

## SHAKER POWER EVENTUALLY SEES THE LIGHT OF DAY!

When I was asked to design and produce a shaker Convention set in 2019, I felt very proud and honoured that a National Club had asked me in the first place. The criteria was Shaker Power incorporating a cruet set with mustard pot. Then the nerves set in! I'm a one-man band, could I produce this number of 125 sets? I'm normally used to 40-50 maximum. I'd never designed a cruet set either! It almost quadruples the amount of component parts needed to complete the order with spoon, pot, lid, and a base! It was a challenge to say the least! I like challenges though, so I submitted some preliminary drawings and hey presto the club board approved it, contracts sorted and off we go!

I had a year to get this done. Everything had to be sent out by the following July in time for the 2020 Convention. I set about making the base first and roughed out some figures in clay to get some idea and then cracked on and got them finished around the September time, made the moulds, and produced some finished pieces for perusal. Something wasn't right though. As anybody who makes or designs things knows, if you're not entirely happy with what you're creating, you can't possibly show it to anyone until it is 110% right. The figures were full figures and just didn't look in proportion and as four-inch full standing figures, I couldn't get any decent detail on the faces as they were the size of a tiny pea! Not my style at all. I like faces. It's what people initially look at and hands next which show expression. I had to say something, and it was agreed I change the design. Time was ticking. I had an artist's block. The original design wasn't right, but nothing was coming through on the artistic airwaves. I was fretting. I normally work well under pressure but when there is no good idea there in the first place, the pressure is intensified. October came and went and still nothing in my mind. You can't force these things. A good idea comes out of nowhere, so I knuckled down to my making my normal pre-Christmas stock. Then the lightbulb on the event horizon happened!!! saw the idea plain as day. I hastily drew a sketch and knew it was right. Once the right idea gets into my head then I tend to burn the midnight oil to see it through. 110% commitment, All, or nothing! I submitted the new sketches, and it was immediately agreed they were a vast improvement. Shaker Power Superheroes punching the sky in Victory as they emerge from the clouds! Far more dynamic than two stand up figures not doing much but shoegazing! I also wanted the idea of a hidden cruet pot in the cloud so as you look at the whole piece, you wouldn't immediately know there was mustard pot there at all. Another technical challenge!!

I set about making the figures in clay. Far better half body size. I could achieve better detail on the larger faces and hair and get a real sense of good arms punching the arm. It was working at last December came and went and 2020 arrived. I was getting a good speed on with the sets and then something happened that shook the whole world. What's this about this flu thing from China I was hearing on the news. Italy in lockdown? In a matter of a few short weeks, it felt like an invisible tidal wave hitting us all and then dead stop in the March...

I was only way through the total at this time. Unfortunately for me, my main studio is 18 miles away in the Countryside. My kiln was there, and I do all the casting there which is the messy bit! I tend to bring all my once fired pieces home to paint as it's far easier to transport and if I want to work at home then I can. With no kiln at home and no casting facilities I had to revise completely the way I was making things. At this time Convention 2020 hadn't been cancelled so I really had to think of something fast. The first lockdown was really strict. We weren't even supposed to be driving anywhere unless it was medical emergency and you had to prove you had good reason to go to work. Making shakers unfortunately was not viewed as an essential service!

