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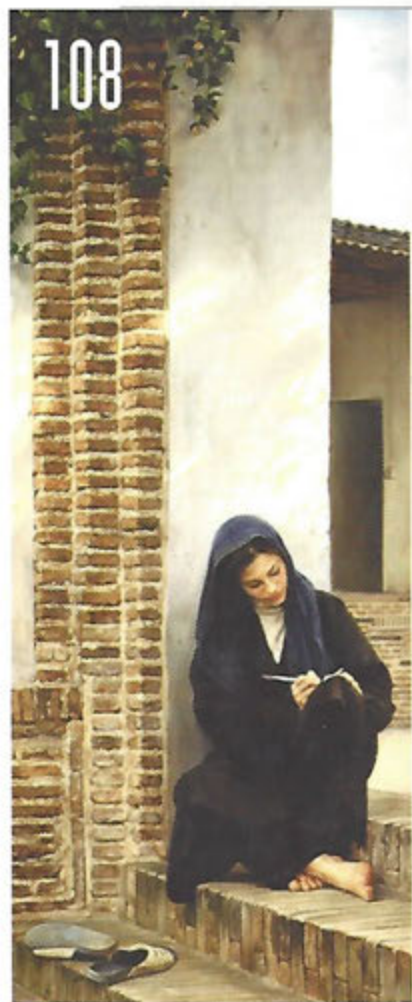
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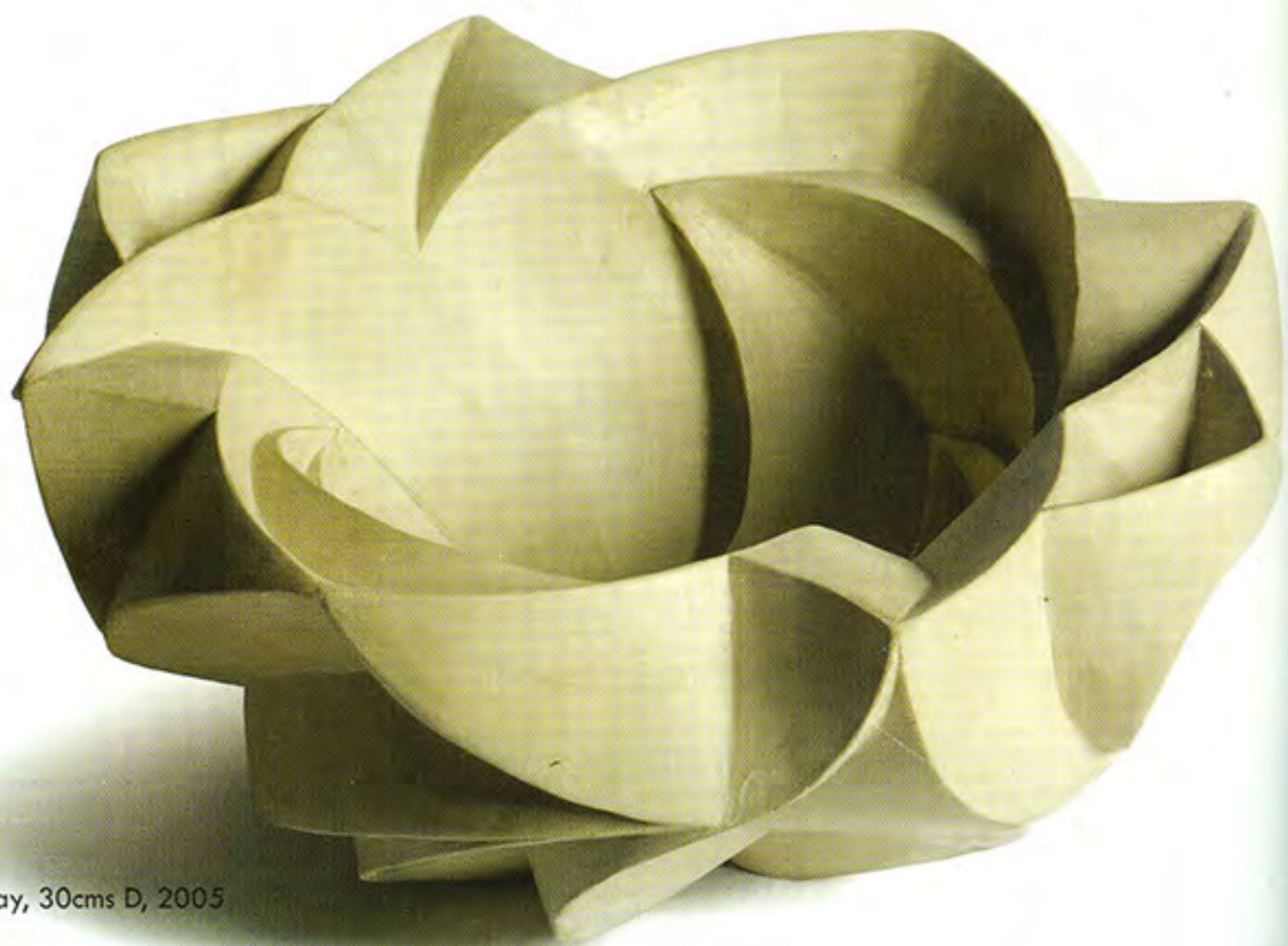


