

Artroversion: Crafting Rest Through Creation: Interview with Alexander Clinthorne, MFA

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Abstract: *The article presents an analysis of a semi-structured qualitative interview with ceramic sculptor and community college faculty member Alexander Clinthorne. He introduces artroversion, a somatic practice of rejuvenation cultivated through meaningful creation. Clinthorne explains how working with clay fosters somatic intimacy, patience, focus, and tactile engagement, enabling embodied ways of knowing through the creative process. Drawing on these insights, the article situates artroversion within somaesthetic practice for rejuvenation and self-connection. The discussion concludes by outlining strategies Clinthorne offers for artists seeking to restore creative vitality through artroverted engagement.*

Keywords: *artroversion, somaesthetics, art, ceramics, clay, aesthetics, aesthetic experience, embodied practice, creative process, artistic intuition*

Following a two-hour interview in the artist's classroom studio, it became evident that defining an embodied concept like artroversion required ongoing collaborative analysis. Alexander Clinthorne, MFA, is a ceramic artist and community college studio art faculty. He primarily works in detailed pieces with delicate materials, requiring careful and controlled manipulation. Through this artistic journey, he encountered limitations that prompted a revision of his approach; an evolution that led him to discover artroversion.

Artroversion is a somatic practice cultivated through meaningful creation, which the artist experiences as inseparable from beauty. It emerges through tactile engagement and reflective making, supporting creative rejuvenation and self-connection, while cultivating patience, intimacy with an artistic medium, and engagement with oneself. Building on Shusterman's (1999; 2018) definition of somaesthetics as a "critical and ameliorative approach that focuses on the experience and use of the soma" (p. 302), the article situates artroversion within somaesthetics to illustrate how artist-generated concepts can advance both studio and practice practices.

The research method employed a semi-structured face-to-face interview, recorded via Zoom for transcription. The transcript underwent collaborative revision by the artist and principal investigator (PI) to ensure accuracy and readability while preserving the tone of the dialogue. The transcript was then independently reviewed, annotated, and coded using Microsoft Word and the open-source software Taguette. Recurring codes such as "making_detachment" and "patience" guided thematic clustering and informed the selection of quoted material.

These thematic clusters shaped the analytic structure of the article, particularly the description of the process of artroversion. The artist authored the section detailing this process, while the PI wrote the introduction and conclusion, linking the interview insights to scholarly discourse. The full manuscript underwent joint proofreading to ensure coherence. Selected excerpts are integrated with analytic commentary; the complete transcript is available through Figshare¹.

Artroversion: Crafting Rest Through Creation

What is the strange sensation of watching a movie in the theater during the day, only to be surprised that the sun is still out afterward? There is a momentary disconnect from one's sense of place in time; in other words, one is displaced from a personal timeline. When this disconnect occurs, one might have an experience of timelessness. Moments of timelessness are mundanely referred to as "feeling in the moment", but feeling present goes further than simply placing one's pin between the past and future. This principle also applies in the creation of art and connecting with one's soma.

The sense of timelessness that results when present is a somatic sense of an expansion of space around one's body; time does not slow; it becomes less influential in the experience of moment-to-moment awareness. It is in this interval of timelessness that one can find a new understanding of the word '*patience*'.

When discussing the topic of patience, it is common to meet the word with resistance. This could be from childhood experiences of our parents or teachers urging us to "just be patient!" Perhaps what was meant was, "just wait nicely!"

At first glance, being patient sounds like an arduous task, a feat of mental gymnastics. But patience is really an opportunity to rest. Patience can encompass the feeling of having all the time in the world to accomplish something. A lack of patience can manifest as the feeling of continuously leaning forward into the next moment or an unyielding drive for productivity and efficiency. The push to make the most out of one's time, because 'time is money,' motivates many but can be harmful to the natural development of an artist's body of work.

One essential part of learning to improve as an artist is considering the artist themselves. Many artists hit plateaus of development, but sometimes it can seem that an artist has come to the end of the road of their creativity. After several years of living as a frustrated maker, Clinthorne noticed that he was not improving as an artist and felt like he had hit the wall of his own creative potential. Creating no longer brought him joy. Making art became tedious and exhausting.