I had to take the chance of driving over to the studio at least a couple of times a week to get things fired and glazed. Luckily my partner Philippe had been furloughed so we bought a couple of extra foldable tables and hastily converted part of the garage into a casting area. I had to make the slip (liquid clay) at the main studio, bring it home in barrels and keep topping up weekly to keep the supply going. We also had the scary challenge of transporting 300 or so pieces of very delicate greenware cast pieces from my garage to the kiln, 18 miles away. Anyone who has tried to transport a wedding cake from A to B in a car will understand how I felt! Every journey we made by car my heart was in my mouth. Every single piece was wrapped in bubble wrap and at times we could only drive about 3 mph due to speed bumps which were unavoidable whichever route we went from my garage! Amazingly we did it with few breakages. Then I received the news that Convention had been cancelled which caused the next snag. All the waterslide transfers which state the event and date (2020) which get fired on had already been made and paid for BUT luckily, I hadn't fired them all onto the bases at that time. New ones had to be made and I'm so thankful that those backstamps were the very last part of the process as once they are applied and fired, they would all have to be refired to burn the original off and then new ones reapplied and fired again to fix them!! Once I'd received the revised backstamps with 2022 on them, we could start packing everything up. I had an army in my front room! There was a war going on between the sexes. Girls on the right, Boys on the left! 250 of them! I started to realise what some collectors see every day in their vast collections. You can't see the woods for the trees! Anyhow, Philippe and I got into a system of packing, and we included a slip of paper which should be in with each set as to how to arrange the lid in a certain way to make the spoon fit and lid fit snugly on the base cloud. The Flash finial finishes it off and will be delicate but makes a focal point on the cloud. Hence the extra cardboard packing around it.

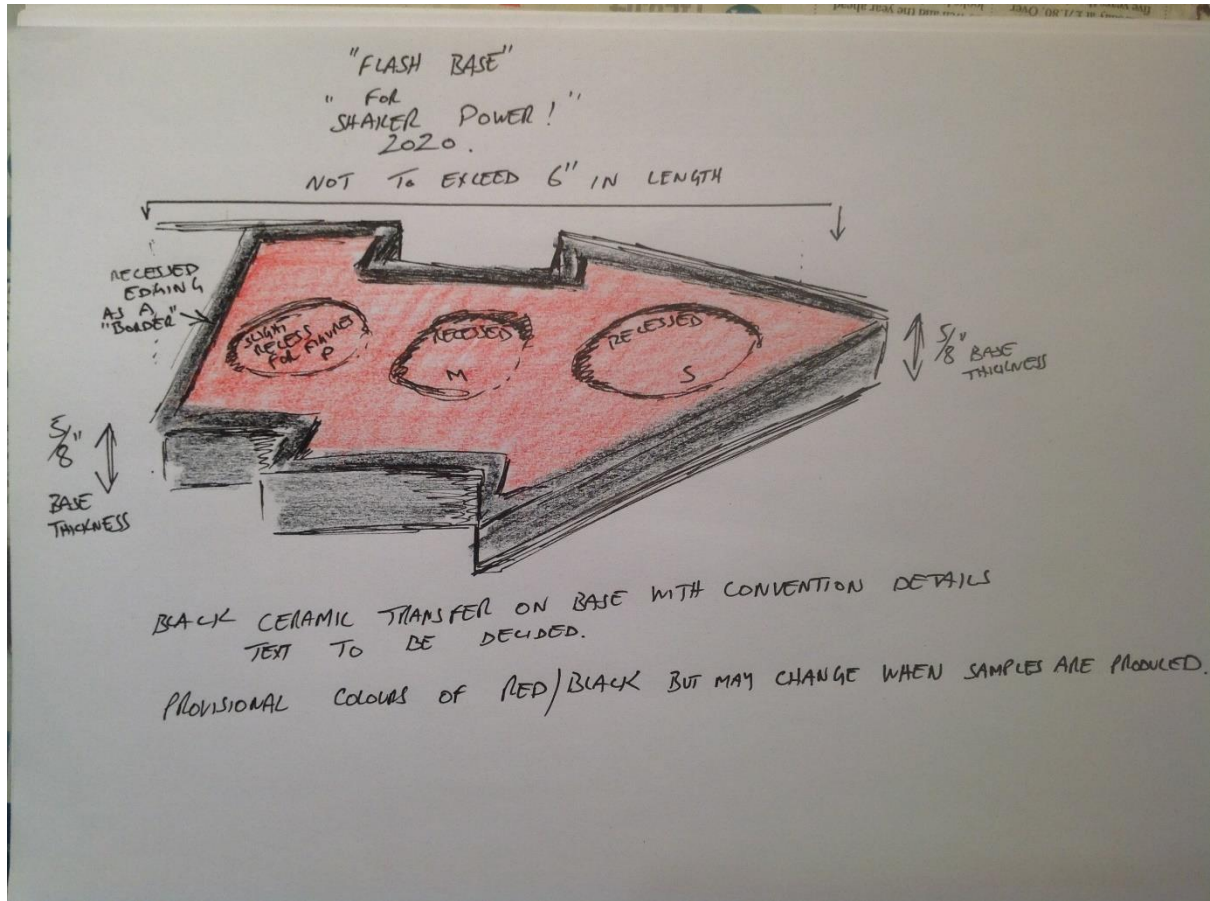
SHAKER POWER SEES THE LIGHT OF DAY AT LAST!