by John Holt

The context

In nature, we find patterns, designs and structures from the most minuscule particles, to expressions of life discernible by human eyes, to the greater cosmos. These inevitably follow geometrical archetypes, which reveal to us the nature of each form and its vibrational resonances. They are also symbolic of the underlying metaphysical principle of the inseparable relationship of the part to the whole. It is this principle of oneness underlying all geometry that permeates the architecture of all form in its myriad diversity. This principle of interconnectedness, inseparability and union provides us with a continuous reminder of our relationship to the whole, a blueprint for the mind to the sacred foundation of all things created. As we can find in the architecture and structures within multiple cultures and foremost are the archetypes of structure found in Islam, in the Celtic and African motif and also in the tribal cultures of the world; the Aboriginal people found in pattern the means to express the innerness of all things, the energies that underlies all life animate and inanimate, the ancestral spirits. It is into this context of the archetype, the universally symbolic, that the work of Halima Cassell can be placed.

Halima
Cassell



Halima Cassell, *Ice Dune*, unglazed Clay, 30cms D, 2005

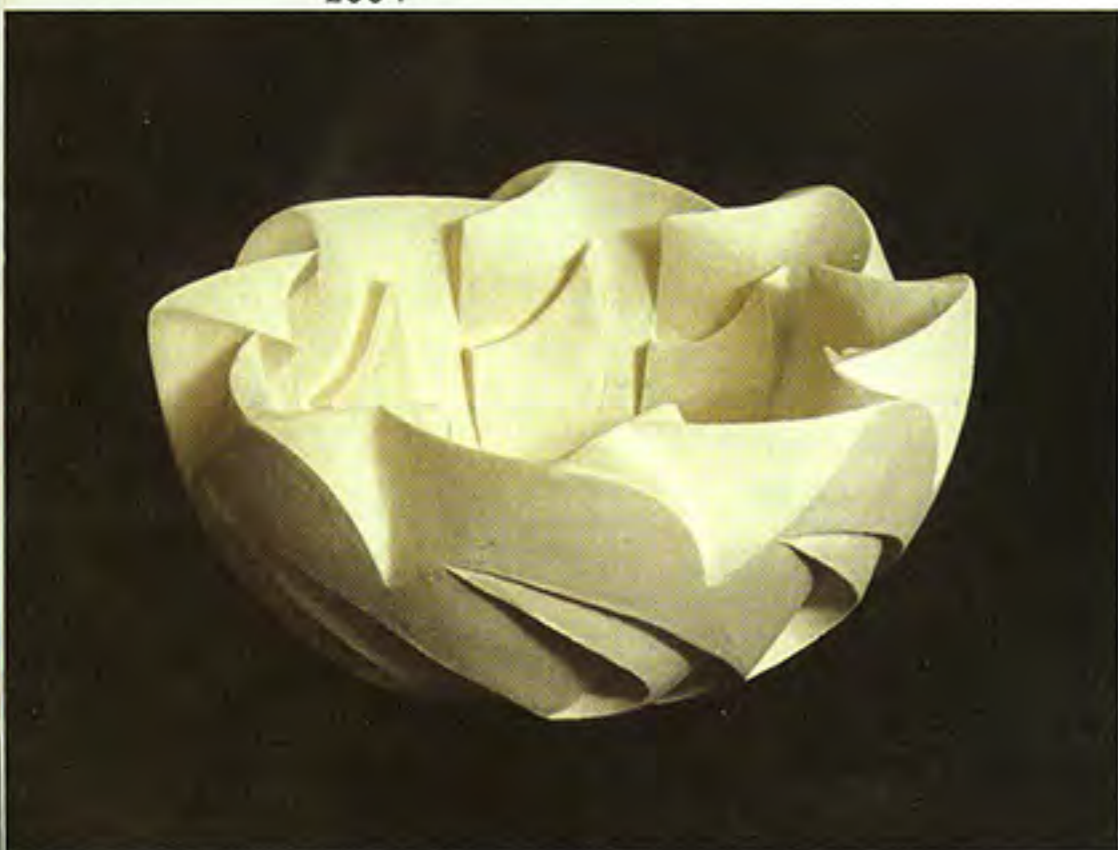
Halima Cassell, *Crystalline*, 30cms D, 2004



