

Tania Rollond

NEW SONGS





the riddle 2017
porcelain, ceramic stains
and metallic decals
19 x 17 x 17 cm

FRONT COVER
drawing closer 2017 (detail)
porcelain, ceramic stains
22 x 17 x 0.5 cm

Tania Rollond

N E W S O N G S

September 23 - October 8, 2017

SKEPSI GALLERY EXHIBITION

Skepsi @ Malvern
1297 High Street, Malvern
Victoria, 3144, Australia



all mist and fire 2017
porcelain and
ceramic stains
22 x 17 x 0.5 cm

How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground! Also, how I distrust neat designs of life that are drawn upon half-sheets of note-paper. I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement. I begin to seek some design more in accordance with those moments of humiliation and triumph that come now and then undeniably. Lying in a ditch on a stormy day, when it has been raining, then enormous clouds come marching over the sky, tattered clouds, wisps of cloud. What delights me then is the confusion, the height, the indifference and the fury. Great clouds always changing, and movement; something sulphurous and sinister, bowled up, helter-skelter; towering, trailing, broken off, lost, and I forgotten, minute, in a ditch. Of story, of design, I do not see a trace then.

The Waves Virginia Woolf

New Songs

It is the task of ceramic objects, such great archeological survivors, to carry a snapshot of their particular moment in time through history. For humans, the opposite is true, we are brief sparks in an ever-changing parade. I wonder if, along with the jewellers, we potters must be the artists most obsessed with time and its passing? If we must be the artists most marked by that obscure sense of loss, most filled with an impossible longing for permanence? Or is it just vanity to presume this: will future archaeologists cherish plastic, not porcelain? In any case, there is some solace in the solidity of ceramics. In almost any archeological dig, shards will be there, mere fragments nonetheless capable of evoking the larger picture of a human civilisation that once was, and no longer is.

I am convinced that the thread linking all the parts of my work is my affection for the fragment. I feel drawn to bits and pieces that have lost their connection to their original form or function; the strange and yet familiar. In museums I prefer the ambiguous objects, whether broken or just unknowable. On the streets, I admire the paintings and re-paintings of urban walls, the fragments of illegible text left behind, the peeling and the layers of time and grime. What is it about the fragmentary? Poets, I suspect, know the most. Louise Glück writes:

I do not think that more information always makes a richer poem. The unsaid, for me, exerts great power: often I wish an entire poem could be made in this vocabulary. It is analogous to the unseen for example, to the power of ruins, to works of art either damaged or incomplete. Such works inevitably allude to larger contexts; they haunt because they are not whole, though wholeness is implied: another time, a world in which they were whole, or were to have been whole, is implied. There is no moment in which their first home is felt to be the museum. ... It seems to me that what is wanted, in art, is to harness the power of the unfinished. All earthly experience is partial. Not simply because it is subjective, but because that which we do not know, of the universe, of mortality, is so much more vast than that which we do know. What is unfinished or has been destroyed participates in these mysteries. The problem is to make a whole that does not forfeit this power.¹

Not long ago, I discovered the work of Wang Shu and his practice Amateur Architecture: I fell in love with the Ningbo History Museum. It is an immense structure with a striking modern shape, but an exterior patina that looks ancient. It was built from the brick and tile debris of about 30 villages which had been demolished to make way for development. Wang Shu says 'Everywhere you go, you find ruins of buildings that have been demolished... But everywhere there are materials, beautiful materials... So I wanted to build this museum for the people who were originally living here so they can keep some memories.'² The museum seems to



FAR LEFT
Graffiti in moss, Mittagong
NSW

LEFT
Ningbo History Museum,
facade and brick detail,
China

RIGHT
Boucherouite carpet,
Morocco

CENTRE RIGHT
Gee's Bend quilt, USA

FAR RIGHT
Boro cloth, Japan

me a perfect whole, that does not forfeit the power of the fragments. At an earlier stage in the development of this work, I was obsessed with a book of old Moroccan carpets, similarly assembled from fragments, of used clothing or recycled and over-dyed wool from old carpets. The 'boro' cloth of Japan, and American 'Gee's Bend' quilts have a similar power and beauty, derived from simple materials. The Moroccan carpets, however, have an additional element - they host a playful carnival; an astonishingly diverse array of patterns, abstract motifs and magic symbols. There are elements specific to regions and tribes, and yet the powers of improvisation exhibited by each weaver are a constant delight.

