

A Dialogue about Tableware

Megan Patey reports on a recent exhibition at Sturt Gallery

Tableware was the theme of an exhibition called *Back to the Table* held recently at Sturt Gallery, Mittagong. Curator Vicki Grima presented thirteen emerging ceramic artists to “explore the role handmade ceramic tableware plays in our everyday lives, to present us with ceramic proof of their thoughts and give us a reason to ditch the mass-produced imported tableware that floods our homemaker stores, and to open up a dialogue.”

On a perfect spring day in the Southern Highlands of NSW, I visited Sturt Gallery to see the exhibition and learn more. The effect when you entered the gallery was strong. Constraint dominated the room. The palette was minimal – repeated use of blue and white, dark oxide on light body, and soft woodfiring colours echoed around the walls. One hundred and sixty-five pots were placed on dark timber tables, laminated tables, trestle tables, wooden chests and wooden planks. Wall spaces were used as well for display. Most of the work was small in scale, but the space was unified by distinct groupings of thirteen artists’ works with the clever use of the tables providing the visual continuity uniting this exhibition.

Ashley Fiona McHutchison’s beautifully resolved work dominated one corner. Using line, she paints traditionally shaped teapots, coffee pots and cups and saucers onto her pieces. This imagery generously fills the space of the handmade plates, bowls and cups giving an effect that is exuberant and welcoming. Sarah O’Sullivan also plays with a sense of the traditional turned into a contemporary idiom. She combined found metal objects with finely decorated thrown ceramic pieces to create a series of table settings and tea parties. Janetta Kerr-Grant painted thick lines of iron oxide slip onto porcelain bowls, vases and dishes to create a dramatic patterned graphic tempered by the effects of the high temperature firing.





1



2



3



4



5

1 Zak Chalmers
2 Hayden Youlley
3 Alexandra Standen
4 Dawn Vachon
5 Ashley Fiona McHutchison
Photos: Vicki Grima

Three of the artists in the show chose to work with woodfiring, producing the subtle colours and soft forms typical of this medium. Zak Chalmers, Joey Burns and Alexandra Standen produced pieces which complement food beautifully. Unadorned surfaces continued in the small geometric shapes made by Hayden Youlley and the black and white minimally shaped pots of Andrew Widdis. Dawn Vachon remembered her past in her childlike forms using raku clay and pale pastel colouring, and Andrei Davidoff was fascinated by lettering. Diverging from these themes were the two large colourful pieces by Rachel McCallum in which she used heavily applied colourful glazes to drip with colour, texture



1 At the opening of *Back to the Table* on 14 September 2014
Back row (L to R): Hayden Youlley, Joey Burns, Ashley Fiona
McHutchison, Sarah O'Sullivan, Janetta Kerr-Grant, Serena Rosevear
and Vicki Grima. Front row: Dawn Vachon and Rachael McCallum
2 **Kate Jones**
3 **Sarah O'Sullivan** and **Serena Rosevear**
4 **Janetta Kerr-Grant**
Photos: Vicki Grima

and presence. Kate Jones made a selection of intriguing light sets from terracotta clay, whilst Serena Rosevear thoughtfully used low wooden boxes to complement her glazed porcelain bowls.

This exhibition was beautifully placed within the calming atmosphere of Sturt Gallery. It is always challenging to create a unified exhibition with group shows, and Vicki Grima succeeded. I left the room realising that contemporary ceramic tableware was indeed well and truly alive.

**Megan Patey is past Director of Sturt Contemporary Craft Centre.
She makes tableware in her studio at Colo Vale in the Southern Highlands of NSW.
www.sturt.nsw.edu.au**