

In Studio with Carol Sinclair

Evelyne Schoenmann



Carol, let's start with your biography and your professional career.

I've been running my ceramics studio for thirty-three years and have a ceramics degree from Grays School of Art in Aberdeen. I ran my tile studio in Edinburgh for 12 years and also had a gallery for 3 years. For the last 20 years I have combined my making with project and advisory work, and really enjoy this balance of activities. Now I work as a ceramic artist creating one-off pieces for exhibitions and projects.

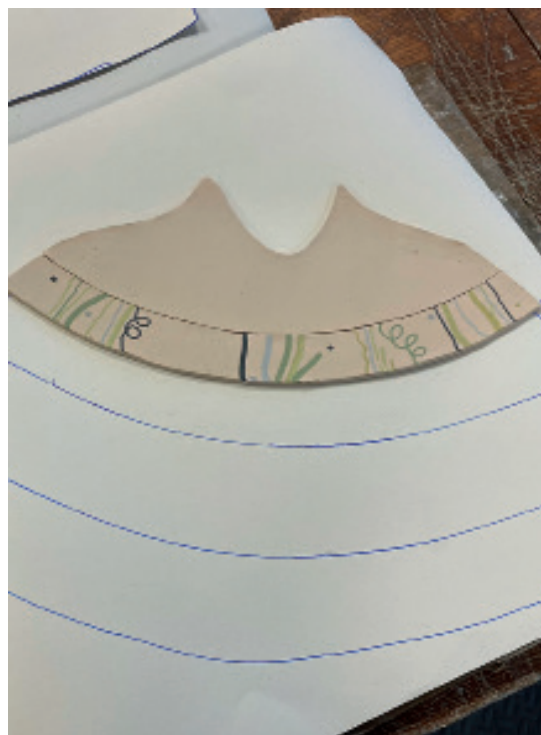
You combine your ceramics practice with your work in arts and business consultancy. Can you elaborate?

About 20 years ago I was invited to give a talk about my studio practice and it made me realize how much I had learned and that perhaps I could share some of that experience. I worked as a freelancer with a range of wonderful organizations and it is such a joy and a privilege to work with people from all creative disciplines. It really helps me understand what drives us, the challenges and the rewards.

You love to collaborate with other makers. We would love to hear a story or two about such team play...

Collaboration is a great way to push yourself to try new things. It's also valuable in having someone to be accountable to, so I always get more done than if I was working alone. Since 2019 I have been collaborating with a jeweller called Rebecca Hannon, who is based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, and we are currently working together on new pieces for an exhibition in Cape Breton in autumn 2025.





"Working across the world", that sounds to me as if you are a perfect networker. I think it is important for you to bring people together...

Yes, it really is. International working is life changing and getting to know makers from other countries puts so

much of your own life and work experience into perspective. On my first project in Thailand, I realized how much value there would be in facilitating exchanges between Thai and Scottish makers, and now nearly all of my projects, creative and business develop-

ment, have an element of collaboration in them.

You mainly work with the inlay technique. The two bottles in our In Studio article are also inlay. Can you please take us through the making steps from A to Z?

I work in porcelain because I love its clarity, purity and translucency, and also because I can create beautiful finishes without adding glaze. The pieces I am sharing are large curved bottles from the After The Storm series, using chopped and reconstructed strips of inlay to represent the broken branches and tree trunks left after the winter storms have passed.

1. I start by mixing up the coloured porcelain for inlay, selecting a palette from all my test tiles. For this collection I have a spring-inspired mix of warm greens with a cooler blue grey. I use Mason stains as they have such a wide range of beautiful colours, but I also mix my own combinations.

2. I then cut out paper templates and roll out slabs of white porcelain to an approximate size using my slab roller. For bigger pieces like these bottles, I build up the shape in smaller sections, as only some will have inlay added.

3. Now I hand roll out my shapes of coloured clay for inlay and compose my desired pattern. For these pieces I used a small clay extruder gun to create the thinner strands, and then hand form other components. I know approximately where I want to concentrate the decorative elements on the final pieces, but I do work instinctively rather than to a specific sketch.

4. The next step is rolling the coloured clay into the surface of the slab. This is an important stage and needs to be done carefully to keep the thickness of the slab even and not distort the pattern. I always really enjoy that moment of peeling back the paper and seeing how the pattern has sprung into life.

5. Once the inlay is ready, I cut up the slabs and compose the final pattern for the bottles. I use the outline of the paper template as my guide and steadily build up layers of pattern. The clay is still very soft so I have to be careful when I manipulate it.

6. Once the final shape is formed I gently, but firmly, roll them together to form one solid slab. Once formed I trim the slab down to its final size using the paper templates.

7. Preparing the base, I add a coil of soft clay around the edge to give more surface area for joining. I form the bottle shape when the slab is still quite soft so that I can curve it gently around the base. Once I have the base attached,

I can take my time to gently coax the slab into place and join its seam all the way to the top.

8. Once I have the bottle shaped, I work with a series of wooden paddles and tools to gently tighten up the form. I do most of this work when the clay is still quite soft, but also a last trim at the leather hard stage.

9. Once the pieces are bisque fired, I polish them. In the final firing I take the pieces up to 1235 degrees C. I used to fire higher, but as I try to reduce my carbon footprint, I have gradually brought the temperature down to the lowest I can that will still achieve vitrification and bright colour. This inlay technique has been developed to use only very small amounts of coloured clay to use precious resources as sparingly as possible.

We both recently had discussions about your research work for the WCCE (World Crafts Council Europe) on the topic of A Study into the Resilience of the Craft Sector in Europe. Please tell our readers about it.

I know from all my years of working with makers how determined and dedicated they are and the WCCE project was a chance to understand what makes craftspeople so resilient. And although they have a number of different skills and abilities, it is their sense of purpose that keeps craftspeople going. That might be to carry on traditions, to encourage ethical and sustainable working, or just the sheer joy of making that drives them on.

When will the next study be published and how can we reach ceramists in Europe with it?

The WCCE website wcc-europe.org has great information about projects and research. Resilience was one of a series of five projects. No dates for publication yet, but plenty more activities to support ceramists across Europe.

For someone like you, who loves working with ceramists all over the world, all these crises in the world are a setback. How do you deal with them privately and in your work?

Ceramics is in a very interesting place at the moment. A lot of people turned to ceramics during lockdown, taking up making as a hobby, for their health and wellbeing or because they have just



decided to now make time for creativity. And the knock-on effect of this is a larger number of informed and engaged buyers, and huge opportunities for ceramists who want to teach. Although along with that are rising costs and prices being squeezed, so not only do we have to be creative with clay, we have to be creative with our business models.

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WCCE report about resilience: <https://wcc-europe.org/whats-on/news/new-study-reveals-resilience-and-challenges-in-europes-craft-sector/>

The next interview partner is the author of this report

Evelyne Schoenmann.

Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist, writer, and curator. She is a member of the AIC / IAC and lives and works in Basel, Switzerland.

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