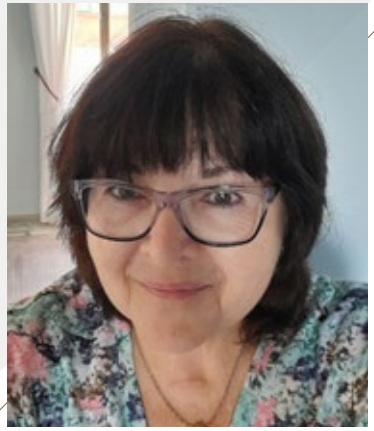
newsletter

April 2022

LETTER FROM THE chair



Dear Members

As your newly elected Chairperson, I wish to thank you for your support and the trust displayed in me. I will try my utmost not to disappoint you.
Having said that, I have utter faith in my fellow committee members and together we will get our 10th Biennale on its feet and make it a huge success. This prestigious exhibition will be displayed at the National Art Gallery from the 18th of August 2022 until the 17th of September 2022.

We are finalising all the details and will send out the Call for Entry soonest. But such a big event, of course, we cannot do on our own. We need you, the members, to work towards this goal. As discussed at the AGM, we asked you to give a few ideas of who our guest judge should be. And I am very happy that quite a few have responded. It gives me great pleasure to inform you that Anthony Shapiro has accepted our invitation as guest judge. We are so excited! And Anthony, likewise, is really looking forward to visiting our beautiful country.

In the meantime, of course, we ask you to get potting. We all know that making pieces for a Biennale takes extra care and skill. The guest judge can be quite critical, and nobody wants to be left behind. And although there is always a possibility that the judge will not like your work, this should never be taken personally or discourage you. If we give our best, we will move forward – and never look back.

In this newsletter we again bring Sharon's contribution "Working for the Biennale", which is very helpful. Of course, you can always share concerns or questions on our WhatsApp Group or social media. Someone will have encountered a similar problem and might have a solution. Fortunately, as PAN members, we have access to likeminded people who have the experience and who can advise and guide us. We again aim to get out regular newsletters this year and here we of course need your assistance too. Please share your ideas, tips, tricks, stories and anecdotes.

We have secured a few advertisers, who will of course want to see our fabulous newsletter. And CPS have agreed to add our newsletter to their website! That is so exciting! So, in order not to let them down, we really need to perform. And if you want to be included on our website, please make use of this free service. Chrizaan has offered to work with our website guru Franz to spruce up and modernise our website. You can send your profiles and photos to me, and I will share them with Franz.
As a small group of likeminded people, let us work together towards a successful Potters Association.

Yours,

Renate

WORKING FOR THE 2022 BIENNALE

NOTES FROM SHARON FLEWELLEN'S PERSONAL CLAY JOURNAL

2022 Biennale.

It's time to START NOW and yes! You are good enough to enter! To build up your self-confidence just do what you enjoy doing most and do what you do best. Trust your instincts. Picasso famously said: "Inspiration finds you when at work..."

PREPARE MENTALLY. Decide what you want to make and in what overall category (e.g. functional, decorative, traditional, sculptural, etc) and do detailed sketches of each. Focus on a basic theme or concept to be continuous throughout everything you make; this will evolve into your own personal style. Never copy another's work. Study a piece you admire, determine what makes it successful and extract an element of it to develop into your own.... find the "Wow Factor"!

SET A GOAL. Commit to completing everything within a set time frame. Plan a strict schedule, including breaks; work backwards from the deadline date, planning for every eventuality. Be realistic and don't put last-minute pressure on yourself by not allowing enough time! Draw up a detailed timetable/timeline/progress sheet with columns showing daily, weekly, monthly tasks required for all the necessary processes. This helps one focus, gives direction and reduces stress.

REFINE TECHNIQUE. Picture the finished item mentally before starting. Explore various methods; choose the correct clay for the project; settle on only two variations of design, construction and decoration, etc.

Keep craftsmanship and aesthetics always up permost in mind! Don't waste time ... dump it if it doesn't work. Do not fall into the "failure trap" of only making one item – make more... make twenty! Practise makes perfect!

BE CRITICAL. Do not be "precious" about every item you make - be strict: submit only your very best! Carefully assess everything you make throughout all the processes. Ask outsiders for an opinion if you can't critically assess your own work. (But don't ask friends or family - they love you and will not wish to hurt your feelings with a truly unbiased opinion.) Never underestimate the buying public – they are very discerning when it comes to opening up their purses and will not easily buy work that is second-rate. Exhibition entries that are obviously flawed will not fool the selectors either so don't downgrade yourself by entering imperfect work.

