

Kelly Austin



A Space for Softness





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Craft ACT
16 Nov–16 Dec
2017



Foreword

From Vancouver to Canberra to her current home of Sandford, Tasmania, Kelly Austin's burgeoning career has taken her from one side of the world to the other. Regardless of location, Kelly's inquiring mind and commitment to her practice have remained constant, resulting in a refined visual language of unassuming beauty.

Reflecting on Kelly's work and this exhibition I am reminded of values at the very heart of Craft ACT: innovation, excellence, a contemporary spirit, and community. As an emerging ceramic artist, Kelly has sought the mentorship of leading South Australian ceramicist Kirsten Coelho in creating this body of work; the kind of relationship which has for over forty years been a hallmark of Craft ACT's community of artists, makers and designers at all career stages.

A Space For Softness is presented as part of Women in Design, a group of four solo exhibitions forming a centrepiece to DESIGN Canberra (6-26 November),

Craft ACT's major outreach activity. The exhibitions are a celebration of the creativity and contribution of women to the contemporary craft and design sector, proudly positioning the work of female artists at the forefront.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Kelly for what is a truly beautiful show and welcome her back to Canberra for the occasion. Patsy Hely, herself a respected artist working in ceramics, offers a thoughtful analysis of this new body of work in the pages ahead.

The frenzied blur of daily life can make slowing down almost impossible. How remarkable then, to be transported, even just for a moment, to a space of stillness. A space for quiet reflection. A space for softness.

Rachael Coghlan

CEO / Artistic Director

Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre

October 2017

Essay

With this current exhibition, 'A Space for Softness', Kelly Austin continues to experiment with form-types while shifting her focus from the generalised contemplation invited by still life works to a more forensic exploration of looking. Here, she questions the connections between perception and expectation encouraging the viewer to use the eye of an investigator as well. How carefully do we look? How might what we see help build meaning out of form, surface, colour and object relationships? And, as this work also asks, what are the ways in which broader concerns might be signalled through still life composition? These are the concerns at work here.

In his seminal text on still life painting, *Looking at the Overlooked*, art historian Norman Bryson provided an argument about nomenclature relevant to Austin's work here. Rather than 'genre', he wrote, the term 'series' more

usefully describes the still life oeuvre, '... the series has no essence, only a variety of family resemblances' and further, that series '... regroup themselves around the individual work, the boundaries of the series fluctuate around each new case.'¹ I think this particularly holds true for works in the ceramic medium and Austin's new body of work is a case in point; family resemblances can be recognised but the questions being asked mark out different territory.

Illusion and reality, always at issue in still life painting, are rarely in play where work includes ceramic domestic forms; rather, the real is inescapable. Austin's compositions here do engage with illusion though, where everyday forms – beaker, jar, bowl – are seen in juxtaposition with less immediately recognisable objects. These unknown items seem familiar - they are wheel-thrown, they seem hollow - but on closer inspection their interiors are inaccessible, tool-like perhaps, rather than implements. What to make of this pairing? Austin refers to the wheel as a 'form-making tool'² and her use of it here to mimic other analogue tools, a grinding stone, a pestle maybe, acts to keep the heritage of her own practice in play while alerting us to our habits of looking.

Austin is thoughtful about using the potter's wheel, it is where her skills lie and so she uses it, but it also suits her purposes by connecting her work in a historical and cultural sense to the act of making, and to the world of made objects. In this exhibition, each work is thrown

but the choice of differing clays, colours and surface treatments builds a complex scenario in the groupings. Key in this strategy is to play around with how far difference can be pushed without a group becoming too discordant or unruly and it is here that the work finds resonance with issues in the world today. 'A Space for Softness', it becomes clear, is for Austin a space where she can rehearse her version of what might be a more thoughtful, accepting place.

These issues infuse the grouped compositions, but the solitary works act differently. In these, one example has been lifted into three-dimensional space where its particularity can be closely examined. There is potential for analogy in these singular works too but I think what is at work is rather a celebration of the object just as itself and viewers are invited to witness the acts of skill and enculturation that have brought it into being.

In the works grouped on backed shelves where back and forms are close in colour, the objects visually dissolve in and out of silhouette. This brings to mind an influence on Austin, the painter Jude Rae. Rae concentrates energy along the edges of her still life subjects through lively brushwork so objects appear to oscillate in and out of the picture plane. Austin's light on light and dark on dark works achieve something similar but it is through her handling of the muted palette that these compositions manifest as tonal painting one moment, solid form the next.

