



Chris Johnston

The land resonates with stories. Pots are like stories – they are a way to speak.

My ceramics reflect my response to places and stories, my feelings of connection as well as concern for the fragility of where I live – a flinty dry landscape. I also have a great love for the desert, its colours, forms and scale, and I often spend time in and around Alice Springs and out in the Simpson Desert. Water and dryness are constant themes for me.

I love making a series of pieces: exploring the subtle variations that come about with each, even when they start out as the same handful of clay.

Many of my sculptural forms are hollow: I am intrigued by what is hidden when an open vessel is enclosed – the marks of the maker, thoughts, dreams and stories. But my recent work – the ‘droplets’ and ‘cones’ and other vessels are open mouthed!

My other passion is texture and pattern: I often beat the clay form, press the clay into leaves or seed pods, or use home-made clay stamps to reshape the surface.

The surface of many of my ceramics features terra sigillata, a fine clay in suspension painted onto the surface before firing – it has a natural sheen, creating a beautiful, rich colour and a soft surface. I use local ‘wild’ clay for the terra sigillata. The ceramic pieces that have a terra sigillata surface are not water-proof, they are decorative rather than functional and are best hand-washed. Other surfaces feature matte slips and several different glazes that I create from scratch.

All of this work is fired to 1180°C – a ‘mid-fire’ temperature between earthenware and stoneware – and all have been created in my small studio in Green Gully.

An explanation of the ideas that motivated some pieces can be found next to each.

Chris Johnston: List of ceramics

1	Falling to Earth	(in Gallery 1)	<p>This piece is about an ever-present story embedded in a place in Central Australia – Tnorula (Gosses Bluff). The surface expresses the polish of the desert, the story of the dance in the Milky Way and the shattered rocks that mark the fall. The inside is unknowable.</p> <p>Details: Made and first exhibited in 2008. Hand built, with terra sigillata surfaces.</p>	<p>Group of 5 pieces: 2 pieces only for sale</p> <p>\$250 each</p>
2, 3, 4	Nurturing Lands	(in Gallery 1)	<p>Our land nurtures us. It nurtures everything. These pieces are always in a group – a mob. The forms reflect the volcanic landscapes that edge this area, or perhaps the domes of Purnululu. The groupings remind me of kangaroo mobs, always one on alert looking out for the others. I have been engaged with this concept and this hollow form for several years.</p> <p>Details: Each piece was wheel thrown and altered, enclosed and hollow. The surface is terra sigillata, some with wax resist lines. Mid-fired to 1180°C.</p>	<p>2 – \$40 each (7 available)</p> <p>3 - \$40 each (5 available)</p> <p>4 - \$200 (for the group of 4)</p>
5 & 6	Gorges and Gaps	(in Gallery 1)	<p>And in the gorges, in the gaps, the water is deep and still. Dark, mysterious. The light finally reaches in, and the landscape ignites. Are the lines the marks of the water retreating, or do they come from within? Inspired by the gorges of Tjoritja, Arrernte name for the MacDonnell Ranges.</p> <p>Details: Made and first exhibited in 2008. Wheel-thrown and altered, hollow, with terra sigillata surfaces using wild clay, copper carbonate and black stain.</p>	<p>5 - \$900 (6 pieces - group)</p> <p>6 - \$400 (5 pieces or available singly)</p>
7	Rain Series: as water hits the dry earth	(in Gallery 1)	<p>Rain is rare in our flinty goldfields landscape. When it rains it pours. Droplets hit the dusty ground, water runs in worn channels, digging into the earth. And then it drains away. Rain, its absence or torrential presence inspired this series.</p> <p>Details: Wheel-thrown and altered, terra sigillata surfaces, with wax resist.</p>	<p>Group of 5 pieces: 3 available</p> <p>\$150 – large (2) \$140 – medium (1)</p>
8	Earth bowls	(various locations)	<p>Everything needs water – these bowls are for the joy of water in the garden.</p> <p>Details: Hand-built, textured with eucalyptus leaves or parsley seed heads, used as stencils for plain or coloured slips. Several have internal and/or external surfaces washed with terra sigillata. Mid-fired to 1180°C.</p>	<p>White glaze \$140 Green glaze \$120 Unglazed \$110</p> <p>Small bowls (2) \$80</p>
9	Orb vessel	(in Gallery 1)	<p>Details: Hand-built vessel, white slip, sgraffito, black-grey slip lines. Mid-fired to 1180°C.</p>	<p>\$180</p>
10	Bead vessel	(in Gallery 1)	<p>Details: Hand-built vessel, textured surface, white slip. Mid-fired to 1180°C.</p>	<p>\$180</p>
11	Lip Vessel	(in Gallery 1)	<p>Details: Hand-built vessel, textured surface, grey-black slip under white slip. Mid-fired to 1180°C.</p>	<p>\$200</p>

