

# BIOGRAPHY

Leandra Brandson is a ceramic artist, art instructor, and technician currently situated in Medicine Hat, AB. Brandson graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with Honours in 2021 from the University of Manitoba.

Brandson's works bridge themes of self-representation, queer identity, veneration, and environmentalism. Brandson creates works compartmentally, building in sections to allow for precise fine-tuning. Creating and altering replicas of real-world objects, Brandson builds layered narratives that bridge themes of grief and self-exploration through clay.

Prior to graduation, Brandson was awarded a residency at Medalta in the Historic Clay District, which has acted as a catalyst for her development as an artist. During her time in residence, Brandson facilitated workshops and worked as a production potter in the historic museum. Brandson's time at Medalta culminated in a solo exhibition, titled *She's Here Too*. After the completion of her residency, Brandson travelled between Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba to participate in the summer market season. In late 2022, Brandson relocated to Halifax, Nova Scotia to become a technician, instructor, and event coordinator for various institutions across the province.

Brandson currently lives and works in Medicine Hat, AB, where she is a recurring artist in residence at Medalta in the Historic Clay District, independent consultant, and workshop instructor.

This publication accompanies the exhibition, "Blood From a Stone", presented at the Estevan Art Gallery & Museum, from June 13<sup>th</sup> - Aug 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025

Cover Image: "Hand Vase", 2022,  
Oxidation electric fired ceramic,  
Leandra Brandson

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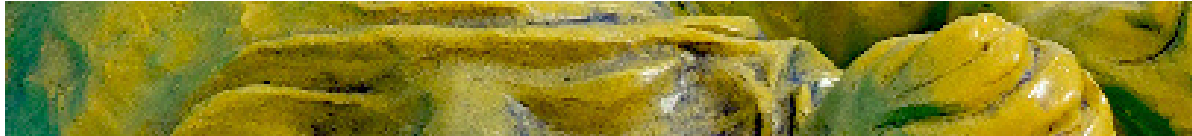


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## BLOOD FROM A STONE

Leandra Brandson

June 13<sup>th</sup> - Aug 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025



## AN INTERVIEW WITH *LEANDRA BRANDSON*

### **Q) What is this exhibition about?**

Blood from a Stone explores survival, grief, and queer embodiment through a series of dark, gritty, and whimsical ceramic sculptures. The work was made during a period of personal reckoning with gender and identity, filtered through irony, symbolism, and medieval visual language. The pieces are offerings, absurdist monuments to moments of suffering, hardship, and overcoming.

### **Q) “Blood from a Stone” is an interesting concept, what does it mean to draw blood from a stone to you?**

The phrase itself is about futility, a person perpetually struggling with an impossible task. There’s also something sacred or stubborn about the attempt. There’s the saying that “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results,” I’m of the opinion that, once the expectation component is removed, it is symbolic of resilience. It is the human condition to try, over and over, knowing full well you are likely to fail. In my case specifically, it is a metaphor for processing difficult emotions through repetition, ritual, and artistic labour. Even if you know something can’t be resolved, there’s meaning in showing up to try.

### **Q) Can you speak about how your experience of detransitioning influenced your relationship to your body and how that relationship is reflected in your sculptures?**

Yes! While the work doesn’t explicitly depict my body or transition/detransition, that history is embedded in the sculptural language, fragmentation, mismatched components and disjointed forms. “The Hand that Feeds Snarling Dogs” is the closest to a direct self-portrait. The body is lain on the floor, twisting and biting as it moves between an arm and a dog’s head. It is based around transmogrification, and animalism, desperately trying to remove itself from its own skin. I spent many years feeling at unease in my own body, and this exemplifies that feeling. My experience made me more attuned to how identity can be very fluid. The body can feel like a site of grief, survival, and invention all at once. These pieces speak to that: not as direct portraits, but stand-ins for self-portraiture.

### **Q) You mentioned creating these works during a transformative period after university. How did art-making support or parallel your personal transformation?**

Art-making was an anchor for me when everything else felt unstable. Ceramic construction has strict rules, timelines, and generally requires a lot of commitment to see completed. After graduating, I was moving constantly and questioning a lot of things about myself. Working in clay, because of how process and technique oriented the medium is, helped me by providing an escape. The physicality of sculpture gave me a way to metabolize what I was feeling into something tangible, even when I didn’t have the words for it.

### **Q) What emotions or questions were the most difficult to confront in the studio, and which ones offered clarity or relief?**

Grief, by far. There’s a lot of loss within and around this work. Over the duration of constructing this body of work, I experienced the deaths of people who were close to me. Being from Manitoba, and living between Alberta and Nova Scotia at the time, I was rarely allowed time to confront and process grief, and I was often horribly alone when I could. It’s tricky to hold space for sorrow while still making something that doesn’t feel self-indulgent. I take solace in moments of humour and absurdity, sculpting snarling dogs and cinder blocks helped balance the tone.

