

Mercedes Mangnall



In formulating her ideas Mercedes Mangnall works in a wide cultural context. She is responsive to the irreverent humour and counter-culture values of pop and funk art. The American pop artist Claus Oldenburg holds interest and lessons in how to draw on popular culture as a source of ideas. A professional association with Adelaide-based ceramic artist, Gus Clutterbuck, who also uses elements of humour in his art, is valued. More recently, 'cutesy' contemporary Japanese design and entertainment idioms have been incorporated in her work. Some of her production line items contain references to the fashion industry. Much of the artist's JamFactory Associate period was spent in acquiring vessel forming

"In my own works I would like to substitute clay for flesh and create works that seem to have a life of their own"

(hand building and throwing) and decorating skills. From this the artist developed a production range of vase-like vessels which she anticipates will subsidise more experimental, sculptural work. However, she does see potential in her production wares being more than functional items and points to the fact that many items which inspire her are themselves mass produced lines such as toys, comics and cartoons.

Inspiration

'Respectable High Art meets tattooed street culture'. This statement (from the artist's visual diary) captures Mangnall's approach to design. Tattooing in its widest sense is a central inspiration and source of ideas. In researching this topic the artist has looked at tattooing as; tradition (tribal), contemporary urban tribal (pop star/celebrities tattoos) and transgression (gang affiliation and criminality), in addition to tattooing within art contexts. By quoting or using tattoos and tattoo culture in her work Mangnall engages with questions about what is acceptable or unacceptable in contemporary society. Mangnall comments, "I hope to produce work which explores social prejudices such that we might be encouraged to look for beauty in 'the ordinary' places."

Visualisation

Mangnall maintains a regular visual arts diary of sketches and visual samples. In her scrap book collection are Tattoo parlour advertisements (as used in the *Skull* decals) along with the artist's own designs.

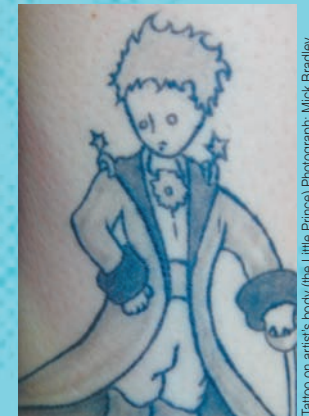
Process

The artist feels that in working with clay she is 'wearing two hats', thinking as a sculptor on one hand and also as a ceramicist, thinking about ways to engage the forms though surface treatments such as glazing and transfer designs.

Realisation

Mangnall comments that from her earliest sculptural work she gravitated to 'forms with faces'. Her 'bunny rabbits' and 'teddy bears' are evidence of this. But they have an edge that somehow re-locates them away from the cute and cuddly and into the twilight zone of anxious thoughts. This is achieved in part by the artist's application of tattoo, scar or wound-like surface embellishments or treatments as seen in the *Teddy Bear* series. Occasionally (as in the gun motif on one bear) contradictions between innocence and violence are intensified. The edginess of

Mangnall's work also derives from the artist's deliberate use of roughness or crudity in finish (such as the mould marks left on the bears) to contradict the bland mass market identity of the source material. And the teddy bears? Mangnall comments that most of the tattoo artists she's known have been "big hairy bikers... Initially, with their leather and tats they can look frightening. But after talking to them for a while you realise they are just big teddy bears."



Tattoo on artist's body (the Little Prince) Photograph: Mick Bradley

Tattooed Teddy designs from artist's sketchbook



Pink Bear with skulls, (detail) 2007, stoneware, enamel paint, 630 x 220 x 200 Photograph: Mick Bradley



Tattooed Teddy 1, 2007, stoneware, glazed decoration, 240 x 150 x 50 Photograph: Mick Bradley