Halima Cassell, *Chain of Diamonds*, unglazed clay, 30cms D, 2004



Halima Cassell, *Tsunami*, unglazed clay, 30cms D, 2004



oppression as a model of universality of the unity of difference grounded in the truth of truths which we all share.

"It is not easy to put into words the effect that Halima Cassell's remarkable ceramic sculptures have on you when you first encounter a well-displayed selection of her work. I can only describe it as being like entering a concert hall and being hit by a symphony of beautifully tuned instruments that fill the air with a unique and thrilling energy. For Cassell's works are sublime ceramic forms, carved with extraordinary precision and spatial imagination, whose playfully manipulated formal elements resonate with profound cultural references."

Zachary Kingdon Curator of the African Collections with National Museums Liverpool.

Sacred Geometry

There is also a sense of sacred geometry, of an "architecture of the soul" in Halima's work, a formal underpinning which is found within many cultures throughout time and space.

The term sacred geometry is also used for a configuration which is employed in the design of sacred architecture or art. The underlying belief is that geometry and mathematical ratios discoverable from geometry also underlies music, cosmology and other observable features of the natural universe. This belief was held from ancient times through the Renaissance and influenced the construction of temples and churches and the creation of religious art.

Halima Cassell's work moves in the circles of the geometry of the sacred.

Her work takes us to the essence, the centre, the origins:

The universe is created by thought consciousness which manifests in physical reality through a geometric blueprint that we call Sacred Geometry. It repeats in cycles giving the illusion of linear time so we can experience emotions. The term "sacred geometry" is used by archaeologists, anthropologists, and geometers to encompass the religious, philosophical, and spiritual beliefs that have sprung up around geometry in various cultures during the course of human history. It is a catch-all term covering Pythagorean geometry and neo-Platonic geometry, as well as the perceived relationships between organic and logarithmic curves.

Questions: Does this work and its processes represent an innate capacity within Halima Cassell; does she see, feel and intuit these patterns of the inner worlds? Has she been handed responsibility to bring these archetypal forms into a chaotic world and if so why?

Answers: Could this be for the healing properties that such sublime structures bring to our manifest world? Is the movement within her work the very energies of life itself, the imprints on our retina?

The Bushman of the Kalahari produce the most evocative and profound "rock art". This is essentially the work of medicine people or shamans. Their striking pieces of art depict trance visions and symbols of supernatural potency. The understanding of Bushman beliefs enhanced by neuropsychological research into trance states has made the connection between the neurological and the spiritual significance of patterns, grids, zigzags, lines, u-shapes and filigrees, aspects clearly visible in the works of Halima Cassell.

