

# Ceramics

## Art + Perception

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# #111

USD	\$20
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CAD	\$27
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GBP	£15





# Breaking Ground

## First Indian Ceramics Triennale

Written by **Anjani Khanna, Vineet Kacker** with **Bernadette Mansfield**

**M**ansfield Ceramics have been closely following the excitement and hard-work that surrounded the first Indian Ceramics Triennale and remain grateful that they found time to answer some questions from Bernadette Mansfield about this important event. Bernadette Mansfield's questions were responded to by Anjani Khanna and Vineet Kacker who are both members of the curatorial team of the Triennale.

**First up, congratulations on the inaugural Indian Ceramics Triennale. You chose as your theme/title *Breaking ground*, could you explain why?**

The curatorial team wished to encourage work that would break pre-conceived notions about ceramic art practices in India; encouraging projects that were experimental, experiential, that would push the envelope for the artists within their studios, as well as challenge viewers in the way they engaged with this ancient material in a contemporary context. Hence we hoped to 'Break Ground'.

Moving the focus away from the plinth-based display to a combination of installation and site-specific art was also new. The use of sound, projection, video, digital technology in conjunction with ceramic or clay-based work had not often been seen in India. Kate Malone and other artists who worked with her at her Balls Pond Studio in London, recreated their London Studio in Jaipur, providing a rare glimpse into their making practice – something that had not been done in an exhibition context in ceramics in India

**Was the Triennale well supported in India by way of funding and promotion?**

The Triennale was presented in collaboration by the Jawahar Kala Kendra (JKK) (a government-supported multi-arts centre) which played host to this first edition and the Contemporary Clay Foundation (an artist-led not for profit organization). The scale of the event would have been impossible without JKK's financial and logistical support, and more importantly their alignment with the vision of the Triennale.

Akshara Foundation of Arts and Learning, a Mumbai based not for profit organisation partnered for schools' outreach and children's workshops, which were conducted by artists from across the country and abroad. Bangalore based Clay Station supported us with studio equipment and clay. Several cultural organizations such as the British Council, Pro Helvetia – Swiss Arts Council, Inko Centre, Japan Foundation, and the Embassy of Israel provided support in facilitating projects by international artists.

**Are there many private galleries in India that exhibit ceramics? What about public collections?**

While there is a prevalent enthusiasm for the medium and new practitioners are always growing, dedicated galleries that showcase ceramics are extremely rare, and collectors are mostly private individuals. This is one of the reasons that the Triennale came to be an artist-led venture – practitioners have had to become curators out of necessity.

The Indian Ceramics Triennale has garnered an incredible response from the public, with more than 8000 people visiting the exhibition over the first seven weeks.





*Opposite:*  
**Relics of Future**  
 (detail), Dipalee Daroz,  
 2018, stoneware.

*Above:*  
**Migration and  
 Memories** (detail),  
 Sukhdev Rathod, 2018,  
 stoneware.

*Below:*  
**Unnamed**, Anjani  
 Khanna, 2018,  
 porcelain, rope,  
 fabric, paper.

**The Indian Triennale is collaborating with the British Ceramics Biennale. What does this mean in real terms regarding how this collaboration will work? An extension of this question is that it's an interesting collaboration between these two countries; what prompted it?**

The exciting collaboration between the Indian Ceramics Triennale and the British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) is intended to be an ongoing one. This year at *Breaking Ground* the BCB presented a live project space where the artwork shown was a result of a short residency between British artist Joanne Ayre, BCB artistic director Barney Hare Duke and traditional Indian Warli artists Ramesh and Rasika Hengadi.

<https://design.britishcouncil.org/blog/2018/oct/30/indian-ceramics-triennale/>

Next year, at the BCB, an Indian artist will present work made at a residency at Stoke-on-Trent. The artist will be selected based on a nationwide open call. This will in part be supported by the Charles Wallace (India) Trust.