HOPE YOU LIKE!

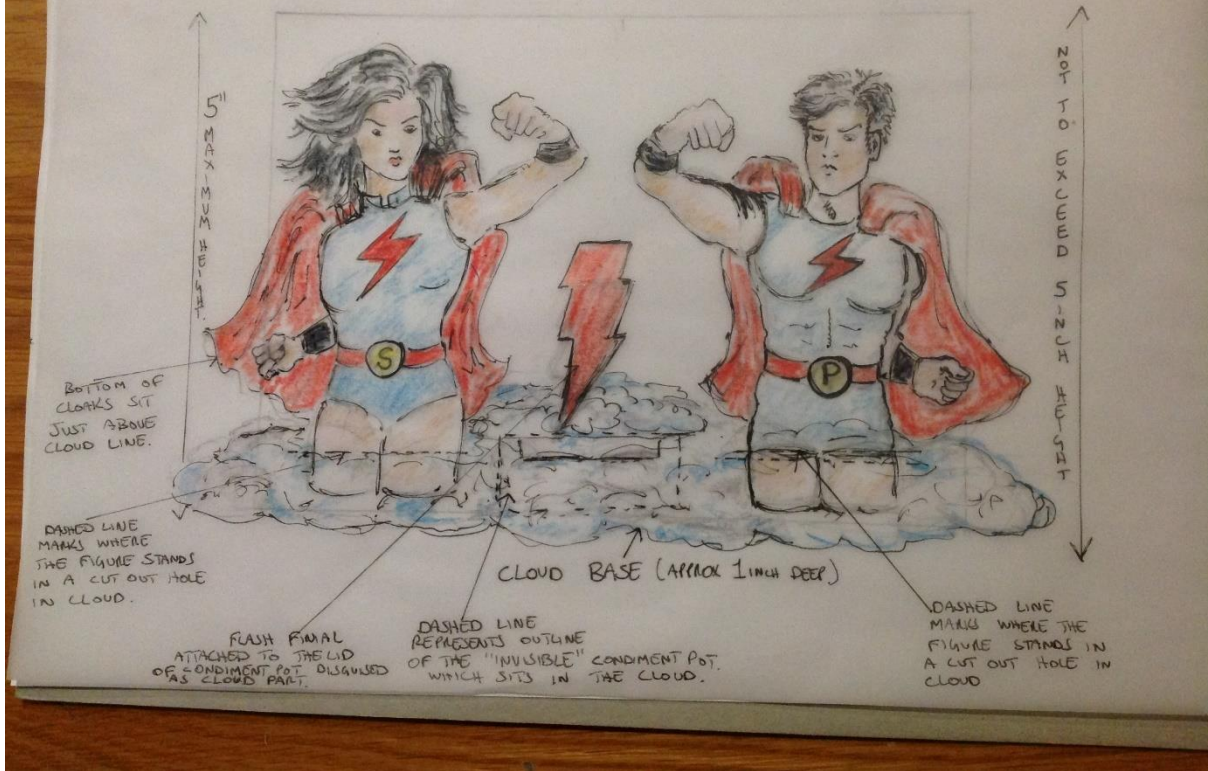


The very first sketch of the Shaker Power heroes.

Original Sketch of the first prototype base for Shaker power.

