



Artback NT

An Artback NT Touring Exhibition

clay on country

ceramics from the central desert

SYNOPSIS

Clay on Country celebrates the enthusiasm for ceramic practice in the central desert region. A diverse and eclectic survey, the exhibition includes over forty artists, the majority of whom have made new work for the show. Some are established ceramic artists, some are reconnecting with the medium after a hiatus, others are incorporating clay as a medium in their practice for the first time. All have produced accomplished, insightful and contemporary works that reflect the culturally and historically rich and complex region where they live and work.

Clay on Country was developed by Artback NT to coincide with the 16th Australian Ceramics Triennale held in Alice Springs in July 2022. Curated by Visual Arts staff, Jo Foster and Neridah Stockley, it is a celebration of clay, community, culture and creativity and will be available to tour from late 2023.

Making small objects: pinching, shaping, carving, painting, arranging and re-arranging

Christine Godden



Christine Godden

Untitled, 2021

hand built stoneware
with underglaze
approx. 15 x 80 cm



**Ernabella Artists
Collaborative**

Wankuru/Surviving, 2019

hand built black
stoneware,
dimensions variable,
approx. 40 x 110 x 170 cm
Courtesy of Ernabella Arts



CURATORIAL PREMISE

Clay on Country was curated using a simple premise - the artists included must reside in the Central Desert region and work with clay. There was no overarching brief for artists to work to or that work was selected against, however, work produced invariably speaks of the context of its making and naturally synergies and connections emerge between ideas and objects.

At the heart of Australia on Arrernte country Mparntwe [Alice Springs] is home to many of the artists included. Others reside in adjacent desert country on Pitjantjatjarra and Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Western Arrernte and Warumungu country within a 550km radius. There is an ebb and flow between these places, between 'bush' and 'town'. These experiences, the conversations, the physical, cultural, political and social landscapes, intentionally or subliminally inform creative practices.

The diverse works in *Clay on Country* speak to the rich complexities of Ancestral stories, lived experiences and settler histories, alongside the joys and challenges of making with clay, the push and pull of the medium and the myriad results of an engagement with this material, the stuff of country itself.

Wild clay is a living medium.

Claire Freer

Thomas Tjilya

Kulata Memory, 2021

glazed stoneware,

30 x 15 cm dia



Mikaila Rodgers
Untitled, 2021
various clay bodies and glazes,
series of 15 small vessels



Mikaila Rodgers
Untitled, 2021
various clay bodies and glazes,
series of 15 small vessels

***I relish the experimental nature
of working with clay and glaze.
My work is bright and often messy,
a jumble of colour and texture.
I aim to captivate and delight.***

Mikaila Rodgers

ARTWORKS

Clay on Country showcases an eclectic array of work including vessels, sculptures, installations, animations, paintings and works on paper with a combination of floor and wall mounted works totalling approx. 70 objects in all. A selection are detailed below.

Hermannsburg Potters, a day trip from Mparntwe and **Ernabella Arts** in the Pitjantjatjara Lands have well established ceramic studios with artists continuing to make astonishing work drawing on their cultural stories and everyday experiences. The Potters created a large new collaborative work for the exhibition with a companion audio visual work created by animating a series of painted ceramic tiles. Ernabella is represented by a collaborative piece alongside works by a number of accomplished artists. Artists at **Walkatjara Arts** based in Mutitjulu delighted in making sculptural works drawing on their observations and cultural connections to owls. Arrernte artists working through **Akeyulerre Healing Centre** have fashioned large scale letterforms to spell out a specific query. **Iltja Ntjarra** artists worked together to create a series of interconnected portraits of people and place.

Pastoral histories and the impact of settler culture inform a number of works. Established ceramic artist **Mel Robson** references station boundaries in the linear graphics mapped on to the surfaces of her highly refined vessels and slipcast animal bones. **Tara Leckey** mosaics found shards of broken crockery onto remnants of building materials to create miniature follies while Arrernte artists working through **Yarrenyty Arltere Artists** decal quirky silhouetted creatures onto the surface of retro dinner plates. Crockery is also at the heart of **Suzi Lyon's** charming blue and white teacup and saucer set which is deceptively decorated with covid related imagery and **Emma Frank's** installation of teapot and pannikins which is a nod to the 'bush cuppa'. **Anne Mosey** also references the domestic sphere in her observations of suburban Alice Springs architecture.

The impact of the natural environment is never far away. Emerging artist **Vanessa Sim** uses her ceramic work to voice concerns about fracking. **Beth Sometime's** abstract forms are inspired by soil structure at a cellular level. **Mikaila Rodger's** vessels have encrusted surfaces reminiscent of the mineral crunch of country. **Claire Freer's** large pit fired vessels, made from fine coils of wild clay, resonate with the process of their making out bush while **Maria Vanhees'** highly refined organic forms seamlessly and ambiguously blend figure and landscape.

Continuing the connection between place, material and culture a cross cultural group of scientists and artists have been investigating the termite pavements ubiquitous over large tracts of country. These **putu** are connected to important Ancestral stories and used historically as sites to carve out dishes in which to grind and winnow seed. A series of interrelated mixed media pieces tell this story.

These are just a few of the works representing a rich mix of responses to place and material.