<https://indianceramicstriennale.com/portfolio/opportunities/>



**Please, could you summarise what worked and what didn't (as ceramic festival organisers ourselves we are constantly on a learning curve!) and what you might do differently next time? Will each of your festivals be themed? What do you think the benefits are (in real terms) of hosting the event?**

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There has been a vibrant discourse around the scale and quality of the works on show, as well as the diversity of the projects. The attempt to be inclusive—to do away with hierarchical distinctions—was fairly successful, as were efforts to create a space for new dialogues centered around contemporary art practices using clay.

There were mutually beneficial collaborations with design institutes such as the Indian Institute of Crafts and Design, Jaipur (IICD). A very active and successful internship programme with the IICD, saw students working full time with visiting artists Juree Kim from Korea and Danijela Pivašević-Tenner from Germany. An opportunity hitherto mostly unavailable in India.

The outreach and master classes programs brought in students and many school children to the exhibition venue.

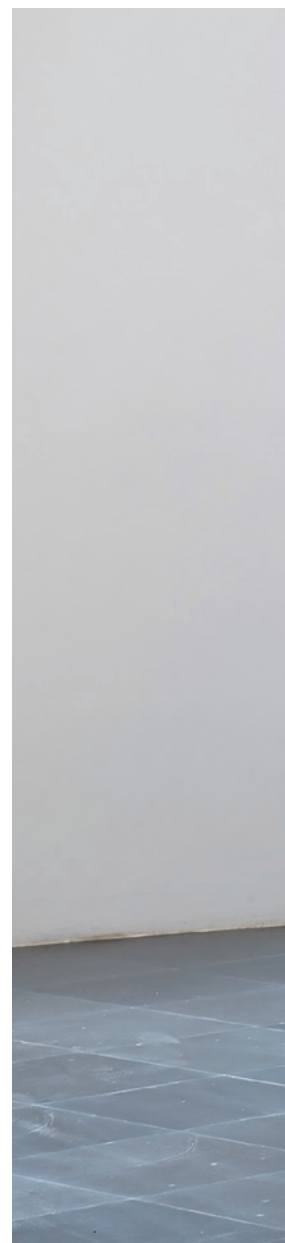
The media response has also been encouraging, providing coverage which has not been seen for a ceramic arts event in India. People have travelled from across the country to see the exhibition and some came from abroad.

The future is open at this stage and we will make decisions as we move ahead. The Triennale is not tied to the venue, but the Jawahar Kala Kendra was among the best we could have had, and we would be delighted to have their support going forward.

Whether the next Triennale will be themed or not, depends on what curatorial direction we choose to take. We would like to look at increasing outreach activities, collateral events and exhibitions and increasing the geographical spread of artists – or perhaps having a special regional focus one year.

The Triennale has been wonderful in bringing a focus on the medium within the wider art world in India. We have also encouraged artists to push their own practice and to move ahead with confidence. We had very limited funding for artist projects (in fact only 5 of our younger artists received project support from the Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation) and most artists put in their own resources. We would certainly like to be able to support artists to explore and expand their practice, unconstrained by market considerations.