In a recent interview I heard musician Billy Bragg speaking about the English musical form skiffle. He traced a popular song back to an American blues musician, then further back to African-American sharecroppers, then to New York, London, and finally Ireland in the 1750s. 'So, who does the song belong to?'³ he asks, before answering that everyone who sings the song has a right to do so, and suggesting that every singer adds something to it. The Moroccan weavers, similarly, weave new songs from old, each adding their own inflection.

Clearly, sadly, it is not possible to recycle old pots into new ones in the same physical manner described above. But the idea of weaving

new songs from old, of traces and fragments coalescing into a new whole, has been my companion as I made these pieces. In regard to form, I have looked further back in history than in my previous work, but it is on the surface where this influence seems strongest. Motifs have been disrupted by partial masking, fragmentary images destroyed by sanding or obscured by the next layer of colour. Accidental marks were welcomed - the physical finger marks of coil building frequently disrupt the surface. These works are multi-layered and each has been subject to sanding back or painting over: destruction has played an equal part in their creation. Each layer was built on the ruins of the one before. Looking at them now, I still feel the need to 'finish' them somehow, they don't feel as easily complete in the way other works have, but I must stop. These ruins must be my truth for now.

Tania Rollond

September 2017

1. Louise Glück "Disruption, Hesitation, Silence" Proofs & Theories: Essays on Poetry, Ecco Press, 1994
2. <https://www.dezeen.com/2016/08/18/video-interview-wang-shu-amateur-architecture-studio-ningbo-history-museum-movie/>
3. <http://www.npr.org/2017/07/19/538079082/billy-bragg-on-skiffle-the-movement-that-brought-guitar-to-british-radio>





twilight whispers 2017
porcelain, ceramic stains
and silver lustre
24 x 18 x 18 cm



vivid memory 2017
porcelain and ceramic stains
19 x 10 x 10 cm

charcoal and moonlight 2017
black midfire clay, engobe
and metallic decals
16 x 16 x 16 cm



storm codes 2017
porcelain and ceramic stains
17 x 16 x 16 cm



campfire smoke 2017
black midfire clay, slip
and ceramic stains
10 x 15 x 15 cm



a faint accent 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 19 x 21 x 21 cm

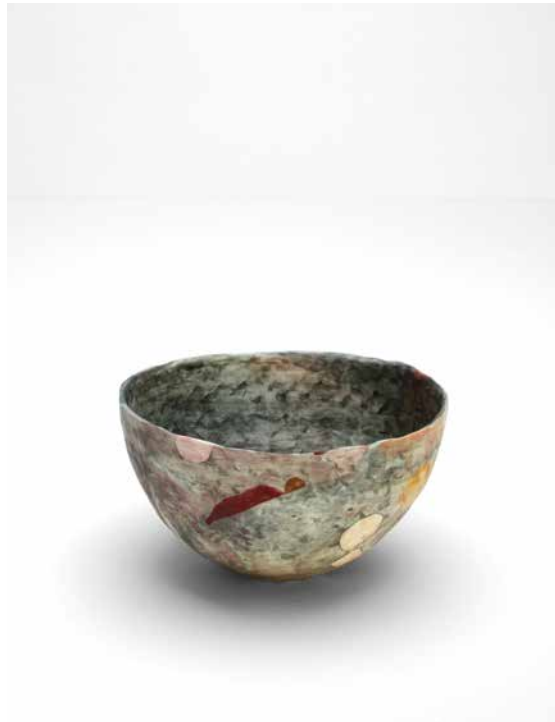
florescence 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 34 x 13 x 13 cm

concrete poetry 2017
porcelain, ceramic stains
and decals 25 x 12 x 12 cm

stratum 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 15 x 17 x 17 cm



lost language 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 23 x 14 x 14 cm



dust notes 2016
midfire clay with inlaid
engobe 14 x 14 x 14 cm

last vestiges 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 21 x 25 x 25 cm

