

Laura Aldridge

sumVigour

19 June – 29 Aug 2021



Oliver Basciano is a writer based in São Paulo and London. Since 2010 he has worked at ArtReview magazine, becoming Editor at Large in 2019.

His writing has otherwise appeared in The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, Times Literary Supplement, Spectator and The National and he is a contributor to BBC Radio 4's From Our Own Correspondent. In 2017 and 2019 he chaired the Artes Mundi award, and in 2018 he sat on the jury of the Turner Prize.

Uncertain Smile

In late antiquity, on the Ionian island of Elis, lived a man named Pyrrho. As a younger man, he painted. What his subjects were is unrecorded, though he was professional enough to have had a show at the local Gymnasium. I like to think he made pictures of the chalky white cliffs and bright blue Mediterranean that I can see with a pang of yearning through an Internet search. Maybe he also made pots (like another artist, Laura Aldridge, who we will come to shortly), objects that would stand beside the wrestling pit or oratorium. What is known is that Pyrrho did not keep up with the art-making and, as he got older, he became a philosopher, the profession he is known for today. His thinking was out of step with his peers however (which makes me think perhaps he was a decent artist): though like them his aim was to arrive at the state of ‘eudaimonia’, that is a kind of flourishing or prosperity of the human spirit, Pyrrho did not think it could be obtained with dogmatic opinions and firm ideas. While his contemporaries argued about the various ways one might gain precise knowledge, Pyrrho was of the opinion that so little could be proved there was little point in worrying about it. Embrace uncertainty. There is nothing predetermined in life, and knowing that, accepting that – suspending judgment – will bring one happiness and contentment.

Pyrrho spent time in India, travelling with Alexander the Great’s army, and was exposed to Buddhism. Most scholars credit this period as being the main influence on his thinking. I can’t help but think, however, that some of his philosophy was also fermented in the artist’s studio. There are two ways of making art temporarily (well, there are infinitesimal ways actually, but let’s concentrate on two). Plan everything out, design the work, get it perfectly made; put it in an exhibition alongside other similar objects, placed exactly as

always intended. There are benefits to this approach. Yet the other way is to embrace what Laura Aldridge terms ‘positive doubt’, in which unpredictability reigns supreme, mistakes are useful, works are muddled through and ideas endlessly revised. Aldridge has used fabricators in previous bodies of work, necessitating well planned briefs, the results resplendent in sophisticated perfection. However, she missed the sensorial qualities of the art-making, she missed the variability and vulnerability of a studio practice in which process was as important as product.

Comparing my insides to other peoples outsides (that's your freedom), 2021, is a totemic sculpture made up of three balanced discrete parts. The top is a great cluster of cast melons. They are 1:1 in scale, but the way the bulbous fruits are configured together, bunched up, calls to mind the fleshy Venus of Willendorf; the tiny Stone Age fertility statue enlarged to human scale. It is a passing resemblance countered by the green, orange and brown autumnal, homemade glazes Aldridge has used. This is all



retrospective projection however. Aldridge invites us to make our own connections. This element of the sculpture arose from a mould the artist had lying around from when she wanted to learn how to cast. Melons were the ideal form for the beginner to have a go at, and the sculpture for all its initial peculiarity is a totem to the human, and humane, act of learning. The fruits sit on what looks like an upturned bowl, a cast of the one she used to mix the clay in actually, its raw ceramic surface clad in a plastic bag and a hair net. Both these elements in turn balance upon a third ceramic pot, which has also been placed upside down. Its rim – what was originally the top of the pot – is now touching the floor, collapsed and curled over. Objectively this was an error, the result of the artist still learning her way through the material, yet crucially here it gives the sculpture a great splendour, a decorative thrill reminiscent of the whimsical flourishes common to neoclassical architecture.

In a second totemic sculpture, *Make an image an act (don't take it peripersonally)*, 2021, several pieces of yellow and orange textile are scrunched inside a glass vase. On top of that is a Perspex column filled with blue coloured rice. There is a sensory schism here, the surface texture at odds with how one imagines the work to feel. Indeed, to view Aldridge's work is a lesson in self-restraint: her sculpture is characterised by its haptic qualities, and there will be few who won't secretly wish to run their hands across their surfaces (we must resist the temptation! look, don't touch!). Topping this column is a large ceramic receptacle attached to which is a mix and match of differently glazed and patterned small ceramic elements. This surface collage technique is a recurring feature within the exhibition at *CAMPLE LINE*, each arrangement unique. The overtly textural quality of the artist's work is again apparent in a series of wall sculptures, *Things that soak you*, 2015 onwards, in which a variety of found textiles, both natural and synthetic, hang down from large ceramic clips, wild in colour, weighted down to form what seem like bulbous stalactites. In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 2002 book *Touching Feeling*, the queer theorist writes about the radical and emancipatory qualities of touch, in which a new form of communication can operate freed from the suffocating precision of language and its

demands for exactness and clarity (and, of course, its determination from Pyrrho's time by the powerful and privileged). 'To perceive texture is always, immediately, and de facto to be immersed in a field of active narrative hypothesizing, testing, and re-understanding of how physical properties act and are acted upon over time,' Kosofsky Sedgwick writes. In the place of language and clever certitude comes the exploratory caress.

