

McGRATH

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With these hands

A glimpse inside the workshop of ceramic artist Malcolm Greenwood



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In a time where cheap, mass produced ceramics too easily find their way onto tables, it is a pleasure to see how a true craftsman works an idea through to a finished piece...

Whatever Malcolm Greenwood decided to do with his life, it was inevitable it would involve using his hands, a talent he honed from a young age working beside his father. "My father was an industrial chemist by trade but also a great craftsman who could make anything from boats to cabinets".

Malcolm's graciously original family home in leafy Mosman resembles a small gallery, a testament to his skill. He points out the kitchen tiles, the wooden dining table and the shelves filled with plates, bowls and vases he has handcrafted. A beautiful abstract head sculpture, a new personal project, watches peacefully from a plinth in the corner. "I'm pretty good at making dinner too" laughs Malcolm.

A life long penchant for adventurous travel has taken Malcolm across every continent. However most days you will find him after his ritual morning swim in his unassuming backyard workshop (more a shed than studio) where he produces stunning ceramics made with handcrafted tools, moulds and a jigger jolly (a fascinating 19th Century machine).

Malcolm almost spent his life as an engineer but a spur-of-the-moment stop into the Potter's Society on his way to work as a young apprentice fitter and turner sparked an intrigue with clay. Years later Malcolm signed up for a ceramics class while studying Business Administration (University of





Massachusetts). “The rest is history!” he says.

Malcolm describes the mentor relationship he formed as a young artist with Makoto Yabe (a master Japanese potter) as an immense privilege and “something that all artists should strive to find for themselves”.

Makoto Yabe’s laid-back approach and incredible skill appealed to Malcolm and working with him was like learning all over again – first the Japanese techniques (including the making of tools he still uses) and then the eastern philosophy that continues to influence Malcolm’s approach to his work and life.

“Not a day goes by that I don’t think about him. The way he worked – very quickly with a freedom and simplicity.”

Over the last 10 years Malcolm has experienced an enormous freedom of his own. “I can feel my skills are so much

greater than they were ... now it almost feels like there is an outside force doing the work but I know it’s just the years of experience.”

“I can’t imagine a life without making things... they will be digging up my porcelain chards for thousands of years!”

“A lot of artists are told how long it will take to develop this... I have been making pots for 30 odd years now – when you have spent that much time, you suddenly realize they were absolutely right! There is a level of experience you cannot get any other way”.



Malcolm believes neither the government nor community owe artists a living and that while boundary pushing is essential so is an ability to create objects that will sell. “I have sold a vase for \$3500 but I have also sold little bowls for \$10... I really do want my work to be accessible to as many people as possible.”

“We have to find ways to finance our artwork however that might be – some people choose teaching, some people choose making.”

Having chosen to make objects like tableware, Malcolm does not feel creatively compromised. “Most of my work is functional...my bowls or plates aren’t complete until they are filled with food, they are beautiful objects you enjoy using as well as looking at for a long time.”

“In Japan there is appreciation for functional objects that are also pleasing to look at.” His point is perfectly

illustrated by a beautiful set of sake cups on a bench that form a striking sculpture.

Malcolm’s distinctive porcelain work has been featured in food and style magazines, cookbooks of leading chefs and on the tables of high-end restaurants and innovative retailers across the country. Malcolm’s most recent commissions can be seen at Masuya, Southern Ocean Lodge, the newly renovated Sydney Park Hyatt, Brent Savage’s Bentley Restaurant Bar and Grill and Koskela. ■

malcolmgreenwood.com.au



Words and images Sam Mackie