DO NOT BE DEJECTED. If your work is not accepted for a judged exhibition! Selectors have been chosen specifically for their experience in a particular field and are as objective and unbiased as is humanely possible in performing their duty. Nevertheless, judging is always subjective and merely one person's opinion. Do not take the "non-selection" of your exhibition entry as personal criticism – the selector does not know you! He/she is judging your work, not you the maker. Constructive criticism is a valuable learning opportunity! Take it in good spirit, learn from it and keep working!

POSTSCRIPT WHAT IS THE "WOW FACTOR"? It's that ethereal element we all try to achieve with our work. It is the happy singing of the maker's heart when he/she just knows that a piece has turned out well. It's difficult to describe in technical terms as it is a gut feeling – an instinct – a "love at first sight"! Mostly it is about visual communication, engagement by the viewer with an item which has appealing synchronization of concept, material and technique. It's about capturing the attention of the viewer and leading them on an exciting path of discovery with your work. Various factors usually combine and are expressed together to make an item successful: Originality and the personal style of the maker; Content and context; Composition: the important elements of design (line, shape or form, texture, colour or surface) all brought together in balance, harmony, variation and also contrast; Unique and competent handling of material and technical skill and professionalism; .... and a little bit of luck and rich blessings from the kiln goddess!

JUDGING CRITERIA:

1. Originality / Concept
2. Skill / Handling Medium / Technical Ability
3. Design / Texture / Decoration / Colour
4. Content / Context
5. Form / Function
6. Surface Finish / Glaze
7. Proportion / Balance
8. Aesthetic Appeal / Wow Factor!!!

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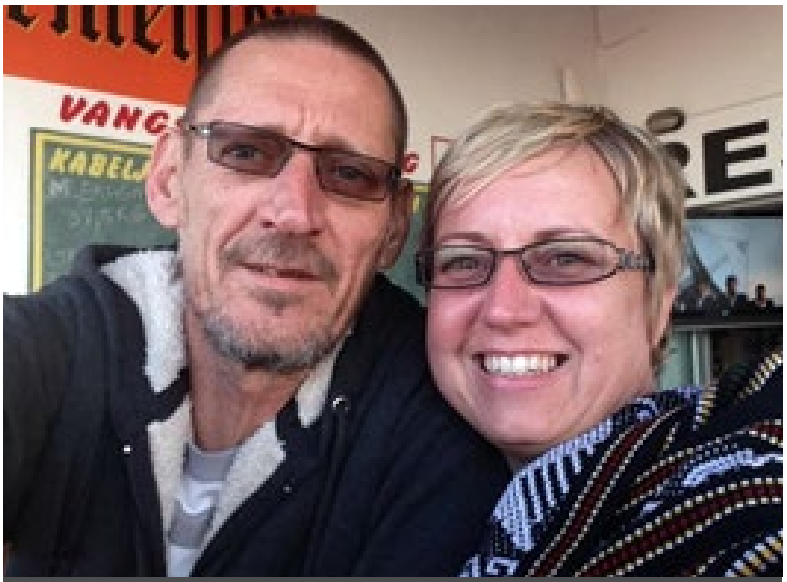
MEET OUR NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER

charlene

Since I am such a newbie to pottery, to PAN and as committee member, I thought to tell you a little about myself.

I am happily married to my best friend and soul mate, Louis, whom I like and love equally much. I am the eldest of 2 girls, and grew up in Tsumeb and Kombat in northern Namibia. We had a very happy childhood with parents that, to this day, are an example and an inspiration.

Both my Mom and Dad pushed me to always finish what I started. And to never, ever give up.



Louis and I

With my folks and sister

My grandmother showed me that you're never too old to learn something new. It's fair to say that continuous learning and tenacity is my recipe for success.

My parents encouraged me from an early stage to work and earn my own money. From the age of 16 I always had a holiday job and earned my own pocket money through university. As time went on, I realised how much I loved business and general management, and that I have a talent for working with people.

As an individual I look for alternatives and flourish in a frequently changing environment that brings challenge and surprise. I enjoy taking the initiative and looking for hidden possibilities and solutions.

I like working in an environment which is relatively free from routine. I'm organised and function well in an environment that others have described as chaotic.