A recent mentorship with Kirsten Coelho in Adelaide and dialogue with Ben Richardson in his Tasmanian studio have been highly valuable in the development of this work. The work here shows her refining processes with greater sophistication and attention to detail. Further, use of local Tasmanian materials and the incorporation of diverse processes and finishes – woodfiring, surface polishing, matt and lustrous glazes - give complexity and a lovely variety to the work.

In a still life painting nothing moves; here, a series of carefully crafted and curated objects have also been stilled. But as you move around before the work reflections morph, highlights fade or shine, shadows re-position or disappear completely. In this way the body, each according to its own specificity, re-animates the work. I think this is why Kelly Austin's new work compels; by inviting us to think about looking, about encounters with things and about difference, it takes us both into the studio and out into the world, more curious about what we find in both places.

Patsy Hely

September 2017

¹ Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, Reaktion Books: London, 1990, p11.

² Personal communication, 23 August 2017.

Works



stilled composition no.36, stoneware, glaze, wood, acrylic paint, 80 x 30 x 40 cm, 2017



stilled composition no.27, stoneware, porcelain, glaze, wood, acrylic paint, 60 x 30 x 30 cm, 2017



stilled composition no.30, stoneware, porcelain, glaze, 120 x 30 x 25 cm, 2017



stilled composition no.42, stoneware, 28 x 28 x 10 cm, 2017



stilled composition no.32, porcelain, stoneware, glaze, wood, acrylic paint, 65 x 28 x 50 cm, 2017



stilled composition no.31, stoneware, porcelain, glaze, 110 x 30 x 20 cm, 2017



stilled composition no.38, stoneware, porcelain, glaze, 40 x 20 x 30 cm, 2017



stilled composition no.39, stoneware, glaze, 55 x 30 x 10cm, 2017



stilled composition no.24, stoneware, porcelain, glaze, wood, acrylic paint, 60 x 30 x 30 cm, 2017



stilled composition no.41, stoneware, glaze, 30 x 30 x 14 cm, 2017



stilled composition no.33, stoneware, glaze, wood, acrylic paint, 80 x 30 x 45 cm, 2017

CV

Education

- 2016** Master of Philosophy - Ceramics, ANU School of Art, Canberra, Australia
- 2011** Bachelor of General Fine Arts, Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Vancouver, Canada

Exhibitions

Solo Exhibitions

- 2017** *A Space for Softness*, CraftACT, Canberra
- 2016** *Composed Ambiguity*, SOA Gallery, University of Tasmania, Launceston, Australia
- 2013** *Compositions*, Craft Council of BC Gallery, Vancouver, Canada

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2017** *Still: National Still Life Award*, Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery, NSW, Australia
Innovation, Tasmanian Craft Fair, Deloraine, Tasmania, Australia
Clunes Ceramic Award Exhibition, Union Bank Arts Centre, Clunes, Australia
- 2016** *30th International Gold Coast Ceramic Award*, The Arts Centre, Gold Coast, Australia
Graduation Exhibition, School of Art Gallery, Australia National University, Canberra, Australia
Throw Open the Doors, Memorial Hall, Gulgong, Australia
BC Creative Achievement Award, BC Craft Council Gallery, YVR, Richmond, Canada
Handpicked Handmade, Gallery KLEI, Sydney, Australia

- 2015** *The Tandem Project*, Gaffa Gallery, Sydney, Australia
Mud, Hands, Fire, School of Art Gallery, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada
Hobart Art Prize Exhibition, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, Australia
Clunes Ceramic Award Exhibition, Union Bank Arts Centre, Clunes, Australia
Surrounds, Watson Art Centre, Canberra, Australia
Protean, Nishi Gallery, Canberra, Australia
Emerging Contemporaries, Craft ACT, Canberra, Australia
- 2014** *Port Hacking National Pottery Exhibition*, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery, Gympie, Australia
Member's Exhibition, Watson Art Centre, Canberra, Australia
- 2013** *Coming up Next*, Alberta Craft Council, Edmonton, Canada
- 2012** *Pots, Pots, Pots*, Gallery of BC Ceramics, Vancouver, Canada
Student Scholarship Recipients, Circle Craft, Vancouver, Canada

