



## The changing face of craft

By Sharon Peoples

**T**he exhibition by Craft ACT of recent works by Les Blakeborough, one of Australia's influential practising ceramicists, is part of Object Gallery's travelling exhibition series *Living Treasures: Masters of Australian Craft*.

This collection is not a retrospective show of Blakeborough's work, but rather an exhibition of the recent culmination of five years of research and development working with Southern Ice porcelain. This material, developed by Blakeborough, has become known for its translucency, crisp whiteness, strength and quality. In many ways this show reflects the changes in the way "craft" has also developed in the last 40 years: from work with the obvious mark of the hand to that which encompasses and embraces the design and manufacturing processes.

Blakeborough was born in 1930, and like many ceramicists in the 1960s travelled to Japan, exploring what was the Leach/Hamada philosophy. In the 1990s he travelled to Scandinavia where there is little schism between commercial production of work and that produced by artists and craft people. Over this long period Blakeborough has been refining surface technique and the subtle play between light and shadow in functional ceramics.

Here in this exhibition there is a wide variety of work ranging from commercial

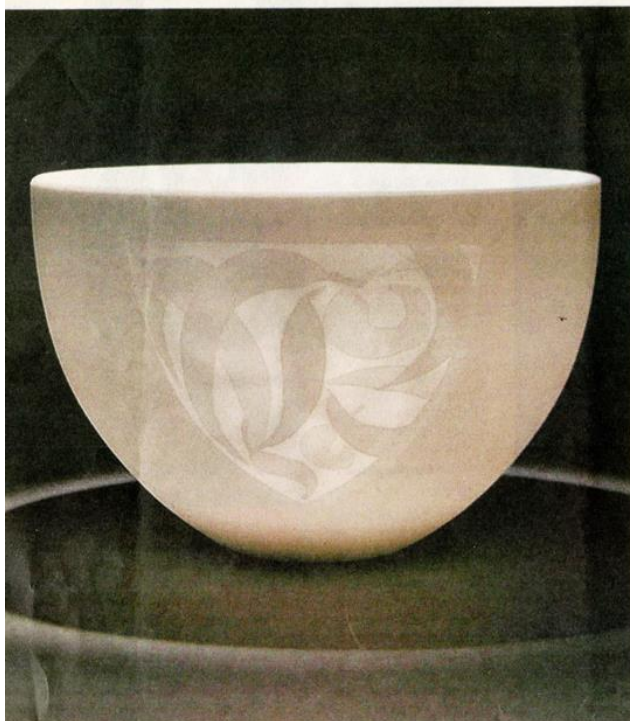
production work such as the *Tea Set Tasmanian Tiger* (2005) to the one-off exhibition pieces such as the cylinder forms of *The Ice* (2000).

The movement between commercial and exhibition work is fascinating and possibly appeals to two different audiences. Many ceramicists do production work, but large-scale commercial production is not always possible nor sought after. Such commercial production tableware, such as the *Flora Tasmania* project (2001), can only be manufactured in conjunction with a company such as Danish Royal Copenhagen running over a number of years. *Tea Set Tasmanian Tiger* (2005), made in Southern Ice porcelain with surface decoration by Linda Warner, uses decals and a clear glaze to give a distinct contemporary look.

Of the one-off exhibition pieces the oval form, *Homage to Sally Sorrell* (2005), is one of the highlights. Not only the translucent form itself but the text slightly raised from the surface of the base, plays with light and texture. The touching text is taken from the journal of Sally Sorrell and begins with the line, "Illness is a lonely journey".

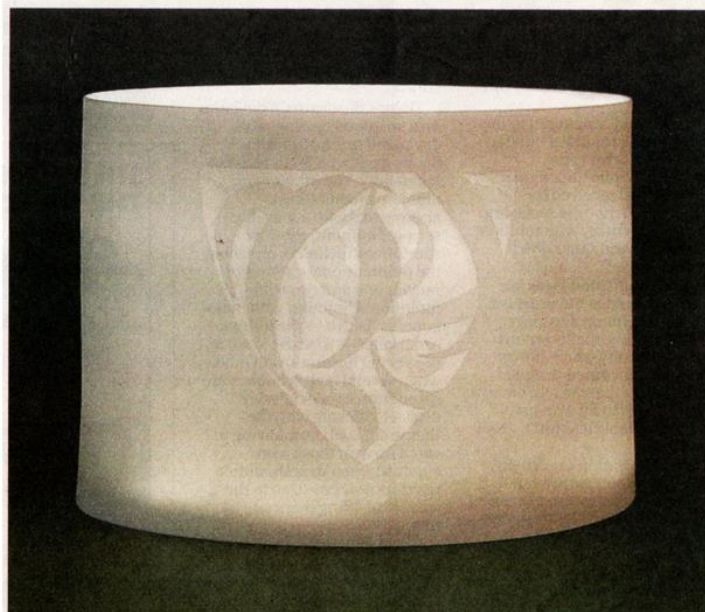
In this exhibition Blakeborough maintains a balance between exhibition and production works and through the use of Southern Ice porcelain has changed the way the craft of ceramics can be perceived.

Les Blakeborough, Craft and Design Centre, 180 London Circuit, Civic until today.



Les Blakeborough's *Forrest Floor Bowl*, 2002.

Photo: Uffe Schulze



*Forrest Floor Oval Form*, 2002, is made from Southern Ice porcelain.