I have a knack for factual, logical and critical thinking processes and navigate through processes that require precision, accuracy and analysis with ease, but become bored by too much detail. I'm a seasoned people's person, culturally sensitive and experienced at negotiating through and around barriers and don't shy away from tough situations towards making sound outcomes.

It is my personal mission to be referred to as a person who made a positive contribution and having been of service to those around me.

Growing up in northern Namibia and attending government schools we weren't fortunate to have art classes. Other than attending ballet classes (thanks to my mom) the art skills that I learnt were largely self-taught.

My creative journey started by watching my elders working their craft. I stood by watching closely as my grandma sewed beautiful wedding gowns, asking many questions. By the time I was 13, I created my own dresses from scratch.

After school, I went to university and completed my BSc degree in 1992, frequenting theatre (didn't have that growing up) and moonlighting as a chef and baker for restaurants. These days, I wish I paid more attention in Chemistry because then I would better understand how firing and different ingredients of pottery and glazes work!

For the following decade or so, I focused on building my life, my career and 'climbing the ladder'. I gave in to my artistic side by writing for some travel magazines and working in advertising.

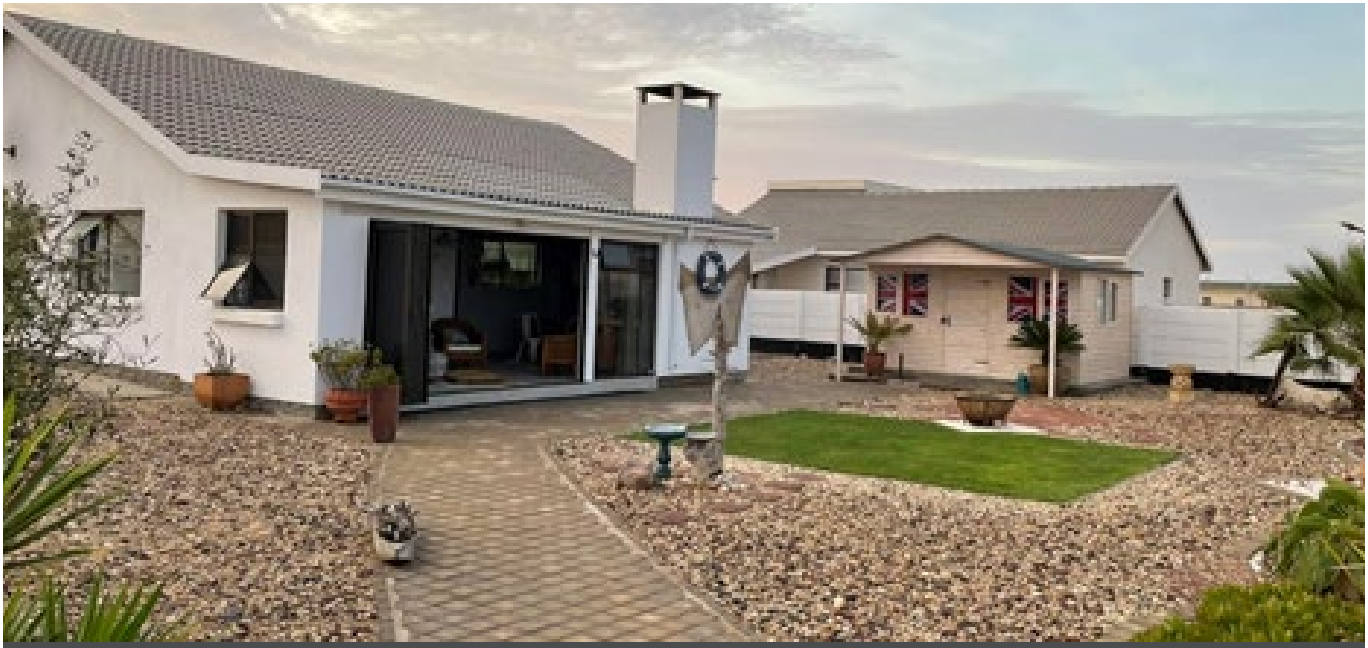
In 2010 I completed my MBA. My profession as project manager in a technological-driven company was demanding and all-consuming, leaving no time for hobbies or anything artistic. Towards the end of 2015, we bought our 2nd property at the coast, and life seemed to slow down a little (or I got smarter and managing my time) and I finally found time doing stuff that I felt passionate about.

