

Aussie Culture and the Landscape – Inspiring generations of Australian Ceramic Artists.

Sally Walk (Australia)

Early Australian potters had to deal with the isolation created by the geographical location and size of the country. Arts and Craft Societies were the early contributors to the development of ceramics in Australia offering the support and criticism required. With the influences of Bernard Leach, the diversity offered by an ever increasing multi-cultural society and the ability of artists to travel, Australian ceramic artists began to present a wide variety of ideas, concepts, techniques and use of materials. The landscape also had its effect – the climate, the light, the distinct geography, the growing spiritual association with the land, and the geographical availability of materials. This fascination with the Australian landscape is still extensively evident in the work of contemporary Australian ceramic artists.

At the beginning of last century the newest settlers to Australia had an appreciation of the local Australian flora and landscape. Many ceramic artists were influenced by the unique flora and fauna present in the landscape. The use of Australian motifs (like eucalyptus tree gumnuts, wattle flowers, koalas and kangaroos) became popular and fashionable in the decorative arts.



Merric Boyd b1888 d1959 ‘gumnuts’ and ‘koala vase’

By the 1920's the use of Australian motifs had become important, representing a nostalgic yearning after a lost innocence and as a patriotic expression of a nationalist spirit. This need to discover a national Australian art led to the exploration of the federation movement and influences from aboriginal art in the 1930's. By the late fifties and sixties, Australian ceramic artists travelled overseas more than ever before and these travels influenced the growing diversity in ceramics. The influences and teachings of Bernard Leach were evident in this time. Additionally the Californian Funk movement originating in California in the 50's, reached Australia in the 60's. Clay became a vehicle for political, satirical and social commentary.

Margaret Dodd is perhaps the most well-known Australian ceramist of the period. Her work centres on the car (in particular the Holden) as a twentieth century Australian icon. The image below titled ‘Bridal Holden’ is Dodd’s vision of a virginal, innocent bride, complete with rosebuds, veil and satin under-garments. It is the ultimate absurdity of unity, displayed between a masculine Australian icon and feminine spectacle, achieved fully in the ritual of marriage.



Margaret Dodd ‘Bridal Holden’ 1977 Earthenware and silk

During this time, many Australian artists travelled to Japan and many Japanese potters were also invited to Australia to lecture and give workshops. It is interesting that

many of these artists were also overwhelmed by the Australian culture and landscape, so much so that they stayed in Australia. They were influenced by the striking colours, the textures, the sounds of animals and centuries old stones.

The diversity of Australia’s multi-cultural population, the influence of the artists and ideas of the world as well as the vast and amazing Australian landscape that has inspired many contemporary Australian ceramic artists of this time. My focus for this paper is on the artists who have been influenced by the landscape.

Simone Fraser continues to use the vessel form for her creative expression as she finds it carries within it the wonderful idea of antiquity - the footprints of our civilization. On to this timeless canvas she adds a contemporary story using dry glazes and textured layers to conjure images of landscape, “from the lime green lush of my immediate environment to the Australian red earth, sea and sun”.



Simone Fraser, Impressions Series, 2014, dry glaze



Simone Fraser, Landscape Series #1 2012

For Fraser the landscape is the ever-constant lure, the catalyst for her work, the connecting point and anchor for each new development. Her works is ambitious. It negotiates interweaving journeys through various landscapes describing her artistic practice and her engagement with the sites she documents. Through a continuing investigation of the flora and landforms of these unique areas of Australia and a commitment to engaging with the cultural, social and political agendas that are shaping them, she is open to embrace each new creative challenge.

Pippin Drysdale is one of Australia's most accomplished. Her works evoke a timeless and breathtaking sense of space and place within finely crafted porcelain vessels, narrating the mesmerizing vastness of colour experienced in the unique Australian landscape.



Pippin Drysdale, Billabong-Tanami Mapping Series 2011



Pippin Drysdale, Lake Surprise, Tanami mapping III, 2014

Jeffery Mincham's work has a recognizable landscape quality which is inspired mainly from his view from his studio, the weather patterns, seasons and farming lands nearby. He is mostly known for his hand built clay bodies & multi-fired glazes that paint a literal or abstracted sense of landscape across or around the form. He sometimes employs deep textural marks that hint at the landscape it is inspired from and his palette meanders from deep copper greens, rusty reds and soft creams, with the contrast of pockets of black.



Jeffery Mincham AM, Shoreline, 2009



Jeffery Mincham AM, Within sight of the sea, 2011

Greg Dale is inspired by the Australian landscape as he walks to the his studio and back each day. “I see the light through mist, rain clouds, sunrise, sunset, dust, heat and the moment the sun goes down, that after glow that changes for just a moment, the land and sky. This is what has inspired me to return to exploring lustre glazes once again, after 20 years. Daly believes that light and lustre have a synergy that creates astonishing colour and movement. As you move around his work, the different angles of light striking the surface will change the colour and intensity of the lustre glazes that he uses. The nature of the light too will have a remarkable affect on the colour and tone of the glaze. “lustre is as much a product of its surroundings as the glaze recipe and the firing process.



Greg Dale



Greg Dale

Sandra Black focus's on surface decoration and shapes derived from organic forms particularly the structures of plants and trees, exploring both their ecological fragilities and adaptive strengths. There are still elements of light play, within, through and from the objects exploring translucency, illumination and reflection.



Sandra Black



Sandra Black

Merrin Esson has always had an affinity with the land, having spent her childhood on a farm in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, however, the geology and vastness of this recent exploration has brought a more organic resolve to this work. “My interest in the collision between man and nature continues. All working farms have a junk pile of old water tanks, machinery parts and odd

bits of farm detritus that might just come in useful one day, so stepping into this environment at Fowlers Gap was in some ways quite familiar. I was intrigued to see twisted metal iron from a water tank wrapped around a tree trunk in the dry creek bed behind the main farmhouse. It is a reminder of the power of nature”



In addition to the above artists, my own work is influenced by the land. Having grown up by the beach and having a fascination for the creatures of the sea has seen sea creature like forms in my work. In addition I often use line representing the growth rings found in old trees. I am fascinated by history and use these growth rings to signify age and history in my Australian environment. In addition my work looks at identity and the facades that we adopt as humans.



Sally Walk, Age lines series, porcelain, 2014