The twentieth century American critic Harold Rosenberg wrote that art is a record of its making and that its primary relationship is with its maker (this position put him at odds with the likes of Clement Greenberg who deemed it to be with the viewer, the artist being of little consequence in the act of viewing an artwork). Rosenberg described artworks as 'anxious objects': maps of movement, documents of the artist's body when making the things, which are eventually allowed out in the world, independent but linked forever to their makers by an invisible umbilical cord. Aldridge's sculptures fit this description. Every flourish, every ornamentation, every decision, every error, every breakthrough, acts as a postcard from her studio. Souvenirs from a moment in time. Yet, though Aldridge undoubtedly has a close relationship with her works, amplified over these past few months, it is not hermetic to the point of exclusion. The artist says that at the start of 2020, when she embarked on this exhibition, with most of the world in lockdown, she felt stuck. Uncertain of how to proceed, uncertain of the validity of making. To overcome this block, an anxiety widely experienced during the pandemic, she started to imagine each sculpture as a gift to someone. It was a generosity that set her free. Generosity is a good quality in uncertain times. The resulting sculptures are human in scale. They have their own personalities: there is no monumental narrative, no predetermined meaning in their assemblage at **CAMPLE LINE**. Details hold our attention at eye-level, catch our gaze. There is intrigue in detail. There's a nervous precarity to them, but they flirt too and they charm. It is an exhibition that invites us to come, let's hang out, let's make friends.