I started painting and renovating furniture (for Kelkiewyn, our 'strônd' huis). I made some beautiful mosaic pieces and attempted dot art (but found it boring).
On 5 Dec 2020 my creative journey started in all earnestness as I went for my 1st pottery class...

and the rest is history, as they say.
I love contemporary, functional art in clean lines and poetry. A salad bowl that looks like a fish or bird. A fat bellied whale as butter dish. Or a piece of text that moves me. And I try on delivering these aspects in my pieces.
During December 2021 my husband and I constructed my studio at Kelkiewyn where I completed a mosaiced birdbath. I also invested in a previously loved potters wheel (which is waiting for me once I have had a few lessons). In January 2022, Dotty, my first little kiln arrived.

On location, Zoo Park, Windhoek filming a traffic safety series back in 1993

Louis and I in front of Kelkiewyn, our happy place at the coast



My completed shed-studio at Kelkiewyn

For the next 5 years or so I suspect that my creative journey will continue as a balancing act between earning a living and creating time for pottery. For the moment, I will continue finetuning my technique as a hand builder, focussing on one-of-a-kind pieces and later enrolling in wheel-work.

Fortunately I am all set up for my future life as passionate potter and I look forward having muddy hands more permanently and spending full days in my studio.

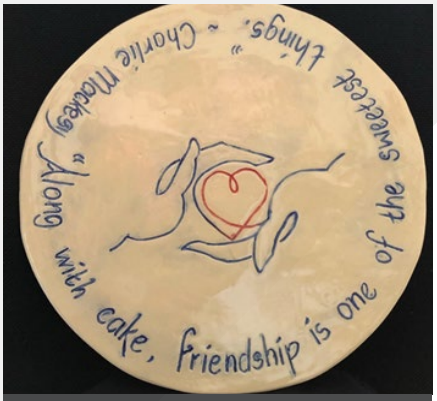
Dec 2021, giving in to creativity

First piece, salad platter, slab built with sgrafitto

Babette the butter dish. Pinch technique

Sugar pot & milk jug with Alice in Wonderland theme, coiling & slab technique

Salad bowl, coiling technique, paper resist & sgrafitto



Cake platter, slab built

Drawing inspiration from nature, platter ready for bisque fire

Coil built vase with pasta alphabet lettering, flower sprigs & finished with underglaze paint work.

Salad bowl, ready for bisque fire

My pottery space at home in Windhoek

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FROM renate.

Easter has come and gone, and my little people, aged between 6 and 9, have thoroughly enjoyed making Easter Bunnies, small vases for flowers to decorate the Easter table and little trinket dishes. My kiln has been firing twice a week for the past two months and the little faces are a sight to behold when they get to take their masterpieces home.

But, as with everything, some enjoy the process more, while others find it very hard to wait for so long until they see the finished pieces. A few stand out as very good potential, understanding the way clay works and reacts, while a few just want to squish the clay into some or other form.

So far, I only have one adult student. She enjoys working with clay and never despairs when things don't go to plan. Martha is the least demanding pottery student I have ever taught. She is a complete newbie, and it is such a pleasure and privilege to teach her. Having taken suggestions from Sharon on board, I am now on a roll, producing lovely wheel thrown plates and platters.

Dare I hope that some might have potential for the Biennale? I will hold judgement until they have been decorated and had their final glaze firing. Thank you, Sharon, for spurning me on and sharing your experiences.

What is very special to me is teaching my 8-year-old granddaughter to work on the wheel. She was always keen to try but, being left-handed, she struggled centring the clay and pulling it up into a recognisable form. My new pottery wheels have come in very handy, since one can change the direction in which the wheel turns. And voilà, Natasha's problem has been solved.
Oh yes, she still sometimes struggles to centre and lift the clay, but her progress is remarkable.

So, all in all, life is great!
Yours in potting,

Renate

Cone 5-6

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A POTTERY RETREAT IN RIEBEEK KASTEEL, SOUTH AFRICA

carola

Sometime in 2021 Garth Meyer, a South African potter, based in Riebeek Kasteel, advertised throwing workshops on weekends on his Facebook page. I immediately decided that this is what I would like to do this year. As I wanted to take all my pots back to Swakopmund, there was no question that I would be driving to South Africa, which I had to convince my husband that I could do on my own. But four days of travelling for a two-day workshop is a bit unbalanced and that's when I contacted Garth and asked if he would be prepared to give me a week's workshop instead of just a weekend. This meant travelling down to Riebeek Kasteel one weekend and returning the following one.

I envisaged my journey to start at the end of August, when my boys had school holidays, but revised Covid-19 regulations threatened to ruin my plans. Garth kindly agreed to change my workshop date to the end of September.

