

# TIMELINES -

*An Exhibition by Simone Fraser*

Merran Esson



Sitting across the lunch table, I am listening to Simone Fraser discuss her recent work. We have shared conversation, coffee and lunch but my strongest impression of the meeting is the way Simone uses her hands. She expressively gestures with every sentence and her long fingers create her story. Her hands explore the language that she uses in a conversation as though she is still working on a ceramic form. I know Simone has always used her hands to create. Working in clay demands the handmade, and touch is the most important aspect of her practice.

Fraser's latest body of work, *Timelines*, explores the importance of time in her practice. Working in clay is also working with geology, and geology is the study of time. It takes time, and in fact years to really develop and evaluate the skill and an aesthetic eye to make work of this standard. Time to mature as an artist, to be able to strip back the layers of work that has been part of the development of a studio practice, and to quote Simone from our conversation "taking time to watch – the present, by going forwards and looking backwards." She has always had an interest in the ancient work from the Mediterranean and the medieval Islamic world. *Timelines* also refers to the time it takes to really understand this work. She explains "Beauty for me is in purity of form, the reflection of history and tradition, the fact the pot has a relationship to the human body. The unmistakable rhythmic gesture



## ILLUSTRATION -

left - *Watermark Series* - 64 cm, terracotta slip with dry glaze, midfired

right - *Landscape Series* - 65 cm, dry glaze, terracotta slip, three firings, midfired

of the hand. The volume of the work." In her exhibition statement she comments that "Time is part of the fundamental structure of the universe, a dimension in which events occur in sequence. It can follow a line in both directions, without end, collecting and organising our events and experiences."

Simone has been making ceramics for a little over 40 years. She creates this work on a potter's wheel and is able to work on this scale by using a flame thrower from a gas bottle to stiffen her clay as she forms the individual pieces. This technique was part of her education under Alan Peascod at Canberra School of Art in 1978. Simone continues to develop this way of working, passing these skills to students today at the National Art School in Sydney.

During our lunch Simone showed me a bowl that she made under her mother's tutorage at the age of 14. She talks about the substance and sustenance of life's experiences that have given her the confidence to be at this point in her career but for me, it was seeing a beautifully thrown bowl made by a 14 year old girl which had a firmly imprinted spiral visible in its softly thrown interior. The spiral with its traditional and historical references still appears in her work today. She also writes in her catalogue statement; "The wheel creates a centrifugal form, like a spiralling line, unravelling within and without the centrepiece of a circle, extending unceasingly in a timeline or story. It wraps itself around the form, unfolding its embossed narrative. This spiralling forges new boundaries, and in its wake leaves a life story of kinks and notches. Each expansion of the line allows for a larger concentric ring to form and give structure to the vessel. It depicts our instinct to hold within the form a connection to tradition and our inner relationship with nature."

She discusses the strong Middle Eastern aesthetic that was part of her education under Peascod. She refers to this exhibition as a way of having worked through this very strong passionately taught aesthetic, emerging now with a maturity that can only continue to develop over time. Her understanding of dry glazes stems from her early years at Canberra School of Art, Australia. Simone continues this research in this exhibition. In writing about dry glazes in a recently published book on the work of Alan Peascod, she writes that it is an "intensely personal methodology and needs sensitivity and skill to develop to a point







where it can be used to resolve particular aesthetic aims. It relies on intuition, spontaneity and a willingness to break with conventional glaze thinking. It can't be replicated as an industrial process. Every work is different - the goal is variation not consistency."

I viewed *Timelines* on its opening day. Her skill, intuition and mastery of dry glazes and their application is on display. Sabbia Gallery presents the work on tall plinths, and gives the work the space and presence that it deserves. The work has a strong sculptural presence. Tall pieces stand alone, while others are grouped together like the tall tree trunks referencing the forests from two of her favourite places, the hinterland behind Byron Bay in northern NSW, and Tartha on the south coast of NSW. Other influences from Cradle Mountain in Tasmania, and Table Mountain in South Africa where she was born, are also hinted at here. There are glimpses of blue amongst the green and yellow glazes and I am reminded of billabongs viewed from the air. As I sit talking to Simone, I look over her shoulder at her lush Sydney garden, with layers of green foliage and glimpses of her next door neighbour's pool, I see the layers of colour and texture that have found their way into her studio. This new work presents us with clay textures and patterns that shows a strong relationship to the vast dry Australian landscape.

