laminex, stoneware, brass, mirrors, 63 x 20 x 20cm.
 Courtesy the artist and Toppan Simps, Melbourne.
 Stephen Ralph, *Untitled*, 2011, wood, concrete, gold leaf, 13.5 x 40 x 40cm. Courtesy the artist.
 Chiara Lamba, *Untitled*, 2011, Plexiglas, glass, unrefined clay, 41 x 36 x 28cm. *String of Pearls*, 2011, unrefined clay, terra stano, 40 x 30 x 38cm. *Stones in a Row*, 2011, unrefined clay, 20 x 14cm. Courtesy the artist and Sarah Scott, Melbourne.
 Sarah CowEST, *Untitled*, 2011, ceramic, acrylic, ink, collage, approx 160cm x 20cm x 20cm. Courtesy the artist and Chalk House, Sydney.
 Rob Malach, *Gravel - Stone by Field*, 2011, steel, UV light, epoxy resin, unrefined clay, 100 x 100 x 100cm. *Gravel - Stone by Field*, 2011, steel, UV light, epoxy resin, unrefined clay, 100 x 100 x 100cm. Courtesy the artist and Marc Parr, Melbourne.
 Sarah CowEST, *Untitled*, 2012, Baiguin linen, ceramic, terracotta, pseudo-ceramic (un-burning modelling clay), dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.
 Rebecca Delange, *Untitled*, 2012, clay, paint, timber, acrylic, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.
 Marco Chiarantini, *Untitled*, 2011, stoneware, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist.

UTOPIAN SLUMPS

9TH MARCH - 7TH APRIL 2012
OPENING THURSDAY 8TH MARCH, 6 - 8PM

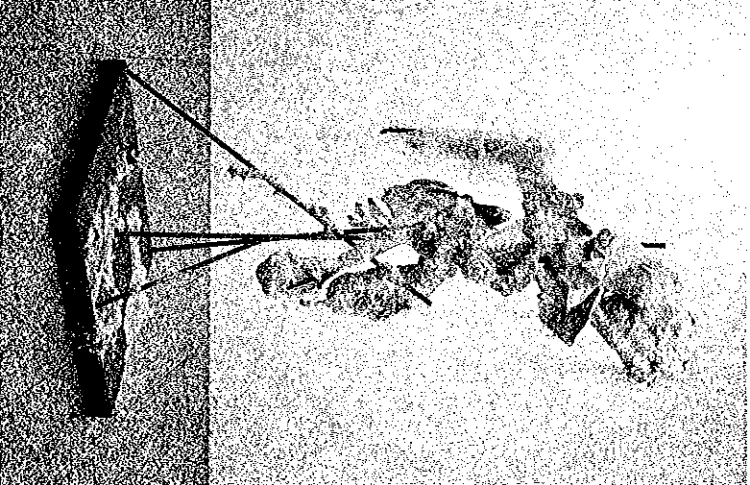
Curated by Melissa Loughman and Jane O'Neill