"In the first stage of altered consciousness, the people "see" entopic phenomena, or entopics. These are luminous geometric shapes that include zigzags, chevrons, dots, grids, vortexes and nested U-shapes. All these percepts are experienced as incandescent, shimmering, moving and sometimes enlarging patterns. They also grade into one another and combine in a bewildering way. Because they derive from the actual structure of the nervous system, all people who enter a certain state of consciousness, no matter what their cultural background, will be liable to perceive them.

"Images of Power. Understanding Bushman Rock Art" David Lewis-Williams/Thomas Dowson. Southern Book Publishers. 1989.

And so there is a trans-cultural and timeless quality to Halima's work. It exists in a changeless zone connected it seems to a global architecture of deep templates of human consciousness. From the prehistoric carvings scattered over the moor-tops of Northern England, Scotland and Ireland are hundreds of prehistoric carvings - strange apparently abstract curves, circles, branching lines and hollows. Specific meanings have never truly been found for these patterns but then they do not have to reveal to us the logic of their forms, they remain as evidence of an architecture of the soul, a spiritual crafting which reaches out to our deepest aspects all these many years later.

Artist's Statement:

"Combining geometric elements with strong, recurrent patterns and architectural principles, my work utilises definite lines and dramatic angles in an attempt to manifest the universal language of number and create an unsettling sense of movement.

This particular approach is the culmination of influences drawn from two university projects: the recurrent use of pattern in African Art and the architecture and spirituality associated with Islamic Art.

I make and then carve my pieces by hand using heavily grogged clay which allows me to work on a large scale and use relatively thick surfaces to carve to the desired depth. Whatever piece I create the form remains simple in order to maximise the impact of its complex surface pattern combined with strongly contrasting contours."

Halima Cassell.

Sacred Geometry then can be said to be the blueprint of Creation and the genesis of all form, an ancient science that explores and explains the energy patterns that create and unify all things and reveals the precise way that the energy of Creation organizes itself. On every scale, every natural pattern of growth or movement conforms inevitably to one or more geometric shapes. This energy is what moves us in and out

Halima Cassell, *Tsunami* (detail), unglazed clay, 30cms D, 2004



of life, it is what spirit is and is the moving aspect of all things. It is dwelling in all things and is understood and attuned by Halima Cassell and transformed into the formal arrangements of her work.

"Both the contemplation of and the creative skill in making patterns lead in their own way to an understanding of the perfections of Universal Nature as it moves the elements. Islamic pattern, unique as an art form, is also unitary in its aim and function. Symbols can exhaust verbal explanation but verbal explanation can in no way exhaust symbols -and the symbols inherent in Islamic pattern and geometry are directed towards that undifferentiated unity".

http://www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/march02_index.php?l=3

As you enter the world of Sacred Geometry, Islamic design or the ancient carvings of the Celts you begin to see as never before the wonderfully patterned beauty of Creation. The molecules of our DNA, the cornea of our eye, snow flakes, pine cones, flower petals, diamond crystals, the branching of trees, a nautilus shell, the star we spin around, the galaxy we spiral within, the air we breathe, and all life forms as we know them emerge out of timeless geometric codes. Viewing and contemplating these codes allow us to gaze directly at the lines on the face of deep wisdom and offers up a glimpse into the inner workings of the Universal Mind and the Universe itself.

"When people look at my work they will see my forms materialising and coalescing into concrete tangible planes and facets. They may glimpse the deepest recesses of my creative consciousness and subconscious which is the muse that drives me to strive for newer more challenging aspects of my art".

