



**Quiet echoes, a pause for breath**  
porcelain by Prue Venables. Beaver  
Galleries, Deakin. Until April 9  
**Craft: Kerry-Anne Cousins**

Prue Venables' last exhibition at the Beaver Galleries was in October 2005, when she exhibited with Patsy Hely and Neville French. There were only a few pieces of Venables' work in that exhibition so it is a pleasure to encounter this more comprehensive collection of her work several years later.

It may be that the overall ideas behind Venables' work have not changed a great deal. Like Jane Austen, she is content to work on an intimate domestic scale.

Venables has written of the influence of using her grandmother's delicate porcelain fluted cups and saucers as a child. She was taken with their elegant delicacy and the gentle sound they made when brought together. It is a childhood memory that has continued to inform her work.

Venables' initial training was in science and music but she developed an interest in ceramics. She studied ceramics in both England and Australia. Her interest in functional ceramics was reinforced by her training at the Harrow Studio Pottery at the Harrow College of Art in London where she notes the emphasis was on making new and interesting functional ceramic objects.

In later years Prue Venables has won many prestigious awards and grants. She has lectured in ceramics in both Australia and in various prestigious institutions abroad. In 2010 she was appointed creative director, Ceramics Studio of the Jam Factory in Adelaide.



**DOMESTIC:** Porcelain bowl, bottle and ladle – deceptively simple forms with a purity and luminosity of their glazes, arranged as if for a ritual.

The works in this exhibition are a collection of domestic objects in porcelain. They include bowls, jugs, sieves and spoons. Venables relishes the hand-thrown wheel form of making ceramics, which she then carefully works by hand, slightly modifying their forms and, in the case of the sieves, piercing them through with holes to make varieties of patterns. The glazes are luminous – milky whites, pale eggshell blues and celadon green-tinted creams partnered with soft inky blacks. In a work called *Black vessel and soft celadon bowl No. 7*, for example, the bowl is connected to the larger black vessel by a cast shadow while the blue form of the bowl is reflected in the dense black glaze of the vessel.

The ceramics are not ornamented. Their appeal comes from their deceptively simple forms and the purity and luminosity of their glazes. The objects are placed in small groupings – a bowl, a jug and a spoon with as much care as if they were ritual objects arranged for a ceremony. Each one is accorded a place but each is in a mindful relationship with the other. It occurred to me that the objects all have an affinity with fluids – the jugs for pouring water, the bowls and spoons for holding it and the sieves to allow water or other fluids to flow through their perforations. Nothing is static and this fluidity is one of the characteristics of Venables' forms.

The series of sieves and spoons are

also characteristic of Venables' work. The sieves are either round, oval or in some examples quite elongated. While the majority are in a ladle form, there are others that are larger scoops such as in the group *White trio with spoon No. 6*. They can echo the forms of the other objects in their particular grouping. The patterns of their perforations mimic the arrangements of holes in ordinary sieves or make up more deliberate patterns. Their handles can be either long and straight or are modelled on bamboo with its characteristic knobs and segmentation. I recently brought back from Sri Lanka some beautiful handcrafted spoons made from coconut. They have the same beauty found in Venables' spoons and sieves

and share the handmade skill in joining and balancing bowl to stem. Venables' sieves and spoons also bring to mind the lades used in the Japanese tea ceremony as well as our own domestic rituals while the jug and bowls have the ceremonial associations of cleansing and purifying.

It is the serene quality of the work that allows such interplay of thoughts and associations – and perhaps it is a need to reconnect with everyday domestic rituals that accounts for the infinite pleasure that Prue Venables' work continues to provide.

■ Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Hours: Tuesday-Friday 10am-5pm, Saturday-Sunday 9am-5pm.