### **Q) You describe some of the figurative components of these sculptures as larger-than-life reconstructions of yourself. What does physical or conceptual scale allow you to express that a smaller or more literal representation wouldn’t?**

I once had a professor who said “If you can’t do anything important, the least you can do is make it larger, people will be impressed.”

Working at this scale is one part twisting an insult, and the other a technical pursuit. Larger-scale sculpture is, quite frankly, a pain to work with, a pain to store, and a pain to move, but it allows for distinctive layering. Small can feel precious or private, but something bigger makes you reckon with it in a bodily way, you have to move about it.

### **Q) How do your works function as both a personal embodiment and a broader representation of 2SLGBTQIA+ experiences?**

While these works are deeply personal, they touch on broader themes of disidentification, survival, chosen family, and absurd resilience. These are a constant in my life as a queer woman. The combination of humour, pain, and tenderness in the work reflects shared emotional landscapes many queer people have to navigate.

### **Q) What does it mean to you to use your body as both subject and symbol in your art?**

I use stand-ins for the body, such as open jaws, animal forms, and segmented limbs, rather than direct representation. These symbols become extensions of my physical or emotional experience. They let me speak to embodiment in a way that feels indirect but still deeply personal. My body is there in the gestures and the marks, even when it’s not literally depicted.

### **Q) What kinds of conversations have your sculptures sparked, especially around coming of age, gender, and queerness?**

The response has been fairly supportive. I find the people within my circles relate to the feelings expressed in the work, despite not having the exact same experience as myself. The work itself is based reactively on conversations over the course of several years, and I really don’t have one exclusive answer to a question like this. It can be a simple description of how someone’s day went, and how that made me feel, or it is the result of a knee-jerk response I had to a strange idiom. Much of ceramic itself is about technicality, and often the conversation when viewing the work is more a quick reaction of care and support, or a technical question about salt and soda firing.

### **Q) Can you walk us through your sculpting process, from conception to firing to final surface treatment?**

I have a mixed process, some works I jump in, and others are preconceived long before they are completed. For example, I made several bear traps prior to the one on display here, but the cormorant was started and finished on a whim within the day.

Generally speaking, I construct the form over a period of a few weeks. They have internal supports to stop them from falling in on themselves while constructing, as clay becomes more brittle the more you work with it. The work is then dried over a period of up to a month, and fired to a lower temperature called a bisque. This sets the clay so that it doesn’t dissolve while glazing. It is then coated in a mix of colourants, metals, and silica (glass) as part of “glazing”.

The work is loaded into my chosen kiln and I fire it to a complete temperature.

Depending on the firing environment, the surface of the work can change dramatically. Ceramists work at such high temperatures, and differing ranges can burn out certain colour expressions. My favourite by far is soda firing, which was discovered fairly recently as far as ceramics is concerned. Work is coated in a soda mix as it volatilizes in the heat of the firing environment. My firings alone take between 12-16 hours of continuous work to complete, and they are very much worth the effort!

### **Q) Why did you choose ceramic as your primary medium for these deeply personal pieces?**

I chose it because I’m a potter! Why else?

Just kidding, ceramic has always felt like the right language for the ideas I’m working with. It is extremely fragile, but the range of surfaces is unmatched, it is an artistic chameleon. I also love the physicality of it.

The community is also a major draw. The people within ceramics in Canada are a league of their own, and they’re what initially kept me from moving to other mediums. There is a dire need for friends when you’re alone firing massive kilns for weeks at a time, and pottery people show up for each other. Community, sharing, and caring for one another are key components of the people that surround the medium, and it is a major part of why I love it so much.

### **Q) Looking back, how have your ideas of gender and embodiment evolved through the making of this exhibition?**

I’ve moved away from trying to represent gender in a fixed or declarative way, and more towards self and object-based representation to build narrative. I’m more interested in storytelling, and representing how the body holds memory or reacts to pressure.

This work helped me let go of the need to “resolve” my own identity and instead focus on creating an experience that acts as an allegory for identity.

### **Q) What’s next for you? Are you continuing to explore personal narrative, or moving toward something new?**

Next up for me is living in Medicine Hat, AB! A business partner and I are putting together a framework for opening a public-facing ceramic studio within the next few years.

In the immediate future, I’m continuing to produce functional work and firing salt and soda ware at Medalta in the Historic Clay District. I’m very lucky to live in a city that hosts such a historically vital space for ceramics in Canada. I’m continuing my work with medieval imagery, as the conceptual process behind the ware is still very new to me. I’d like to push deeper into the intersection of historical imagery and contemporary emotion, and how it relates to my ceramics ware.