In her exhibition catalogue Simone continues; "As we are forced to join a world of fast communication with little time for deliberation, we equally need to follow the trail of our imagination in the silence of our inner domain. We need to "see", and renew our inspiration, connecting with our origin in mind, and all the while taking another step outwards. The melting pot of references in this

body of work: from the fossil, the archaeological, the environmental to the contemporary, have melded to produce a personal timeline in clay that still allows individual interpretation. Using the vessel as metaphor, I see my work as a series of communications. It's also about our senses, our reaction to texture, to colour, to beauty. Touch is an important aspect of the work - the trace of the human hand the finger mark, the scrape. It's about a context - a narrative, unfolding through its layers, while still referencing the timelessness of a tradition."

A couple of years ago Elton John snapped up three pieces from a previous exhibition and the Western Australian Art Gallery has purchased a piece from this exhibition for their collection. For those of you keen to add Simone Fraser to your collection you may need to wait. I understand that this exhibition almost sold out. This is indeed an acclamation of her growing success as an artist.

**Merran Esson** is a ceramic artist and Subject Leader in Ceramics at the National Art School, Sydney. [merranesson@me.com](mailto:merranesson@me.com)

#### ILLUSTRATION -

- top left - **Cambrian Braille** - h 13 cm - w 27 cm - porcelain slip - dry glaze - midfired
- top right - **Landscape Series** - h 52 cm - terracotta slip - dry glaze - three firings - midfired
- right - **Ceramic Form** - h 42 cm - terracotta slip - dry glaze - three firings - midfired



## STATEMENT -

Time is part of the fundamental structure of the universe, a dimension in which events occur in sequence. (wikipedia). It can follow a line in both directions, without end, collecting and organising our events and experiences. The wheel creates a centrifugal form, like a spiralling line, unravelling within and without the centrepiece of a circle, extending unceasingly in a timeline or story. It wraps itself around the form, unfolding its embossed narrative. This spiralling forges new boundaries, and in its wake leaves a life story of kinks and notches. Each expansion of the line allows for a larger concentric ring to form and give structure to the vessel. It depicts our instinct to hold within the form a connection to tradition and our inner relationship with nature. As we are forced to join a world of fast communication with little time for deliberation, we equally need to follow the trail of our imagination in the silence of our inner domain. We need to "see", and renew our inspiration, connecting with our origin in mind, and all the while taking another step outwards. The melting pot of references in this body of work: from the fossil, the archaeological, the environmental to the contemporary, have melded to produce a personal timeline in clay that still allows individual interpretation. Using the vessel as metaphor, I see my work as a series of communications. It's also about our senses, our reaction to texture, to colour, to beauty. Touch is an important aspect of the work - the trace of the human hand, the finger mark, the scrape. It's about a context - a narrative, unfolding through its layers, while still referencing the timelessness of a tradition.

**Simone Fraser** was born in Cape Town in 1951. She immigrated to Australia in 1964. Clay was part of my life from an early age, she says. Her mother, a painter, encouraged her to accompany her to classes at the age of about 14. Later she majored in ceramics at the Canberra School of Art in Australia, completing a diploma in visual art. She has also completed post graduate study (graduate diploma in visual art) at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. Simone has been part of over 80 exhibitions, both group and solo shows since graduating. She is also part of numerous permanent and private collections, both in Australia and overseas, including the National Gallery of Australia. She has taught at a tertiary level for over 20 years. She currently lectures in ceramics at the National School of Art in Sydney.

## SIMONE FRASER

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