

# Inspired by...

## Written by Sally Walk.

Sally Walk (Australia)

Much has been written about inspiration or concepts and how an artist may achieve it. Is it intuitive, can one plan to achieve it, are only some enslaved by its ever present power or is it a fabricated ideal considered after the artistic creation in order to satisfy the viewer, ever hungry to understand. With regards to my own studio practice, I would have to admit that my inspiration varies and is dependent on what I am working on.

Inspiration is always present in everything I see, I can be inspired by the physical, a squished bug, a storming cloud formation, people and places. In addition I am inspired by emotions, feelings and tensions. I notice the beautiful pattern of a traffic jam, I find beauty in the skull of a parrot, and once even I collected the melted pools of metal from the scene of burnt out car accident. Inspiration is everywhere.

As for ideas, I find myself quite interested in the words of artist Robert Irwin, when talking about the point at which his thoughts no longer fit in terms of social reality and the requirements of the world. "Ideas, when they get like that", explains Irwin, "then you can really get into the game of reason. When you peel those layers away and you arrive at just the qualities of the ideas themselves, it becomes very clear and very simple as to why they are what they are and do what they do" He goes on to say that "You can romanticise yourself, and you can have all these aspirations and ideas and illusions about what you are doing, but then every once in a while you might get lucky enough to get a real look at what you're doing, I mean, just that kind of straight focus which happened at that critical point". He was referring to standing back and looking at his work just prior to a major opening and realising that everything he was doing was 'shit'. As with Irwin's work, I am keen to strip my ideas and concepts back to the basics, however I am not afraid to let my flamboyance and eccentricities shine through.

My greatest influences, however, have been the many artists who inspire me. Over the years I have been influenced by a wide variety of artists. The first that comes to mind is an Australian artist, Fiona Hall.

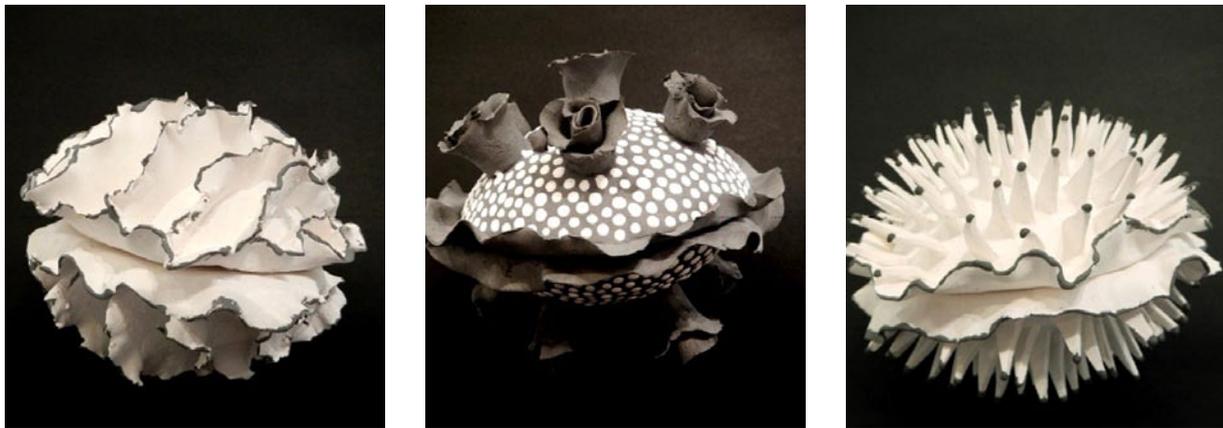


Fiona Hall  
Castles in the Air  
of the Cave-Dwellers  
(details)

Fiona Hall  
Tender 2005(detail)

Tender consists of dozens of birds' nests of all shapes and sizes, made from American one-dollar bills, each bearing the official declaration: "This note is legal tender". Hall feels that, like birds scavenging for material to build their nests, the greenback and its value provides shelter for people of third world countries.

Another work by Hall is called Cell Culture and is a collection of animals and plants constructed out of clear glass beads and white Tupperware containers, all housed within a large museum display case. Here Hall has used everyday items to create sculptural forms and displayed like a collection of specimens. These works relate to my own works that have often been referred to as organic forms.



Sally Walk 'absurdities' 2012 Porcelain

My own work (pictured above) is currently exploring the idea of disguised eccentricities. The forms themselves are quite flamboyant and a little bit crazy to emphasize eccentricities. Strong contrasts of light and shadow are used here to enhance dramatic effects. The limited colour scheme of the fine white and black porcelain is used to emphasise conformity as if the flamboyant personality can be covered by a white veil. I am interested in repetition and grouping works together as an installation. Hall's work has inspired this idea.

I have been researching the ceramic work of Australian artist Angela Valamenesh, and although her work is small in scale, I am interested in the simple forms, repeated and groups of sculptural forms. Her interest is in microscopic biology and intricate life forms with an emphasis, like my own, on shape, form, pattern and texture. I enjoy how the individual sculptural forms work on their own, yet relate to each other as a group.



Angela Valamenesh 'Animal, vegetable, mineral' 2007

Another artist I have been looking at is Chih-Chi Hsu a Taiwanese artist. Her ceramic sculptures are as the artist herself describes them ‘white organic forms’. As my current works are also white organic forms I am interested in how different these actually are. The very curvy fluid forms appear quite fragile, yet portray certain strength, with large forms balanced on fine edges. They are handbuilt using a stoneware clay strengthened with nylon fibre, a process I do not know anything about. Perhaps that is something to research further. Her work is sanded and then fired and then meticulously sanded and sanded with finer grades of emery board and then coated in white terra sigillata. After a final firing it’s sanded again. She says of her work “I am finding the possibility of fluid space and seek reality without gravity”.



Chih-Chi Hsu ‘a dwelling in infinite brightness’ 2009



Chih-Chi Hsu ‘a dwelling in infinite brightness’ 2009

After visiting Japan on a 5 week art residency in 2012, I had the great pleasure of meeting an artist who I have admired for quite some time. His name is Nagae Shigekazu and he is from Seto in Japan. He invited me and a glass artist, Mare Sare from Estonia, to his home for a wonderful seafood dinner and to see his gallery. His work is quite breathtaking and I admire his expertise and persistence to develop new ways to work with ceramics. He has taken porcelain slip casting to new highs, deliberately encouraging warping to form the smooth silhouettes of his sculptural forms.



Nagae Shigekazu

I have been exploring the idea of 'baroque' with exaggerated forms and pattern and plan to use this idea as a way of representing eccentricities in my sculpture. 'Baroque favours higher volumes, exaggerates decorations, and fluidity. A sense of movement, energy, and tension are dominant impressions. Strong contrasts of light and shadow often enhance dramatic effects. My work is deliberately left unglazed to represent a disguise or the hidden. So there is an apparent tension between the highly decorated and detailed surface and the apparent disrespect to the glaze.



Sally Walk 'beauty within' 2012 Unglazed Porcelain and LED lights (made during residency in Japan)