windlight 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 14 x 11 x 11 cm

feather and bone 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 9 x 15 x 15 cm



an inkling 2017
midfire clay, inlaid engobe
and ceramic stains
13 x 14 x 14 cm

a darker gleam 2017
porcelain, ceramic stains
and metallic decals
22 x 16 x 16 cm



canopy 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 9 x 13 x 13 cm



sub rosa 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 12 x 22 x 22 cm



deep midnight 2017
porcelain, ceramic stains
and metallic decals
28 x 18 x 18 cm



heavy air 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 22 x 17 x 0.5 cm



copper sheen 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 22 x 17 x 0.5 cm



flare and fade 2017
porcelain, ceramic stains
and enamel 22 x 17 x 0.5 cm



filament 2017
black midfire clay, inlaid
engobe and silver enamel
22 x 17 x 0.5 cm



sand lines 2017
midfire clay with ceramic
stains 22 x 17 x 0.5 cm

broken chant 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 22 x 17 x 0.5 cm

roselight, falling 2017
porcelain, ceramic stains
and decals 22 x 17 x 0.5 cm

figments 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 22 x 17 x 0.5 cm



autumn approaching 2017
porcelain and ceramic stains
22 x 17 x 0.5 cm



a sharp metallic tang 2017
black midfire clay and ceramic
stains 22 x 17 x 0.5 cm



drawing closer 2017
porcelain, ceramic stains
22 x 17 x 0.5 cm



blue sparks fly 2017
porcelain, ceramic stains and
enamel 22 x 17 x 0.5 cm



a mass of sound 2017
porcelain and ceramic stains
31 x 21 x 3 cm

woven light 2017
porcelain and ceramic stains
31 x 21 x 3 cm

all possible greens 2017
porcelain and ceramic
stains 31 x 21 x 3 cm







bright music, suspended 2017
porcelain and ceramic stains
31 x 19 x 3 cm



raw materials 2017
porcelain and ceramic stains
31 x 19 x 3 cm

slow dawn 2017
porcelain and ceramic stains
31 x 19 x 3 cm





On process

In the beginning there is no image, there is nothing. Just the bag of clay, the blank page, the brush poised... and infinite possibility.

Over the last several years I have been interested in developing the most gentle of strategies for coaxing this 'nothing' (using materials and gestures) into becoming 'something'. Or almost something... It's a kind of opposite to moving from figuration towards abstraction.

My tactics are concerned with holding my conscious mind back (it seems so often to want to steer me towards the safe ground of cliché and repetition) in order to give the unconscious a chance. What is in there? That's the question, isn't it? Intuition is such a small, faint voice, and the desire to control things is so strong, that quite firm strategies are required to reach this place. I have often employed a style of drawing which is like absent-minded doodling, I have used grids, or traced outlines from catalogues

as a way of forcing my images and objects into uncertain territory.

The lengthy process of ceramics is, of course, useful in setting these roadblocks against certainty. It can drive you crazy with disappointment, but it's my inner control freaks most useful sparring partner. The road is so long that when I set out I can't see the end at all. I must trust my intuition to give me the first few steps, then set the work aside to dry, to fire and change, and then at the next encounter I will add a little more and fire again, and so on...

Unlike earlier drawings and paintings, these works are dominated by the search for a more spontaneous, experimental and random mark. I have always been a drawer, not really a painter, but my repertoire of marks is gradually expanding. These marks have been made with a wide range of implements and materials; paper and vinyl cutouts, fingers, engraving tools, sandpaper, masking tape and many brushes are at work here. There are black and white clays,



coloured slips, as well as engobes, stains, chalks, onglaze enamels and decals.

Previously, I would make drawings on my ceramics only after bisque, and glaze fire just once. Instead, these pieces are densely worked, with marks added to the surface at every possible stage of a longer process. The imprints of my fingers pressing out the slab or coiling the pot are the first important mark making stage, then I may smooth, or scrape back a little, add slip or watery stains, perhaps with some randomly applied paper cutouts to snap focus in the brushy confusion. I know this is just a first layer, so it's easy to be spontaneous, there's a long way to go. After bisque, I might sand some marks off, or build several more layers of thin engobe. There may be further masking, or chalk marks, or more scraping. I just build something on the fragments, trying so hard not to be precious: this is not the end. I'm searching for the 'right' atmosphere or feeling, an image starting to emerge. When it's there, I fire the work, and everything shifts - it's gone again.

