

Elegant porcelain demonstrates technical skill

Review

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Sandra Black: Solace. Beaver Galleries. Until August 27, 2022. beavergalleries.com.au.

Sandra Black's past exhibitions at the Beaver Galleries (2009, 2015 and 2019) have been dominated by her elegant, carved and pierced porcelain vessels. Examples of these are in this current exhibition but on display are other works also demonstrating the technical skill and versatility of the artist, her openness to other stylistic influences and her response to the world around her.

A key factor in this exhibition is the time the artist was able to devote to her work during the last two years of the pandemic.

Black works in porcelain, a material known for its hardness, purity and trans-

lucency. The set of pierced and carved works from the *Etched* series and the *Vine* series are good examples of Black's skill in carving into the walls of these vessels in order to create a structural balance that plays with the possibilities of positive and negative space.

In the *Branching vines* series, stem and leaf form a trailing vine - an iconic motif that has its origins in the decorative arts of many cultures.

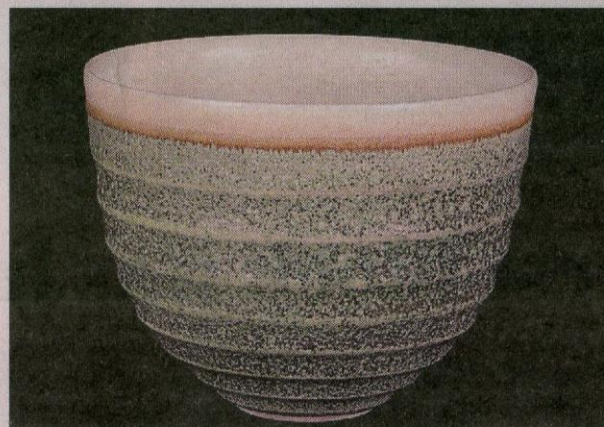
The works in the *Etched bowl* series have designs of open fretwork based on abstract geometric patterns. Their interplay of negative and positive space evokes for me the carved wooden and marble screens found in Indian architecture. The vessels are left unglazed and instead are polished to enhance their surface.

Other works in the exhibition include a series of green

glazed bowls, three black and gold vessels (the *Crossed off* series) and a series of porcelain vessels that are notable for their decorative imagery of autumn landscapes.

The six small green and gold bowls are timeless in their subtle and elegant simplicity - organic in form with beautiful green speckled glazes, they ask to be cupped in two hands. The green glazed *Ripple* bowls are thrown on the potter's wheel and the ridges made by the potter's fingers as the form is raised from the clay, providing a pleasing sense of energy and rhythm. Inside on the bottom of each bowl is a decorative gold motif left by the artist as a gentle surprise.

In the *Ranges* and the *Autumn chill* series of slip cast cylindrical vessels, the surface is decorated with images of branches denuded



Sandra Black's Ripple Green Bowl 1. Picture: Supplied

of leaves depicted against a suggestion of mountains and darkening skies. A lone bird provides a recurring motif. These images, taken from the artist's photographs, are digitally manipulated before being translated into decals that are fused by high temperature firings onto the surface of each pot. The resulting painterly effect evokes the atmosphere of a

misty landscape informed by an Asian aesthetic sensibility.

The three vessels in the *Crossed off* series also seem to suggest an Asian influence with their gold linear designs in blocks providing eye-catching decoration on their dark surfaces. However, in the *Dark Forest* series of slipware, the use of an all-over design of red/

brown foliage against a dark porcelain body is so subtle as to be barely perceptible.

Sandra Black is an internationally recognised West Australian artist who works in Fremantle. After a short career as a high school art teacher in the late 1970s, she began teaching at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (now Curtin University) as well as practising ceramics professionally.

Her many residencies, including in Maihar, Madhya Pradesh (India) in 2015 and Jingdezhen in China, (a famous centre for porcelain production) in 2018, have extended her knowledge and technical skills.

As well as her distinguished art practice, Black has always been involved in art education and currently teaches community classes in ceramics at the Fremantle Arts Centre.