



Alana Wilson

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Simple, practical, inventive – vessels are one the earliest expressions of human ingenuity and culture.

Ever evolving, from the prehistoric pottery of the neolithic, to their present day place as treasured objets d'art.

For Sydney based ceramicist Alana Wilson, the aesthetics and techniques of ancient, bygone ceramics is a starting point for creating works that explore modern ideas and functions.

Wilson utilises a variety of traditional, but also present day experimental techniques in her process. Emphasised in the rugged textures and glazed finishes of her pieces, which are consistently beautiful, expressive and contemporary. The result is a body of work by Wilson that seems to echo the past, but is always looking forward.







# Interview. Sasha Geyer.

## Photography. Rudolf Zverina.

SG Your work utilises ancient methods to convey contemporary ideas. How do you negotiate past, present and future both artistically and structurally?

AW I think it's extremely important as a human being to negotiate between what has come before us, what exists now, and where we are headed; both in art and otherwise. It's impossible to not look to art history and cultural history as a starting point in terms of communicating ideas, our own memories and understanding of concepts that only exist due to the fact they relate to our previous understandings and experiences. I am consistently utilising the past as a map of sorts in ways to create new pathways into the future for ideas that I feel are important to bring in to reality.

SG What are the core ideas that currently drive your work?

AW Imperfection, natural abnormality, textural and experimental works and a longing to always go against the grain. I feel artists have a responsibility to reflect societal and cultural values, to encourage questioning within the viewer and in a sense, contribute to restructuring what is valuable for us as humans to move forward in a positive direction.

SG Do you have a particular research process in terms of citing traditional techniques?

AW I have researched into various traditional techniques: between classical and atavistic. More often than not it involves grasping an understanding of the daily lives of the people that created these methods, why these techniques were brought into existence and whether or not they remain today. Some techniques, rituals and forms have no relativity to today's society, yet some have lasted thousands of years that still have such a connection to the human creator and user – for them to still exist in the creation of pieces is quite immeasurably stunning.

SG What are some examples of old techniques that have changed the way you create and see ceramics?

AW Techniques that I use often such as coiling and beating have been utilised since 8000 to 9000 BC. The relationship that these techniques allow to the human body has in turn strengthened my understanding of how the body and the vessel are so intertwined. For example: our daily vessels we use, a cup that is created to hold enough liquid to half fill a human stomach, a bowl to fill a human stomach, a bathtub to allow a human to lie down in, a vase to hold enough grain or liquid for several days or more. Beyond scale and volume, the raw materials of clay and glaze and the results they can create have lead to a great interest in seeking these results and processes elsewhere in nature - geologically and ecologically.

SG I understand that you're a self-described 'water person', living near the beach in Sydney and teaching swimming. Tell me about your relationship with water and how it informs your work?

AW Absolutely. I have been around water and around people that love water my entire life. My parents were both swimmers and surf lifesavers, and I grew up with them running a swim school as the family business, which was my second home. My grandfather was heavily involved in sport in New Zealand and its relative communities; he led the New Zealand Olympic team of four athletes to Moscow in 1980 when many nations boycotted the Games due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

This commitment, particularly of him and my father, to the sport and to the relative values that coincide with being in the water have consistently stuck with me; I feel a great need to maintain this kind of commitment for myself and my own generation towards encouraging kids into a physical sport, in particular swimming, being safe around the water and upholding good sportsmanship. I feel the desire to serve a community, as well as to connect with others and encourage a continuous involvement with water environments. These values have in turn affected my work and practices in order to communicate some of these ideals via my visual language.

SG You discovered ceramics while studying at Sydney's National Art School. What drew you to it as a discipline?

AW I had never experienced working with ceramics before studying at the National Art School, but the first day of it I loved it. I think the physicality, cyclical, and meditative nature of it drew me in. Now I love it more so because I keep experimenting and weaving my way deeper into the medium, resulting in a connection which is hard to let go of. It has absolutely affected by life and work beyond the use of it as a physical medium, and more so the values and practices that are necessary when working with something physical, slow and natural.







SG What is unique to working with ceramics as a mode of expression for you?

AW Ceramics is a much slower medium, it requires persistence and patience throughout the process of making, drying, firing, glazing which can never be completed within one sitting. The area of ceramics I work in primarily revolves around experimentation and pushing the material boundaries of the glaze ingredients, which in itself is very hard to predict, let alone feel a sense of control. Working slowly yet experimenting seems to work for me, as well as resolving both technical and aesthetic issues in order to bring ideas in to existence.

SG What are some of those technical and aesthetic issues you feel you've resolved?

AW Technically, in particular in terms of glazing and firing, I am constantly resolving various faults and using these faults as a catalyst to create new textures, via layering, use of destructive materials and varying firing cycles. This is an ongoing process – it varies seasonally and with different materials it can depend a lot on how and where it was mined.

Over time I have refined my own sense of balance and proportion in terms of the scale and silhouettes used in my work, and in particular how this relates to a human body. Again, this in a consistent evolution of constantly refining intuition within the process of creation in the studio.

SG In the past you've collaborated with fashion designers, with your work appearing in lookbooks and runway presentations. How do you find your work interacts with other types of design?

AW I feel ceramics is lucky in this sense that it can really connect to the daily life of many, intersecting human interaction more often than some mediums may get the chance to. This connection has allowed me to work with some wonderful designers and collaborators, which is always an interesting process to be a part of – particularly fashion, where the norm of the industry are so fast and elusive and the opposite of my own practice. Whether I've collaborated within fashion, interiors, film, I feel the works still embody the essential values I hope to communicate.

SG Do you find your work takes on a different meaning when it's used for decoration rather than at the forefront, or in a showcase?

AW I don't believe it takes on a different meaning, yet the meaning derived from any experience will depend on both the conditioning of the viewer as well as the works immediate surroundings. My work is not about creating the most heirachically-valuable piece or embodying any shock-value. I much prefer creating works that make more sense or pose further questions over time, rather than seeking immediate attention via excessive scale, colour or form. There's also an interesting human reaction to works of a domestic scale, they provide a different intersection into daily life and the human form. All of these components - presence, longevity, scale, and coexisting within an environment - are more important to for me to consider than being at the forefront.