- 2011** *New Design BC*, Cutty Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
The Edge of Here, Various Galleries, Vancouver, Canada and Seattle, USA
Emily Carr University Award Winners, Windsor Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
First Serve, Gallery of BC Ceramics, Vancouver, BC, Canada
Graduation Show, Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Vancouver, Canada
Please ~~Do Not~~ Touch, Concourse Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
- 2010** *Moving Through The Image*, Concourse Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
- 2009** *The Portrait Show*, The Brow Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
- 2008** *Leaf*, Canvas Gallery, Vancouver, Canada

Professional Activities

- 2017–present** Teacher, TasTAFE, Hobart, Australia
- 2016** Artist in Residence, Tasmanian College of the Arts, Launceston, Australia
- 2015–2016** Lecturer, Ceramics, ANU School of Art, Canberra, Australia
Teacher, Ceramics, Watson Art Centre, Canberra, Australia
- 2014** Teaching Assistant, Ceramics, Watson Art Centre, Canberra, Australia
Studio Assistant, Ben Richardson, Sandford, Australia and Chris Harford, Canberra, Australia
- 2012** Artist in Residence, Medalta International Artist in Residence Program, Medicine Hat, Canada
- 2011** Workshop Assistant, Andy Brayman, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, USA
Board Member, Potter's Guild of BC, Vancouver, Canada
- 2010** Gallery Assistant, Gallery of BC Ceramics, Vancouver, Canada
Workshop Assistant, Andy Shaw, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, USA
Teaching Assistant, Julie York, ECUAD, Vancouver, Canada
Studio Technician, West End Community Centre, Vancouver, Canada
- 2009** Studio Assistant, Julie York, Vancouver, Canada
Studio Assistant, Gailan Ngan, Vancouver, Canada

Awards, Prizes, Grants & Scholarships

- 2017** Finalist, Still: National Still Life Award, Coffs Harbour City Council, NSW, Australia
Finalist, Clunes Ceramic Award, Union Bank Arts Centre, Clunes, Australia
- 2016** Development Grant, Australia Council, Sydney, Australia
Project Funding, ArtsACT, Canberra, Australia
Out of Round Funding, Arts ACT, Canberra, Australia
EASS Patrons HDR Award, ANU School of Art, Canberra, Australia
Award of Excellence, Handpicked Handmade, Gallery KLEI, Sydney, Australia
- 2015** McGrath (Woden) Emerging Artist Award, CAPO, Canberra, Australia
Keane Ceramics Tertiary Student Award, Canberra Potter's Society, Canberra, Australia
Carter Wosk BC Creative Achievement Award, BC Achievement Foundation, Canada
Senior Student Scholarship, BC Arts Council, Canada
Finalist, Hobart Art Prize Exhibition, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, Australia
Finalist, Clunes Ceramic Award, Union Bank Arts Centre, Clunes, Australia

- 2014** Senior Student Scholarship,
BC Arts Council, Canada
- 2011** Maureen Wright Scholarship, North West Ceramic
Foundation, Vancouver, Canada
- 2010** Senior Student Scholarship,
BC Arts Council, Canada
North West Ceramics Scholarship, ECUAD,
Vancouver, Canada
- 2009** Tamarissa Hoskin Memorial Scholarship, ECUAD,
Vancouver, Canada
- 2008** Steven John Hodge Memorial Scholarship,
ECUAD, Vancouver, Canada

Citations

- 2017** Dr Patsy Hely, *A Space for Softness* (catalogue),
Craft ACT, Canberra, Australia
- 2016** Sarah Aquilina, *Ceramic Artist Searches for
Inspiration*, The Examiner
- 2015** Kerry-Anne Cousins, *Protean by Claybodies is
Diverse and Polarizing*, The Sydney
Morning Herald
Clarissa Thorpe, *Giving up the Day Job and
Surviving as an Artist in Australia*, ABC
Zoya Patel, *Emerging Contemporaries*,
www.craftact.org.au
Kerry-Anne Cousins, *Craft Review: Emerging
Contemporaries*, The Canberra Times

- 2015** Dr Mary Ann Steggles and Dianne Carr, *Mud,
Hands, Fire* (catalogue) University of Manitoba,
School of Art Gallery, Canada,
Peter Hughes, Dr Patsy Hely and Julie Robinson,
Hobart Art Prize (catalogue), Tasmanian Museum
and Art Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania.
Dr Sarah Rice and Dr Patsy Hely, *Surrounds*
(catalogue), Canberra Potter's Society, Australia
Mark Van Veen, *Protean* (catalogue), Nishi Gallery,
Canberra, Australia

Collections

- Artemesia, Hobart, Australia
Handpicked Wines, Sydney, Australia
Private Collections in Canada, the United States of
America and Australia



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