



Project Holocene: The Clayful Phenomenology of Jōmon Flame Pots

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Summary

As a ceramic artist, I was surprised to find that archaeological research gives little attention to the extraordinary sensorial qualities of Jōmon flame pots. To understand why, I consider the challenges of including sensory experience in archaeological method and the problems of leaving it out. Turning to the typological approach to Jōmon pottery, I highlight the assumptions it makes about cognition before introducing Material Engagement Theory (MET) as an alternative. A MET-oriented reanalysis of the typological evidence places sensation at the centre of enquiry and removes the need to interpret symbolic, representational content. Through MET, I consider the sensorial qualities of flame pots, not as prehistory but as they appeared recently and unexpectedly during the process of modelling clay into sculptures for a contemporary art project. Flame pots joined conceptually with the explorative activity of clay. A prehistoric/contemporary artefact/modelling system was created and developed itself into a method of monitoring intra-systemic experience—clayful phenomenology. The findings cover five themes: enacted agency, iconicity from indexicality, bending rules/undermining habits, the choreography of material engagement and the phenomenology of space.

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