

– DONNA GREEN: CLAY 2 –
By ARTAND, Sydney



Showcasing the art of four contemporary artists working with the medium of clay, ‘CLAY 2’ is currently on show at Utopia Art Sydney until 21 February 2015.

As a sequel to the ‘CLAY’ exhibition of 2014, ‘CLAY 2’ continues to engage with artists who are creating works in clay that surpass the description of ‘ware’. Conceived as a kind of tribute to the late Mareca Gazzard – an artist who advocated for clay to be treated like any sculptural medium, not to be categorised as a ‘craft’ – the show interrogates the démodé divide between art and craft. It features a diverse collection of works by Donna Green, Glenn Barkley, Eloise Rankine, Brett Stone and Kati Watson, and prompts the audience to look not at the formal qualities of the works (the clay, glazes and techniques) but at the forms themselves.

ARTAND spoke to New York-based artist Donna Green, whose work in the show makes a nod towards the history of clay – one of the oldest and most enduring mediums of art – whilst also inscribing its own mark on our time.

ARTAND: In the past, your work has been compared to Willem de Kooning’s paintings. What artists influence your practice?

Donna Green: I love looking at and talking to artists about their creative processes. Janet Mansfield was a master in ceramics. Looking at her work and her respect for the material was a turning point for me. The paintings of Emily Kame Kngwarreye are also influential; it is her intrinsic understanding of color and application that I find so exciting. Janelle Lynch, who photographs the landscape, taught me to find beauty in the ordinary or mundane - beauty in ugliness, *wabi sabi*. And I am inspired by the majesty and presence of the work of Peter Voukos.

AA: Your artworks have an almost organic feel to them. What inspires this aesthetic?

DG: Their organic aesthetic is part of my visceral response to the clay. The act of making these vessels is physical and emotional. I squeeze and then roll the clay into coils. I scrape the coils together and then I use fingers, fist, thumb, elbow and chin to manipulate the form. But only when I feel I have a command over the material do I dare to make the most bold or provocative mark - a gestural freedom that is a relationship with the clay.

AA: Does this 'gestural freedom' ever manifest as a kind of randomness, or is each form carefully considered in the creation of your vessels?

DG: Randomness is not important in the creation of the vessels – every part of their formation is thought through. I look at the history of ceramics, from the Jōmon pots of Japan and the storage jars of the Han Dynasty, for example, to Classical Greek urns and the naturally occurring 'Chinese scholars' rocks'. I attempt to understand the strengths and limitations of the clay through experimentation – I have spent years experimenting with glaze recipes and combinations. But there is randomness in the firing process. These pieces are fired in a gas reduction kiln to cone 10 (1305 degrees Celsius). There the chemicals in the glazes react to the atmosphere in the kiln and the results are often unexpected and can appear random.

Clay 2, Utopia Art Sydney, Sydney, 28 January – 21 February 2015