

Encoded sentinels

CERAMICS

Terra intima: Avital Sheffer

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street,
Deakin.

Reviewer: **Kerry-Anne Cousins**

In the Jewish Museum in Jerusalem, Avital Sheffer encountered an exhibition of some of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the pottery vases that contained them. It was an event that influenced her decision to study ceramics.

In 1990 she migrated to Australia and graduated in ceramics from Lismore TAFE College in 2003.

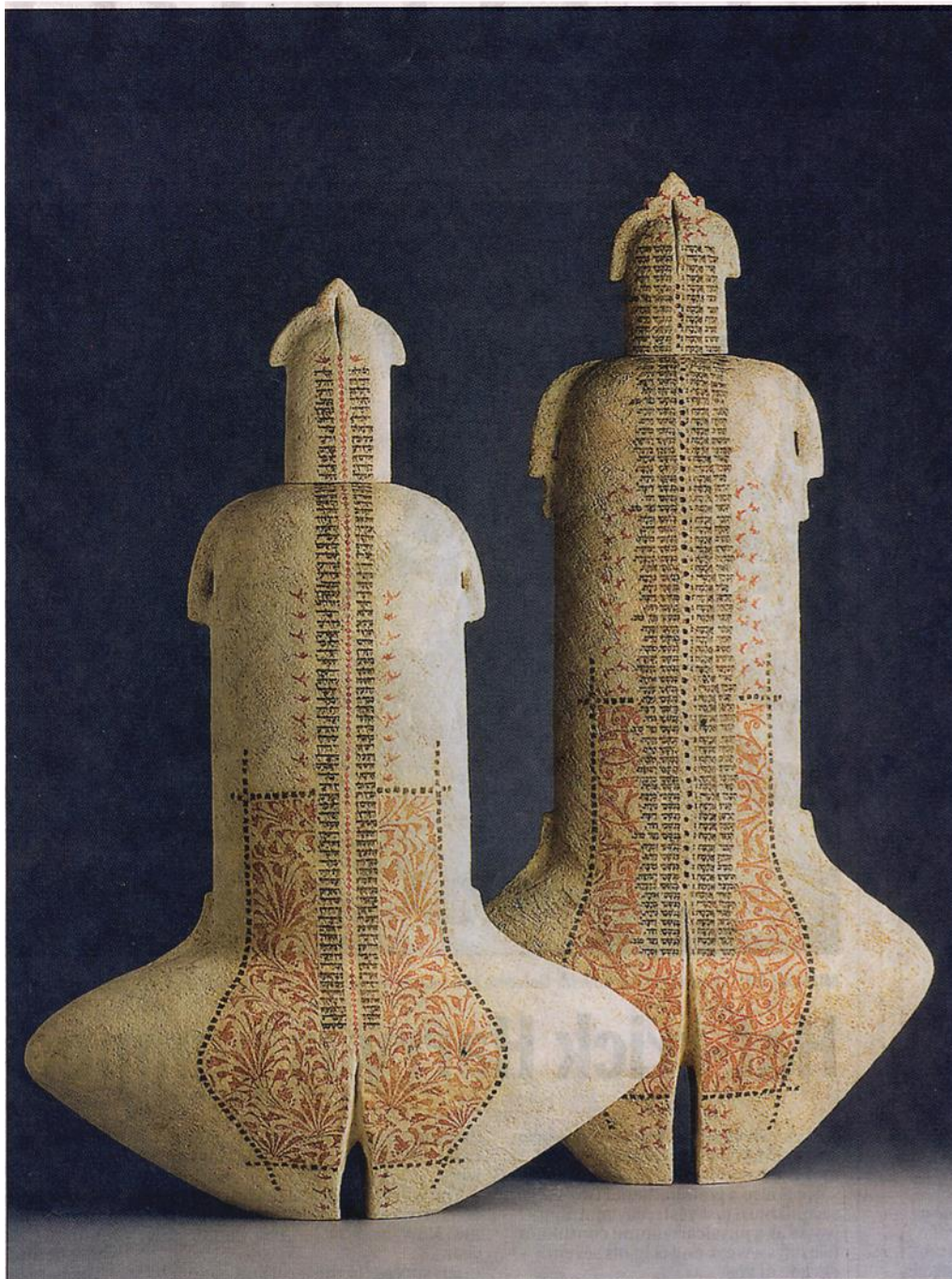
Sheffer's pots appear to carry with them the inheritance of centuries of Middle Eastern art. They stand like sentinels as if guarding this inheritance, but their forms and decoration are very much a re-casting and assemblage of fragments of historical flotsam and jetsam in a contemporary idiom.

The pots are hand-built in earthenware clay using the coil or slab method. They are almost two-dimensional as the decoration suggests they are meant to be viewed either from the front or the back.

They operate like ancient clay tablets carrying on them inscribed encoded symbols and signs. Their architectonic forms, between 58 and 77cm tall, are derived from ancient vessels. In some pots the form becomes divided at its base to suggest the human form in the guise of primitive clay votive figures.

The patterns and texts are taken from early Hebrew, Christian and Islamic texts the artist has found during her research into ancient manuscripts. This beautiful old calligraphy remains unreadable to most of us. I did wonder if it would alter the dynamics of the work if we were able to understand or interpret its meaning.

In these works Sheffer has refined her forms and decoration to present a beautifully coherent if enigmatic statement.



EVOCATION: The hint of human form in Avital Sheffer's *Piryon I & II*, hand-built earthenware, 69cm and 77cm.