

Maria Parmenter



Studio bench top, accidental souvenirs: gentle reminders series works

"It's the simplicity that I like.
The pared-back aesthetic"



Sample tiles artist's studio



Familiarly, 2007 (detail), slab built stoneware glaze, largest dimension 250 x 50 Photograph: Michal Kusznik

Maria Parmenter's practice has seen a transition from working in porcelain to produce rectangular slab-built vessels embellished with domestic patterns to small, hand-built hollowware forms (in nostalgic 1950s pastel colours), reminiscent of utilitarian domestic items. She sees her 2005 Honours year as a time when she was 'pushed into the conceptual side' of what she was making. Working at a conceptual level has meant exploring qualities of unevenness, the handmade and usage to create metaphors for lived experience and memory. She regards a mentorship she had with Adelaide-based artist Angela Valamanesh as influential in helping her to refine forms and ideas. Parmenter sees a need to maintain her vessel-based production work while continuing to explore sculptural possibilities and to exhibit the outcomes of these investigations.

* The title of her Honours thesis topic was *An investigation into the potential for surfaces within the domestic environment to act as carriers of memory.*

Inspiration

The fact that the artist's family moved house regularly during her childhood may be a significant factor in the directions her work has taken. The artist identifies a preoccupation with the 'decoration of the domestic surface' as referencing such childhood experiences. Parmenter observes that this stems from 'a desire to impress my own enduring mark on an interior... I am increasingly aware that my personal imprint or trace is seldom left within these dwellings.'

* See Wendy Walker, exhibition catalogue essay, *accidental souvenirs: gentle reminders*, JamFactory, July 2007

Memory vessels, accidental souvenirs: gentle reminders series, 2007 stoneware, variable dimensions to maximum 250 x 100 x 90 Photograph: Grant Hancock



Visualisation

As part of exploring the possibilities of slab-built vessels, Parmenter produced an extensive range of 'tiles' in which experiments in surfacing and decoration were explored. She states that it is often difficult to know in advance what she wants. In the *accidental souvenirs: gentle reminders* series for example she had a sense of what balance of colours were needed in a group but the arrangements came later.

Process

Surface treatment is a feature of Parmenter's work. The range includes; screenprinting and relief (linoblock) printing, embossed relief, impressed designs and silver wire inclusions as found in the slab-built vessels and subtle brush textures used in the *accidental souvenirs: gentle reminders* series. Porcelain and high fired stoneware can be difficult clay mediums to work with. Shrinkage is a factor and vessels often buckle or crack in the firing process. Parmenter has come to terms with this and exploits these properties. She comments: "The absence of evenness, the suggested clumsiness these are things that support the idea that



vessel, hand me down, gentle series, 2004 - 2005, slab built printed porcelain, 140 x 200 x 150 Photograph: Michal Kusznik

memories are never the same, never rigid. They move."

Realisation

Most recent work (2007/2008) marks a transition from decorated slab built vessels to making objects 'you remember things by.' The result has been a series of small container-like objects (*accidental souvenirs: gentle reminders* (2007) that superficially resemble such things as jugs, toasters, salt and pepper shakers and the like. The artist intends that these objects will have the capacity to act as 'trigger memories'. Clues to this intention can be found in the deliberate unevenness of the surface implying usage, aging or as Parmenter suggests, 'a sense of the surface being caressed'.