FIGURE AND GROUND

MARCO CHIANDETTI
SARAH CROWEST
REBECCA DELGANGE
MISHA HOLLENBACH
CLAIRE LAMBE
ROB MGLEISH
SANNÉ MESTROM
STEPHEN RALPH



FIGURE AND GROUND

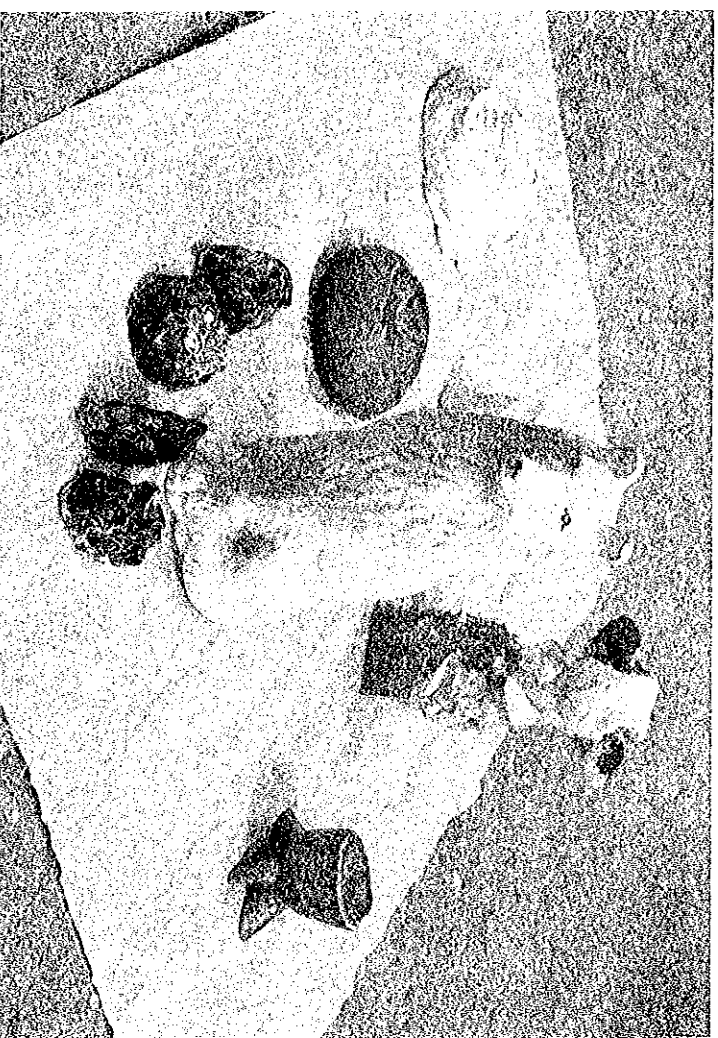
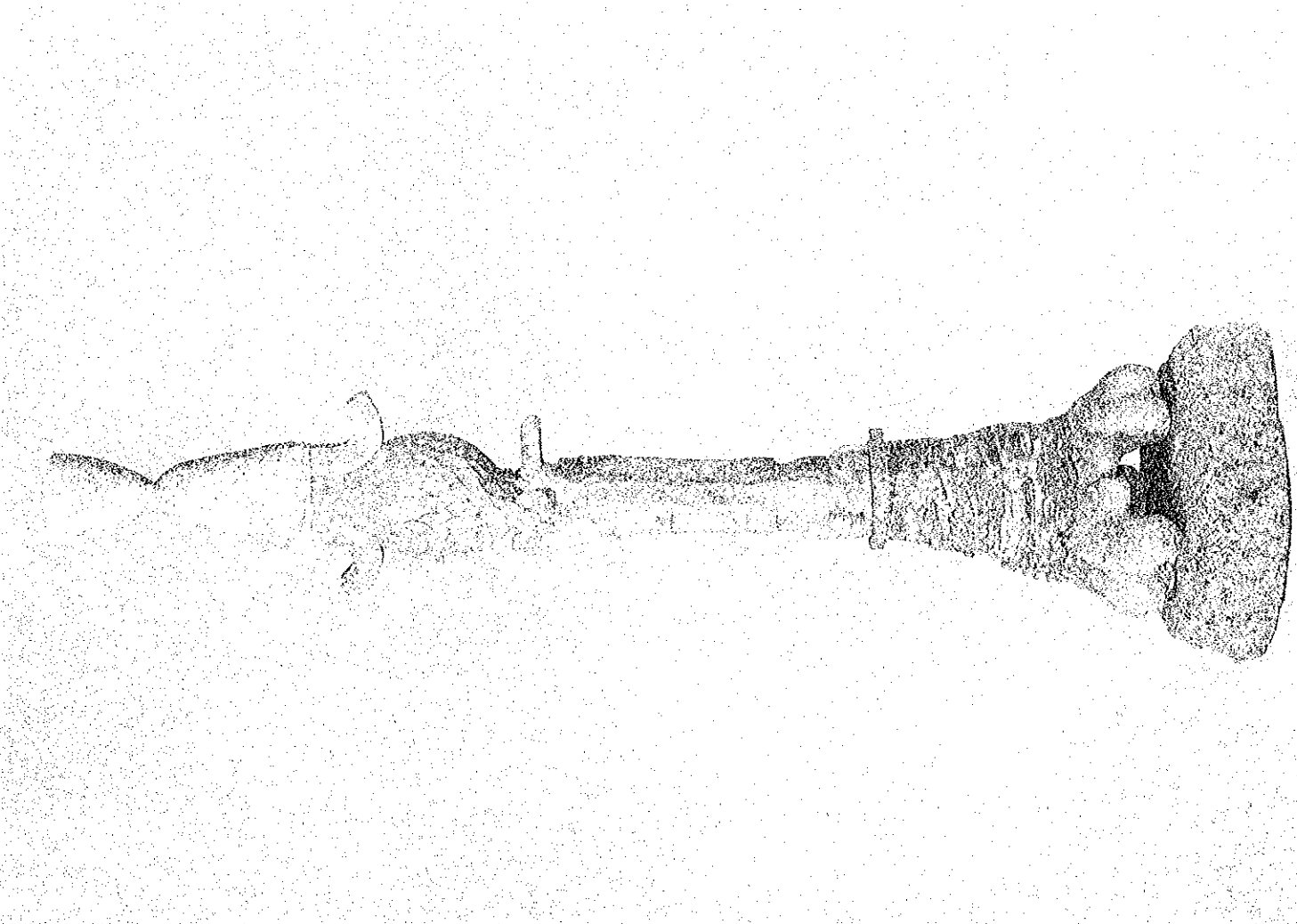


Whatever daring imaginings might be incited by the untouched lump of clay, the technical limits of the substance and the unpredictable outcomes of drying, firing or casting what is possible. Several artists here deliberately embrace the volatile aspect of clay so that it is employed in unexpected gestures. Rob McLeish, in preparing a sack of enamel-coated epoxy 'clay', needs to work quickly, the final flourish on an otherwise pristine handrail is executed within minutes. Misha Hollenbach too, in his approach to the coarse cob with which he has worked, is concerned with the fleeting transference of energy from hand to material, so that the end result is a series of free-form sculptures which celebrate a random, Dionysian spirit. And although Claire Lambe's work gives the impression of an impromptu slathering of unfired clay, is in fact often meticulously prepared in advance through the creation of delicate miniature bronze maquettes.

