

seven 21st-century ceramicists

Just prior to the 3rd Australian Ceramic Triennale in Sydney in July, seven ceramists gathered in the Wheel Room of the National Art School's Ceramic Department for a photo session capturing over six decades of women in pottery and ceramics in Australia. For several of them it was the first time they had been back in this room since they had studied there, and conversations and reminiscences flowed at a great pace. The variety of working styles and types of clay used by these women shows the strength and diversity of ceramics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Australia.

Left to right: Lynda Draper, Mollie Douglas, Janet Barriskill, Julie Bartholomew, Margaret Tuckson, Jenny Orchard and Sandra Brown

Margaret Tuckson, Mollie Douglas and Janet Barriskill are of the 'old school' potters and ceramists who have built their careers during the mid-twentieth century, when women were often seen to play the 'lesser role' to the male potter. However, each of these women has forged careers with national and international recognition. Margaret, an expert potter with an exceptional knowledge of the traditional pottery of Aboriginal, Melanesian and New Guinea's Indigenous peoples is co-author, with Patricia May, of a seminal book, *The Traditional Pottery of Papua New Guinea*. Tuckson's interest in PNG goes back a long way – she has visited almost a dozen times since the 1960s. This was at a time when people said that women should not visit areas like the Sepik River. She has exhibited widely with the Potters Society. Mollie Douglas's pottery career spans over 60 years and encompasses the history of contemporary ceramics in Australia from the 1940s through to today, including the formation of the Potters Society and her experiences as the first Australian representative at the First World



Congress of Craftsmen in New York in 1964. A pottery teacher at the National Art School with Peter Rushforth, Douglas was one of the few professional women potters at a time when there was very little female influence in this field. Mollie's work was chosen to be part of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics Exhibition. Janet has always had a passion for the basic elements of ceramics – clay, rock, fire and water; and these elements are most evident in her work, which is influenced by the more than seven years she spent living and working in Japan, studying under master potters such as Kato Kozo, a leading Shino potter.

Dr Julie Bartholomew, Lynda Draper, Jenny Orchard and Sandra Brown are the 'less older ones', although each has over 25 years experience as practising ceramists. The diversity of their works is wide ranging, and all these artists rely on a strong narrative component in their work. Draper builds coiled and pinched forms of porcelain vessels, with luscious textile surfaces that explore the tactility and fragility of clay, and has been a ceramics teacher at Gympie TAFE in

southern Sydney for over 20 years. Julie is an artist and educator in ceramics. Currently President of the Australian Ceramics Association, a national non-profit organisation representing the interests of practising professional ceramists, Julie has received numerous awards and grants, including two Australia Council for the Arts New Works grants and a Tokyo Studio Residency. She has also taken part in three artist residencies in China. Julie's slip-cast porcelain hands, feet, stiletto shoes and other fashion accoutrements confront issues associated with our obsession for fashion branding, often at the sake of body comfort. Jenny's quirky sculptural forms are a riot of colour and stories of animals, monsters and fanciful ideas. Her installation totems often reference the fragility of our planet. She paints earthenware shapes and vessels with strong glaze colours that enhance her organic creatures. Jenny's long teaching career in several tertiary institutions has complemented her long and exciting career. Sandra Brown's fine porcelain

vessels are often embellished with delicately drawn or painted surface decorations, and many have sterling silver attachments. After more than 25 years of teaching and operating a commercial ceramics business, Sandra is now the touring exhibitions coordinator at Object and is currently the coordinating curator for the *Jeff Mincham: Ceramics* exhibition, in the *Living Treasures* series.

All artists have been acknowledged in both national and international exhibitions and collections, and they are an excellent indication of the strong direction of ceramics in the twenty-first century. ○