

Footprints of memories

All things leave a footprint – the forces of wind and animals; the siftings and siltings of water, the [often problematic] activities of man.

But even memory and thought can mark a plain.

Anita McIntyre's current exhibition of ceramics traces all kinds of actions across the surface of the Earth, rendering delicate maps of time, place, memory, and the kinds of meanings she – or we – might attribute to the landscapes that inspire them.

Both intensely personal and quasi-objective documents, McIntyre's visual language embraces several qualities and techniques from contemporary to ancient: from moulding, printing and glazing, to fusing and embedding slender tubes of glass [millefiori technique]; from arduous clay coating techniques to tissue paper transfers, McIntyre's finishes range from lustrous to opaque; milky to dry.

Her work moves across continents. "Canada will be my north; China will be east, the Kimberley, [my] Heart Country, my west and the limestone plains [my] Home Country, my south" and from lightness to weight: from the ghosts and shadows of ancestors, to model-like clay canoes, which carry the stories of journeys through these passionately remembered, ancient lands.

The exhibition acts as a kind of travelogue of places she knows well, remembers, or imagines.

A series of delicate porcelain cups, laced with fossils and fish, show the influence of Chinese printmaking styles, but also hint at the paper rubbings a traveller might make up against walls in a foreign land.

It is a way of taking a photograph through texture, like measuring touch's taste against the tongue.

Her Canada wall plate series reveal squirrels and fir trees, patterns of traditional Amerindian maroon and blue against a cream porcelain background.

Footprints disappear into this clay "snow": was the traveller ever really there, equal to the landscape and its histories, or are we only ever a blip passing through?

These works contrast with the "explorer's maps" of the Queanbeyan district, printed with the surveyor's words and scratched with his journey lines, perhaps counting a round of endless days, or simply documenting a farmer's furrows in the land.

Her Kimberley plates move into ochres and greys, and the rich yet delicate depths of the millefiori glass fragments lend the soilscape an ancient depth, excavating murmurs embedded in the land.

One senses allegory at work: here, the water coursed; here, the fishes danced; here, the spirits sang.

Do I see urban China in Plate 16? These thin, "buildings", if that is what they are, are tiny tubes within a much broader sense of time. Plate 25, *Collage*, is a delicate compendium like a dream traversing several lands.

Perhaps I am most surprised by the Weereewa vessels, so spare, so finely lined. Thin lines and tracks cross in almost plain porcelain ground.

This resonates with my experience of this ancient lake bed: sparse, bare, but wildly full of very old slow song.

Ceramics

Encompass ceramics

By Anita McIntyre at Beaver Galleries, 81 Dennison St, Deakin, until April 13.

Reviewer: Zsuzski Soboslay

Weekend arts

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