A consciously temporal engagement with materials is also evident in the work of Sarah Crowest and Rebecca Delange. Both artists employ an evolutionary approach to their work. At times Crowest's objects are coated with glitter, ground coffee or butter scotch, at others they are coded within non-hierarchical groupings such as *Ten objects tending to white*. Rebecca Delange also maintains a practice of adding to and changing works over time so that her works are personal visual diaries. A pink plasticine hoop, for example, is threaded with many long pieces of yarn. It is a talismanic piece with clay baubles and round hoops; at times threaded and knotted, that represents a collection of found objects over time.

In the works of Stephen Ralph there is a sedimentary layering of historical references. The artist playfully combines fragments which recall varying episodes in the history of creation across the fields of architecture, craft, toolmaking and sculpture. In one instance we see a concrete cast of a jackhammer above a smooth curved wooden base, which resembles a wholesome ornament from the sixties. Elsewhere, terracotta wings rest upon smooth rounded clumps of fired clay. Corinthian detailing provides a clue that this is the story of the birth of Apollo; reputedly born rising from sea-foam.

Clay incites bodily action too and reveals the traces of physical engagement. Marco Chiandetti forms bone-like structures which bear the imprints of his body in particular positions;



the grip of his hands, the space around his thigh - suggesting an oeuvre of performative self portraiture. Claire Lambe's empty clay cast bears the imprints of a pair of breasts, and although they appear as from an ancient ruin, the work strikes a chord with more recent crazes such as breast enhancement surgery or belly casts for pregnant women. Elsewhere, we see an oversized pink tongue lurching from the wall in plasticine or the entrails of an intestine swirled upon a plinth by Rebecca Delange. In an earlier work from 2009, Mestrom creates what at first glance resembles a paleolithic artefact; *Joy Prop* is in fact a fictional prosthetic device intended to forcefully engage the wearer's mouth in a smile.

There is a tension in the exhibition between the embrace of the material and synthetic intrusions. Instances of nature, such as the loving indentations of a thumb on a vessel by Mestrom, or evocations by Lambe and McLeish of the delightful sloppiness of clay, are regularly countered by synthetic disruptions. In Misha Hollenbach's work this is demonstrated by severe black museum stands which support his rudimentary creations. Ralph disrupts his meanderings into ancient artefacts with cloyingly kitsch elements such as gold leaf or woodwork. In the case of Rob McLeish the clay itself is an illusion; it is cured epoxy 'clay' painted with beige enamel to create the look of wet clay.

The fascination of archaeological objects lies in their being tokens of a lost life-world. The hope is that through close examination of the artefact we can speculate on that world and imagine its unifying features. Similarly the artworks on display here can lead us to speculate on the constellation of influences and guiding passions that led the artists to create them and to take pleasure in imagining the circumstances of their construction.

Jane O'Neill
February 2012

Left:
Rob McLeish, *Gravity/Zone My Breath*, 2011, steel, UV
digital print on aluminium, epoxy clay, air drying
clay, varnish, cast epoxy resin, dimensions variable.
Courtesy the artist and Neon Parc, Melbourne.
Above:
Sarah Crowest, *Top Dog*, studio shot, multiple
arrangement, 2012, Belgium linen, ceramic, bronze,
wood, natural-uranium, air-drying modelling clay,
natural, industrial, paper-ribble, 'corkie' jam, 'hand
cannon', direct-fired terracotta. Courtesy the artist.

Claire Lambe is represented by Sarah Scott, Melbourne.
Rob McLeish is represented by Neon Parc, Melbourne.

The exploration of the earth is typically one of our earliest sensory projects. As crawling infants we learn how mounds of dirt can be transformed into mud through water; of the malleability of soil as it clumps together; how grit can coat the skin and creep beneath the nails. There is a pervasive sense of this primordial tactile experience in the works chosen for *Figure and Ground*. The works here present to us, in various ways, the pleasure the artists have found as they engaged in kneading, pressing, smearing and throwing clay. Although each of the artists has a well-established contemporary practice, none are formally trained in ceramics. Several have backgrounds in the very different realms of the conceptual and the painterly, so that there are moments here, as in much outsider art, where the artists embrace their material without great technical finesse. And yet, although a primal engagement with clay is certainly evident, the exhibition is by no means just a celebration of quaint rusticity.