




Form and surface narrative: porcelain and politics in the twenty-first century

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Title Form and surface narrative: porcelain and politics in the twenty-first century

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Abstract This practice-led research project explores the relationship between porcelain and politics. It does this by examining selected historical and contemporary pots that convey a political message and the visual language of surface decoration. Decorative functional ceramics may not be immediately associated with the creation and legitimisation of a culture and its political position. However, with this

political position however, with this research, I investigate selected political ceramics from the beginning of the twentieth century and contemporary ceramics and focus on how surface imagery is used as an instrument of political promotion and personal commentary. Stories that unfold around the surfaces of three-dimensional forms occupy a genre that is now commonly referred to as 'narrative ceramics': pots that tell a story. Mark-making is one of the unique ways people have shaped and sought to understand their world. Paintings and stories on ancient ceramics have revealed much of our knowledge of the past and the cultures that created them. For example, the black and red figure painted vases of Classical Greece (Ostermann 2006, 13) . My relationship with political porcelain objects was formed as an undergraduate art student in the 1980s. I was curious how Russian revolutionary pots made during the early twentieth century incorporated modern designs and political energy with traditional decorations on their surfaces. As such, I became interested in the contrast between what past cultures had integrated onto ceramic forms and the surface narratives of functional ceramics in the twenty-first century. In Russia, from 1917, the Bolshevik Party utilised porcelain forms from the Imperial Porcelain Factory in St Petersburg to promote their new regime. My interest lies in how artists were enlisted to create messages of propaganda, by adopting traditional symbols and patterns with phrases and images of the modern environment. In twenty-first century Western democracies ceramic artists, such as Stephen Dixon, Stephen Bowers and Gerry Wedd, articulate personal and political narratives. Using functional and non-functional forms contemporary ceramic artists decorate surfaces with historic symbols and visual

surfaces with historic symbols and visual metaphors to observe and comment on twenty-first century political decisions and concerns. The primary focus of this research project was to respond to the political machinations of Australian politics as observed during the period of the research candidacy, by creating functional porcelain objects that utilised images and text on the surfaces. As a consequence, works developed for this project use text from contemporary phrases of the Australian Trade Union movement, and sound bites taken from the slogans and speeches of Australian politicians. By using functional forms to carry visual images of the Australian political landscape, the project aimed to advance the link between Australian politics and functional porcelain, establishing a space for our personal lives to engage with the politics that surround us.

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