

## LITTLE WHITE LIES

Steve Harrison, Gallery notes  
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In this show of recent works I have conscientiously tried to create a softer image than that shown at my last exhibition here.

At the last show, I wrote of being concerned with process, which I was. However, with the benefit of hindsight, I have become more aware of the impetus behind the faceted forms.

The last show represented work made over a period of years, and during that time, the boom years of the eighties, I was forced to pay a lot of attention to my company Hot & Sticky Pty Ltd. Much of this time was spent in stainless steel sheet metal fabrication. I found that the increasing demand on my mechanical faculties seemed to concentrate my thinking on the left side of my brain, and consequently my pots, slowly, imperceptibly took on more of the hard edged sheet metal qualities.

Having become aware of this through self examination of my feelings, thoughts, motives, and realising that although my work had benefitted from the prolonged period of concentration in this mode, I was also aware of what it was lacking, I had not exercised for some time, another part of my personality, that of the soft, the open, the vulnerable, the feminine knowledge. A title for the collective form of the earlier work could well have been "Of mammon and metal". I do not shrink from that earlier work, it was very beautiful and subtle. I have and will continue to make similar work, there are just a few pieces in this show, they show a continuation and act as a bridge from the earlier work to this.

The work before you here today, is offered at different levels simultaneously. On first viewing, the work is a group of small, quiet, white glazed bowls. They are beautiful and practical. It is my intention that they be used. I believe that they will improve with work and age, as they suffer the mundane wounds of domesticity, and acquire the patina of use.

The work is symbolic of the recognition of my previous aesthetic single mindedness and perhaps I might even say loss and is in itself now my emotional re-entry point and in a perverse sort of way, my material gain.

I have intentionally avoided the slashing, tooling, and mark making often associated with Japanese influenced styles. I have instead tended towards Chinese and Korean sources. Primarily to avoid stereotyping the work, a topic I deal with further below, and secondly, because my intention was to make a more gentle body of work. Where distortion exists, it is not forced, although it is intended. I hope that it does not look contrived, it is not done just for its own sake, but rather in an attempt to soften the surface, and to reduce the thrown concentricity of the forms. For the most part the ash and felspathic glazed forms have been softened by gently scraping the surface inside and out with a thin piece of metal. I like this technique, because it represents a crossover between traditional throwing and handbuilding techniques.

The format is largely that of the open container. I like the duality of that description. Like the first strands of steel wire to pass through the Australian bush, the landscape was simultaneously contained, and yet still open. I live in

the bush, and have a great affinity for it. I prefer to see it more open and less contained.

Although, superficially, all the pots are white, they are not white, like light or truth, being made up of all colours, and many shades of grey.

All the clays and glazes are white, although the clays appear darker after wood firing in reduction, where the surface flashes to shades of red, brown, orange and pink. This does not happen however in oxidation, where the clay retains its pale creamy white tones.



Woodfired white felspathic glaze over white and black slip, over white coarse clay body

The juxtaposition of the familiar and the other.

As it is perhaps true to say that there is nothing new in the world of ceramics [other than thoughts], I have recreated some recognisable ceramic surfaces and forms reminiscent of various archetypes, predominantly eastern. However, the experienced ceramic viewer will recognise that in most cases I have applied the familiar surface to the unfamiliar form and vice versa, or treated the commonly reduced as oxidised etc. I am pleased with the jolt that this 'out of placeness' gives the work. The haunting quality of what ought to be familiar, repositioned

and allocated a new association. The almost déjà vu. It allows the work, however briefly, to be viewed for the first time.

I hope freshly. All that is old will be new again, and all that is new is the same old stuff relaunched by a new agency!

By firing in different, usually neutral or oxidised atmosphere, occasionally lightly reduced, and presenting in a different context, I have tried to avoid the worst clichés. I have employed a mixing and matching technique, an example of this would be the felspathic glaze applied over a brushed white slip. By firing in an oxidising fire, the effect is quite different to that usually associated with this type of glaze. It allows the surface and form to be viewed without a conditioned response immediately interposing, [ah! yes, I know that style] such that the experienced eye has the same chance as the unexperienced.

Likewise, with my use of the tenmoku bowl form, proffered here as the white tenmoku, coupled with the great stoneware glaze trilogy, The limestone, felspathic and magnesia sets.



Waxy white glaze over white clay body showing yellow natural ash deposit

The wood fired technique in ceramics has long been associated with reduction atmosphere. The use of the oxidised atmosphere has long been undervalued or even ignored. This could well be because the oxidised surface is so much quieter, less flashy one might say. It doesn't have the immediate appeal, the high drama and contrast that occurs on the flashed surface. There is however, a quality. A quality that takes a little time to appreciate, but it has depth, and is enormously rewarding. It is an ideal surface for the mundane world.

The work offers an almost total lack of ash deposit, and where it is, it is subtle. Much of it is dissolved into the glaze surface, where it causes a softening of glaze, reducing its brightness by promoting a subtle crystal formation in the surface.

I have applied some ash glaze to selected pots. This particular ash is from the prunings of my own orchard of approximately sixty trees, which I planted almost two decades ago, and have enjoyed watching grow into mature trees. This year I did a particularly heavy pruning for reshaping of the trees. The ash produced after burning the branches and trimmings was collected and resulted in one bucket of glaze! Hence the title "Seventeen years of hard work up in smoke" etc.

All the clay bodies were made on site, and incorporate local materials. I don't pretend that this gives the work any magical flavour, but it is important to me, and it is my attitude to this concept that influences the work and makes it mine.