

RECIPROCITY

Reciprocity is the idea that has underlined the past twelve months for me. Generating a body of artwork and teaching workshops go hand-in-hand. One fuels the other. Being given space to work in means I can make more art, and in turn benefit the museum.

My name is Laura Marley and I am an artist from Tyneside. For the past year I have been the Artist in Residence at Jarrow Hall. I love talking to people about art and helping them discover their creativity.

In my work, I focus on what it means to **make things with your hands** without any special equipment and make something new where nothing existed before.

I have exhibited in Estonia, London, and all over the north-east of England. I work in community groups and schools and pursue my own practice - primarily with wild clay.

My main job has been to **encourage people to come to Jarrow Hall to explore being creative.** I run workshops to show people how easy and enjoyable this can be. It was 20 days work, and 10 workshops, but I haven't stopped thinking about it here. You can't spend that much time in a place like this and not want to make things.

The north-east of England is made of clay.

It is everywhere under your feet. You might see it in roadworks or when digging in a garden. When it rains, and the soil and grass get slippery and claggy - that's clay. When the rain dries up and the ground is parched, and the mud cracks and breaks – that's clay too.



LAURA MARLEY

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Ceramics is one of the oldest ways of making artworks, and tells the history of humans in archaeology. It is one of the most useful ways archaeologists and historians have to learn things about people in the past.

THE PROCESS



The clay here is very short – this means it is quite crumbly – but it is also very rich in colour and texture. Everywhere you go the clay is slightly different and I've spent a long time getting to know how this clay behaves when I make things with it. Sometimes, if the clay needs it, I'll **mix it with animal fur or chopped up straw or sand**. This is called **tempering** and it makes the clay stronger and easier to use.

The process of turning earth into clay can be long. I start with clay straight out of the ground. If it is smooth and can be worked straight away I will use it. Most of the time, I have to let it dry out, then break it up into pieces. When it is completely dry, I can crush it into dust and sieve out any stones or plant roots. Then I leave it in a bucket of rainwater for a while – this is called **slaking**. When dry clay slakes, it fizzes, hisses and bubbles and releases air. It's like its coming to life.

Once it has stopped fizzing and has soaked in water for a while, I can then spread it out onto plaster until it is the right texture to use for making things. It is **gloriously smooth and cold and glossy**. Thankfully, Jarrow Hall is so busy with farming, building and gardening, there is always a heap of clay to be found somewhere!

You don't need any special tools or equipment to make artwork from clay. Lots of the things you see here are **made only with my hands, a stick for poking holes and a stone for smoothing**. Sometimes I don't even use the stick and stones.



MAKING AND INVESTIGATING



Sometimes its smooth as glass, and other times I add different surface textures to it. In the display case, you'll see some examples of this. You can see some burnished pieces here in the display cases, and some of the tools use to burnish clay with.

When you find a stone you really like, that fits your hand and is just the right kind of smooth, **you can make clay incredibly shiny**. Lots of people think these things are made of polished wood, or that I've glazed and fired them. **Usually, things made of clay are fired in a kiln – this turns the clay into ceramic**. For things like the tiles here, I have fired them. They will last forever like this. If you fire ceramic to a high enough temperature it becomes waterproof – when this happens we can call it 'vitrified'.



What I usually like to do is called **burnishing**. This creates a beautiful surface that doesn't have to be fired at all. **I rub the surface of the clay with a stone until it is smooth** and then let it dry a bit. Then have another go, and it gets a bit smoother and shinier. I keep doing this until it looks how I want it to.



The tiles on the wall were made by people who attended the workshops I ran here as part of the residency. Starting in the spring of 2025, I made tiles covered with Jarrow Hall clay. I invited participants to **use plants from Jarrow Hall** and press them into a tile while it was still soft. This has made a **visual record over the year of how the environment around us changes with the seasons**, coming full circle back to spring again. The changing of the seasons was just as important to the Anglo Saxons as it is to us.



Animals are such a key part of life at Jarrow Hall now, just as they would have been in Anglo Saxon times. I like to think that anyone then could have used this clay to make a little animal, just like we have here.