Halima Cassell

The ancients believed that the experience of Sacred Geometry was essential to the education of the soul. They knew that these patterns and codes were symbolic of our own inner realm and the subtle structure of awareness. To them the "sacred" had particular significance involving consciousness and the profound mystery of awareness the ultimate sacred wonder. Sacred Geometry takes on another whole level of significance when grounded in the experience of self-awareness and slowly but surely moves us to self realisation of our relationship with all things including our bodies,



Halima Cassell,
Harlequin Shifts (detail),
unglazed clay, 30cms D,
2005

environment, spiritual lives.

Process and methodology:

"In my early work I was exploring the boundaries my new found modus operandi which was infused with Islamic influences drawn from heavily carved architecture which led me into looking at other examples of intricately carved and constructed buildings from all around the world, as well as the repetitive motifs of pattern derived from the influences of African surface design.

My recent work has been influenced by the structures of contemporary and past building styles, looking at how the internal space and structure expresses itself and is articulated on the external surface envelop."

Halima Cassell

There is an "alchemy of ceramics" in the astonishing transformation from raw clay to fired pottery. In itself there is the essential connection with earth, the stuff of which we all derive.

Halima Cassell,
Harlequinn Shifts (detail),
 unglazed clay, 30cms D,
 2005



"In my work I use heavily grogged clay which allows me to work on a large scale and utilise relatively thick surfaces to carve to my desired depth. I also concentrate on simple forms as the basis of my work in order to maximise the impact of the complex surface pattern combining with heavily contrasting contours.

In the making of my work I go through different processes, each requiring a different mindset. Firstly I start off by hand-building, and/or using a "former" to create the basis of a shape for my construction. The second process involves exploring numerous possible design outcomes. At this stage I shut out all external stimuli, this allows my mind to run free. I don't permit myself to think about the inherent technical problems which might occur at the construction stage as this might affect my freedom within the creative design process.

The third stage involves working out the mathematics of the pattern and the surface area of the form, so that they work harmoniously and accurately together. Finally, when the clay is at the right consistency (in between leather-hard and stone dry), I intuitively work out which way to carve each section of the design. Subsequently, this informs the remaining pattern on paper. Each piece takes approximately eighty hours or more, depending on the size and complexity of pattern. The work is slowly dried over several weeks to ensure a steady drying process. The pieces are fired up at variable temperatures depending on the clay body."

Halima Cassell

Halima lets the clay speak through her. It speaks without cosmetic application in its raw and essential state. She allows her structures to speak to us with the interplay of light and angle of view unencumbered by surface they offer us an unstained, virginal and sensitive experience of earth.

"The hue of the clay body is crucial because I rarely use glazes, I solely rely on the piece itself to dramatise the tones and textures through the effects of light, shadow and rain"

Halima Cassell

The Wounded Healer:

There is something of the "wounded healer" within Halima Cassell and her work. Working with her as I did on a major project with women patients in a secure hospital I saw the place of healing in her own life and work. Working for a while as a Social Worker with the mentally ill she re-emerged as an artist but still carrying the ethos of the healer with her. Her capacity for empathy and love for others shone through in her relationships with the women patients all of whom were severely damaged by the deep traumas of their lives. Halima brought an empathy and compassion to her work with the women who were truly the "un-forgiven" of society. The work they did with her touched upon subtler levels of their own inner worlds bringing a deeper engagement with the beauty within them. The drawings, poetry and sculptures flowed out of them all like the rain that nourishes the land, only the nourishment here was of the human soul.

Born in a small village in Pakistan and brought up in Manchester, one of a family of seven, she lost both her parents when she was twelve and was in care until she was sixteen.

This moving and compassionate aspect of Halima Cassell is also within her work. The beauty of pattern and structure gives order to chaos. The chaos of human insecurity and loss, the chaos of mental illness and fracture. Halima in her



Halima Cassell, *Pyrogyro* (detail), unglazed clay, 30cms D, 2005

work and her life as an artist manifests a beauty, an order to counter the manic randomness of psychosis of brokenness.

African poet and novelist Ben Okri states:

"Only those who have lived, suffered, thought deeply, loved profoundly, known joy and the tragic penumbra of things tell truly wonderful stories. When we have made an experience or a chaos into a story we have transformed it, transmuted experience, domesticated the chaos."

