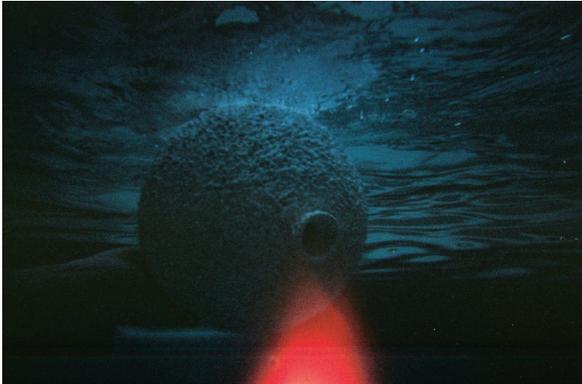


Opposite page: **Alana Wilson, *Aquatherapie (Reef Amphora)***, 2014, porcelain paperclay various glaze finishes; photo: artist

Below left: **Alana Wilson, *Aquatherapie (Whitewash)***, 2014, porcelain paperclay various glaze finishes; photo: Scott Wilson

Below right: **Alana Wilson, *Aquatherapie (Standing Amphora II)***, 2014, porcelain paperclay, various glaze finishes
Photo: artist



Clay Therapy

Caterina Leone reports on Alana Wilson's *Aquatherapie* works

Alana Wilson is, to be blunt, an emerging artist to watch. Her work is already recognisably hers, yet with intriguing developments from each body of work to the next. Engaging in person, Wilson possesses the desire to experiment coupled with the self-confidence to do so. The result is a beautiful interrelation of aesthetic, meaning and technique and a surface treatment that is unusually advanced for such a young artist. A recent Honours graduate of the National Art School, Wilson was awarded the Sabbia Gallery Exhibition Award in 2011 for her graduate body of work, she was the recipient of the UNSW Arc Ceramic Residency, and most recently, has participated in a group show at emerging gallery Home@735 in Redfern.

Her most current body of work, *Aquatherapie*, is the culmination of her dedicated glaze testing and a refinement of her unique aesthetic. The collection takes its name from a Vogue Paris editorial by Mario Sorrenti. Wilson draws inspiration from a wide variety of sources, from contemporary fashion, the classical forms of antiquity, Cy Twombly's sculptures, to her love of the ocean and her other life as a swim instructor. In her UNSW studio, amongst her beautifully curated collages of inspirations, is an



Wilson's workbook and inspiration, 2014; photo: Caterina Leone
Above right: **Alana Wilson, *Aquatherapie (Amphora I)***, 2014, porcelain paperclay, various glaze finishes; photo: artist

image of an ancient amphora being pulled from the water's depth by a diver. Wilson's *Aquatherapie* works are, in many ways, an imagining of what comes next. Taking the classical amphora form, she has recreated them for a new age, whilst simultaneously making them appear ancient, encrusted with the accumulation of centuries underwater. Almost paradoxical in nature, her works are a celebration of both old and new, reconciling the conflicting aesthetics of water and fire. The veneration of antiquity ends with the iconic forms; their surface treatment is thoroughly modern in both appearance and technology. Embracing new materials such as a commercial pink slip, the resulting works successfully achieve her aim of harmonising "the opposing aesthetics of primitive, rough and raw with subtle, composed and contemporary". In some works, such as *Amphora I*, the glaze has consumed the form beneath, swallowing the openings between the vessel and its handles. In another, the glaze has devoured the opening of the vessel, sealing it shut. Such anthropomorphising of an inanimate glaze can extend beyond appearance; some pieces even make soft noises when handled, due to air pockets in the bubbling surfaces, reminiscent of a shell that one holds to the ear to hear the ocean. Wilson speaks of the works interacting in the kiln, the highly reactive nature of the chemicals used sometimes causing nearby works to stain one another, a collaboration of vapour distribution. The works seem alive, as though one may return to an exhibition to see further growth and a spot of colour that wasn't previously there.

Another new form, the large, wide, uneven bowls, also draw inspiration from antiquity, this time from a Neolithic Chinese bowl seen at the NGV, Melbourne. It is not usually a form she is drawn to, preferring more closed shapes. Even this small way of stepping out of her comfort zone shows that Wilson is unlikely to become repetitive. Each successive body of work has grown into an independent, distinct entity, stemming from an obsessive desire to refine her surface treatment.

Exhibited at Home@735 Gallery in March 2014, the *Aquatherapie* works possessed an overwhelming power, eclipsing their surroundings, making irrelevant the challenges of the small, unusual space. However, the works are quiet in their power, with their muted palette and subtleties of texture and colour that warrant close and long inspection. Wilson has created works that need no philosophy of art, no theory of criticism or even language to appreciate them; all you need are eyes. The rest is just justification for that pre-linguistic, primal 'yes!'

The Secret to Alana Wilson's Glazes:

Wilson's already distinctive surfaces have obsessed her since art school, and she has devoted her practice to developing them in a highly technical and precise manner. She uses porcelain or terracotta paperclay, for both the lightness of the fired work and the ease of manipulation when wet. Her forms are often exaggerated; uneven bowls with feet almost too small for their size, or vessels that bulge outwards on one side more than the other. The paperclay easily allows Wilson to handbuild these individual forms. She coats the works, after the bisque, in slip, usually silicon carbide-based. It seems fresher to her, and is more reactive with the glaze. The more silicon carbide in the slip, the more bubbles on the finished surface. Highly reactive at stoneware temperatures, the silicon carbide vaporises through the glaze directly layered on top, creating the texture. After the slip, Wilson paints the works with washes she has developed, typically containing 8-10% tin, which mattify the surface. She has slowly increased the amount of tin over time, consequently making the works more susceptible to vapours from the other glazes around them in the kiln. The tin often flashes pink during firing. In her recent work she has begun experimenting with red iron oxide, copper oxide and titanium washes too, the latter of which also mattifies, though not as successfully as tin. The titanium produces a stony-beige glaze. Lithium and barium, chemicals that eat into the clay, are also used helping to produce the pockmarked, spongy surfaces. Whilst understandably secretive about her recipes, she imparts that it is important not to mix the layers too much.