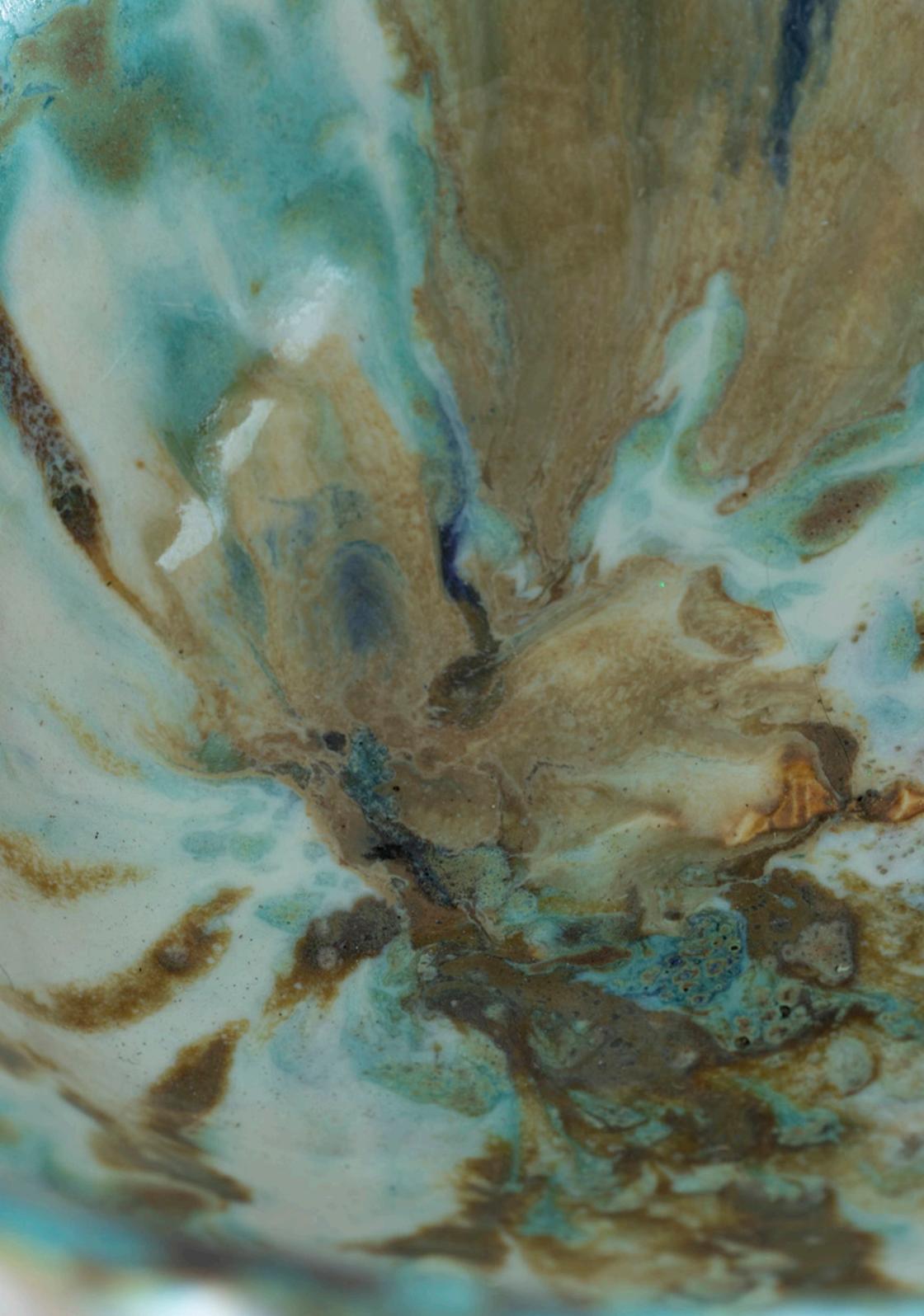


















List of works

1. *NINE*, 2021
Glazed stoneware, fabric, cardboard,
epoxy resin
65 x 25 cm
2. *No Math Method (paper theory)*,
2021
Fabric, glazed stoneware, thread,
wood, digital print on paper in
artists custom frame
146 x 86 x 45 cm
3. *Ennobled Objects (touch face, slip)*,
2021
Glazed stoneware, turned wood,
plaster, brass tray, dye, epoxy resin
116 x 48 cm
4. *Things that soak you (XV)*, 2021
Stoneware, dye, netting, fabric,
towel
124 x 112 x 18.5 cm
5. *Walking Bundles (lampshades,
waistcoats and book covers)*, 2021
Glazed stoneware
25 x 17 x 6.5 cm
6. *Libretto-ah!*, 2021
Glazed stoneware, wool, jesmonite,
wooden dowel
148.5 x 64 cm
7. *TEN*, 2021
Glazed stoneware, epoxy resin
52 x 35.5 cm
8. *Comparing my insides to other
peoples outsides (that's your
freedom)*, 2021
Glazed stoneware, plastic bag,
hair net
91 x 54 cm
9. *Handle/relief*, 2021
Glazed stoneware, wood, glass vase,
rainbow filter, fabric
89 x 50 cm
10. *No Math Method (energy please!)*,
2021
Dye, fabric, towel, clay, incense,
glazed stoneware, mirror card,
thread, copper pipe, wire, mdf digital
print on paper in artists custom frame
154.5 x 83.5 x 35 cm
11. *Make an image an act (don't take it
peripersonally)*, 2021
Glazed stoneware, dyed rice, wool,
glass vases, rope, wool, pigment and
fleece
130.5 x 40 cm
12. *Things that soak you (XIV)*, 2021
Stoneware, netting, fabric, plastic
sheet, pigment, bamboo cane
190 x 64 x 17.7cm

Overall display dimensions are given
H x W x D

Laura Aldridge

b. 1978, Frimley, UK, lives and works in Glasgow, UK

Laura Aldridge is participating in Glasgow International in June 2021 with Leanne Ross and Judith Scott: *The Outside is Inside Everything We Make*, Kendall Koppe, Glasgow. Recent solo exhibitions have included; *#fromKStoyou*, Kunsthalle Stavanger, Norway (2020 –2021); *No Math Method*, Curfew Gallery, Edinburgh (2019); *Indirect Sunlight* – Laura Aldridge and James Rigler, New Gallery, London, (2018); *Plant Scenery of the World*, Inverleith House, Edinburgh (2017); *Go Woman Go!*, British Council in Nigeria Season, Abuja, Nigeria (2016); *Inside All My Activities*, Koppe Astner, Glasgow (2016); *One to another, one-to-one*, Passerelle Centre d'art contemporain, Brest (2015); *California wow!*, Tramway, Glasgow (2015) and Laura Aldridge, Studio Voltaire, London (2011). Recent group exhibitions include: *I am a Dependent Object*, Biennial of Contemporary Art Brno, Czech Republic (2019); *Perceptions*, National Gallery of Kosovo, Museul Contemporary Art Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Musuem of Contemporary Art, Macedonia (2018-2019); *Things That Soak You*, Kate MacGarry, London (2017).

Vibrant and tactile, Aldridge's work engages, indeed embraces, all our senses. Taking many forms and scales, her work derives from her deep-seated instinct for colour and texture, and from the knowing and intuitive approach she takes to making and to materials and their possibilities. She has said: 'Being completely absorbed in the process of making, being alert and open is really very important to how an idea develops. It is physical research and it is how I move the work forward.'

Working across textiles, glass, ceramic and found objects, and with processes such as printing, casting and dyeing, Aldridge's body of work moves freely between wall-based reliefs and sculptural assemblages or installations, playing on the abilities of 'collage' to operate in two and three-dimensions. She has herself described her work as a form of expanded collage, and she often arranges elements of her works upon tables, low plinths or across gallery walls to bring 'things' together so that they might coalesce as a whole.





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