A couple of weeks before I left Swakopmund, I placed an order with Fernando at Reinder's Pottery

Supplies for 400kg of clay, which Garth collected for me in Durbanville the week before my arrival. I packed enough boxes and plastic, in which I could pack my unfired pots for my return, pottery tools and had my car checked. On Saturday morning 05:30 I left Swakopmund en route to South Africa. The first stretch until Windhoek was the usual busy road full of traffic, but once I passed Rehoboth there were mainly trucks, the lifeline to almost all imported goods in Namibia for company, and the odd farmer or

self-drive tourist. I enjoyed the relaxing drive and scenery. I spent the night at the Grünau Hotel and then continued to the border early Sunday morning. The early morning drive down to the Orange River and border to South Africa was breath-taking.

The sun coming up in the east over the vast southern plains, made me wonder why I don't always travel this early in order to experience this natural magic. Sunday mid-afternoon I safely arrived in Riebeek Kasteel, where I was warmly welcomed by Garth and his wife Lesley. Garth's home is situated on a slope overlooking the winelands and the Riebeek valley. After I was shown to my spacious room "The Potters Room", I relaxed and had an early night. Driving 1800km on your own is a bit strenuous, but after a good night's rest I was ready to roll on Monday morning at nine o'clock.

We started off throwing smaller jars with 1.5kg clay proceeding to 2.5kg and then up to 5kg. I was in heaven, just sitting at the wheel feeling the clay run through my hands, forming, pulling and shaping it into something useful to be admired once finished.
The first 40kg of clay was used up quite quickly with all the jugs, fermenting jars, teapots and their respective lids.

It was so much fun!
The next day was spent turning feet on all the previous day's pots. That's when I realised that most of the time making a pot is spent on turning its foot and refining the shape. But when you see the final creation, you realise it's worth the time. It really pays dividends to put the pot back on the wheel-head once more, taking time to remove that little ridge on the base, or smooth off any roughness you discover. You will be glad once it's glazed and fired and you pick up the light, smooth jar or jug. On Wednesday we focussed on throwing large platters, beginning with 3.5kg and to 5kg of clay.

Here I learnt to use the blow torch to dry the rims of the platters in order to prevent them from dropping and tearing, which was fun and useful!
On Thursday we continued with the platters, and I changed to another type of clay, which would fire black after the glaze firing. Then the turning of the feet began on which I spent many hours! The bases of the platters were thick and a lot of clay had to be taken off in order to give the platter a beautiful shape and the lightness it needed.

A large amount of clay scraps were the result, which would need recycling back home.

I was surprised how quickly the week flew by and on Friday morning I finished the last of the platters.

All my creations were wrapped in plastic and carefully placed and stacked in the boxes I'd brought from home. The backseat bench in my VW Combi was folded forward, the potter's wheel I purchased was loaded, and all the boxes securely packed in. Once again I felt grateful to drive a Combi which can take loads of pottery stuff!

The bags with the clay scraps were also packed and then Garth and I managed to squeeze in a quick wine tour in the Riebeek valley. I couldn't be in the Cape winelands and not stock up on the good wine produced in the area! These were well stashed away under the clay bags – hot tip: wine boxes should not be visible when crossing borders!

The week ended with a delicious dinner with Garth and Lesley in one of the fine restaurants in Riebeek Kasteel, and I began my homeward journey early

on Saturday. I had the most beautiful weather the whole week and as I got into my car to leave it started raining – it seems my timing was perfect! Overnighting in Mariental on my way back, I picked up my son and his friends in Windhoek (I had to unload some of the clay so they had space to sit) and made it back home safely on Sunday evening.This was a wonderful week in my life. My sincere thanks to Garth, who taught me the passion of working and playing with clay.

He taught me how to create beautiful pots, platters, jugs, vases and much more, in a very relaxed and harmonious way.

I learnt so much and found the whole experience hugely enriching. The time we spent chatting and talking ceramics, clay and all that goes with it, was so inspirational and rewarding.

I left feeling inspired and I just wanted to continue with it when I got home.
As is so often the case, life welcomed me back very quickly and the daily family and business matters had me wrapped up in no time!

I will definitely do something like this again.

I would highly recommend that everyone has this sort of experience if the opportunity presents itself.