The Narrative:

Although Halima Cassell's work can be described as formally abstract there is still a case to describe all created human form as a narrative, a manifestation of human thought making sense of humanity by mapping the journeys of our lives charting our relationship with the world. This is evident in all art of significance as it is the true purpose of art to transform, to move us to a new place, a place of depth and wisdom. Knowledge has always been-sought through various means of inducing a deeper vision. In my adage that "creativity is the immune system of the mind and the source of the mythic" I refer to the innate capacity of creativity to heal, to illuminate and to reveal and that this capacity is the gift within us all given the conditions in which this "sacred process" may prosper. For some though it is an instinctive compulsion a driving force, as Kandinsky stated in "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" there is in the true artist a compulsion to make art from an "inner necessity".

Halima Cassell makes art from an "Inner Necessity"!

"Soul receives from soul that knowledge, therefore not by book

nor from tongue.

If knowledge of mysteries come after emptiness of mind, that is illumination of heart".

Rumi.

"Cassell's creations are especially effective when exhibited together. Each one seems to swell into the space around it and resonate, like a musical instrument, with its neighbors. They resonate on an intriguing visceral scale with fragmentary products of consciousness, memory and imagination. Fragments, orchestrated in opposition and dialogue, at the same time individual and cultural, personal and universal, primordial and contemporary, spun, folded and teased into a whole within each work. Cassell is constantly amazed at the enormous variety of responses to her works that she receives from visitors to her exhibitions. Yet this diversity is a function of the remarkable accessibility and humanity of her creations, because each person who views them is able to see, reflected in their sublime yet indefinable structures, the emerging products of their own mental processes".

Zachary Kingdon, Curator of the African Collections with National Museums Liverpool.

"My perfect day has to be a fusion of satisfying hours spent forming and shaping the solid earth whilst at the same time absorbing music that feeds my soul and at a deeper level drives my creativity by placing my level of consciousness in a receptive place for ideas and processes to flow unhindered."

Halima Cassell

And I am indicating here that the dream inspired, Islamic and universally motivated geometry of Halima Cassell is about connectedness, is about a deep and profound reference to the stuff of which we all originate. As Albert Einstein said "God does not play dice with the universe." and so we

Halima Cassell, Coliseum (detail), 45cms D, 2002

can but humbly discern the patterns of creation through vision and insight and allow it manifest in the work of the artist for the benefit of all. To share in this vision is a privilege and a joy and I am sure that this work, wrought by Halima will contribute to the insight we all struggle towards in so many diverse ways.

"Where does her pre-occupation with carved form spring from? What are the roots of her fascination with carved space? This all embracing obsession of bringing into being the poetry of faceted forms, the displacement of air with something special that once wasn't there...or was it? Are her creations all around her? In her head, under her bed? Buried in layers of forgotten history, like sub-cutaneous memories waiting to be plumbed, like the ocean deeps do they float in darkness waiting to be revealed by the light. She carves out parts of her history, an exorcism of thought forms, a compulsion to make manifest the intangible, transmuting it into something hard and permanent. Like life everything begins with the energy of a thought. Her forms are energetic expressions of her psyche linking two continents, two cultures, like left and right hemispheres of the brain; logic and reason married to irrationality. Like slightly shifting sands her work refuses to stand still, like the dynamism of a time warp where normal paradigms are swallowed up in time and space beyond our comprehension. She wants her work to be on the edge of reason yet speaking with an eloquence that is understood by the universal consciousness, altered states yet accessible tectonic plates in dialogue, setting up tensions, lines of force, the "Lay Lines" of her world made visible within the forms and folds of the beloved earth. I want you to sense her love of form and surface, sense her delight in clay and creativity and walk away with wonder".

David Lindsey- Coggins, Artist/Writer in conversation with
Halima Cassell

"Poor copies out of heaven's originals,
Pale earthly pictures moldering to decay,
What care although your beauties break and
fall,
When that which gave them life endures for
aye?"
Rumi.

