

Self Knowledge Through Guan and High Water

This current show of faceted vessels has moved away from the mixture of tablets and bowls incorporating text that I have shown here recently, although still maintaining continuity from my earlier work, by way of form, this body of work is less overtly political, here I am relying on tactile and visual imagery. The title for the show comes from my interaction with the concept of the 'Guan'.

Self knowledge is self explanatory, its about self — myself.

Kuan here refers to a traditional Chinese glaze quality, closely associated with the concept of 'celadon', although having a much broader reference than that word implies.

It is as inscrutable as the East, as variable as politics, as hard or as easy to read as the East itself and as beautiful as you want to feel and see it to be.



High water has two reference points, the first being a quote from the poet Xu Yin comparing the Guan glaze (the secret colour) to clouds - high water indeed. The other being the collapse of my water tank stand, high water brought to earth, which in itself is quite a story, its about how I rose to the occasion-in the place of the high water-only to be brought to ground as all high water eventually must.

I find the interesting parallel that the challenge "come hell and high water" fitted my situation quite well during the making of this show, a time I had set aside from other work, as other work always crowds in on my precious studio time. I gave myself a lesser workload to make several shows this year, which I have done, this being the last of them, so that I could really enjoy the process of making my work without all the usual pressures. But lo! what's this noise like thunder that shakes the house and rattles the windows. Is it a plane? Is it a sonic boom? No! its 9 tonnes of water falling through the roof of the shed and exploding like a tidal wave and knocking out the stone footings and mud brick wall, surging and shifting machinery that weighs over a tonne like so much tidal detritus.

Hell and high water both came but in reverse order. The show is made as planned, however, it does not convey the angst of the process, but rather the sublime satisfaction of the achievement of being itself.

These forms point to heaven but are of earth, just like a tank stand. They are pinnacles as was Guan the pinnacle of the Sung potters art. They do not represent the finality and refined perfection of Ming, but rather the softer passion of a work in progress. They are full of faults, as are we all and beautiful in spite of it and for it. They are meant to be beautiful, they feel gorgeous, please enjoy them.

Steve Harrison
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The story so far;

The tank stand has collapsed in a deafening crash flooding everything and taking out the wall of the shed. With only half the work made for the show and only five weeks to go can there be a happy ending? Now read on.

So there we were standing dumb-struck in shock looking, starring, glassy eyed at what used to be something else now in seconds transformed, unrecognisable. Muttered stumbling speech, questioning, unbelieving, shocked! Over a period of time which was probably shorter than it seemed, I came to the realisation that we no longer had any water supply. No drinking water, no hot water, no washing-up water, no toilet water,

and it was 3pm on a Friday before the long weekend. No plumbers, no phone calls, and I was packing the ute to go to Newcastle to do a 3 day workshop over the long weekend and I had to leave soon. I couldn't cancel at this late stage.

I have always thought fondly of the concept of the renaissance person. I like the idea perhaps more than the reality, I flatter or delude myself in my more optimistic moments, on my up days.

I formed a plan, I rang around, I left behind the soggy ground.

I went to the Co-op to buy a pressure pump, returning only to find that the hot water tank was leaking out all its precious contents by a process of reverse peristalsis, so I welded a valve on to the ruptured copper water pipe where it emerged from the ground and fashioned a Heath Robinson style series of fittings to secure the new pressure pump to the old water pipe line, but the ground was still oozing water.

When the tank stand hit the ground one of the severed legs sheared through the earth at the exact point of convergence of several underground waterlines rupturing them all in one fell fall. After isolating all the ground water tanks I fabricated a jerry rig line direct from the new pump to one tank that still had water in it. I finished the oxy work in the dark. I ran an extension cord to the pump, finished!

It was at this point that I entered the house and realised that our hot water tank was not a pressure system! The new and very efficient pump was pouring all our remnants of hot water onto the roof through the overflow pipe. I hadn't designed the house for such generous and abundant pressure. I quickly turned off the cold inlet tap to the hot water tank isolating it from the pressure pump. Janine had cold water and a functioning toilet for the weekend but no hot water.

Thinks! If I stuck a square wooden peg in the end of the hot water overflow pipe on the roof the hot water wouldn't squirt out but only drip out through the gaps and Janine could have hot water as well while I was away. Thus done, I left a little late for Newcastle after clambering over the wet tin roof in the dark plugging the pipe with a square softwood peg in a round copper pipe.

Janine and Geordie only had to turn on the cold water inlet tap to the hot water tank to have a hot shower with very little loss of water onto the roof. I cautioned that the hot water should be turned off again straight after use as the pressure might blow the plug out and then they'd lose all their hot water over night. I felt like I'd achieved something, I realised that I had more inner resources than I had previously given myself emotional space to allow.

Conceit comes before a fall!

I was on the Newcastle freeway returning home when the mobile rang.

"Steve—the kitchen's flooded"!

"Did you turn off the hot water"?

"Yes, we did what you said"

On my return I found that over the three days the wooden plug had swollen up and sealed the overflow pipe, the tank was half full of cold water when the off-peak heater

came on during the night. The cold water expanded and could not escape, the pressure built up and the tank exploded flooding the kitchen.

It took me five weeks to repair the hot water tank, build a new tank stand and put every thing back to rights. Time I would have rather spent in the studio, but both jobs got done in enough time. Had I had more time I'd still be making more work. There is always one more pot left in me. Today I started work on the next show. It is not possible to unpack the same kiln I just packed. By the time the work comes out time has moved on and my expectations have changed, I am never happy with anything that I find that I can do. I always want the work to be better, more mysterious, more interesting, more sensual, everything.

Restlessness, ambition, angst, artistic temperament? — whatever.