Carola Lorck

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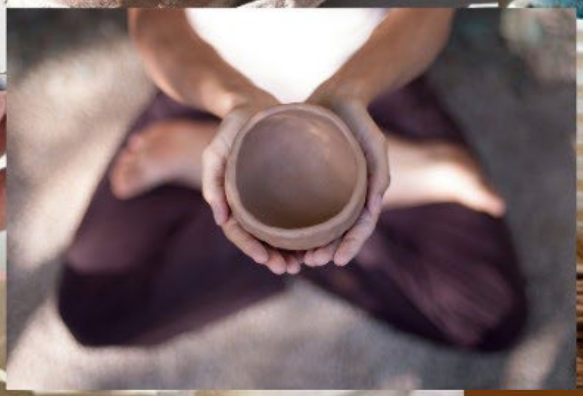
POTTERY quotes



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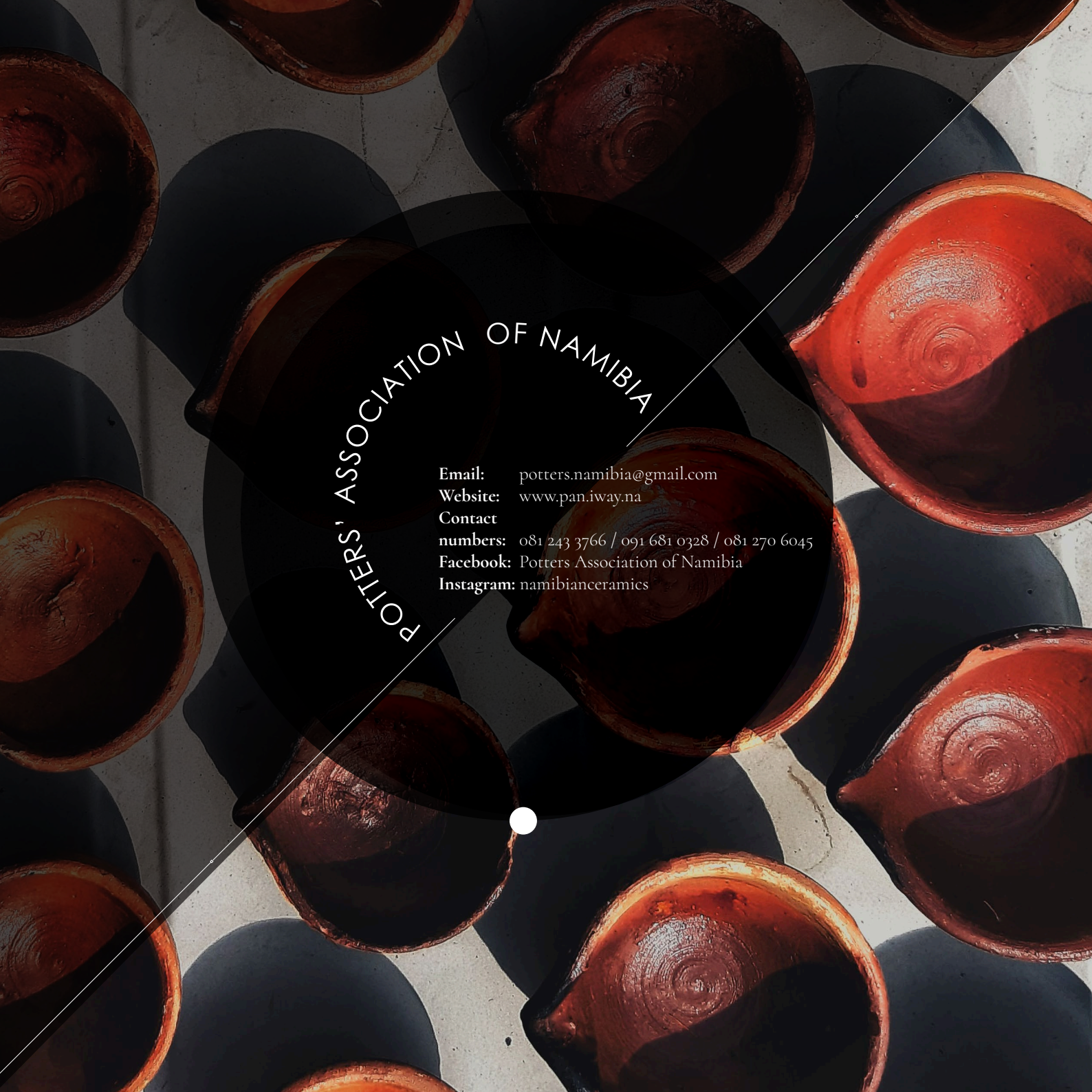

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