

'Engrossing' exhibition of fine porcelain

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Alice Couttoupes 'Dwellings, Tea Rose', porcelain

craft / "Porcelain" Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin until June 14. Open 10am-5pm, Tuesday to Sunday. Entry, numbers, strict hygiene protocols and distancing controlled. Reviewed by MEREDITH HINCHLIFFE.

THIS exhibition brings together six of Australia's ceramicists, Prue Venables, Keiko Matsui, Kevin White, Shannon Garson, Neville French and Alice Couttoupes, who work almost exclusively in porcelain.

Porcelain is a white translucent clay body, usually fired to above 1300°C. Pieces made from this clay are generally delicate, fragile and fine.



Shannon Garson – 'Winged bowl', porcelain, glaze, underglaze, terra sigillata

Shannon Garson, from Queensland, is passionate about the environment, particularly those parts including the littoral zone – that space between water, such as an ocean or a river – and the shore. All kinds of detritus collects in this space, as it is lapped by the water. "Winged Bowl" is relatively large for this finicky clay. Both the interior and exterior surfaces on this work, which balances on a gently curved base, are

finely decorated with markings that are evocative of the littoral zone: twigs, small stones, vegetation, and shallow pools of water. The matt surface and the slightly uneven rim enhance the fragility of this bowl.



Neville French 'Mungo light 1', set of two, wheel thrown and altered porcelain, limestone matt wood-fired glaze

Also drawing inspiration from the environment, Neville French is showing “Mungo light 1”, a work made up of two pieces. His altered, wheel-thrown vessel forms are pale, with subtle multiple thin layers of glazes evoking the ephemeral effects of light at Lake Mungo, NSW. They are understated, seemingly simple forms, with a dry glaze.



Keiko Matsui 'Up_in_the_ch+air #4', porcelain, glazes, cobalt, self-hardening clay, acrylic paint and found object.

This exhibition includes two ceramicists with whom I was not familiar. Keiko Matsui received her honours degree in fine arts from Sydney's National Art School in 2006 and she has exhibited widely. This body of six pieces expresses her whimsical dreams and sentiments. Each “house” is topped with a gold ball and at least one chair – for Matsui the chair is reflective of human character and presence. These objects are quirky and fun. The bright cobalt blue surface ornamentation highlights the whiteness of the clay.



Kevin White 'Window', porcelain, enamels

Kevin White has been a regular exhibitor at Beaver Galleries and is highly regarded both nationally and internationally. Three quite large vessels are elegant and sophisticated. Geometric planes of colour sweep over the surface, layering colour on colour, and offering a variety of images for the viewer. The surface decoration on "Vase for a self-isolating flower 1" is strong and the tiny aperture on the flat top might be for a single flower.

The pure whiteness of unglazed porcelain lends an ethereal delicacy to Alice Couttoupes' fine "roses". "Dwellings, Tea Rose" shows three perfectly formed roses sitting on a shelf with their stems twining around each other. "Dwellings, Dog Rose # 1" shows a trellis with blossoms winding around it. These flowers are extraordinary – frangible and delicate.



Prue Venables 'Black and yellow oval with black teapot', Limoges porcelain, thrown and altered, reduction fired

In 2018 Prue Venables was selected as the ninth Australian Design Centre's Living Treasure – Master of Australian Craft. Her work exudes calm and stillness. Often depicting kitchen utensils, she mainly works in dark and pale white glazes, pairing them to create visual tension. Often the interiors of vessels are in pale colours such as yellow and olive green, she has begun using silver and Australian timber in the long handles of small sieves. Riffing off Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, Venables combines several objects to create one work. Her groupings are often unusual, for example, in this show a beautiful teapot is paired with an oval form although they seem to have little to join them.

I found it a joy to see the outstanding works in this exhibition "in the flesh". Their delicacy belies the strength of each piece. It is an engrossing exhibition to revive the 2020 program.