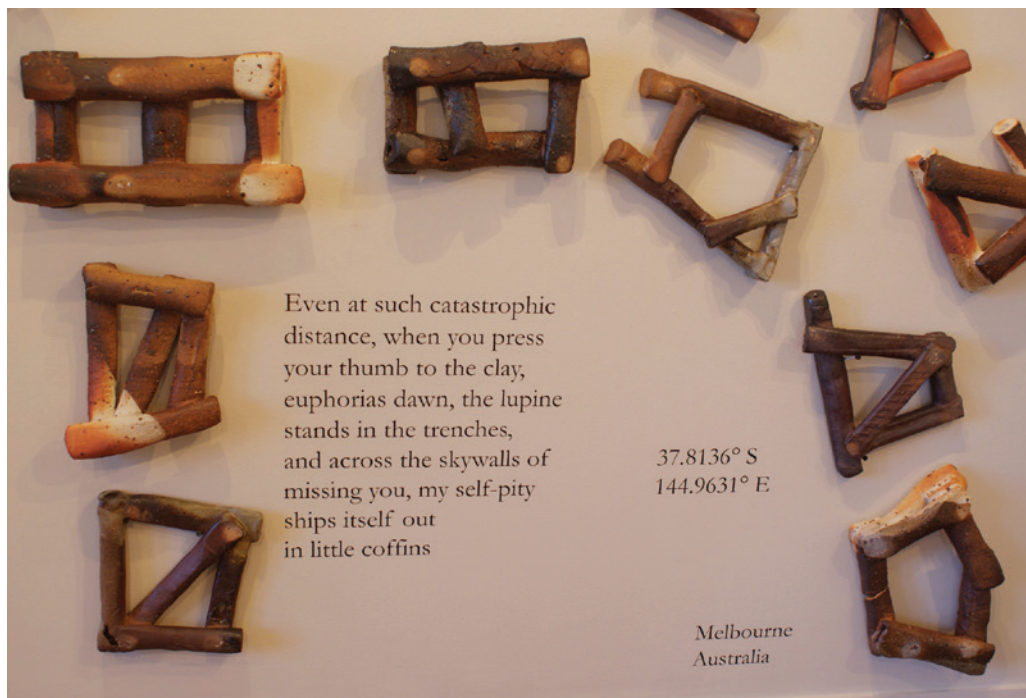
The support that we have received from the international ceramics community has also been very heartening. Artists gave of themselves generously and added much to the first edition. We would like the Indian Ceramics Triennale to be recognized as an event of international standard and value.



**Blossoming – Being all of Them, She Stands there**, Priya Sundarvalli, 2018, ceramic, fiberglass & steel.

Ray Meeker talks about Indian ceramic artists 'breaking ground' around the world and the Triennale is about 'breaking ground' on home turf. Could you expand on this?





*Left:*  
**Compass Rose** (detail),  
Ashwini Bhatt, 2015,  
stoneware.

*Bottom:*  
Art Ichol at Maihar,  
Jaques Kaufmann.

**Ray Meeker talks about Indian ceramic artists 'breaking ground' around the world and the Triennale is about 'breaking ground' on home turf. Could you expand on this? Especially in regard to the support and recognition that Indian ceramic artists receive within India. As an addendum to this, it is always a delight for us all to meet so many Indian ceramic artists on the international circuit, it part of your aim to encourage them to return home to work?**

A number of Indian artists are now active on the international ceramics circuit including some who are resident in other parts of the world. Several of them participated in this iteration of the Triennale and two were active on the Curatorial Team as well. Given international communication, the internet and the ability to travel, geographical boundaries have become less meaningful and we are happy to showcase best practices from across the world.

**Regarding educational pathways in India for studying ceramics, what are the options at tertiary level?**

The educational pathways for ceramics are fairly limited in a formal setting. There are however university courses available in about 6 or more centers – the J J School of Art in Mumbai, MS University in Baroda, Benares Hindu University in Varanasi, Vishwa Bharati in Santiniketan, the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad and the Indian Institute of Craft and Design in Jaipur to name a few. However, a number of artists have worked and studied at the Golden Bridge Pottery in Pondicherry with Ray Meeker and Deborah Smith, and a number are self-taught or have grown through a participation in shorter courses held by practicing ceramists. The Delhi Blue Pottery Trust in Delhi has been instrumental in introducing a vast number of people to pottery through their short courses and by organizing quality ceramic shows regularly.

**As an extension of this question, is ceramics widely appreciated and supported by the general public?**

There is a growing appreciation for pottery and ceramics, but contemporary art practices using clay aren't widely supported by the general public. The exposure to these has been limited and consequently so has the understanding of the potential of clay as a medium of artistic expression. We hope that Triennale has helped widen the discourse and sparked an interest. ■

