



Meet the maker: Andile Dyalvane, Imiso Ceramics



Gary Cotterell

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Ceramicist Andile Dyalvane's first recollections of working with clay are from his childhood, growing up in Ngobozana village, Qoboqobo (Kieskamahoek) near Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape. He jokes now about how he and his friends would sit on the banks of the nearby river and try to bring the biblical Adam to life from clay, 'literally afraid that it might work'. He had no inclination at the time that he would become an artist, and even less a ceramicist bringing clay to life on such an impressive scale.

Andile is the recipient of numerous awards including a recent Southern Guild Design Foundation Icon Award in recognition of outstanding achievement and innovation. As one of our most successful exports, his work is also in many prestigious local and international public and private collections. Gary Cotterell visited him in his new Salt River studio where he is busy creating the magnificently large works that form part of his imminent solo show in New York City.

Q&A:

Having also grown up in the Eastern Cape I know how at once it can be magical but also tough. Do you believe that your formative years in Ngobozana strongly affect the way you think and work?

Yes, daily manual work has become a discipline. Outside of school hours, much of my childhood included herding livestock, building fences and hunting. This builds overall strength of character and resourcefulness, and makes life in a remote, rural area successful.

Cotterell, Gary. "Meet the maker: Andile Dyalvane, Imiso Ceramics," *1/1 Private Collection*, February 1, 2016.

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Did you ever plan to become an artist or ceramicist?

No. Career guidance didn't feature so highly in my early education. In fact drawing was punishable by lashings as it was seen as a distraction from work. I eventually considered the opinions of my peers about my drawing [talent] and realised that this was my passion. Art, but not ceramics at that time.

Where was your first studio and do you recall the first piece you made?

A terracotta piece, decorated with white flowers. Inspired by enamel bowls at home. It was heavy as it was a coiling lesson at Sivuyile College [now the Gugulethu, College of Cape Town Campus]. It was hideous looking after the firing. My first 'studio' was in Kalk Bay. Having previously worked for Chris Silverston at the Potter's Studio, she extended an offer to rent a workstation in her establishment. I took up the offer and worked toward my solo exhibition at the Irma Stern Gallery in 2004. It sold out and was a milestone event in my career. Imiso Ceramics Gallery space was set up at the Old Biscuit Mill [in Woodstock] in 2006.

On a previous visit to your studio you explained the meaning of Imiso. If I recall correctly it is the plural of 'ngomso' (tomorrow) but is more about 'working today for a better tomorrow'. You support and mentor young artists and mentioned a sort of 'creative ubuntu'. How does this play out in the context of your studio?

Yes, through the medium of clay. We all have obligations to our families, the communities we grew up in. Having a studio aids in inspiring others and gives us the opportunity to work together and to pay it forward in doing so.

How would you best describe your work?

Reflective of culture, experiences, locale, with the constant spiritual consciousness delivered in each line and form. A musicality of possibilities in paying attention to detail.



What is the significance of the scarification marks in your work?

Scarification is an African practice undertaken for various reasons. It incorporates the channelling of ancestral guides to protect individuals against manifestations of negative entities/energies, a conversion of inner pain turned into physical symbolisms of rejecting negativity. It is also used for clan and status identification within a clan. The latter holds strong within my heritage as a Xhosa, belonging to the Jola clan.

What is the biggest influence on your work?

Where I come from, where I've been and where I am.

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How would you best describe yourself?

Human first, inclined to believe strongly in a vision and universal connections to all things relating to that vision. Important to me is balance in all aspects of my life. I like resolution. Keeping time is key to daily successes, something my late father instilled in me.

Favourite icon?

The late Senegalese designer Babacar Niang. A man I believe to have been cut from the same cloth as me, albeit born 12 years prior to me but on the same day. He inspired me to connect with and respect the mediums I work in, a way of living by using what avails itself to you. Another is Porky Hefer, for his imagination and visionary skills in sketching.

An important life lesson?

Gratitude. Giving thanks in acknowledgement of lessons learnt and applied. I often say 'camagu!', which in Xhosa means 'I see and hear with gratitude'.

You recently did a residency just outside San Francisco. Tell us briefly about this and the importance of international residency programmes?

I undertook a residency at the Palo Alto Art Centre in Palo Alto California, a first for them in accepting an international artist in residence. This was done with the assistance of great friends I'd made through my work many years ago – affectionately known to us as The Bermans, who are based there. Exploring as a human being is so very important in learning. As an artist my scope is an entire world filled with connections to be made, which gives rise to stories sculpted by experience, and history to be shared. This is why I enjoy residencies.

Through the experiences I had exploring artisans in the area and correspondence with my wife and confidante Nkuthazo (her name means 'to inspire' in Xhosa), as well as collaborating with ceramicist Gary Clarien, I started honing in on textures inspired by landscapes and the tensions expressed in layers that give way to the rawness of earth over time. Somewhat like scarification. [For example] erosion seen in the *dongas* back home or California's earthquake threats. While there, I hosted a lecture for adults on my processes and a workshop for kids on embossing your environment onto clay as a means of archiving expressions, memories and keep sakes.

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You achieved a \$20k bid for one of your works at a recent Christie's auction in London. What does this mean for you?

It means that I have been acknowledged by a wider audience who appreciate my work. The arrival on that particular platform while I'm alive is a feat some artists that I look up to, could only have imagined. *Camagu!*



Most exciting now is your solo show at Friedman Benda in New York, opening in June. Part of the arrangement with the gallery is that they've set you up in a wonderful new studio, allowing you to focus exclusively on huge new pieces for the show. How did this project come about?

This was facilitated by Southern Guild, who represent my work on various international platforms. Friedman Benda have been 'head-hunting' the African continent for people they consider to be the best representatives of design on the continent.

Your work is included in important local and international collections. Tell us about some of them?

My work is in the Iziko Museum's Social History ceramic collection along with a special edition SA Post Office stamp series of select ceramicist's work that the museum continues to collect. I'm also in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum in Port Elizabeth, William Humphrey Art Gallery in Kimberly and Corobrik SA national ceramic collection. Internationally, my work is in the Danish International Ceramic Centre and at Taiwan's Yingge Ceramic Museum. There are private collectors of my work based in various parts of the world.

Do you get time to read? If so, what are you reading at the moment?

At times yes, I read all the books and catalogues of the artists I've collected whose work I appreciate. One of them is *Wendell Castle: Wandering forms, Works from 1959-1979* by Alister Gordon.

What music keeps you moving in the studio?

All kinds of music that appeal to my rhythmic senses, mostly world music, traditional music, dub reggae, tribal house, alternative, classic chill, jazz, African funk.

Three South African artists or designers we should be keeping an eye on?

Fashion designer Dennis Chuene (Vernac); industrial designer Ebrahim Assur; and visual artist/social influencer Tony (Zipho) Gum

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