

Opening speech from CAAWA President Bernard Kerr

Welcome to Central Gallery to the Ceramic Arts Association Annual Selective Exhibition. Our Association acknowledges the passing of Queen Elizabeth on this official day of Mourning. Our Association also respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we operate, the Whadjuk people, as well as other First Australians connected with this land.

We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging. Having paid respect to the Queen and to Indigenous Australians, I'd also like to pay respect to the exhibition committee especially Matt Russell, Jenny Wood, Liz Berry and Andrea Vinkovic for their fantastic and tireless efforts. One of the Objectives of the association is to promote among practitioners and non-practitioners the production and appreciation of ceramics and to represent their interests. Hopefully this exhibition achieves this and especially and importantly the appreciation aspect.

This is an opportunity to appreciate the diversity of practice in WA. Western Australia is such a large place and it is very pleasing to see so much representation from Regional centres in this show. In another innovative initiative, this exhibition will run in parallel to a Student Ceramic Exhibition, open for all students in primary and secondary schools in Western Australia. That show will be in the Shop front gallery in Beaufort Street. It opens at 6 PM on Wednesday 5 th of October.

Another objective is to promote and facilitate the marketing of work of those practising in ceramics in Western Australia. Whilst this is a selling show, it is not necessarily the financial aspects that are important although some have said that being a potter is perhaps a 21st century form of subsistence living, but there is also wealth in terms of cultural capital. These are the riches that result in both the process of making and the sharing of ideas and socialising with others. It is also of paramount importance for a life well lived.

Potters are often the best collectors of other potter's work because they have a trained eye. Owners of quality works are rewarded by subtlety, nuance and beauty every day. It can be a gift to oneself that keeps on giving. If you see something that you like, don't hold back! Buy it! You deserve it! It often comes down to WAYS of SEEING: What we have before us are objects and things, but more than that; they are expressions of human creativity, of individuality and personal and cultural being. They may be seen as mere objects but they

may also be seen as vitrified poetry. They also need to be seen in context. In the context of where and how they were made, of who made them and how they learnt to use the medium and in the context of this actual exhibition here and now and how the curators chose to exhibit them. All these factors give meaning to the works. Each maker uses Elements and Principles of Art and Design to communicate through the language of the medium. As a language, handmade ceramics may express lyricism, poetry and eloquence. Clay and ceramic is a plastic medium and so almost infinitely malleable but is often frustrating, demanding and, at times, downright cruel and heart-breaking in its demanding process. It is a 'trial by fire', and yet in this alchemical process, it provides rewards in terms of knowledge of the self and as expressions of our own unique individuality. It is a mirroring process between us as unique individuals and the inimitable objects that we produce. It is a complex way of expressing the complexity and wonder of lived experience thus the DIVERSITY of this show is to be celebrated, as it is a manifestation of us as unique and special.

Last year I attended the IOTA conference at Curtin University and observed academics theorising Craft as it is practised in the 21st century. The discussions often involved flowcharts and diagrams and the great push in academic institutions towards the digital world of 3D printing and computer-aided design. I believe that this is a questionable direction. It was as if humanity can be codified and standardised into simple systems and that making can become divorced from the relationship between hand, eye and brain and the expression of the individual. It is the subtle emotional and expressive qualities in these works that give them their power and express precious human qualities. The mark of the maker's hand in concert with their personality that imbues them with meaning not the object in itself.

One of the most important things I have realised over the past few years is that making Craft is a political act. It is a way of saying: 'this is me' in a world of confused information, anxiety and uncertainty. It is a way of celebrating being alive, special and unique. A quote from Leonard Cohen: 'I didn't know how to feel, so I learnt how to touch.'

With that thought, I turn to a person with an extremely heightened sense of touch and a highly attuned sensitivity to form and surface and the ceramic arts in general: our guest judge Warrick Palmateer. Warrick: TAFE graduate, Master potter, Collaborator and Educator. Thanks for the seriousness and diligence of the judging process that I gathered took over 3 hours.