


# *RECLAIMING A LOST ARTISTRY:*

*AN ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF TEAPOTS THROUGH A  
STUDIO-BASED EXPLORATION OF WHEEL THROWING*





## *Research Questions*

- **How have potters used this artistry to create functional works of art?**
  - What are some of the pottery ideals and techniques used in some of the first teapots that were then lost?
  - What can I learn from ancient potters?
- **How has the creation and meaning of tea and teaware changed over time?**
  - How was the artistry of pottery lost at the hands of Westernization?

# *Methodology*

- Literature-Based Research
  - Change in meaning, creation
  - Westernization
- Creative Study
  - 2 days a week, 4 hours a day of practice
  - Journaling after each practice session
  - Photo/Video Documentation

# *Historic Background*

# *Ancient China (T'ang Dynasty) 1st Century*

- Tea was first introduced into society by Buddhist and Taoist monks
  - Became staple of religious ceremony
- Tea became urbanized and incorporated into the daily life of citizens of all classes
  - Required entirely new set of social practice rules
- Drink became highly ritualistic and a part of everyday life both religiously and socially
- Vessels during this time were often made from porcelain
  - Freshness and spontaneity of time was reflected within traditional pottery
  - Varied, often translucent glazes, with ovoid shaped forms

# *Westernization (England) 17th Century*

- Tea was first brought over by the Dutch through trade
- Immediately became a hot commodity in England, with only the wealth able to afford both tea and teaware
  - Quickly became social phenomenon, with the British altering meal times to make room for tea time
- Drinking tea became point of developing a sense of “otherness” and came along with the notions of exoticism where tea sets were being collected by rich upper class and were used as statement pieces
  - Original Chinese tea sets were often modified to fit English aesthetics

# *Industrialization (England) 19th Century*

- Growing market of ceramic-ware in England lead to the industrialization of pottery by Josiah Wedgwood in England
- Used division of labor for quicker and cheaper mass production
  - Designated certain tasks to specially trained workers -- no crossover whatsoever ‘
- Entirely removed artist from process
  - Bought and commissioned designs
  - No direct contact
- Lead to scarcity of handmade teapots in households due to wider distribution of industrialized pottery

# *Studio-Based Study*

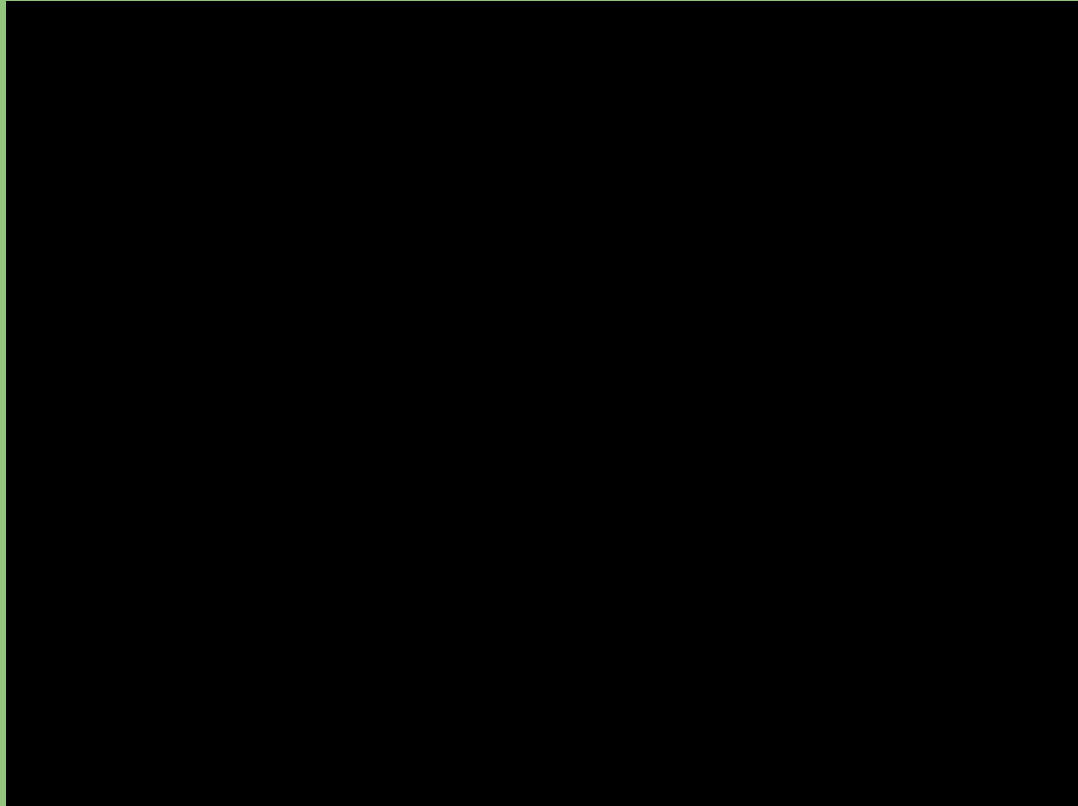




# *Steps to Wheel Throwing*

- Wedging clay (kneading to knock out air bubbles)
- Centering
- Creating cylindrical forms
- Creating bulbous forms
- Glazing

# *Throwing Teapot*



## *Final Tea Set Photos*



## *Final Tea Set Photos*



# Findings

- **Differences in Production Processes**
  - Handmade teapots require mastery of varied skills
    - Learning specific skills in a specific order requires a lot of time
  - In mass-production, certain steps of the process were delegated to different workmen
    - they were able to train for less amount of time to complete their steps
    - they also were able to dedicate more time to learning these steps, achieving a high level of mastery
    - added to the swift creation and capabilities of mass-production of teapots as well as a quicker turnout rate for ceramic products

# Findings

- **Physical Engagement**

- Process of creating teapot took both physical and mental strength
  - Soreness of arms and back from working on the wheel for extended periods of time
  - Frustration during build up of skills, with unsuccessful practice sessions

# Findings

- **Teapots as Ritual**

- First known to be ritualistic through religious context, then moved into a ritual of daily life
  - Became a part of social situations throughout China, spreading then into Europe, making major impacts on everyday life
- Ritual also plays a role in the wheel-throwing process
  - Series of steps must be taken for handmade teapot to be created

# Findings

- **Finding meaning in my work**

- I was able to create a functional work of art
  - Forced me to consider how industrialization not only resulted in the loss of pottery as a well-known artistry but also how ceramic-ware of today is typically not viewed in the realm of works of art
- mass-produced ceramic-ware cannot hold the same meaning as hand-made traditional pottery works, due to the sheer time it takes to be able to create a handmade ceramic work
  - Idea directly relates to Walter Benjamin's *"The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction,"* where he purported a loss of uniqueness in an object when it becomes reproduced (Benjamin, 2008)
- Mass produced pottery lacks history both ritualistically and historically that can be held by hand-made teapots



# Steps Moving Forward: *Carrying on the Ritual*



- I will reenact the social gatherings historically attributed to teapots
  - I will make use of my teapot, pouring tea for my friends
    - This will not only serve as a continuation of the rituality of the work, but will lament its status as a “functional” work
    - will activate its relational and performative dimension, while also heightening awareness to this scarcely found artistry
    - may even inspire others to delve into their own wheel-throwing practice, further carrying on the ritual