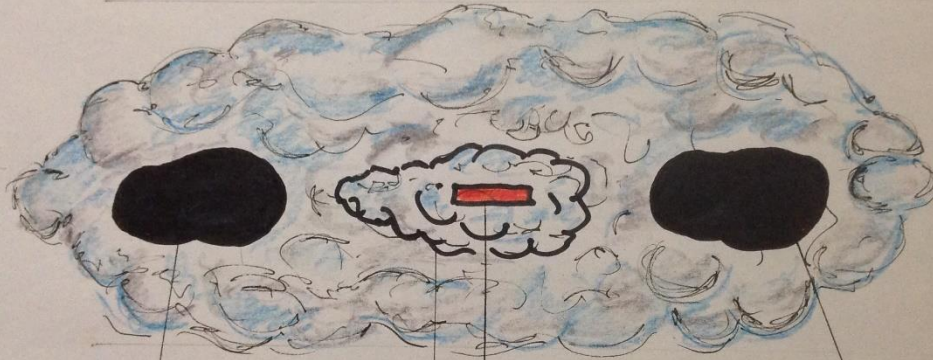


REVISED "SHAKER POWER" SKETCH MK 2.  
FACE SIDE.



Revised drawing version of the definitive Shaker Power heroes.

CLOUD BASE FOR "SHAKER POWER MK 2.  
AERIAL VIEW (NOT TO SCALE)



BLACK AREA REPRESENTS  
WHERE THE GIRL FIGURE  
STANDS INSIDE THE CLOUD  
APPROX  $\frac{3}{4}$  INCH.

TOP OF FLASH FINIAL  
BLACK CLOUD OUTLINE  
IS THE LID OF CONDIMENT POT  
WHICH SITS INSIDE THE CLOUD  
WITH TOP EDGE JUST SITTING  
ABOVE CLOUD LINE SO THE LID  
CAN BE LOCATED TO FIT.

BLACK AREA  
REPRESENTS WHERE  
THE BOY FIGURE  
STANDS INSIDE THE  
CLOUD APPROX  $\frac{3}{4}$  INCH.

Revised sketch of the cloud base for Shaker Power.



Clay master model of the female Shaker Power hero. No arms added at this time as I was focused on getting the face right.



Refining the back of the hair. It has a sculptural quality at this point.





The start of the clay cloud base. I placed a small jar in the middle as a mock-up for the mustard pot container.



Cloud base with the mock-up of the mustard pot lid which disguises the actual working condiment pot inside the cloud.



Arms now added and the whole figure is being refined to conclusion.



The finished clay master model ready for moulding. The finial flash was carved in plaster for better accuracy.



Side view of the master model.



Finished clay model of the male superhero.



Final clay model of the female superhero.



The moulding process, the Shaker Power mould needed 17 sections of moulding overall and 7 separate components. Because of the amount needed for convention I made 3 complete sets of moulds, so 51 sections were ultimately made for example.





