



2010 SIDNEY MYER FUND  
AUSTRALIAN CERAMIC AWARD  
SHEPPARTON ART GALLERY

**2010 SIDNEY MYER FUND  
AUSTRALIAN CERAMIC AWARD**  
SHEPPARTON ART GALLERY  
27 NOVEMBER 2010 6 FEBRUARY 2011

## SPONSOR'S FOREWORD

The 2010 Sidney Myer Fund Australian Ceramic Award (SMFACA) has entered a new era, changing from a group award exhibition showcasing 40 different pieces to three solo artist exhibition commissions. The Sidney Myer Fund is delighted to continue its association with the Shepparton Art Gallery in this important event and to increase its support for five more awards. Total prize monies rise from AUD\$15,000 to AUD\$55,000. This undoubtedly makes the SMFACA the most prestigious contemporary ceramic art exhibition in the country.

The SMFACA places ceramics at the very heart of contemporary art dialogue and the new exhibition format provides a serious platform for the development of this art form in Australia. Importantly the three new award categories – International, Australian and Emerging Australian – ensure that the event caters both for Australian artists and those from abroad. I offer my congratulations to Paul Wood, Stephen Benwell and Anne Wenzel on their extraordinary commitment over the last six months to bring to fruition their new artworks for our enjoyment.

Sidney Myer arrived in Melbourne in 1899 as a penniless 21 year old Russian immigrant. Today some would call him an "asylum seeker". He started his retailing career as a hawker in the gold field districts of regional Victoria. He became one of Australia's most visionary entrepreneurs and a pioneering exemplar of the best traditions of personal and corporate philanthropy. In his will Sidney Myer left part of his estate for the benefit of the community in which he had prospered. Conscious of the Founder's love of the arts and of regional Victoria, the Sidney Myer Fund is delighted to partner with the Shepparton Art Gallery in delivering the 2010 SMFACA. These three exhibitions could stand proud in any major state gallery. It is a tribute to the Shepparton Art Gallery that they are able to produce new work of such high calibre.

Mr Carrillo Gantner AO  
Chairman  
Sidney Myer Fund

## MAYOR'S FOREWORD

Greater Shepparton City Council is delighted to support the 2010 Sidney Myer Fund Australian Ceramic Award in partnership with the Sidney Myer Fund. The Council is committed to developing a sustainable mix of Tourist attractions in Greater Shepparton and believes in the vital importance of high calibre arts program to the sustainable of our region. The growing stature and success of Shepparton Art Gallery and its initiatives such as the SMFACA, the richest contemporary ceramic art exhibition in the country are a source of pride for our city. They bring visitors, generate economic activity, social and educative benefits essential to a thriving community in the Goulburn Valley.

The vision of the new award as an international event with a renewed provision for Australian and emerging Australian artists is to be commended. Significantly it provides a platform to create three exhibitions of new work which can not be viewed anywhere else but here, in Greater Shepparton. It is exciting to see our provincial gallery producing its own exhibition and publishing content at such a high calibre, and not simply operating as a venue for urban touring initiatives. This strategy of seeking out and generating new work, is one which we can be particularly proud, and is bound to produce future exhibitions of exemplary calibre.

I extend my congratulations to the artists Anne Wenzel, Stephen Benwell and Paul Wood who have dedicated the past six months to producing new artwork which is both thought provoking, engaging and stimulating. I have no doubt that their exhibitions will create much excitement and discussion about a wide range of issues. The themes of environmental destruction, sustainable living principles and the historicising of the past are extremely relevant to our collective and particular future in this region.

Geoff Dobson  
Mayor  
Greater Shepparton

# DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

The 2010 Sidney Myer Fund Australian Ceramic Award is very different to previous incarnations, and the changes have been in part motivated by a desire for artists working in clay to reconsider what has seemed like an unquestioning acceptance of the totality of the banal piece of museum infrastructure that is, the white pedestal. The pedestal has been the silent leaning post for the display of ceramics, capable of lending authority to table-top sized clay objects for perhaps too long. Accordingly I came to the view that the regulations monitoring the award in its previous guise needed to shift in-line with how contemporary art practise has evolved, necessitating structuring the award so as it was no longer dependent upon a single plinth for a single artwork contribution.

