

Ceramics by Simone Fraser



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SITTING ACROSS THE lunch table, I am listening to Simone Fraser discuss her recent work. We have shared conversation, coffee and lunch but my strongest impression of the meeting is the way Simone uses her hands. She expressively gestures with every sentence and her long fingers create her story. Her hands explore the language that she uses in a conversation as though she is still working on a ceramic form. I know Simone has always used her hands to create. Working in clay demands the handmade, and touch is the most important aspect of her practice.

Fraser's latest body of work, 'Articulation: aspects creating form', continues to investigate her lifelong interest in the universal nature of the vessel. She states, "the vessel is, to me, a time capsule which carries within it tradition and a sense of antiquity – a thumbprint of our civilisation. My contemporary response is to investigate new rhythms of this ancient form. My exploration involves looking from the macro of landscape to the minutiae of surface. I see my work as a communication, a series of investigations into the senses, where form, texture and beauty intertwine".

Working in clay is also working with geology, and geology is the study of time. It takes time, and in fact years to really develop and evaluate the skill and an aesthetic eye to make work of this standard. Time to mature as an artist, to be able to strip back the layers of work that has been part of the development of a studio practice, and to quote Simone from our conversation "taking time to watch – the present, by going forwards and looking backwards."

In her exhibition statement she writes: "My work is both physical and sensual; the process of creation has my whole body engaged. I am at one with the work; the wet soft clay bending and flowing in my hands; expressionistic notches from the impulse of my fingers. The random gestural markings allow texture to create form as well as identifying softness and malleability. The piercings create lightness, pushing through and deconstructing the "container" even further, enhancing the sculptural nature of the work. The layers of rugged slip and soft water colour application of the dry glaze further extend the sensual nature of the surface and unifies the many aspects of the work."

Fraser has always had an interest in the ancient work from the Mediterranean and the medieval Islamic world. She explains: "Beauty has been an important element in my work. However, there is no 'golden mean' of beauty. The subjective nature of it comes from the fact that it is in the eye of the beholder, and it is a phenomenon that has changed throughout history and has helped form tradition and civilisation. It is more than what we can observe and what we are comfortable with. It needs to be tested. For example, imperfection yields new forms of beauty and this investigation is a constant in my work. Therefore my role as an artist is not to define what beauty is but question what has been seen in the past, while also bringing new elements together and pushing into new ways of seeing beauty subjectively."

Simone Fraser has been making ceramics for a little over 40 years. She creates this work on a potter's wheel and is able to work on a large scale by using a flame thrower from a gas bottle to stiffen her clay as she forms

the individual pieces. This technique was part of her education under Alan Peascod at Canberra School of Art in 1978. Simone continues to develop this way of working, passing these skills to students today at the National Art School in Sydney.

During our lunch Simone shows me a bowl that she made under her mother's tutelage at the age of 14. She talks about the substance and sustenance of life's experiences that have given her the confidence to be at this point in her career, but for me, it is seeing a beautifully thrown bowl made by a 14-year-old girl which has a firmly imprinted spiral visible in its softly thrown interior. The spiral, with its traditional and historical references, still appears in her work today. She also writes in her catalogue statement: "The wheel creates a centrifugal form, like a spiralling line, unravelling within and without the centrepoint of a circle, extending unceasingly in a timeline or story. It wraps itself around the form, unfolding its embossed narrative. This spiralling forges new boundaries, and in its wake leaves a life story of kinks and notches. Each expansion of the line allows for a larger concentric ring to form and give structure to the vessel. It depicts our instinct to hold within the form a connection to tradition and our inner relationship with nature."

She discusses the strong Middle Eastern aesthetic that was part of her education under Peascod. She refers to her work over the last few years as a way of having worked through this very strong passionately taught aesthetic, emerging now with a maturity that can only continue to develop over time. Her understanding of dry glazes stems from her early years at Canberra School of Art. Simone continues this research in this



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exhibition. In writing about dry glazes in a recently published book on the work of Alan Peascod, she writes that it is an “intensely personal methodology and needs sensitivity and skill to develop to a point where it can be used to resolve particular aesthetic aims. It relies on intuition, spontaneity and a willingness to break with conventional glaze thinking. It can’t be replicated as an industrial process. Every work is different – the goal is variation not consistency”.

This exhibition has a strong sculptural presence. Tall pieces stand alone, while others are grouped together like the tall tree trunks referencing the forests from two of her favourite places, the hinterland behind Byron Bay in northern NSW, and Tathra on the south coast of NSW. Other influences from Cradle Mountain in Tasmania and Table Mountain in South Africa, where she was born, are also hinted at here. There are glimpses of blue amongst the green and yellow glazes and I am reminded of billabongs viewed from the air. As I sit talking to Simone, I look over her shoulder at her luscious Sydney garden, with layers of green foliage and glimpses of her next door neighbour’s pool. I see the layers of colour and texture that have found their way into her studio. This new work presents us with clay textures and patterns that show a strong relationship to the vast dry Australian landscape.

Simone explains, “As we are forced to join a world of fast communication with little time for deliberation, we equally need to follow the trail of our imagination in the silence of our inner domain. We need to ‘see’, and renew our inspiration, connecting with our origin in mind, and all the while taking another step outwards. The melting pot of references in this body of work: from the fossil, the archaeological, the environmental to the contemporary, have melded to produce a personal timeline in clay that still allows individual interpretation. Touch is an important aspect of the work – the trace of the human hand, the finger mark, the scrape. It’s about a context – a narrative, unfolding through its layers, while still referencing the timelessness of a tradition”. ■

Simone Fraser is represented by Sabbia Gallery, Sydney and Narek Galleries, Tanja.

EXHIBITION

Articulation: aspects creating form
23 July to 16 August, 2014
Sabbia Gallery

www.sabiagallery.com
www.narekgalleries.com
www.simonefraser.com.au

- 01 Landscape (detail), 2013, ceramic, finger scraped and pressed with dry glaze, 56cm (h)
- 02 Contained Impression, White Satin, 2013, ceramic with white satin glaze, 60cm (h)
- 03 Simone Fraser. Photography: Greg Piper
- 04 Contained Impression (and detail), 2013, ceramic with grey blue dry glaze, 55cm (h)
- 05 Landscape (and detail), 2013, ceramic, finger scraped and pressed with dry glaze, 56cm (h)

Courtesy the artist and Sabbia Gallery, Sydney



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