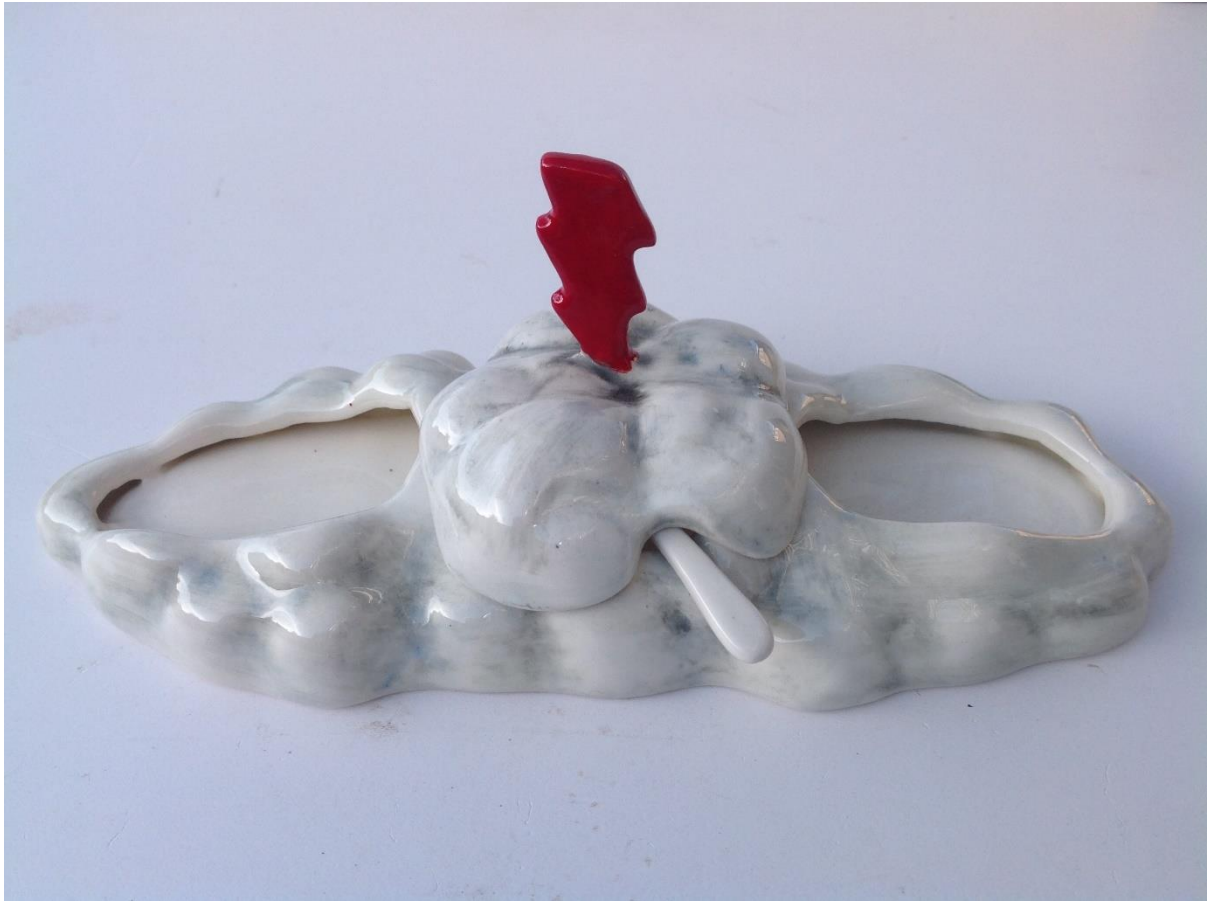
The first castings of the Shaker Power set. Excess slip is poured away into a bucket after about 30 minutes which leaves a thin hollow clay impression of the model inside the mould.



The first hollow castings are released from the moulds after 1 to 2 hours, when the clay supports its own weight and can be left to dry.



The idea of the condiment pot being concealed inside the cloud with only the tip of the spoon showing for reference.



This is the back view of the top of the condiment pot lid which has a groove to accommodate the spoon being able to sit in it.



Ceramic spoons on the go. Yes I did break a few!



Surrounded by cloud bases about to be first fired at 1000 degrees Celsius ( 1832 Fahrenheit) known as biscuit firing.



The first heroes coming out of the kiln after their biscuit firing. Now ready for painting.