If I was sitting down to write a prog-rock ballad instead of a Director's foreword, I might start with...If I see another pot on a pedestal, I'll puke. I can hear the manic percussive lyricism of my musing broken through with passages of lone air guitar, in an ode to Emerson Lake and Palmer's, *Pictures in an exhibition*. The album is set against Russian Composer Modest Mussorgsky's famous 1874 composition for piano "Pictures from an Exhibition – A Remembrance of Viktor Hartmann" written by Mussorgsky in response to the experience of viewing an exhibition of 500 artworks shown as a memoriam to a great artist. Written in ten movements, the music evokes the pace of walking through an art museum, stopping to look at works, evoking various imagery depicted, and at times remembering with sadness something, someone lost.

While reading through the contributions to this catalogue by Kim Dickey, Charlotte Day and Danny Lacy Emmerson Lake and Palmer's rendition clicked over on my music stick to swoon and blast apart my living room in a kind of 'child of the seventies' awakening moment. Despite discussions about art becoming post medium, the 2010 SMFACA exhibition is about clay. These three exhibitions by Paul Wood, Stephen Benwell and Anne Wenzel testify to the longevity of an ancient and innate material, which is vitrified, constantly becoming ruinous, discarded, found again, to be remade, refired, catalogued, and recorded. *Pictures in an exhibition* reminded me,

*I carry the dust of a journey  
that cannot be shaken away  
It lives deep within me  
For I breathe it every day.*

*You and I are yesterday's answers;  
The earth of the past came to flesh,  
Eroded by Time's rivers  
To the shapes we now possess.*

Walking the through the 2010 award I am also reminded of Mussorgsky's piano, its mix of grandeur, admiration and sadness which seems encapsulated in these artworks; the imminent decay of current domesticity, the turning of our today into trinket, the potential environmental apocalypse and its terrible beauty, and I can not help but feel that we made the right decision with the award's restructure. I extend my congratulations and thanks to the artists, judges, staff of the gallery and the Sidney Myer Fund for their ongoing support and vision for this award.

Kirsten Paisley  
Director  
Shepparton Art Gallery

LANDSCAPES OF  
STILL LIFE

*The image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy.* Ezra Pound<sup>1</sup>

As a ceramicist, it has always struck me that the Hebrew name for the first human being, Adam (Adamah) was the same name for "earth." It seems that humans are and have been largely defined by this relationship. Much, often all, of what we know of long-lost civilizations comes from ceramics. More than even words, which can all too easily be lost and forgotten, objects fashioned in clay have a power to endure, to speak to future generations. Our relationship to clay is no trivial matter, for it largely shapes and defines what it means to be human.

As a medium, clay can evoke a host of associations that extend beyond the arena of human activity. I don't think it is necessary here to rehearse arguments here concerning the power of art. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that recent work in cognitive psychology, as Barbara Stafford and others have argued, shows that thought is fundamentally comprised of dense networks of images.<sup>2</sup> In other words, consciousness is image-based; images are the stuff of thought. Art's potency may stem largely from its analogous relationship to our consciousness. As images are captured by our memory and live in our minds, the visual arts can have the power to haunt, and haunting is important. It is one's sense of the inescapable, the unavoidable, the un-containable; it can alter our consciousness and conscience. The artists selected to receive a Sidney Myer Fund Australian Ceramic Award demonstrate this potency in the works presented here.

Choosing three artists from the numerous strong proposals for this competition was a daunting task. I struggled with having to select so few, for so many were deserving of recognition. Without having the opportunity to see these works in person, I had to engage them through my imagination. And so I lived in their ethereal realms for several weeks. They became part of my mental landscape. What ultimately spoke to me was their poetic quality, an attribute often identified in the visual arts. Both poetry and art share an ability to structure metaphors, juxtapose unrelated images in the creation of new meanings, and give voice to the ineffable, tangible form to the intangible. I was drawn to work that demonstrated an intrinsic logic, a language that described the human condition as a felt experience through a coupling of rich and unlikely textures and arresting images.

