29 Oct 2021 LIFE FEATURE

# All Fired Up: The Passionate Potters Sharing Their Skills with Their Communities

Teaching the next generation of ceramic artists is important to Frieda Gardner, who has taught to the students. Words by Chloë Ashby

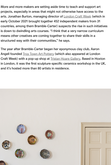
Frieda Gardner Carter

Frieda Gardner Carter grew up with clay. Her father, Chris Brandes, makes hand-crafted pots and ceramic sculptures. He also teaches, and ahead of his retirement, he invited his daughter to take over the students. Words by Chloë Ashby.

"It's important for me to share the craft," she explains over the phone from her home in Hackney, East London. "I've been thinking about it for a long, long, part of my life and strongly into making, and I think it stems, but even so when a week comes out of the blue it's different product. It's still and it's still a lump of clay, and it's still, I'm still, I'm still the same person of the inheritance-ness, because that's where the lessons are, that's the community."

Frieda's Day Class was founded in 2015 with the aim of teaching people of all ages how to handle clay. Brandes Carter started out hosting children's ceramics classes in her parents' garden, but as the class grew and the demand requires, it wasn't just the opportunity to share the craft that appealed to her. It was also the chance to teach others in the way she wished she'd been taught herself.

"We've been sent brilliant and gifted people who have had attention," she says of her students. "These things are amazing for them, and experience of an artistic I'm made my own school and do it my own."



More and more makers are setting aside time to teach and support art-making in their communities. Ceramic artist and educator Lisa Brandes Carter, sister, Jonathan Burton managing director of London Craft Week, behind in early October 2021 brought together 400 independent makers from 37 countries and over 100 venues in London, and the ceramics community is down to identifying city courses. "I think that a very narrow curriculum means other creatives are coming together to share their skills in a structured way with their communities," he says.

The year after Brandes Carter began her eponymous clay class, Aaron Burton founded the Ceramic Art London Community Outreach Project Craft Week with a pop-up shop at Frieda Gardner's class. Based in Peckham in London, it was the first sculpture-specific ceramics workshop in the UK, and it's hosted more than 80 artists in residence.

Tony Tuan Ali Pottery, Tristan Hoare Gallery, Photo: Betty Jackson. Courtesy Tristan Hoare Gallery

Lisa Brandes Carter, Angel-eye looking disenchanted with higher education in the city's. "There's barely any decent formal ceramics education left in the country," he says. "They're expensive courses to run, which is of course why they're being cut and why they're being cut back. It's a shame, but it's where universities decided that art education should more come under a very technical fulfilment, requirement, or space. I don't pretend to replace a fully staffed university ceramics course, but I do offer something..."

*"I can inspire a student, and vice versa. We bounce off each other, we're growing together"*

The price of formal higher education in the arts has skyrocketed in Britain since the mid-2000s. In 2010, the government cut the arts and design subsidised place to cut funding for art and design courses at universities by 50%. "Clearly there are still extraordinary talents coming through the major courses, but these community groups are a way of tapping into the talent of the very many people who are unable to afford them," says Burton. "There's a democratisation that comes from that."

It's not only through community projects that the current generation of makers are rallying together. It's also through their own work. Tugwood has always been a rich subject for artists, and the separation we endured during the pandemic has only made it more attractive. Tania Berry's work, for example, combines the natural world with the cryptic, cryptic, bodily, of rock and protrusion, and fried eggs on a plate are at once playful and poignant. Contained within each porcelain piece is a story that slope with you, stashed moments from her Wind gatherings.

Tania Berry

From intricate ceramic sculptures of food to a feast for the senses, Tania Berry, the founder of Arts Council Kent, helps people together through events that encourage them to discover their kids. As someone with dyslexia, she found it made her her approach stories physically. "For me, taste, scent and sound are abundant, they're one access for everybody," she explains. "I think it's a very, very important thing when adding the senses breaks down boundaries and allows the visitor to feel more at ease and open to ideas and information."

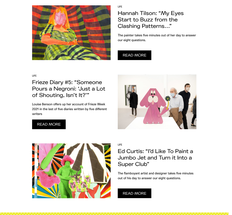
*"These community projects are a way of tapping into the talent of the very many people who are unable to afford major courses"*

For London Craft Week, Marta Ancilevi a scented installation, soundscape and bar at Tom Tempo Tours. At the beginning of the Covid-19, the Bay Area-based artist was forced to cancel her plans for a large-scale immersive, more social gathering, a piece of music made with composer Tina Hanson-Ishawaki, along with a film produced with Dan Tougood and a bring-understand scent created with CPL Aromas.

"This is why my practice is called BAR Consultas and not Tasha Marks," she says. "I know full well I wanted to make it people would be in collaborative mode, something that I wanted people to feel and see physically. Also spoke with the senses requires multiple sides."

While collaborating with others comes naturally to Marta and several of her peers, it wasn't always a consideration for her. Over the last two or three years she's founding her day job, Brandes Carter concentrated on exploring her art form and learning how to teach. She was still making her own work, but focused less on her own career progression.

"I was observing my father and how he taught and articulated himself," she says. "I was also at a point where I was considering what I wanted to do with my life, which had to focus and realise at a time where she wasn't fired any classes. "My students fully support me, which is the best thing about it," she adds. "They want me to do well because I'm helping them to do well too. I'm sharing a lot of myself every time I see them."

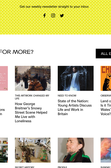


In spite of her individual success (or more likely because of it) Frieda's Clay Club is flourishing. She's currently searching for a bigger studio space, as well as extra teachers. Tony Tuan Ali Pottery is thriving too. Its popularity has seen it open a second location in Hackney, and the ceramics community is generally positive to Hide Hayes-Gardner's hobby, which according to Angel-eye's something found in the art ceramic courses in the UK.

Since 2016, Tony Tuan has also been the home of Hackney Ceramics, a not-for-profit social enterprise that provides training and employment for people who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, mental ill-health with Create London, an organisation that establishes artist- and community-led schemes across the country. It produces small-batch terracotta pieces inspired by functional British garden pottery.

*"There's barely any decent formal ceramics education left"*

Each year at London Craft Week, emerging artists are displayed alongside the big-name, well-established ones. "It's important that we look and act as one large pottery. It's pieces that that have work to of the same quality and deserves the same respect," he adds.



Ceramic artist Tony Tuan Ali Pottery

Both Brandes Carter and Angel-eye also have to acknowledge the benefits of being part of a ceramics community. Angel-eye, who is a Chinese citizen, came into being because Angel needed a space "a sort of sanctuary" to produce his own ceramics and develop glazes and clay bodies for sculptures. To this day, as he students some problems, so does he.

As for Brandes Carter, she can't imagine ever not teaching or sharing her craft. "I think it's very important to share what I know and what I'm learning, making it accessible and taking the pain of why I'm doing it," she says. "I can inspire a student, and vice versa. We bounce off each other, we're growing together."

*Chloë Ashby is an author and arts journalist. Her first novel, Wet Paint, will be published by Trapeze in April 2022.*

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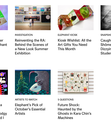

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