"I wasn't getting any better. You know, I kind of hit a spot where I felt like I was my own limitation. I make the same things, and maybe they technically get better and more impressive, but it wasn't really changing in the ways that I want. I wasn't growing in the ways that I wanted to grow. And I think I had to learn to be patient. And that's what changed me. A lot was learning a sense of patience." [12:39:59]

Perhaps many artists experience frustration with their own creative output, and like many, Clinthorne might have stopped sculpting if not for an experience he had in a bathtub. During a residency abroad, he lived unknowingly with stage-four cancer. The progression of the disease forced his body to slow down, and he spent several hours each day immersed in the bathtub. Despite the challenges it brought, it found the experience of this ritual to be enjoyable as,

¹ Graves, Kei (2025). Appendix_Interview Guide and Adapted Transcript. Figshare. Dataset. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.30677678>

“[I]t was, like, complete peace, and I hadn’t really understood it at the time, and I spent several years trying to understand what that was … sitting in the bathtub for a long time, feeling very tired, and not knowing—still enjoying making art, but not knowing what’s next.” [12:39:59]

These intentional moments offered a respite that allowed him to sit with his thoughts silently until time seemed to slow. As he disconnected from his usual thought patterns, he found space for patience. Shusterman (2018) claims that a goal of somaesthetics is to advance knowledge, both in learning and self-discovery (p. 11). Clinthorne’s developed awareness of patience exemplifies this claim as the embrace of timeless presence enabled him to refashion his own creative process. In this sense, patience becomes not only restorative but epistemic, a form of knowledge-making that emerges through the soma. Reflecting on this period, he notes,

“It did feel like something was ending, or like life can’t go on like this. I think my body kind of deeply knew that it was dying. And there’s something resisting, of course, but then there’s something also very peaceful.” [14:06:07]

This moment illustrates how a bodily encounter with the space between life and death catalyzes a profound shift in perception and creative engagement.

The value of patience is not only evident in extreme circumstances. Disconnecting from the drive to be efficient with one’s time can open space for small, everyday experiences of presence. Many people recognize this feeling through activities such as waking from a nap and watching dust motes drift through the air, leaving a theater at midday to find the sun still shining, or lingering after finishing a captivating book before returning to daily responsibilities. These ordinary moments echo the same somatic attentiveness that artroversion cultivates, allowing the body and mind to inhabit the present more fully.

This perspective shift can also be reminiscent of the overview effect, the sensation often described during space flight when one observes the vastness of the universe and the unyielding flow of time (Kluger, 2021). While few of us will experience space travel, we may encounter similar moments when we are reminded of the wide world existing beyond our personal stories and aspirations.

Awareness of one’s mortality can produce a related shift. When the future feels uncertain, thoughts of later outcomes lose authority over direct experience. Clinthorne reflects,

“If you were gonna die, would you care about the piece you’re gonna make, how it’s gonna look later? There’s this huge letting go, at least for me, when I was dying, it was like thing after thing after thing, I was letting go of, and every time I let go of something, I felt so much better…It always feels better, you know, when you’re able to accept that.” [14:06:07]

This openness is essential for rest. When one allows events to unfold without forcing outcomes, it becomes possible to fully engage in the creative process. “Beauty is not what happens,” Clinthorne notes, “the beauty is the meaning that comes from what’s happening. And art making, for me, is a chance to play out this scenario of resting while I do stuff.” [14:06:07]

It is the shifting of perspective that releases one from the pressures of time, allowing a sense of timelessness to emerge, which is central to cultivating patience. Tarvainen (2023) emphasizes that “[t]o understand human embodiment and related well-being, we need to grasp our corporeal situationality in a specific time, place, and socio-cultural setting — and identify the myriad dynamic factors that relationally influence us” (109). For Clinthorne, attending to

these elements was essential to forging a deeper somatic connection and overcoming the factors that had previously held back his creative progression.

Learning to take one's time and follow one's curiosity, letting go of time lost through mistakes, and approaching art lightheartedly are all supported by this type of patience. There is also an important somatic element that is supported by establishing timeless patience. When an artist can slow down to a pace not subject to time pressure, one can minutely direct every touch of the clay, finish each small part of a whole before moving on, and allow the work to be incomplete for as long as necessary. There is also space for enjoying each step of the process. There is something physically pleasurable about interacting with most artistic mediums. Clinthorne indirectly found his path to improvement not by practice or study, but by learning to find joy in every pinch of the clay.

If patience prepared the ground for Clinthorne's rejuvenation, intimacy with the medium provided the somatic practice through which artroversion emerged.