What struck me was how readily categories formed among the submitted entries. Some employed similar forms, such as vessels, assemblage sculpture, accumulations as installation, and the use of brick as an elemental ceramic icon of the built world. I observed tremendous achievements in the works submitted. I saw skilled demonstrations exhibiting a range of touch, from the phenomenally pristine surfaces of the turned or cast, to the evident markings of the woven and whittled and pinched object. There were sculptures as theatrical stage sets, mysterious arrangements of everyday objects alongside unrecognized abstractions, hidden trails of the poetic and figurative, intimate landscapes of dense miniature narratives, temple-like towers and walls as accumulations of color and pattern. The short list of artists, whom Charlotte Day, Kirsten Paisley and I selected, provides insight into the richness of the applications that we received.

Andrea Salvatori is a conjurer, a magician whose stacks of form, some found and some made, are encyclopedic, involving the pristine language of geometry against the chaotic landscape of pop figurines, interspersed with rococo roses. I fell in love with Aino Nebel's delicate and intimate fragments of figures, animal and human, carefully constituted by nearly translucent skins and then hidden and hung in the room as so many talismans. Amy Craig makes stages for performance as sculpture, engaging the viewer in the physical act of balance and suspension. Cyrus (Wai Kuen) Tang's body in clay dissolves in a tank of liquid. Disintegration and disappearance is captured and demonstrated in a material experience. Time and memory are recorded by the artist's photographs, leaving behind a cloudy impression of her dissolving presence. Inspired by Australian Gothic, Gerry Wedd describes the outback and its inhabitants through a series of beautifully modeled tableaux. The landscapes he creates are hauntingly realistic and yet otherworldly. Kirsten Coelho's elegant vessels, reminiscent of the everyday in 19th-century Australian households, act as homage to the miners of that day and their search for gold. Poignant and silent, these still lives serve as a moving tribute.

Anne Wenzel, Stephen Benwell and Paul Wood each explore a struggle between form and formlessness, lightness and weight, in their works. The themes evident in their work comprise a yoking of opposites. Passionate displays of history and death, exuberance and defeat,

ornament and destruction characterise the work of the three selected artists. While the sensibility of each artist is vastly different, their subjects are mutual – death caught in a final, climatic moment. Art becomes a momentary, frozen triumph over its own disintegration, its own decay, and a celebration in that recognition of inevitable demise. All three artists exhibited in their work a “both and” aesthetic that demonstrates an ability to negotiate a complex world of signs and create dense layers of allusion. Robert Venturi writes: “I prefer ‘both-and’ to ‘either-or,’ black and white, and sometimes gray, to black or white. A valid architecture evokes many levels of meaning and combinations of focus; its space and its elements become readable and workable in several ways at once.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the definition of “poetry” posited by Ezra Pound, as the holding of two contradictory ideas in one’s mind at the same time, shares a characteristic I found in these artworks. They seem to embody both their beginning and ending, as in a truth that flips, becoming a double entendre, even an oxymoron. I imagined the conversation these works would stimulate in a tandem exhibition and found a common narrative existed between them. Decadence as an organic metaphor exists in each of their installations. Whitney Davis observes that, “at its heart decadence is really a metaphor of culture applied to nature- of a human history evident to us in and as culture and applied to all nature both within and without human culture itself.”<sup>4</sup> These three artists present a perspective on gravitas and levity that took hold of my imagination, and it is such paired ideas I wish to explore in my response to their works.

