

Malcolm Greenwood

The Art of Production

Article by Bruce McWhinney



Bowls. 2006. Porcelain, matt and gloss glazes. 19 cm and 12 cm diam.

THE HOME AND STUDIO OF MALCOLM GREENWOOD speak about the personality, life and interests of an energetic and prolific potter, whose background in engineering and company management belie the sensitivity of the artist. This home and studio, nestled into a blue ribbon suburb in Sydney, stands as a signpost to an earlier and more genteel past. While gracious in style, the home is simple and devoid of over development. Stoically, it and what occurs within it, remain an antidote to much of what is superficial outside in the modern world. The ideals of simplicity, integrity, devotion and care are nurtured here, and a place at the table is available if you want to share a discussion on any of those matters.

Greenwood's motivation and approach to work, which springs from those structural beginnings and which relate to it by being direct, focused and unequivocal act as a veneer to hide the depth of conviction and determination it took to quit that well-paid job and follow a career path for reasons of the heart instead of the hip pocket. This matter of heart

colours and softens an otherwise pragmatic persona, and ultimately it is this that defines the artist, husband, father and worker. A no-nonsense way of doing things, born of years of achieving practical aims, solving design and production problems, and providing solutions to often difficult assignments by being straightforward and practical, overflows with abundant energy and enthusiasm.

Thirty years ago after studying for a business degree in the US, Greenwood met a Japanese potter, Makoto Yabe, working and teaching in Boston. Makoto had come from Kyoto, where he worked with neriage masters Jinmatsu and Sango Uno as apprentice. Makoto's freedom, mastery of technique, use of materials, and Eastern philosophical approach had a startling impact. What started out as curiosity became an epiphany.

Shortly after, Greenwood began working in Nigeria, and this too had a shaping influence. Greenwood recalls walking through marketplaces filled with traditional pottery, low-fired water jars and cooking



Blossom Vase. 2007. Porcelain, blue celadon glaze, 29 cm/h.

pots, at one with the culture and everyday life of the people. Ceramics, hand woven textiles, carved wooden implements and ritual objects formed connections with earlier impressions of humble teabowls made and used by rice farmers in Korea or Japan. Over time these notions of synthesis matured into a realised way of life, and these early influences have grown more important with time. Making hand-crafted ceramic objects became a full time career but, with the changing face of markets and competition from Asian imports, effort has had to be made to diversify and remain viable. This endurance has hardened Greenwood's resolve to continue to make a life welded to earning a living from making ceramics. It has become a form of meditation based on Mingei principles. When looking at Greenwood's shelves full of books on Japanese ceramics, that influence is clear.

Fulfilling orders for hundreds of plates and bowls for retail outlets, hotels and restaurants is daily fare for Malcolm Greenwood with pots in various stages of production. Slab dishes lie drying on their moulds

while he spins off another round of jiggered bowls, or throws another batch of teapots. On the shelves are modular pieces waiting to be constructed for an architectural commission.

The kiln won't wait long for another bisque or glaze firing. Quick turnaround lies at the centre of Greenwood's deftness and surety. This production work is functional; designed for use, but made with a sense of beauty. Glazes are of Chinese origin; chuns and celadon mix with matt white and black glazes to form a modern multi cultural blend.

In the studio, as in the home, pragmatism is tempered by a warmth engendered by close family bonds. Pots are everywhere in the kitchen, being used to prepare and serve a meal for the family; vases and jars on shelves, counters and the floor. Children studying at the dining table, drinking out of tumblers and cups, eating from bowls and plates, and caring about what matters for each other. Discussion here is as likely to be about the next firing or large order, as it is about schoolwork, friendships and what is important in life.



Vase. 2006. Multifired. 12 cm/h.



Platter. 2006. Porcelain, celadon. 46 x 42 cm.

Paring down, simplifying, jettisoning the unimportant are central themes in the household, and each member makes decisions based on firmly held beliefs. Elsewhere in the home, tables and furniture made by hand by Greenwood from recycled timbers attest to a love of natural materials. Nothing exists here that doesn't have an attachment or symbolic meaning. Artworks on the wall are by the children or from friends or potters.

As an early morning swimmer in the nearby sea, Greenwood renews his love of nature each day, while maintaining the fitness needed to endure the physical demands of the studio.

Much of the work is produced using a jigger/jolley, engineered and developed many years ago, before this method became well known to studio potters. Other pieces are made with equal care by hand, on the wheel, slab built or pressmoulded. There is no



Teabowls. 2006. Porcelain, chun glaze, saggar-fired. 12 cm/d.

distinction made between any method or type of work. Industrial techniques may be used to make sculptural objects.

While the mainstay of the studio is the functional work, the rigour of production is also at the core of the larger individual works. The latest series of one-off vessels, large thrown blossom jars, impossibly thin and precise, speak of an ability that can come only from hours of repetitious throwing.

In juxtaposition to the surety of the shapes, many of the larger vessels undergo extraordinary firing conditions. In the gas kiln, large saggars are built from bricks and kiln shelves and filled with sawdust and organic matter to influence the clay and glazes. Some pots are woodfired in an anagama kiln, these show Greenwood's connection to nature through the markings of the flame and fire.

Now is a time of both consolidation and renewal for Malcolm Greenwood, a time of reflection on his production work and looking forward to future exhibition work, he has the potential for a new force of expression.



Platter and Oval Bowls. 2004. Porcelain. 48 x 26 cm.



Teapot. 2005. Porcelain, chun glaze. 15 cm/h.

Bruce McWhinney is a practising ceramic artist and head of ceramics at Northern Beaches College in Sydney, Australia. The work of Malcolm Greenwood will be exhibited at Freeland Gallery, 120 Glenmore Rd Paddington, Sydney in September 2007. More of Malcolm Greenwood's work can be seen on his website: www.malcolmgreenwood.com