

Beautiful Intent

Lynda Draper
and
Jacqui Hudson

DURING RECENT DECADES, ART THAT DRAWS UPON an aesthetic language of beauty has been associated with disparaging criticism in contemporary art practice and Postmodern art theory. Anti-beauty or anti-aesthetic gestures, abjection, deskilling, lack of finesse and formlessness have been aligned with thinking art in order to reveal the disturbing concerns that lay beneath social and cultural power structures. Beauty has been associated with a field of misdemeanours including commercial interests, Eurocentric cultural oppression, elitism, objectification and voyeurism.¹

Lynda Draper and Jacqui Hudson are concerned with the social and cultural power of art, yet their sculptural work engages with an aesthetic language that conveys beauty. An exhibition showcasing their work at Stella Downer Fine Art in Sydney during 2012, embodies a seamless interconnection between critical thinking and the seductive materiality, technical skill and finessing of craft practice.



*A Review by
Dr Julie Bartholomew*



Contrary to recent trends in contemporary art, their work demonstrates the compatibility of a persuasive rhetoric of beauty and critical commentary.

Rather than employ anti-form, shock, clashing colour or unrefined surface, both craft-based artists engage with the aesthetic traditions of ceramics and embrace technical competence, time-consuming processes and attention to the formal components

of art. Draper and Hudson's exquisitely intricate assemblages are skilfully constructed and surfaces are saturated with luscious layers of glaze. The textural accent and subtle gradation of tone from one surface to another creates a sensual visual journey across forms

that refer to the everyday, domestic and interior realms. Draper's white figurines, religious icons, puppies, kangaroos and hand rendered flowers entice the

viewer into a complex menagerie of dreams and memories. Hudson's buttery, corrugated surfaces invoke

a visual roller coaster across precariously balanced objects that resonate a domestic flavour. Draper and Hudson employ the aesthetics of beauty in their work as a manoeuvre to engage the viewer in critical discourse.

They also utilise small scale and a familiar sense of domestic interiority to draw the viewer towards an intimate experience, encouraging a pause or a prolonged moment of contemplation.

Such attentiveness encourages empathy and consideration of the world beyond the self.² Utilising these tactics to initiate the pleasure of seeing and being with objects, Draper shifts the viewer towards an unsettling, ghostly dialogue around suburban Australia in the 1960s.

When Draper revisits her childhood home for the last time, she experiences the reflective, mixed emotions of security, familiarity but also loss, melancholy and entrapment.

The items she encounters around the house are " ... mass-produced kitsch artefacts, consisting of crockery ornaments, plastic toys and knick-knacks . . . ".³

Jacquie Hudson. *Balance Series 25*. 2009.
Southern Ice porcelain. 12 x 6 x 5.5 cm.



This page: Lynda Draper. Top and inset: **Home Altar**. 2009/2010. Handbuilt porcelainous stoneware, multiple glaze firings and polymer clay installation. Dimensions variable.

Above: **Squirrel**. 2009. Handbuilt porcelainous stoneware, multiple glaze firings and polymer clay. 26 x 20 x 12 cm.

Photos by Lynda Draper.

Realising the uncanny emotional power of formerly vacuous decorative items, Draper retrieves the souvenirs from “forgetfulness”⁴ and transforms them into porcelainous objects. *Home Altar* is not simply a collection of beautifully fashioned figurines expressing humankind’s capacity to imbue inanimate objects with meaning. *Home Altar* consists of a collection of mnemonic objects triggering meaning and initiating a confronting dialogue concerning nostalgia and fantasy but also loss and pain.

Many of Draper’s souvenirs are altered and manipulated to form masked or erased facial features and distortions. As a consequence, the initial enchantment and delight of *Rabbit*, *Squirrel* or *St Joseph* give way to unease and uncertainty. The seemingly innocent and playful are entwined with a questioning of religious belief and family values.

Hudson’s ceramic assemblages seduce the spectator with the allure of their thick, creamy glazes, creating the impression of icing sugar softness. Marshmallow surfaces blend into meticulously arranged architectural structures that are built from corrugated circular slabs and egg-like shapes performing balancing acts. The visual tension and counterpoise of these simple forms, reminiscent of food and kitchen utensils, generate a precarious kinetic energy as cracked shells and rolling forms teeter towards the edges of slab constructions. Perforated walls and sliced structures are bulging under the weight of the maker’s domestic acrobatics.

As a food stylist, Hudson engages with the world of culinary art and it is not an occupation for the faint-hearted. Hudson’s profession involves building structures from raw organic material while working within time constraints.

The precarious equilibrium and counterbalance of Hudson’s ceramic assemblages refer to her work as a food stylist, but also recall the juggling of tasks and commitments that are recognisable on a more



universal level, particularly for women who are balancing the responsibilities of home, children and work.

Draper and Hudson's assemblages seduce and engage. These visually seductive and delicately crafted objects deploy the aesthetics of beauty in order to capture the viewer and trigger concerns that address personal experiences and broader social and culture issues.

The successful binding of beauty and conceptual intent is not unfamiliar territory in the contemporary ceramics world. This is often not the case in other areas of contemporary art practice. Lynda Draper and Jacqui Hudson exemplify artists who question the Postmodern critique of beauty while binding together a refined visual sense of conceptual complexity.

FOOTNOTES

1. Miller, J. *Conceptual Beauty, Perspectives on Australian Contemporary Art*, Artspace, Sydney. 2010. pp 176–191.
2. Scarry, E. *On Beauty and Being Just*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, US. 1999.
3. Draper, L. *Home Alter*. MFA College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales. 2010. p 4.
4. *ibid.*

Dr Julie Bartholomew is an Australian artist and educator in ceramics. She has participated extensively in artist residencies outside Australia and major exhibitions including solo shows at the Kuandu Museum and Taipei Artist Village in Taipei. Bartholomew has been the recipient of numerous awards including three Australia Council for the Arts New Work Grants, the Tokyo Studio Residency, Australia–China Council Red Gate Residency in Beijing and the Asialink Taiwan Residency.



*This page: Jacqui Hudson. Top left: **Balance Series 18**. 2009. Southern Ice porcelain. 12 x 6 x 5.5 cm. Top right: **Shadows in White Series – Shelter 1 & II**. 2009. Southern ice porcelain. 22 x 9 x 9 cm & 21 x 8 x 8 cm. Above: **Rise**. 2009. Southern Ice porcelain. 19 x 7 x 7 cm.*