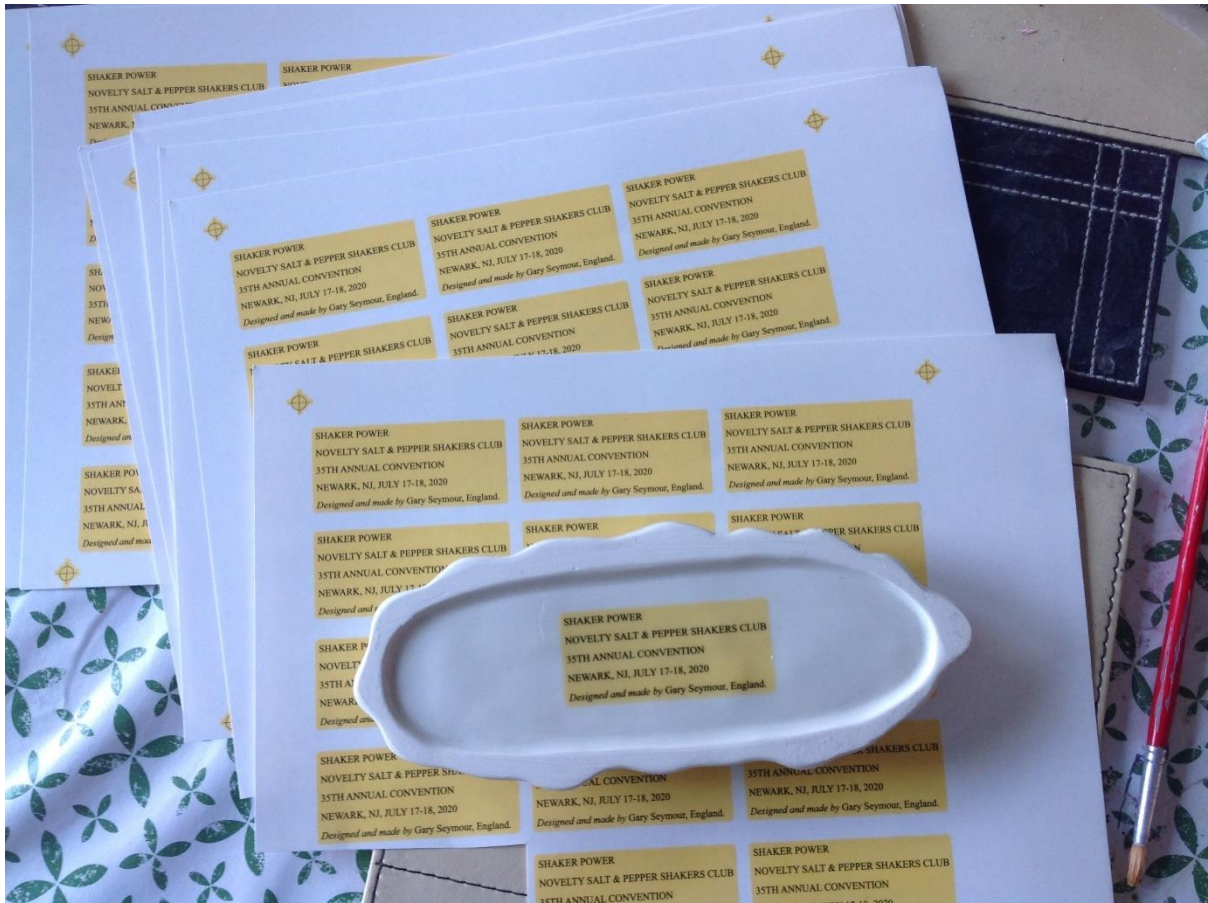


The first set with a definitive colour scheme now applied. These now go back in the kiln at a temperature of 750 degrees Celsius ( 1382 Fahrenheit) to fix the under glaze paint to the clay body so the colours don't bleed.





The first finished definitive version of the Shaker Power set. Only 124 more to go!



The original backstamp decal which had to be changed due to Covid making it 2022 instead. Thankfully I hadn't fired these on before the convention was cancelled.



SHAKER POWER! The army awakes.



Not quite the Terracotta army but not far off and in my living room.



Girl Power. The invasion has begun.



Final job was to box up each set individually with a little instruction slip and the right way to assemble it. Et voila!

I hope you enjoyed this little presentation and you like my vision of Shaker Power and the hidden lid in the cloud. Have fun at convention everyone, we are saddened that we could not attend as we put a lot of work into this years event and it would have been great to see everyone but we had to be sensible. Hopefully maybe see you at the next one.

SALT AND PEPPER, SALT AND PEPPER, SHAKE, SHAKE, SHAKE!