Somaesthetic experiences may serve as a throughline that connects brief moments of artroversion to create a more unifying, intimate moment throughout the practitioner's life. Once Clinthorne learned to momentarily disconnect from his placement in his personal timeline, art making became unhurried. He had the realization that to pinch clay is not simply just to bring one's fingers together around the clay, but it is to carefully guide each minute portion of a sculpture to exactly where it needs to be. Once he slowed down, he learned that a pinch could happen in many directions; it can happen between the fingertips or between the pads of the fingers. It can be a pull, a slide, a twist, or a compressive push. The impact of subtleties like the level of moisture of his fingertips also becomes evident when working at a pace detached from a sense of time.

It is common for artists to use a spray bottle to drench a raw clay artwork in mist to prevent drying. This approach is fast, but it distributes water unevenly, water slides off thin exposed pieces that need moisture, and pools in crevices, causing cracks. While working slowly, rather than using a spray bottle, taking the time to pause, moisten a fingertip before touching a tiny porcelain flower petal's edge is an obvious solution to manage clay dryness and cracking. To focus on the form of just a small part of a sculpture while gently meeting it with an attuned fingertip directs the focus from the sculpture to each tiny act of applying moisture and pressure; there is a sense of fingertip dance about it, like fingertip *Taiji*²! The practice allows the artist to inhabit each delicate movement fully, building patience and attentiveness that extend beyond the sculpture to the practice of artroversion.

When I'm working on [something] each touch requires more than a pinch. You know, when my students are pinching, they when they start, they pinch the clay like this, and it goes out. But when you get better at pinching, you control each little movement of every single pinch. And with porcelain, it'll crack if you touch it the wrong way....It's really about each instant, and I don't want to say it's instantaneous, because that's the wrong word, but it's instant-focused making, something like intuition. I'm not thinking about putting it together until each little piece is perfect. That would be the deeper somatic pieces. It's a natural absorption, since we're maybe using that language over concentration [13:31:38].

There is a deep level of somatic intimacy involved in the sculpting of clay, one that binds bodily knowledge to material engagement. As Sheets-Johnstone (2012) emphasizes, craft depends on a corporeal, nonlinguistic dialogue with the material, a dialogue guided by proprioceptive

² I use the pinyin "Tàiji" rather than the anglicized "Taichi" to emphasize the practice's philosophical and somatic dimensions and to honor the tonal integrity of the original language.

and kinaesthetic awareness or knowledge that is lived through the body rather than abstracted from it. Clinthorne's practice embodies this intimacy in his attention to the smallest gestures: moistening a porcelain petal with his fingertip rather than spraying the entire sculpture. The smoothness of Frost porcelain intensifies this sensation by amplifying the sensory pleasure of each touch. In such moments, the clay becomes not only a medium for creation but also a mirror that reflects the artist's own somatic awareness back to him.

"I'm experiencing only what my fingertips experience. [It's] this moment that I can let everything else go for a while— [homeowner, husband, father responsibilities...] The distraction of what this final thing might be can inhibit our Artroversion. There's no masterpiece waiting to be completed here. What I'm left with after the art-making experience is a record of that wholeheartedness. It's like a memory of that very focused, embodied engagement. Eventually, we kind of get disconnected from ourselves, and this is about connection to the physical body, which doesn't get much attention these days [i.e., because it's over-emphasized in media].” [13:19:15]

In this intimate setting, the experience no longer becomes about completing an artwork; it becomes about the pleasurable act of leaving time pressure behind, fully engaging with a medium, slowly bringing beauty to life, and finding rejuvenation in the process. The rejuvenation of artroversion happens when one steps out of one's personal timeline to meet beauty, pinch by pinch, or one brush stroke at a time. Antal (2018) described this level of engagement within photography as a brief moment; this idea can extend to clay and to Clinthorne's ritual practices for artroversion. In this way, brief moments connect from one to the next as a unifying collection of somaesthetic experiences.

Together, these individual moments of engagement reflect the innate human need to rest and restore energy. The term artroversion was coined by Clinthorne when he officially recognized it happening in his own life. He noted:

I've realized that once my family was asleep, I still had some kind of need. And I felt compelled to go sit on the kitchen floor and have this physical experience that felt very personal, and like I said before, it's very sensual and draws you in.

And it's also this sense of building a greater whole, little by little. There's something really exciting about that kind of growth. That happens so incrementally and slowly. [12:49:06]

Clinthorne describes a need felt by many at the conclusion of a long day, the desire for rejuvenation. While some perspectives in the social conversation tend to linger around the extrovert-introvert binary or perhaps the more likely but less discussed ambivert, Clinthorne found in his experience that the term 'artrovert' resonated with others.

