

# The Contingent

Written by Kerry Jameson

**S**hell Warrior stands defiantly upon a four-legged urn reminiscent of a Chinese bronze censor ready to burn incense – offerings to win favours from the Gods. The feathered shoulders initially purposed for an owl hold up an aqua-blue battle helmet and fix in place the yellow hooves chopped from the limbs of a forgotten donkey. *Shell Warrior* is an assemblage of liberated fragments which have come together through a continuing series of breakages, edits and re-arrangements until final confirmation.

This body of work has been created through destruction which seems like a novel course of action. The result is to force the work one way or another, for good or ill. As the hammer falls there is no determined outcome – breaking things is random and haphazard and relies a lot on chance, but it creates new directions. Every fractured or discarded piece provides an opening and from this new situations are invented. The accidental piece has an ambiguous quality; you can't quite work them out which is why they remain in the memory.

In the studio, a sort of tension is needed to create a body of work – a set of mental and physical conflicts that give the work an atmosphere of urgency. I can't produce work if the environment is too relaxing; I like to put myself in situations I haven't been in before. Breaking a ceramic piece creates that tension. It is almost a necessary moment that frees the medium from its static nature – thereby generating a set of new opportunities. I save all the failures – the aborted sculptures – and by reconstructing them the work becomes about the accident and the risk and perhaps not an overarching idea that is lost in the process of making. Contingency lessens the power of the idea of origin.

**SHE**, red earthenware, wire, acrylic, palm rope, wool, seeds and wax, 32.5 x 38 x 27 cm.  
Image credit: © Philip Sayer, courtesy of Marsden Woo Gallery.







*This page:*  
**Fish Tied**, red and white earthenware, palm rope, acrylic, wool, shells and wax, 64 x 37 x 34 cm. Image credit: © Philip Sayer, courtesy of Marsden Woo Gallery.

*Opposite:*  
**Coral Rope Bambi**, red and white earthenware, palm rope, hessian, coral, acrylic, wool and wax. Image credit: © Philip Sayer, courtesy of Marsden Woo Gallery.

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**The Horse With Antlers**, red earthenware, hessian, glass eyes, shell, stone chips, wool, palm rope, hessian twine, acrylic, wax and gold leaf, private collection, 57 x 28 x 22 cm. Image credit: © Philip Sayer, courtesy of Marsden Woo Gallery.

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During the process, broken pieces get changed around. By moving things out of their original context, interest builds, like how reading a paragraph with a sentence out of sequence causes the reader to go back to read it again. As the work starts to mutate, it is a fight to pull it back together, and that battle stretches the piece emotionally. Making a piece whole again requires labour – it's like trying to complete an impossible jigsaw. Yet, the history of toil can be seen in the surface and form. To focus on breaking work seems incongruous to practice and misfortune inevitably happens. Therefore, help is already available in traditions such as the Japanese art of *kintsugi* which treats breakage and mending as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.

There is a language to be made from the immanent – the materials of our world. Some materials have immediate burdens and attachments that, once accumulated, create a web of relationships that involve the viewer and the material world. There is a feeling to things: the soft fabric surface that nestles against a hard-shiny glaze is provoking. In the making, found objects are also fused into the body of the work. I collect, for example, bottle tops, twigs, shells and coral – these souvenirs represent another view, or perhaps validate a personal experience. These mementos from distant destinations embody nostalgia provoking memories – the sand between tiny toes as the promise of a rock pool sucks in cold hands and they search blindly under the dark of seaweed for the found object, or what Kandinsky called the 'dead that quivers'.

In museum collections, there are many examples of ceramic objects combined with other materials. In the 17th and 18th Century the European practice was to mount imported Chinese porcelain to heighten, re-purpose or adapt the object to a European interior. The mounts feel like imposed prisons – gilded cages sharp against the fluid milky-white of porcelain-like a knife scratching at the surface of a plate. Perhaps in my work, there is a need to make those materials feel as though they are meant to be together.

Often, I find I am unable to make unless I have lots of materials out in front of me, over the table and floor – they need to be accessible and ready to hand. This is part of the decision process for me – materials can be an inspiration and a tool. I use a lot of fabric in my work as strategies either to join, mend or build, allowing me to recapture the spontaneity that is felt initially when working with wet clay. In this way the emotions and ideas that are channelled into my work are kept fluid and gestures can find form. There is also a shift while making between the object and the material. You have to let the material free sometimes and let it be itself: allowing it to simply be paint or clay, a wash of colour, a paint drip.

My intention is to make work that feels like it is living and breathing and perhaps create a feeling of uncertainty and strangeness in what is being experienced. Like the animated turning of Talos's head – the bronze Titan statue on the island of Crete in Ray Harryhausen's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) – I want to turn the object from something ordinary, familiar, and immediately accessible, into something peculiar and unexpected.

*Contingent* was exhibited at Marsden Woo Gallery, London. September – October 2018. ■

#### About the Author

Kerry Jameson trained in London at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design and the Royal College of Art. Her ceramic and mixed media sculptures have an emotional charge that is presented through a mix of narrative set pieces, tableaux and individual figures. Subjects include historical events and the exploits of folkloric and storybook characters. The predominant aesthetic is that of the uncanny – where objects are recognised as familiar and at the same time experienced as deeply strange. Jameson has exhibited widely and was invited to be the Guest Artist in Residence at the Archie Bray Foundation, Montana USA and Sturt Craft Centre Australia in 2015. Her work is featured in many private and public collections including the Fitzwilliam Museum, York Art Gallery and Gallery Oldham. She currently lives and works in Singapore.





**Shell Warrior**, red and white earthenware, acrylic, porcelain teeth, hessian, wax and shells, Anthony Shaw Collection York Art Gallery, 32 x 34 x 76 cm. Image credit: © Philip Sayer, courtesy of Marsden Woo Gallery.



**Pandora's Jar**, red earthenware, acrylic, hessian, wax, palm rope and seed, private collection, 33 x 27 x 76 cm. Image credit: © Philip Sayer, courtesy of Marsden Woo Gallery.