Alana Wilson in her studio, 2014; photo: Caterina Leone





Wilson's test pieces for *Aquatherapie*, 2014

Right: Wilson's collage of inspirations and tea-bowl test pieces for *Aquatherapie*, 2014
Photos: Caterina Leone

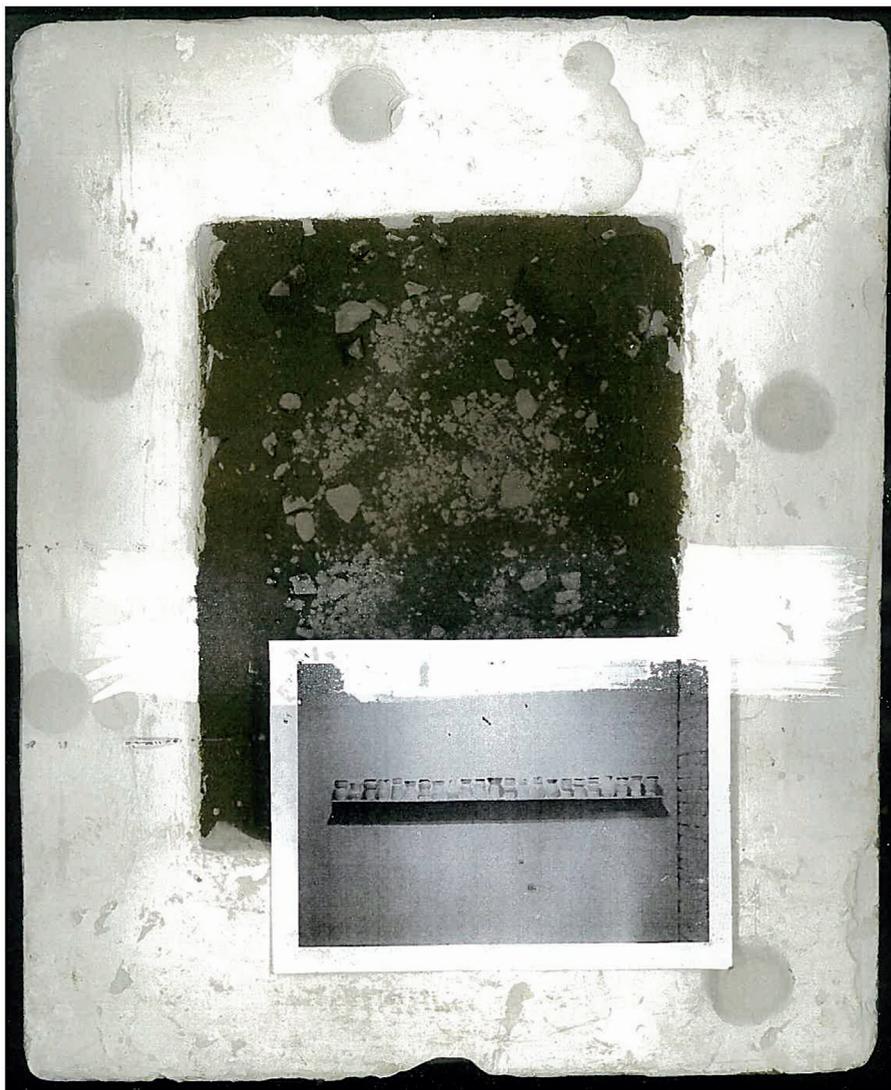
Opposite page: **Alana Wilson**
Collage on Andrei Davidoff I,
2014, terracotta clay and crushed
stoneware clay in plaster mould
with C-type print and titanium
wash, h.30cm, w.21cm



Wilson fires her works in an electric kiln. She rigorously tests the combinations of slips and washes on test pieces first – small mountainous shapes, which become beautiful works of art in their own right, placed en masse. Wilson prefers to make tea bowls for test pieces; though more time-consuming, they allow a greater discernment of the eventual effects of the glaze, its reaction to inner and outer surfaces as well as different thicknesses of application. Despite this, there are still discrepancies between the tests and the finished product. The tests are smaller, and thus more of them fit in the kiln, leading to a greater transference of colours. Originally intending to study painting at art school, a painterly approach and sensitivity to colour is still evident in the thick, textured, multi-coloured surfaces. Wilson begins with a clear idea and works methodically and scientifically to that end, indicative of her background in object design. Yet she still finds joy in the ultimate lack of control, the submission to the kiln and its happy accidents.

www.alanawilson.com

Alana Wilson, Collage on Andrei Davidoff I, 2014, terracotta clay and crushed stoneware clay in plaster mould with C-type print and titanium wash; h.30cm, w.21cm



Caterina Leone: Art has always been remade in the eyes of each viewer, and today, with photography often the only access a viewer may have to a work, there is a further element of abstraction added to this remaking and interpretation. Inspired by Alana Wilson's own collages, which she makes before a body of work to serve as inspiration, I asked her to instead create collages based on another artist's work, and from photographs of that work. Using Andrei Davidoff's ceramics as her starting point, the collages shown here, and on page 23, combine both artists' aesthetics, generating new works of art that demonstrate the beauty of this transformation from work, to photo, to audience, to new work, completed afresh by each viewer.