Just some of the things we've made : **curious medieval animals and mythical creatures, dragons eggs, beads, tiles and slip paintings.** It is especially interesting to me when someone wants to join in who has never made anything with clay before – they often have the best time!



It is also lovely to see people enjoying the activity together. The **focus and curiosity people have demonstrated has been really exciting to see.** It has been so fun helping hundreds of people to have a go and making something with clay, and learn about the process and Jarrow Hall at the same time.



ARTWORK AND RECIPROCITY



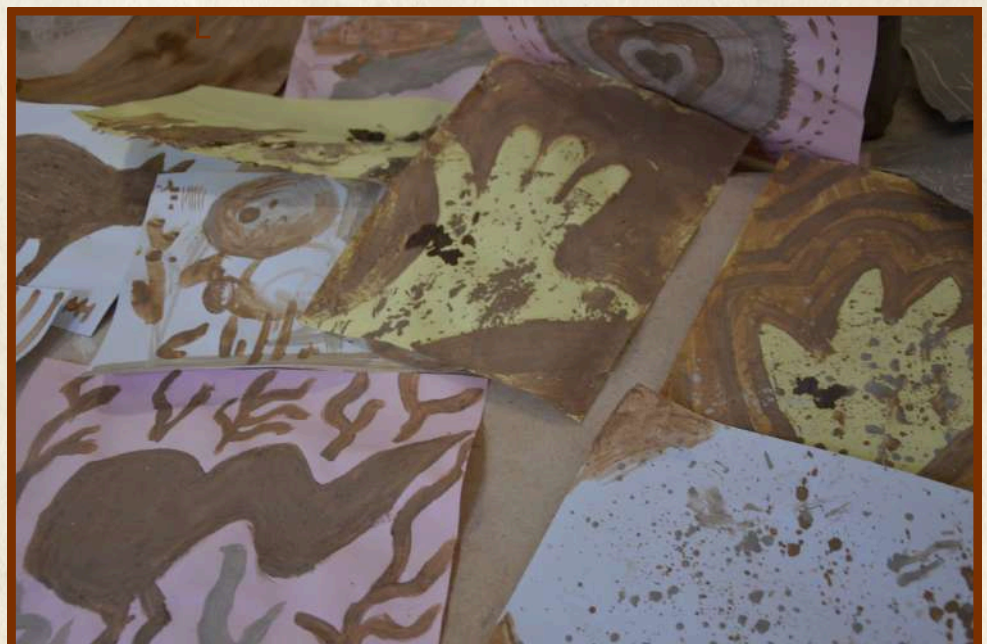
There was a reciprocity and barter system for trade in Anglo Saxon England, and I have used that idea to fuel my practice here. I have learnt so much from working here. **I hope the things I make can be useful to the people who have taught me.**

As well as artworks, I have made lots of things I hope will be useful to the people who work at Jarrow Hall as reenactors. **They make history come to life, just like I try to do with the things I make.**

One of the most common and useful objects made of clay in Anglo Saxon times was a **loom weight**. These made it possible to weave cloth that was even and neat.

Lots of the pieces exhibited here have been made by participants in my workshops. By co-curating this exhibiton, **together we have been investigating the different ways to use Jarrow Hall clay**. One of the most fun exmples of this was with experimental drawing techniques using clay slip. I demonstrated how to process clay from the ground to make it workable, and various building and burnishing techniques.

As a group, we also made the loom weights for a piece of art. **The loom weights we made will be given to the reenactors** here once this exhibition is over. Next time you come, have a look and see if they are being used on the loom in the Thirlings.





Over the years, I have worked with many groups of people to help them make their own artwork from clay. You might like to have a go. Try using some Jarrow Hall clay to add some creatures to the fantastic forest, or paint with liquid clay – this is called ‘slip’.

There are a lot of knowledgeable and dedicated people here at Jarrow Hall who have created lots to be inspired by. I am full of ideas and will keep making thanks to all the things I've seen here. **I think this is the ideal environment to fuel my creativity and I hope it does yours too!**