12	Beak vessel	(in Gallery 1)	
	Details: Hand-built vessel, textured surface with white slip. Mid-fired to 1180°C.		\$200
13	Ground Truth	(in Gallery 2)	
	Ground truth. Beneath our feet – mud and blood, generations gone. After rain, new things are growing. Skywards. But what are they? What is the ‘truth’ of this land, and what does it give birth to?		Not for sale
	This grouping of small pieces, created in 2011 and accepted into the Clunes Ceramics Award, represents my musings on rain and growth after dry years.		
	Details: Created by pressing my elbow into a nest of leaves, each is supported on a curly tail, their skin is a thin wash of clay from the land I live on. The fractured circles on the upper ‘bowl’ represent water.		
14	Pod vessel	(in Gallery 2)	
	Details: Hand-built vessel, textured surface with yellow ochre (iron) and grey-black slip. Mid-fired to 1180°C.		\$250
15, 16, 17	Unformed forming	(in Gallery 2)	
	Like the land, shaped from inside and out, these pieces were originally inspired by stories of how the ancestors (creation beings) walked the earth when there was nothing and no light. These pieces represent the land starting to be formed.		15 - \$160 16 - \$140 17 - \$200 (pair)
	Details: Each piece is hollow. Thrown and assembled. Terra sigillata surfaces. Mid-fired to 1180°C.		
18	Droplets	(in Gallery 2)	
	A gathering of small droplet-like pots.		\$45 each (13 pieces)
	Details: Terra sigillata surfaces using wax resist. Mid-fired to 1180°C. Not water-proof – decorative only.		
19	Wrap vessel	(in Gallery 3)	
	Details: Hand-built vessel, textured surface, grey-black slip. Mid-fired to 1180°C.		\$180
20	Vessel	(in Gallery 3)	
	Details: Hand-built vessel, textured surface, white slip. Mid-fired to 1180°C.		\$180
21	Carry me, carry me	(in Gallery 3)	
	A strand of my ancestral family journeyed across the Atlantic twice – from Africa to America and several generations later to Australia. The first journey as entrapped slaves, the second escaping poverty. These small open vessels reflect the imagined fear and fragility in both journeys.		Not for sale – a work in progress
	Details: Terracotta and stoneware clays, slip, and terra sigillata, with ripped rags and threads.		
22	Cones	(Foyer)	
	A cluster of cone-like forms.		\$45 each (6 pieces)
	Details: Terra sigillata surface using wax resist. Mid-fired to 1180°C. Not water-proof – decorative only.		

Unformed forming

15, 16, 17

In the beginning or in the Dreaming Time ... the world was a huge plain extending level and featureless on all sides ... where tjukurita (ancestral men) traveled ... they performed their everyday tasks – making a fire, camping, digging for water – some natural features rose out of the bare flat land ... (Mountford, 1953)

Like the land, shaped from inside and out, these pieces were originally inspired by stories of how the ancestors (creation beings) walked the earth when there was nothing and no light.

These pieces represent the land starting to be formed.

Details: Each piece is hollow. Thrown and assembled. Terra sigillata surfaces. Mid-fired to 1180°C.

Nurturing Lands

2, 3 & 4

Our land nurtures us. It nurtures everything.

These pieces are always in a group – a mob. The forms reflect the volcanic landscapes that edge this area, or perhaps the domes of Purnululu. The possible groupings remind me of kangaroo mobs, always one on alert looking out for the others.

I have been engaged with this concept and this hollow form for several years.

Details: Each piece was wheel thrown and altered, enclosed and hollow. The surface is terra sigillata, some with wax resist lines. Mid-fired to 1180°C.

Ground Truth

13

Ground truth. Beneath our feet – mud and blood, generations gone. After rain, new things are growing. Skywards.

But what are they? What is the ‘truth’ of this land, and what does it give birth to?

This grouping of small pieces, created in 2011 and accepted into the Clunes Ceramics Award, represents my musings on rain and growth after dry years.

Created by pressing my elbow into a nest of leaves, each is supported on a curly tail, their skin is a thin wash of clay from the land I live on. The fractured circles on the upper ‘bowl’ represent water.

Falling to Earth

1

“Across the sky, the ancestral women dance. At every moment a baby cradled in a coolamon slips off the edge of the dancing ground, falls to earth, vanishes, and is searched for endlessly ... forever”

Shattered rocks, sand ripples, desert polish – all mark the fall. Layers of story – layers of meaning accumulate. A narrative emerges. Listen.

This piece is about an ever-present story embedded in a place in Central Australia – Tnorula (Gosses Bluff). The surface expresses the polish of the desert, the story of the dance and the shattered rocks that mark the fall. The inside is unknowable.

Details: Made and first exhibited in 2008. Hand-built, with terra sigillata surfaces.

Gorges and Gaps

5 & 6

In the gorges, in the gaps, the water is deep and still. Dark, mysterious. The light finally reaches in, and the landscape ignites. Are the lines simply the marks of the water retreating, or do they come from within?

Inspired by the gorges of Tjoritja, Arrernte name for the MacDonnell Ranges.

Details: Made and first exhibited in 2008. Wheel-thrown and altered, with terra sigillata surfaces.

Rain Series: as water hits the dry earth

7

Rain is rare in our flinty goldfields landscape.

When it rains it pours. Droplets hit the dusty ground, water runs in worn channels, digging into the earth. And then it drains away. Rain, its absence or torrential presence inspired this series.

These sculptural pieces are inspired by rain in this landscape.

Details: Wheel-thrown and altered, terra sigillata surfaces, with wax resist.

Earth bowls

8

Everything needs water – having water in the garden is a joy.

Perhaps birds will drink from these bowls, light will play on the water, leaves will fall in and sink, and dragonflies will be amused.

Details: Hand-built, textured with eucalyptus leaves or parsley seed heads, used as stencils for plain or coloured slips. Several have surfaces washed with terra sigillata. Mid-fired to 1180°C.

Carry me, carry me

21

A strand of my ancestral family journeyed across the Atlantic twice – from Africa to America and several generations later to Australia.

The first journey was as entrapped slaves, the second escaping poverty.

These small open vessels reflect the imagined fear and fragility in both journeys.

Details: Terracotta and stoneware clays, slip, and terra sigillata, with ripped rags and threads.

This is a work in progress.