I was running across an open plain one Sunday in Colorado, puzzling over how to describe the paradox of Anne Wenzel’s *Silent Landscape* and Stephen Benwell’s *Collections*, when I witnessed a thick bank of white snow clouds creep up from behind the Rocky Mountains and slowly envelop them in opaque whiteness. The visual experience was magical, for as the cloudbank overtook the sun the horizon of mountains became black and then flattened into a silhouette, losing all shadow and mass. The Continental Divide became simply a negative, an absence of form, much in the way black is the absence of color and light. Meanwhile the whiteness of this cloud (and its blanketing of everything into a formlessness of snow on the ground below) had depth and weight and density, the opposite of what we typically associate with light or whiteness. White and black, all color and no color,

reflection and absorption, for a moment traded places. The snow enveloped the scene like a shroud; the black inky mountains flattened and disappeared like a paper cutout in the wind. This experience described the effect that Wenzel’s and Benwell’s installations offers the viewer – an unexpected twist on our assumptions about scale, weight, and history.

Stillness and blackness pervade Anne Wenzel’s *Silent Landscape*. The installation is filled with a deathly quiet that comes after a struggle is over. There is surrender and the accompanying defeat and melancholy. It is palpable and heavy, as the blackness or density of absent light is heavy, oppressive, and thick. As with the Rocky Mountains on that one afternoon there is paradoxically a disappearance in Wenzel’s installation. The figures dissolve into the inky blackness; the walls absorb the landscape’s silhouette. Anne Wenzel’s works haunt. They are dreams that have turned into nightmares, they are what one fears at dusk when the world becomes hard to discern, reduced to masses of darkness, to silhouettes, to shadows, to monsters. Clay lends its response to gravity to this work. The sculptures in her installations droop and melt from the weight of added material. Wenzel’s installations also weigh on you emotionally, and affect you like a funeral dirge. Who has died? Why is it so still, so silent? Like a black-and-white photograph from a war ravaged landscape they record what has lost its shape and definition and finally its meaning, focus, and direction. Wenzel explains that the series began in 2005 when she started to collect newspaper images of the Indonesian tsunami, and then of the damage wreaked by Hurricane Katrina, stating,

in the beginning, I thought that the subject would be about the human being in nature. In my first sculptures I tried therefore to make a combination of human beings and nature. But after a while, I discovered that the drama is more about the landscape without any sign of life. The destroyed landscape, with perhaps some parts that still (remind us) of life that has been there before. The silence after the catastrophe as the biggest impact.<sup>5</sup>

Wenzel’s figures and animals appear to be sinking into an oily sludge, or losing the struggle against falling and charred debris. Monumental in scope and scale, and in their dramatic voice, these Neo-Baroque installations

our commodity (ceramic) culture, and as with Wenzel and Benwell, with what we may not wish to see. His work reflects a contemporary language unhampered by concerns of beauty, while being visually startlingly and seductively dripping with color and enameled surfaces. Frozen somehow implicates the viewer in a predicament, that in our hunger for the new our discarding of the obsolete is catching up on us, rendering our landscape uninhabitable for the living. And what is doubly sad is that we have hurried along this condition by the built-in obsolescence of our everyday objects. It is what Arman signaled in his *Poubelles* – vitrines filled with the multiple of the daily as in a waste can. What we are presented with is a sculpture about day's end – about what is left behind, cast away, ripped from its context and picked over by scavengers after we've moved on. The destruction seems present and fresh, as if we are behind the factory seeing the newly discarded rejects – the cracked and slumped and melted models. Stacks of toilets, crockery, and figurines in the form of animals that include a noble horse, dolphin, eagle, or songbird, are equally subsumed within the consumer chaos. Yet the eagle appears perched as if momentarily to take flight from this scene of destruction and disorder. The question is can we escape, too, from our own desires? Paul Wood leaves us in front of a precarious balance of "frozen" collapse.

Wenzel, Wood, and Benwell's works speak in languages native to clay – one of paired opposites – of what Janet Deboos has termed "unfixedness."<sup>7</sup> Their works evince a movement from formlessness (clay muck) to form (stone, vessel, figure) and back again to the formless (sand-blasted, coated, piled, broken). The cyclical nature of clay ("dust to dust") as a potent metaphoric language is employed by each artist exquisitely. The works of these artists simultaneously embody both some of the greatest heights of mankind's creations (classical sculpture, industrial manufacture, Gothic architecture) as well as its own self-destruction (environmental waste, war, man-made ecological disaster). What unites the artists in this competition is less their shared use of clay material, than the awareness of the exploitation and exploration of the metaphorical potential of the medium. While clay undoubtedly functions in the objects they make as a material support, as medium it contributes to the conceptual complexity of their works. That this potential is unwieldy, over-arching, and encyclopedic raises a question as to how any event featuring clay as its primary

focus and subject – whether a conference, exhibition, or competition – can do the field justice and serve as representative of the scope of the discipline. It appears an impossible task. At the same time this exhibition offers proof that this 'field' or discipline is as poetic and relevant and thrillingly innovative as it is.

