



Sometimes, when a person experiences trauma, the human mind copes by reconstructing events, subtly altering details with each remembering. Thus memory is less a storage unit and more like a jigsaw puzzle, where the pieces get reshuffled with every press of the rewind button.



James Seet, in his solo show *Memories*, strides the thin line between memory as both a reconstructive and creative force, exploring the blurred edges and modularity of recollection. For James, memory is "very vivid", likely owing to an uncanny talent for recalling events and their details with unerring clarity – he has memories stretching all the way back to his childhood, a quality that is retained in the lucidity of his pieces. *Memories* is his first solo exhibition in his native Malaysia, and showcases new and old artwork.

Clay is James's primary artistic medium. As a material, clay has charted the rise and fall of empires, provided the literal foundations for human industry thanks to its countless uses for farming, construction and art. In ancient clay tablets and pottery, humans have recorded knowledge of ourselves, what came before and what might come to be. Despite its fragility, ceramics are somehow synonymous with posterity.

Throughout his work, James has explored the power of clay as a kind of recollective material. He frequently refers back to clay's ability to "remember" its very origins in motion, fire and moulding. The artworks *Memories 1-4* clearly exemplify this theory; the structures' clay orbs, lusciously shaped by hand, are joined together into silhouettes that recall the physicality of synapses. Every so often, you'll encounter sharp breakages in the clay, reminders of a throwing wheel spinning too fast, a memory of motion made physical.

The surprising breakages in the dreamy structures of *Memories 1-4* reveal a spontaneity that underlies James's work, and expands the definition of memory to include its persistent mutability. It's hard to overestimate just how unpredictable clay can be: firing a piece of work could reveal the irreparable brokenness of a piece just as easily as it could solidify its shape. There is something radically unknowable – and therefore, something exciting – about how this art will react under pressure.

James's remarkable talent for visualisation unites the entirety of his portfolio. The free-flowing nature of his art practice never yields to chaos, and instead his works seem to emerge wholly formed from his mind, Athena-like, resulting in pieces that have an organic quality to them. The "sea-urchin" pieces that comprise the *Memory 1-48* feature a tightly controlled randomness, especially in their intricate detailing inspired by starfish and jellyfish. There is no sense of replication here, only an individual spirit coming alive.

With *Memories*, the artist brings to bear a taste of his many explorations into how the mind, and specifically the memory, can manifest itself in the real world, without losing its natural drama and whimsy. Clay takes on the shape it's given, but it can also be unpredictable, fragile, and wholly individual.

**James Seet** (b. 1970) is a Kuala Lumpur-based ceramics artist. As part of his artistic practice, James produces elaborate and whimsical ceramic sculptures that play with ideas of the fantastical, the dramatic and the theatrical, without eschewing an intimacy that underlies all his works. Clay making has been central to James's work since childhood, when he began dabbling with air-dry paper clay sculptures. He began his education in ceramics by working with local and international potters, including Yeow Seng Cheah, Margaret Fenn, and Australian lustreware specialist, Neil Boughton.

Alongside his artistic practice, James currently serves as an associate creative director with an international ad agency. His experience in advertising has been crucial to his artistic practice by providing invaluable experience on creating art on a commercial level, which has formed the foundation of his more conceptual work.

James's work has been widely featured abroad, in Southeast Asia and beyond. He has participated in several exhibitions abroad, including the first Southeast Asian Ceramic Festival (Philippines, 2009), the 2nd Southeast Asia Ceramic Conference (China, 2012), and the 2015 Kohler Bold. Art. Exhibition. He has been a guest artist at Canada's Medicine Hat cultural exchange programme (2013), and has also shown work in the Workhouse Gallery in Washington D.C., U.S.A. (2014). At home, James has been involved in a number of public art installation projects, including exhibits in partnership with Malaysia's Women's Aid Organisation (WAO).

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Text by Samantha Cheh