I try to put the right feeling back into it, and fire it again. It might work after one glaze firing, but most of these pieces have endured several - all the way down the temperature range to decals and enamels. I think it's quite demented, this scratching amongst the fragments, trying to prod an image into being, whilst also standing aside and letting the process intervene, but I persist!

These works are my most layered - returned to on perhaps four or five separate occasions. Sometimes more. I wanted more uncertainty in this new body of work: I pushed it, and am surprised at the objects I see now. They bother me, in a good way. They are hard to explain and I know I don't understand them yet. But I present my successes and failures here, an extended exploration of 'nothing', in the hope of having created a particular, personal kind of 'something'. Perhaps you can see it? Thank you for taking the time to look.

Tania Rollond



Tania Rollond

Born 1973, Esperance, Western Australia
Lives and works in Mittagong, NSW, Australia

Education

2008-2011 *Master of Fine Art (by Research)* Drawing, College of Fine Arts, UNSW, Sydney
1998-2000 Full time study in *Bachelor of Fine Art (Ceramics)*, National Art School, Sydney
1991-1993 *Bachelor of Arts (Design)*, Curtin University, Perth, WA

Recent Exhibitions (*solo shows)

- 2017 **New Songs*, Skepsi Gallery@Malvern, Melbourne, with Amy Kennedy
Identity, Skepsi Gallery@Montsalvat, Melwbourne
- 2016 *Craft Trend Fair 2016* with Gallery Klei, Seoul, Korea
Still Life, ARO Gallery, Sydney
Gifted, Skepsi Gallery@Malvern, Melbourne
'Clay' Book Launch, St Cloche Gallery, Sydney
Distinctive, Skepsi Gallery@Montsalvat, Melbourne
17.08.16, Home@735, Darlinghurst, Sydney
Clay Intersections, Curated by Cath Fogarty, Australian Design Centre, Sydney
The 'F' Show, NORTH Contemporary Art Space, North Sydney
- 2015 *Drawn to Form: The Matter in Hand*, curators Abdullah M.I. Syed and Merran Esson, Blacktown Art Centre, Sydney
Pedestrian, curated by Jaime Tsai, Rayner Hoff Space, National Art School, Sydney
The Cup Show, Chinaclay, Sydney
Gifted, Skepsi Gallery@Malvern, Melbourne
- 2014 **A flickering moment*, Showcase at Shepparton Art Museum, Victoria
The Course of Objects: the fine lines of inquiry, Manly Art Gallery & Museum, Sydney
Quiet Conversations, Skepsi Gallery@Montsalvat, Melbourne
- 2013 *Expressions of Self*, Skepsi Gallery@Montsalvat, Melbourne
MULTI_GRIP, Articulate Project Space, Sydney
- 2012 *Vitrify: Alcorso Ceramic Award*, Jam Factory, Adelaide
Engaging Form, Skepsi Gallery@Montsalvat, Melbourne
Artwords and Artworks, NAS Project Space, Sydney
- 2011 **Between Objects and Images*, COFAspace Gallery, COFA, Sydney
**Between Objects and Images*, Project Space, National Art School, Sydney
Arresting: Exceptional Australian Contemporary Ceramics, Skepsi Gallery, Melbourne
Shelf Life, Delmar Gallery, Sydney

Collections

Bendigo Regional Art Gallery, Shepparton Art Museum, FuLe International Ceramic Art Museum, Fuping, China, National Art School, Sydney
Private collections in Australia, USA, UK and Japan

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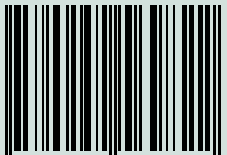
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BACK COVER
a sharp metallic tang 2017 (detail)
black midfire clay and ceramic stains, 22 x 17 x 0.5 cm





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skepsi
GALLERY

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