translucent light Angela Mellor and Mondo Lucé

Translucency depends on light. A developing partnership between artist and industry is revealing new possibilities in ceramics and lighting. **Andrew Nicholls** reports

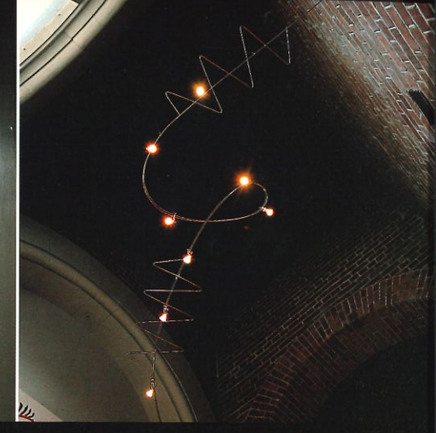
Angela Mellor is one of Western Australia's foremost ceramicists. She is internationally acclaimed for her almost impossibly delicate minimal white vessels, vases and sake sets, and as one of the principal contemporary ceramicists exploring the incorporation of paperclay as a sculptural element with fine bone china. Since undertaking her Honours degree in 1997, the primary focus of Mellor's practice has been the exploration of light and organic form as the basis of an aesthetic in fine bone china.

She draws her inspiration from the natural world: the sublime qualities of sea and sky, the forms and textures of subterranean environments (coral, kelp and weathered driftwood, as well as limestone cave formations) and most significantly, the play of natural light upon the landscape. Mellor attributes this fascination to her amazement at the quality of the Australian sunlight after first emigrating from the United Kingdom in 1994.

Mellor's trademark is the incorporation of paperclay inserts, often cast from natural elements—rock faces, driftwood or the shoreline—to vary the opacity of her pieces. She also employs a sponging technique to alter the thickness, and subsequent translucency, of her works. Hence, viewed in natural daylight, her vessels appear to be extremely beautiful minimal forms; but when seen under focused, electrical light they come to life, literally glowing, with intense areas of intricate detail.

Craftwest's Executive Director, Lynda Dorrington, first suggested that Mellor collaborate with industry to develop a range of custom-lit works that could fully realise the potential of her exploration to date. She arranged a meeting between Mellor and Gerard de Wind, Director of Western Australian lighting design specialists Mondo Lucé, who provided the lighting system for Craftwest Gallery when it was renovated in 2001.

'Mondo Lucé want to profile the role of lighting in the arts,' de Wind explains. 'We are very interested in exploring the effects of light on different kinds of art and craftwork, both in the display of work, and also as playing a crucial role within the work itself.' He suggested one of their primary suppliers, Urs Roth from Ropa Lighting, as a potential collaborator. 'I thought of Urs because the actual Ropa fittings themselves are very fine and minimal,' says de Wind. 'They lend themselves very well to the type of work Angela does. Craftwest gallery itself is lit with Urs's products, and I felt it would be an easy marriage, to get the two of them together.'



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Gerard de Wind, Mondo Lucé

Roth has been responsible for some of the most striking lighting systems installed in cultural institutions around Perth, including a spectacular motion-triggered system for the Butterfly Gallery of the Western Australian Museum. The collaboration of Roth and Mellor was the focus of Mellor's successful application to the Australia Council for the development of new work in 2002.

Roth and Mellor have recently produced a number of test pieces designed to address the technical challenges of their work, primarily the shrinkages that occur during the firing process, and how they then effect the ease with which electrical components can be attached. The prototypes incorporate tungsten-halogen lights, as well as a number of sample LEDs not seen in Australia.

Amid the current debate surrounding the relationship between craft and design in Australia, partnerships of this nature suggest the enormous potential for collaboration with industry. They not only broaden the potential for craft practitioners to extend their practice into commercially viable production, but also foster innovative shifts in their research and gallery work.

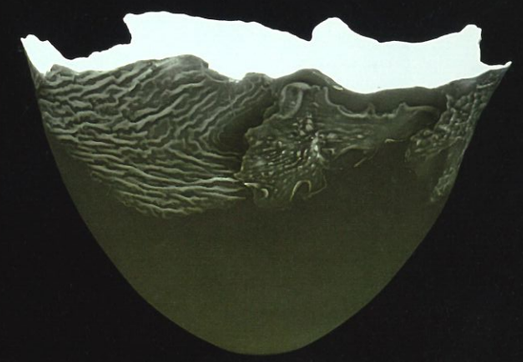
Mellor's upcoming solo exhibition at Craftwest will incorporate both her solo works—custom-lit by Roth—and their collaborative works, which include large-scale installations and more functional hanging and wall-mounted lights. Mellor and Roth are already anticipating the extended life of their collaboration in commercially viable manufacturing.

'In the past I've made what have really been the beginnings of production lines, such as the sake cups and my own light shades at home,' Mellor states. 'But because I've been working towards exhibitions all the time, I haven't been able to continue with those. I've never actually linked up with industry before, and I think that with this project it is a definite possibility.'

Roth agrees. 'It would be great to continue the relationship beyond the exhibition,' he says. 'We haven't really talked seriously about that yet—at the moment the important thing is to get them working functionally. But I would like to develop them into something that has a future in terms of functional product lines of Angela's work.'

Angela Mellor's exhibition, *Ocean Light*, will open at Craftwest in November, 2003 showing until mid-January, 2004.

Andrew Nicholls is an artist, writer and curator based in Perth, Western Australia. He is Artistic Programs Director at Craftwest.



Opposite page: Angela Mellor, *Arctic Fold*, 2002, bone china and paperclay. Photo: Victor France.

Above far left: Ropa Lighting, Interior of Koro Jewellery, City Arcade, Perth. Photo: Alan Turner.

Above centre: Ropa Lighting, *Butterfly Gallery*, Museum of Western Australia. Photo: Alan Turner.

Above right: Ropa Lighting, *Bird Flight Path*, light for WA Museum. Photo: Alan Turner.

Below: Angela Mellor, *Ice-Flow*, 2002, bone china and paperclay inlay. Photo: Victor France.