I noticed that it really resonated with students, and when I brought it up at a faculty meeting. I noticed it resonated with other faculty members, too, which is interesting, and it resonated with faculty members that were in professions [outside of the arts]. But why would it resonate with somebody who's an auto mechanic, right?

I think there's this sense of [somatic engagement], where you get really absorbed into what you're doing. That's a big component of it, where we're so drawn in different directions all day long. Attention is said to be our most valuable resource. So, everyone's trying to get it

from you when you have that opportunity, just to say, “this is the most important thing to me right now, be able to put everything else down.” [12:54:38]

Beyond these possibilities, the idea of somatic engagement may afford individuals who are otherwise struggling with finding moments of intentionality and the space to find what they deem ‘beautiful’.

I think sometimes we don’t recognize what we find beautiful, because we’re so distracted, and we’ve got so many obligations, so much is going on. So many people are trying to get our attention, and there’s a lot of beauty out there. A lot of beauty to be distracted by, right? So, I think we can really connect to what we find is beautiful, and we can make space for ourselves to have that moment. [12:57:30]

Intention, Clinthorne says, can be a key factor in creating the right opportunities for artroversion to occur. By this, he means that an individual is making time for themselves, making something purely for the sake of engaging in the human experience of making art, or making something beautiful, as opposed to for someone else, for work, or another purpose. He affirms that this differs from art therapy, wherein the purpose is to process an emotion or experience. Instead, artroversion provides an opportunity to redirect attention, allowing individuals to engage fully with what they find beautiful.

To create the right circumstances for artroversion to occur, practitioners must ensure they strive to create a sense of timelessness through patience, allowing for the creative process to follow its natural timeline. Clinthorne describes this as “slowing down to the pace that things actually require rather than seeking shortcuts.” In ceramics, following this timeline ensures pieces are not broken, cracked, or malformed. For artroverts, they will find that this allows them to organically seek the beauty of their chosen mediums. In this, patience, or as Clinthorne defines it, the “denial of a natural timeline,” is required. Additionally, in this process, expectations are reduced, and the focus shifts to somatic engagement with the medium itself.

It changes the perspective from something being about that final product, [like] my first approach to artmaking was, and now it’s just about enjoying what happens with each little moment that I’m working on something, not knowing exactly what’s going to happen afterwards, but just getting absorbed into each single pinch of the clay. It’s the difference between playing music for recording and playing music just to get lost in the melody. [12:38:30]

To help support patience, focus, and well-being during artroversion, Clinthorne developed several acrostics that he repeats like a mantra while making work. One such practice is BEDROCK:

B - Breathe:

Focus the mind’s attention on the inhalation and exhalation of breathing. Fully invest awareness in breathing and become the breath. What is enjoyable in breathing?

E - Embody:

Direct awareness of the feeling of having a body. Fully experience bodily sensations and bodily containment. How is this body?

D - Drop in:

Bring attention to the current moment. Sense the pace of the moment. Be as wakeful as the mind will allow. What sensations arise and pass?

R - Release:

Let go of any striving from within or pushing from without. What can be let go of?

O - Open:

What is causing stress? Identify anxieties and attempt to open to the possibility of things not going as planned. Welcome the unfolding of what we cannot control.

C - Compose:

Find a posture that demonstrates comfort and capability. Compose action with the intentionality of a conductor. What could use refinement?

K - Kind:

Create an atmosphere of kindness within and without. The intention for kindness can be a place to return to when feeling lost or anxious.

By internalizing practices like BEDROCK, artroverts cultivate the conditions for patience, attentiveness, and somatic engagement, allowing each moment of creation to become a site of rejuvenation and embodied knowledge.

Conclusion

Clinthorne's artroversion models rest, rejuvenation, and embodied presence through the creative process. By embracing patience, artists inhabit each moment fully, engaging in sustained dialogue with the medium, the soma, and what they find meaningful or beautiful. Through these incremental, somatic interactions, creation shifts from producing a final product to cultivating embodied knowledge and personal insight.

Beyond the studio, artroversion provides a framework for intentional somatic engagement, guiding creatives into a natural rhythm of patience and revealing what truly matters in the use of time. Clinthorne's practice enriches somaesthetic understanding and challenges the binary introvert-extrovert notion of restoration. Artroversion invites artists and non-artists alike to reclaim attention, bodily presence, and time often lost to efficiency-driven culture, offering a tangible way to engage fully with life through the deliberate act of making.

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