



Installation shot at Sidney Myer Ceramic Award, 2012 Shepparton Art Museum (SAM). Image courtesy of SAM

# *Kirsten Coelho: Poetic Forms of Domesticity*

FORMER JAMFACTORY STUDIO TENANT AND FORMER STAFF MEMBER, KIRSTEN COELHO,  
RECENTLY WON THE PRESTIGIOUS SIDNEY MYER FUND AUSTRALIAN CERAMIC AWARD

**Words by Margaret Hancock Davis**

Margaret is Curator and Exhibitions Manager at JamFactory

In 2010, the 20th year of the Sidney Myer Fund Australian Ceramic Award, SAM (Shepparton Art Museum) made strategic changes to its format. Unlike past submissions of a single piece to be juried, artists are now required to conceive a complete body of work for exhibition in SAM's temporary exhibition spaces.



*Bottle and Bowl, 2012*  
porcelain  
Photographer:  
Grant Hancock



*Cup Bottle Funnel, 2012*  
porcelain  
Photographer:  
Grant Hancock

The acquisitive award is presented to three recipients: an Australian, an International and a Student entry, each of whom receives a significant stipend to produce their exhibition. Conceiving a complete body of work provides both a challenge and a unique career development opportunity for the artists involved.

The Australian prize recipient for 2012 was South Australian artist, Kirsten Coelho. Mastering the difficult medium of porcelain, Coelho created a beautiful body of work for SAM, reflecting upon the 19th century settler experience in Australia.

Coelho's installation has a still, near-ethereal quality. Warmth and an underlying austerity coalesce within these ghostly forms. Her paired-back palette of lush matte white glaze, and the richness in glaze density, create a layer of translucency, softening the form and adding to their otherworldly quality.

Coelho's work effortlessly blends the studio traditions of Bernard Leach with classical Japanese and Chinese ceramics to create works redolent with the Australian experience. Gin bottles, medicine jars, funnels and bowls plucked in form from great genre paintings of the era, such as Sir John Longstaff's *Breaking the News, 1887*, are elegantly displayed on the complimentary American white oak furniture designed by fellow South Australian, Khai Liew. The solemnity displayed in the interiors of Dutch painter Vilhelm Hammershøi are clear influences on Coelho's display. However, unlike Hammershøi, who often populates his scenes with a silent solitary figure, no people grace Coelho's interior.

One cannot escape the uncanny sense when moving through this scene that time has played a part in its distortion. Gone is the duress of failed crops, mining disasters and the brutality required to survive in the unforgiving Australian landscape. Instead, all that remains are poetic forms of domesticity, their only hint of wear being a delicate rim of iron oxide.

It is with cool restraint that Coelho is able to elevate such humble enamelware-inspired utilitarian ceramics to such a poignant level.

*Kirsten Coelho began her training with a Bachelor of Design (Ceramics) in Adelaide. In the 1990s, she moved to the UK where she worked in a London studio and was influenced by the styles and trends of British Studio Pottery. In 2004, she gained a Master of Visual Arts at the University of South Australia, where she has subsequently lectured in ceramics. Throughout 2010-11 she mentored artists participating in JamFactory's Indigenous ceramics program.*

*Coelho exhibits regularly, having presented nine solo exhibitions since 1999. Her works are held in leading public collections including the Art Gallery of South Australia, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, and the National Gallery of Australia. Coelho is represented in the USA by Martin Gallery, Los Angeles, in the UK by Adrian Sassoon, London, and nationally by Helen Gory Galerie, Melbourne.*



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