Iltja Ntjarra Artists

Pmara Nurnakanha Tukutrtta Ikuma/Holding Country in our Hearts and Minds, 2022
terracotta and underglazes, dimensions variable, approx. 1.5 x 2.5 m

***When we paint on clay
it is like we are painting
country on country***

Selma Coulthard



Mel Robson

Australian Pastoral, 2022

wheel thrown porcelain, stoneware and
terracotta, series of 15 small vessels



Mel Robson

Ingress Egress Regress, 2020

slipcast porcelain bones with decals
approx. 2.7 x 2 m

Maps and cartographic representations have long been a part of my ceramics practice, but since moving from the East Coast to Mparntwe over a decade ago they have been a device through which I have attempted to engage with the layered and complicated history of this area.

Mel Robson



Maria Vanhees
Becoming I, 2019
earthenware, 20 x 20 x 15 cm



Pip McManus
Night vessel, 2012
HD Video, 12 mins

Grown slowly in an intuitive process of coil-building these fragile, 'naked' white pieces resonate with suggestions of human form and interaction, ever-changing inner landscapes imbued with emotions one may struggle to put into words.

Maria Vanhees

ARTIST LIST

Angela Abbott

Akeyulerre Healing
Centre

Jayanna Andy

Bindi Mwerre Anthurre
Artists

Kunmanara Carroll

Nancy Nyanjilpayi
Chapman

Davina Edwards

Engawala Artists

Ernabella Artists
collaborative

Bronwyn Field

Emma Frank

Claire Freer

Mike Gillam

Christine Godden

Hermannsburg Potters

Iltja Ntjarra Artists

Rupert Jack

Tara Leckey

Alfie Lowe

Suzi Lyon

Pip McManus

Anne Mosey

Sally Mumford

Wintjiya Napaltjarri

Mel Robson

Mikaila Rodgers

Vanessa Sim

Beth Sometimes

Neridah Stockley

Tjunkaya Tapaya

Thomas Ilytjari Thomson

Maria Vanhees

Fiona Walsh

Walkatjara Artists

Yarrenyty Arlttere Artists



Tjunkaya Tapaya working
in the studio at Ernabella
Arts, Ernabella, 2021



Selma Coulthard working
in the studio at Iltja
Ntjarra Arts, Mparntwe
(Alice Springs), 2022



Tara Leckey

Doorstop, 2021

found cement pavers, crockery, grout

20 x 20 x 8 cm



Tara Leckey

Camel 1, 2019

camel bone and found ceramic chards

60 x 17 x 15 cm

My materials are the abandoned litter of early European settlers. Broken vessels that were tossed out of stone houses and into the hillside edges of ghost towns.

Tara Leckey



From **Putu Work** collaborative installation
Nganyinytja making a threshing pit in a
putu (termite pavement).
Photo Linda Rive, 1987



Mike Gillam
Putu Pavements, 2021
digital photograph on
Arches paper, 51 x 66cm

AUDIENCES

There is currently an exponential interest in ceramics with a flourishing of engagement by large sectors of the general public verified through the increasing popularity of community access studios and classes. Ceramics is having somewhat of a renaissance alongside a growing interest in and appreciation of the handmade which makes this a timely exhibition.

The familiarity and accessibility of the medium and the diversity of objects and artists in *Clay on Country* coupled with the cultural and geographic context of the central desert is sure to attract broad audiences. The exhibition has appeal for general audiences, schools and family audiences, students of art/ceramics, artists and ceramicists and those with an interest in Indigenous culture and desert culture. Bespoke education materials and the potential for public programs will also enhance visitor experience.

Clay on Country was extremely popular with visitors to Araluen Art Gallery during its time there evidenced by the responses below.

Amazing exhibition. Such beautiful arresting work. More of Australia needs to see the brilliance of these artists.

– Qld

A sensitive and beautifully curated show, such a variety of work. Congratulations. A highlight of the Triennale.

– Macksville, Nth Vic

I loved this. Especially the video animations and film that accompanied the works. Fabulous and fascinating.

– Elena, Melbourne

Thankyou for sharing the creations of so many talented artists. I am very grateful for this experience. A beautifully put together exhibition. Memorable.

– Candice, Sydney

Beyond blessed and grateful to have chanced upon this exhibition. The land (clay) is a great mode of art for storytelling. Beautiful connections here in this room. Thank you artists for sharing your culture, thoughts and gifts.

– Ingrid, NSW

Thanks for sharing your skills. We've benefitted in more ways than just viewing. Very grateful for the generosity.

– Jan and Mark, NSW

**Samantha Brumby
and Janice Carroll**

Kuur-kuurpa/Owls, 2021
stoneware and oxides,
25 x 14 cm dia, 24 x 15 cm dia
Courtesy of Walkatjara Artists



Rupert Jack
*Maku Maku/Witchetty
grubs*, 2018
stoneware, slip and
sgraffito, 29 x 40 cm
Courtesy of Ernabella Arts



SPECIFICATIONS

Exhibition

Running Metres – approx. 80m

Objects – approx. 25 floor based objects/collections of objects (9 possible to display on shelves),
6 x wall pieces with installation templates

Audio Visual – 2 projectors, 1 monitor, 1 e-tablet required
(everything bar 1 projector supplied)

Labelling – exhibition identifier (vinyl signage file),
artwork labels and captions (design files)

Audience Engagement

Family Trail and School Education Materials – downloadable

Public Programs – artist talks and workshops (subject to funding)

Venue Pack

Comprehensive Installation Manual

Comprehensive Communications Kit

Cost

\$6000 plus GST (freight included)

Contact

Visual Arts Touring Manager

art@artback.com.au



This work is a quiet nod to the enduring ritual of making tea, to the many cups one brews and shares while living and working in the desert.

Emma Frank