I believe there is a coherence to the field of ceramics that can contribute much to cultural practices well beyond the making of objects in clay. And as medium it can offer much in its varied applications, and material intelligence. It can speak about temporality, about daily rites, about material change – the soft made hard, about the landscape under our feet, and the built environment. Wenzel, Wood and Benwell not only explore this vast terrain in their installations, they create them – as 'fields' of ravaged nature, as 'fields' of historical reclamation, and as 'fields' of consumer consumption.

As I ruminate on the themes suggested by the work of each artist, I once again enter their spaces in my mind, live in unfolding dramas, and thank them for their rich imaginations and realized dreams. Each of the artists on view at the Shepparton Art Gallery leaves us in landscapes where our most haunting dreams become material reality.

Kim Dickey

Ceramic Artist and Associate Professor  
Department of Art and Art History,  
University of Colorado

1. Ezra Pound, "Affirmations - As for Imagisme," Selected Prose 1909-1965 (New York: New Directions, 1960, 1962), 375.
2. Barbara Stafford, *Echo Objects: The Cognitive Work of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
3. Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966), 23.
4. Whitney Davis, *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 144.
5. Anne Wenzel, e-mail correspondence with author, August 24, 2010.
6. Susan Stewart, "Objects of Desire," *On Longing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 151.
7. Janet Deboos, artist statement for 2010 Taiwan Ceramic Biennale. Accessed October 12, 2010. [www.ceramics.tpc.gov.tw/2010TCB/en/n01\\_12.html](http://www.ceramics.tpc.gov.tw/2010TCB/en/n01_12.html)



**2010 SIDNEY MYER FUND  
AUSTRALIAN CERAMIC AWARD**  
SHEPPARTON ART GALLERY  
27 NOVEMBER 2010 6 FEBRUARY 2011

Catalogue Published by Shepparton Art Gallery  
November 2010, Edition 500  
ISBN 978-0-9870487-0-7

© 2010 Shepparton Art Gallery, the artists and authors.  
The views and opinions expressed in this catalogue are  
those of the authors. No material, whether written or  
photographic, may be reproduced without the permission  
of the artists, authors and Shepparton Art Gallery.

Shepparton Art Gallery  
Eastbank Centre  
70 Welsford Street, Shepparton VIC 3630  
Postal: Locked Bag 1000, Shepparton VIC 3632  
T: 03 5832 9861  
E: [art.gallery@shepparton.vic.gov.au](mailto:art.gallery@shepparton.vic.gov.au)  
[www.sheppartonartgallery.com.au](http://www.sheppartonartgallery.com.au)  
Monday to Sunday 10.00am to 4.00pm  
Public Holidays 1.00pm to 4.00pm

Kirsten Paisley – Director  
Danny Lacy – Curator  
Tina Lee – Registrar  
Rhonda Chrisanthou – Education Officer (Curriculum based programs)  
Angie Russi – Education Officer (Community)  
Mark Cain – Technician  
Sheron Stevens – Administration and Marketing  
Amina Barolli – Assistant Administration and Marketing  
Lynne Parker – Shop Coordinator  
Romola Hopman – Shop Assistant  
Lyn Patone – Shop Assistant

Acknowledgements:  
Catalogue Design: Jasmin Tulk  
Photography: Stephen Benwell and Paul Wood by Christian Capurro  
Anne Wenzel by John Stoel  
Printed by Adams Print



SIDNEY MYER FUND



GREATER  
SHEPPARTON

**SHEPPARTON  
ART GALLERY**