

Timelines

Simone Fraser

IN *TIMELINES*, SIMONE FRASER HAS ASSEMBLED A WONDERFULLY comprehensive show. There are 35 pieces in all and each, exact in scale, is subtly different. The artist has found a right size for her vessels and the placement in this exhibition affords them real presence. Dramatic lighting and beautiful plinths may have raised the ante but it is not solely the presentation upon which these works rely. Rather that, across such a large show, Fraser has maintained interest and integrity in her forms, each piece seeming to echo another and focus

A Review by Brett Ballard

Fraser's themes and her concerns with materials and technique.

The making of these ceramics, in stoneware clay with porcelain and terracotta slips, is born from an extensive knowledge of ceramic material and a desire to push the work of handbuilding into the realm of sculpture. Working over an armature, horizontally and vertically as she does, and the resolution of smaller forms beyond the wheel, involves Fraser in every step of this labour-intensive process. Physicality is evident in the resolution of each

Landscapes #4. 2011. Ceramic form, multilayered and fired dry glaze. 57 cm/h.



object even before we might consider the surface and colour of her objects, or any implied symbolism that is evident.

It is the surface of Fraser's objects that first engages. Texture, like shape, has its own symbolism and the experience of rougher but attractive surface feeds back through the mind – in memory – to traces of rocks and shells and weathered surfaces such as tree bark.

These impressions are innately with us and are what Philip Rawson has called, "humanity's silent languages". They engage by analogy.

The continuous set of gestures that Fraser has developed in her studio marks all of her vessels. They are

what she thinks of as a line that spirals outward in a wheel-like motion and, as she suggests, "extend unceasingly in a time-line or story". This is carried into her forms. Line becomes the thread that connects moments in the greater narrative. It is a sort of idealism

on Fraser's part that is evident when thought about. These objects, so robustly present, are deeply evocative of the greater world: the sea, the fossil and

archaeological fragments.

Tactile order in ceramics is something we might think of as coming from the Japanese tea bowl. The comfort of a roughly finished surface in the form of a hand cup has similar associations and is never far from

Sabbia Gallery, Sydney
11 May – 4 June 2011

Ceramic Form #3. 2011.

Ceramic form, dry glaze and terracotta slip, midfired. 42 cm/h.



many of these forms. Although they are rather more tapered and enlarged, vessels such as *Touchline #8* and *Ceramic Form #3* suggest containment – dry outside, liquid within – and an invitation to hold. Their tactility is in contrast; *Ceramic Form #3* has a bobbled surface over which rivulets, possibly water, describe the form horizontally. *Touchline #8* is literally a sitter, its broad circular base and wide midriff guarantee stability, but the finger indents and baroque undulation of the form are beautifully seen and enliven the surface.

Fraser is adept with her surfaces and careful never to overload a form. Chance has a role to play in mobile surfaces but, for her, shape is fundamental, you feel she finds that first. Then, surface is where she can add her impress, her touch order and such is the facility she has with her material that she seems never afraid to push it to the edge. As modelling goes she has a true sculptor's touch, surface connects to core and material rings true at the surface.

There are other associations to consider in a ceramic such as *Cambrian Braille #1*, where the form is like a sea

amidst a world of quickened communication and perhaps here the handbuilt vessel can provide some mediation.

Colour has a part to play as well. Fraser has skilfully applied colour to all of her pieces and, like texture, she understands instinctively the role that colour plays in a form. The *Landscapes* series, of which there are four, combines colour to illustrate erosion and point to the effect of environmental change on the landscape. The colours clash uneasily across the forms and are a poser, initially, but it is the title that clarifies Fraser's intention, land – scrape.

Touchline #4 is a stand-alone object slightly crooked as if a bent finger. Tall and cylindrical, at 63 cm and dappled in surface and in colour, it suggests a form straightening and reaching full height. I am not clear what the aspiration is but there is an implicit sense of curiosity in the form. There is the thought that, as we look, it is possibly a tree in a clearing, viewed at a distance, or a prehistoric rock form or vessel marked by age.

If we think of ceramics in this way, as a means to know

Cambrian Braille #1. 2011.

Ceramic form, dry glaze and porcelain slip, midfired. 13 cm x 27 cm.



urchin shell. There is another, *Cambrian Braille #2*, just slightly larger, that makes the same challenge. Why two? Is it because no two things are alike in the world or is it like many things, beautifully similar? This is an issue that this exhibition raises and of which Fraser is aware. In repetition there is an implied critique. As her notes suggest, Fraser would like us to 'deliberate'

the world, then we have a context for Fraser's work that stretches back to the 1930s, when ceramics began to be exhibited with painting and sculpture. Sculpture made new links to craft through the use of stone and clay and, with ceramics, shared a taste for abstract beauty. It was suddenly possible to see a Gaudier Brzeska carving and a Murray Stait bowl in the same exhibition.

It is within this aesthetic canon that Simone Fraser's work most comfortably sits. These objects exist and invite use and touch, but Fraser's forms elide function. She is more willing to work at a metaphorical level; to see what an object can say through its plastic form by analogy, but also likeness. What is made obvious by this excellent exhibition is that the forms do the talking. They begin our conversation.

Brett Ballard is an Art Specialist at an auction house in Sydney. He holds an MA in The History and Theory of Modern Art from Chelsea School of Art and Design. Ballard contributes regularly to national art magazines, catalogues and books.



Above: *Cambrian Braille #2*. 2011. 14 cm x 30 cm.

Below: *Touchline #8*. 2011. 26 cm/h.

Right: *Touchline #4*. 2011. 63 cm/h.

All are ceramic form, dry glaze and porcelain slip, midfired.

