

Review / Ceramic artist breaks out of boundaries

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Prue Venables, 'Betty's Kitchen,' 2017. Photo: Terence Bogue.

craft / "Living Treasures: Masters of Australian Craft: Prue Venables", Canberra Potters Gallery, 1 Aspinall Street, Watson, until October 11. Reviewed by MEREDITH HINCHLIFFE.

OVER several years Australian Design Centre, based in Sydney, has organised a series of major solo exhibitions honouring eminent and highly respected craftspeople, celebrating their master of skill, achievements, contribution to Australian craft, and the unique place they occupy in the national design culture.

This exhibition is the ninth in the series.

Prue Venables is an important, multi award-winning Australian ceramicist. The exhibition includes not only the work, but also an impressive publication and a film.

Venables works entirely in porcelain, an unforgiving material, and there are just some things you cannot do with it. She uses both Limoges and Jingdezhen porcelain.

At first glance the pieces appear to be functional, but after careful examination, the viewer immediately understands that these works are fragile and do not lend themselves to use.

Most are based in vessel form: bowls, tea caddies, stemmed bowls, bottles and jugs.



Prue Venables, White Spoon & Red Handle with Black Bowl , 2019. Photo Terence Bogue.

There is a sharp clarity of form in each piece, they are finely thrown and turned.

Two large groupings of smallish pieces are the centrepieces of this exhibition: "Esme's Dressing Table" and "Betty's Kitchen".



Prue Venables, Tall Black Oval, Hairbrush, White Sieve and Tea Caddy , 2017. Photo Terence Bogue.

"Betty's Kitchen" includes more than utensils generally found around food – such as a pair of shoes. "Esme's Kitchen" includes porcelain utensils, such as

black cups and white cups, bowls in a range of sizes, a funnel with strainer and a teapot. Venables has always made beautiful teapots, with small, proud spouts, practical handles and strong bellies.

Also on exhibit are several jugs. These are elegant and simple, small, round vessels – without handles – that sit in your palm, with an understated but functional lip.

In the last few years, Venables has combined other materials with porcelain – mostly lacquered wood, beaten sterling silver and beaten copper, which add a bright contrast to the velvety black surfaces. Many of the forms are altered, creating tension and visual interest. Perhaps this artist is breaking out of the strict boundaries she set herself many years ago that appear to mask the emotional content of her work.

This is a significant exhibition and marks the importance of the Watson Arts Centre in the Australian ceramics scene.