

The Function of Art, The Art of Function

Sandy Lockwood throwing in her Balmoral Village studio, NSW; photo: courtesy artist

Opposite page: **Sandy Lockwood, *Three*, 2014** woodfired, saltglazed porcelain and stoneware h.9cm, w.58cm, d.7.5cm; photo: courtesy artist



Conversation, Jazz and Pots

Sandy Lockwood discusses art as process and object

Art and function are not mutually exclusive. This is particularly the case when considering tableware. My ideas about this theme include art as a finished piece as well as the art of making and firing tableware, choosing pieces to use, and finally all the creativity involved in preparing and presenting food.

Art in this context is not only what has been created. Art also includes a way of doing things, usually implying skill and judgment such as in the art of flower arrangement. In relation to making and using tableware, both these senses of the word **art** are applicable. The finished product can be art, and art can be exercised in its creation and subsequent use.

Pots made by hand in a studio embody all the craft skills, knowledge, creativity and visual sensitivity of the maker in the finished piece. Through the language of clay there is a potential for the maker to express something unique, to have something particular to say through the act of making. In making functional pots there is a haptic appreciation of an imagined future use. This draws on the accumulated experience of handling and using them that feeds back into the making process: the weight and feel in the hand, the softness of the lip to drink from or to invite one to pour from, the way a pot will sit nestled in the hand, the way the handle fits the hand.

In the best examples, clay is encouraged to have something to say as well. Clay has unique characteristics that allow the maker to engage with it in a kind of conversation: a push here, a fold there, rhythms from the action of wheel and hand, a decision to leave this part clear and to allow the energy to show there – a conversation between imagination, hand, clay, water and wheel – a constant stream of mini choices that continue through into packing and firing the kiln. In my case this is a wood fired salt glazing kiln. There are quiet areas in the kiln where softness can prevail and other more dramatic areas where the movement of ash and salt are clearly visible. They both offer a very living surface.

In firing, the kiln also joins the conversation. My kiln has quite a lot to say and sometimes in quite an assertive manner that demands judicious management.

So, the first conversation in the art of making is between the maker, the material, imagined use, and the kiln. The second conversation is between the user and the pots in the choice of pieces for preparing and presenting food and drink. These creative acts reveal a lot about the art of function. One could say the final enjoyment of food and the art of conversation at the table begin as a conversation between the maker and the clay. This is a melding of the various meanings of art.

The best of tableware pieces play the same role as art in provoking responses through engaging our senses. They can provoke thought, emotional enjoyment, satisfaction, or some blend of these responses. They can continue to engage us over long periods of time as we discover new things about them and ourselves. They can enhance our everyday lives and surprise us on a chance encounter.

The process of collecting tableware pieces is something special and often random. Piece by piece there is an accumulation of experience, meaning and memory that tell the story of how they came to be owned and why. These thoughts and emotions become part of the pot itself.

Storage places for pots can be seen as a library for enjoyment, perhaps a kind of personal and idiosyncratic art gallery. The collection may be a large and comprehensive library or it may consist of a few special pieces. What matters is the enjoyment derived from handling and using the unique collection that is your own. Each time you take pieces from the library there is a potential to start



another conversation. It may be as simple as choosing a favourite mug, or it may start with the visual orchestration of form, texture and colour that complements the warmth and laughter of a gathering of friends for an informal banquet.

In contrast there is also the art of choosing and using pots within a very formal setting such as a Japanese tea ceremony. The function and surroundings of the pieces are quite particular; however there is still the telling of a new story, of enjoyment each time they are carefully selected from the library and used. Discussion of the maker and making of pieces used is an integral part of the tea ceremony.

Using tableware can be seen as analogous to a jazz performance. The event may be spontaneous and ephemeral in nature but leave a lasting impression – it can provoke an emotional response that lingers in the memory. As with jazz, making pots and preparing and serving food can have a variety of styles, genres, tempos, rhythms, tones, colours and improvisations. The venue and audience can vary from time to time and each event is unique, an opportunity to create a new piece of performance art. It may be the soothing lyric of a quiet breakfast amid the bustle of a busy life that is enhanced by a favourite mug for tea and a special plate for toast, or it may be the choice of bowls for a rambunctious and up-tempo meal of pasta and red wine with friends.

Now more than ever it seems vitally important to emphasise human values that include caring for each other and our environment, creativity, compassion, conviviality, humour, art, contemplation, and making of ceremonies. In this context the experience of using pots every day is life enhancing. From breakfast to dinner there is a chance to engage with the hand, the eye, the skin, the heart, memories, others, and the self, without which we would be diminished.

What I hope people get from using my pots is some connection with the story of the making – a connection with the energy and movement of the making process, a tactile experience that draws one closer to the real world of textures and undulations, to feel the hand of the maker when using the pieces, and to spend time being drawn into the colour, texture and variation of woodfiring and salt glazing.

Like jazz, one can talk about it, but it is the direct experience that really makes the impact.

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Opposite page:

Ceramics by **Sandy Lockwood**

1 **Tray**, 2014, handbuilt, woodfired and saltglazed stoneware to 1300°C
h.4cm, w.36cm, d.8cm; photo: artist

2 **Ashy Platter**, detail, 2014, thrown, woodfired, saltglazed stoneware to 1300°C, h.30cm, w.4cm; photo: artist

3 **Pair of Yunomi**, 2012, thrown, woodfired, saltglazed stoneware to 1300°C, h.10cm, w.8cm; photo: John Lascelles

4 **Dish with Handle**, 2012, thrown and altered, woodfired, saltglazed porcelain to 1300°C, h.8cm, w.20cm, d.7cm; photo: artist

