

# Trio combine talents for ceramic show

## CRAFT REVIEW

### A POINT OF DIFFERENCE

Ceramics by Kelly Austin, Dai Li and Kenji Uranishi. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until November 25.

BY Kerry-Anne Cousins

The innovation that characterises contemporary ceramics is very much in evidence in this exhibition by Kelly Austin, Dai Li and Kenji Uranishi.

All three artists were born overseas where initially they undertook their ceramic studies. They now live in Australia.

Kelly Austin, originally from Canada, lives in Tasmania. After achieving her Fine Arts degree in Vancouver she completed her Master of Philosophy/Ceramics at the Australian National University.

Dai Li was born in China and after attending the Jingdezhen Ceramic Centre between 2005 and 2009, she came to Australia and now works in Queensland.

Kenji Uranishi was born in Japan and studied at Nara College of Fine Arts. After graduating, he worked in his own home studio for six years before coming to Australia in 2004. He now lives in Brisbane.

The overseas influence is perhaps more clearly discernible in the work of both Dai Li and Kenji Uranishi.

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Dai Li's ceramic works are memorable. One of her female ceramic heads remains a vivid memory for me long after I saw it at a Beaver Galleries exhibition earlier in this year. Dai Li's small cylindrical feminine figures and busts in glazed stoneware range in size from 16cm to about 34 cm high. In each work, the Asian features of the young women's faces are inscribed with a deft and delicate touch. In works called respectively *Adore* or *Reluctant*, Li cleverly and economically captures the emotion by a turn of the eyes, a twist of the head or the clasp of a hand.

The emotions seem transient – a fleeting expression captured in the facial features of each character rather than their body language.

The artist transcribes small details, such as the delicate strands of hair that appear to escape from the black hair defining the shape of each face. This adds a wistful and vulnerable note. Yet for all their portrayal of emotion, the figures seem inscrutable and enigmatic. This is true of the large figures that are the most important works. The smaller figurines *Girl with yellow dress in the bath* or *Toilet (green dress)* surrender this



Clockwise from top left: Kenji Uranishi – *Tsubomi I*, slip cast porcelain with glaze, 20 x 22cm; Dai Li – *Reluctant*, stoneware, 34 x 14 x 13cm; Kelly Austin – *Stilled Composition 29*, stoneware with glaze, 38 x 120 x 32cm, five pieces with timber shelf. Photo: Peter Whyte

sense of inscrutable dignity to a more whimsical fancy.

Kenji Uranishi has a Japanese sensibility to nature. His porcelain ceramic sculptures are called "tsubomi" or flower buds and bring to mind Leonardo da Vinci's botanical studies of plants where nature is seen as an energetic centrifugal force.

In the series *Tsubomi I-IV*, Uranishi draws for inspiration on this life force which he feels is delicately folded within spring buds waiting to flower. Though abstract in their geometric appearance, his works celebrate the rhythmic circles of nature's growth and fecundity.

Uranishi begins with a drawing which he interprets into plaster. From the carved plaster elements he creates moulds that he uses to slip cast each of the units making up his work. Each of these units is joined together and the work flows from around a central void to create a

circular three-dimensional structure. Solid and void interior spaces make dark and light rhythmic patterns, giving these structures an architectonic complexity.

Although Uranishi has noted his inspiration is based on buds about to bloom, there is no sense of expectation or incompleteness in these works. Coloured by soft pale blue and green glazes they have a tranquil presence and radiate stillness and serenity as if sharing the artist's confidence in the assurance of nature's seasonal cycles.

Kelly Austin's work investigates the recent contemporary ceramic practice of creating still life installations of ceramic objects.

Perhaps one of its best known practitioners was Australian ceramicist Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (1935-2013) who was herself influenced, to some extent, by the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964). Morandi created still life paintings of

ordinary domestic objects, emphasising the relationship of their forms and creating tonal patterns through light and shadow.

Austin arranges her ceramic stoneware and porcelain vessels with great sensitivity and skill using a carefully selected and balanced vocabulary of forms, textures and a restricted palette of soft earth-coloured glazes. She plays with balance as in *Stilled Composition 50* and contrasts different forms emphasising voids and closed forms, as well as referencing tonal values and textures.

Some of these arrangements are created on their own shelves; *Stilled Composition 29* referencing perhaps the historical origins of still life painting presented in frames. Instead of a still life painting, Austin offers us a shelf of actual objects that have the advantage of being open to the transient light that defines their forms and enhances the colour of their glazes.