

# Ceramicist takes its viewers to the top of Canberra

**Review** by Caren Florance - September 6, 2019

*Craft / Cathy Franzi: "Seven Mountains and a Lake", at Beaver Galleries, until September 15.*



"Bulbine Lily" by Cathy Franzi, wheel thrown & altered Limoges porcelain, engobe, underglaze, glaze, sgraffito.

**HIGHLY** respected ceramicist Cathy Franzi takes viewers to the summits of the Canberra region in her latest collection.

"Seven Mountains and a Lake" sits on clustered plinths, each cluster consisting of one majestic black and white vase and two smaller, colourful vases. As one walks around the room, the arrangement falls, literally, into place. I find myself walking through the bowl of central Canberra, and each large vase depicts one of our seven mountains that sit around the rim: Mt Majura, Mt Ainslie, Mt Jerrabomberra, Red Hill, Booroomba Peak, Mt Painter, and Black Mountain, arranged in geographic proximity to each other.

Franzi's style is highly graphic, stark and yet warm, with bold sgraffito shapes in deep matte black on white and touches of primary red and yellow for the mountain pieces. Nature is the focus: the close-up shapes and patterns of leaves, stalks and blossoms predominate the pictorial space, with the surrounding landforms reduced to border

status around the base.

With the exception of the Black Mountain piece (because I was "standing" underneath it), the only sign of human activity within each vista is a tiny Black Mountain Tower, sometimes white against black hills, sometimes black against white sky. The lake is present on all of them, pretending not to be man-made. Franzi uses tower and lake as a temporal pinning in the face of Canberra's native environment's timelessness.

“The environment and character of each mountain is captured in its flora,” Franzi says in her statement about the works

“Standing on a summit I might be surrounded by granite slabs, *Grevillea oxyantha* flourishing at high elevation in rock crevices. Another summit might offer a Drooping Sheoak forest, its foliage whispering in the breeze.”

She utilises visual beauty as a strategy for awareness, and underpins it with research into the botanical sciences; her drawings, even though stylised, connect to the field of botanical illustration in their close attention to detail.

This is especially so in the smaller works, which have a similar graphic quality, but are more lush in their colouring. Each features a specific native plant found in the local environment, such as the Bulbine Lily, the Hoary Sunray, or the Mountain Grevillia, using green instead of black to contrast with the white background, with pale yellow, pink, purple, or blue highlights. The matte exteriors have contrapuntal glossy engobe inners in a highlight colour, rendering them full-throated, like a songbird.

Franzi has a doctorate from the ANU School of Art & Design and is an accredited professional member of Craft ACT, among other professional achievements.

Her ceramics skills, combined with her environmental interests, present here a clarity of concept: the audience walks through the gallery space like giants, heads in the clear air that graces the city, bending in to enjoy the small details. Franzi is urging the audience to care, to appreciate, and to pay attention.



“Mt Majura Kurrajong”, by Cathy Franzi, wheel thrown & altered Limoges porcelain, engobe, underglaze, glaze, sgraffito