

VERNISSAGE / ARCHITECTURAL CERAMICS

# Space, Place & Shape



Grace Brown is one in a group of Australian ceramists whose sculptures evoke the built environment. Her influences — geometry, architecture and the work of MC Escher — are clear in pieces such as *A Place to Watch the Moon* (left) and *A Beacon to the Moon* (right), both realised in hand-built terracotta and lava glaze

Image by Jess Brohier

The crossovers between art and design have long been observed from both camps, and ceramics is one medium where the intersection is distinct. These five Australian contemporary artists use clay to express an understanding of space and place within the sculptural objects, exploring the links between ceramics and architecture, the 3D-modelling style lending itself well to both mediums.

Kyneton-based Cassie Hansen's professional background as a design editor influences her stylistic sensibilities. 'Design inevitably plays a big part in my ceramic practice,' she says, 'Not only in the aesthetics, which are heavily influenced by architecture, but also in the function.' Aesthetically, her works take shape as odes to modernist and Bauhaus architectural styles, but also depict the shadows and compositions captured in architectural photography. Hansen hopes that this balance can serve and inspire those who live with her objects. 'I hope to design an experience for the user — putting together a posy of flowers in a vase or pouring from a jug becomes a ritual because of what the ceramic piece itself brings to the process,' she says.

Like Hansen, Melbourne-based ceramicist Jan Vogelpoel is inspired by Brutalist and modernist design, particularly Roberto González Goyri's concrete relief mural on the Guatemala Bank building complex and British sculptor William Mitchell's concrete murals. Realised in the mediums of earthenware, sculpture clay, black clay and terracotta, Vogelpoel's approach stems from her background in graphic design, interior styling and art direction. The sculptures follow from an understanding of space influenced by both art and architecture, and are defined by soft curves, reflecting Vogelpoel's love of organic shapes.

In the sculptures created by Grace Brown in her Melbourne studio, ceramics are fine art but also functional design pieces. Brown's influences include geometry, architecture and the work of MC Escher. Before producing a piece using wheel-thrown or hand-building techniques, Brown works with a 3D artist to envision her sculptures within an imagined world, giving the works a sense of place. 'I look towards architecture and fallen monuments that exist in our world as well as imagined landscapes from science fiction or my own imagination,' says Brown, who cites the Star Wars universe as one inspiration.

Jane McKenzie, who works in Castlemaine, practiced as an architect for 20 years before

*Text*  
Emma-Kate Wilson



moving to clay. This connection between disciplines is evident throughout her sculptures, through which she investigates form, line and structure. 'I'm always curious about how things are made, and interesting junctions; the mortise and tenon joint in carpentry fascinates me,' she says. 'I like the challenge of trying to transpose that idea using clay.'

McKenzie sees a duality in the medium that blurs the lines between art and design, sculptural and functional. And while fine art has often overlooked ceramics, McKenzie is part of the movement that now sees entire ceramics exhibitions held at commercial art galleries. 'Over the next five years, I think we'll see more diverse galleries exhibiting ceramics and more art institutions collecting them,' she says.

Sydney's Natalie Rosin also studied architecture, and it was during her studies that she discovered ceramics. 'Although I left the architecture



Left  
Jan Vogelpoel's sculptures are defined by soft curves, seen here in *Halo*, a work she describes as 'A giant's aura from an ancient world'

Right  
Vogelpoel's *Space Cadet* (left) is inspired by the Taal Monument in South Africa, while *Ghostly Misfit* (right) from her *Abstract Tiles* series draws on the concrete murals of Robert Oldrich and William Mitchell  
Images by Jan Vogelpoel

profession a few years ago, it still influences my art practice today, with many of my sculptural works heavily guided by the model-making methods introduced in architecture school,' Rosin says. Today, she calls her work 'architectural ceramic sculpture', with clearly defined markers evoking familiar architecture like iconic Sydney buildings and Gaudi's Catalan modernism in Barcelona.

In recent years, Rosin has noticed the proliferation of ceramists who, like her, have come to the medium from different backgrounds. 'From this, I imagine a larger range of aesthetics and approaches to art making will develop, with each background providing an alternative, unexplored perspective or approach,' she says. 'Another aspect I enjoy seeing is less of a separation between art, design and craft. What was traditionally categorised as "craft", like vessels and functional domestic objects, may be regarded in a different way, with less of a desire to label or categorise bodies of work by institutions and audiences.'



Top  
Working from her studio in Sydney, Natalie Rosin creates sculptures that evoke familiar architecture  
Image by Alana Landsberry, courtesy of Bed Threads

Middle and bottom  
Having spent two decades as a practising architect, Jane McKenzie now explores the medium of clay through a similar lens, creating sculptures rooted in modernist architecture  
Images by Penny Ryan (middle) and courtesy of Jane McKenzie (bottom)

