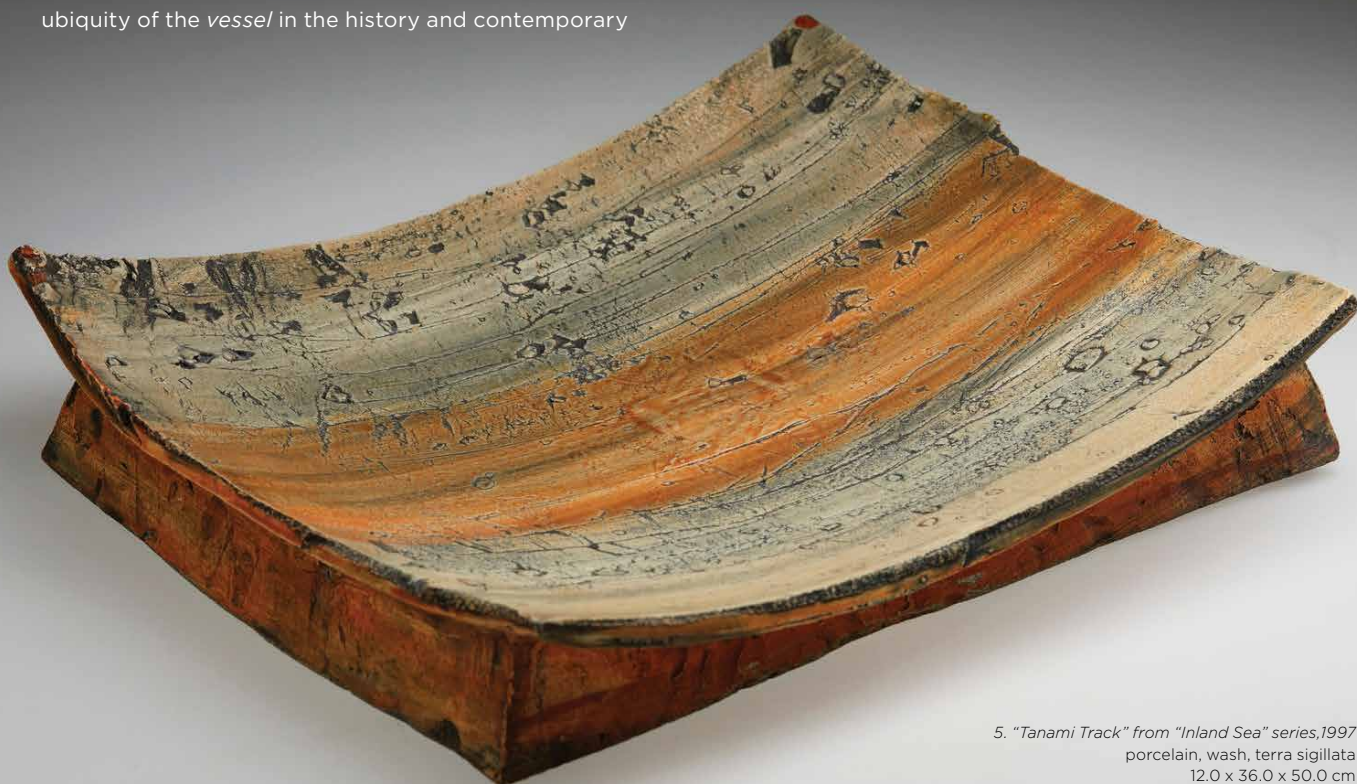


It is a wonderful irony that Anita McIntyre's introduction to working with clay came from her painting teacher (Nigel Murray-Harvey) at the (then) Canberra Technical College in 1969. Murray-Harvey showed her an image of a classic Margaret Dodd clay sculpture of an FJ Holden, a funky quasi-Pop object that bears little if any resemblance to any work subsequently produced by McIntyre, but an object that nevertheless fused an attraction to the possibilities of clay in McIntyre's creative psyche that continues to this day. This essay accompanies a survey exhibition held in the Strathairn Arts Woolshed Gallery (18 June to 17 July 2022). The exhibition examines the artist's remarkable career in ceramics from student works of the 1970s to recent explorations produced prior to the present exhibition. McIntyre's art is an expression of her experiences of her world and her reflections and memories of those experiences. For her the *world* encompasses family, history and especially *place*. Her life journey in both and physical and metaphorical sense is captured in her art. The works in the exhibition open viewers to not only vicariously enjoy McIntyre's journeys but also to imaginatively create their own. Her actual journeys have seen her in Asia, Europe, North America and particularly and regularly in Australia's outback and remote northern and western coastlines. This topographical variety is beautifully exemplified in the formal and decorative diversity that populates the exhibition, an aesthetic diversity that reflects the exploring and inquiring imagination that creates it.

The earliest work in the exhibition is a Raku-fired pot produced in 1970 when McIntyre was a part-time student in Canberra. The form is simple, even primitive, reflecting its basic pinch-pot method of making and the ubiquity of the *vessel* in the history and contemporary

expression of ceramics. The craggy surface underscores the deliberate *primitivism* of the form. The lush blue glaze and its tonal redolence of Ancient Egyptian faience objects however, imparts a painterly quality intimating the artist's continuing attraction to that medium and an early manifestation of the prime formal importance of *surface* for her future ceramic productions.

While the *vessel* figured prominently in McIntyre's early work (and indeed still does), the introduction of the rectangular slab (*platter*) saw another injection of the *painterly* into her art. The artist herself has stated that the *platter* format speaks of the painter's canvas and thus allows her to introduce not only pictorial, but also graphic elements into her overall visual vocabulary. Her art demonstrates an astute understanding of the efficacious, sensitive and appropriate intermingling of a range of techniques in its achievement of a truly singular and idiosyncratic aesthetic language. The rectangular format heralded the pre-eminence of another element in McIntyre's thematic repertoire viz. the expression of *place*. The notion of *place* is simultaneously simple and complicated. It is not just a topographical entity but rather the sum of a range of experiential events and memories of those events that stimulate the creative imagination. *Place* for McIntyre is integral and fully integrated into her art and her ongoing explorations have resulted in some of her most powerful works. The revisiting to the same *places* over a number of years reinforces not only the value of *memory* but the importance of working serially, a practice established very early on in her career.



5. "Tanami Track" from "Inland Sea" series, 1997
porcelain, wash, terra sigillata
12.0 x 36.0 x 50.0 cm

An early (1982) untitled platter from the *Brindabella* series exemplifies the ability of the artist to absorb the familiar, the ordinary, the quotidian, and to make of these something extraordinary and singular. The Brindabella Mountains are well-known to most Canberrans. To McIntyre their familiarity is a given. They provide a background vista from the windows of her family home, a presence that is visually and imaginatively satisfying. McIntyre's Brindabellas capitalises on her predilection for the painterly and the pictorial. Indeed there is imbued in this work many of the qualities of 19th-Century landscape painting. The rectangular format populated with receding, layered topographies bathed in an atmospheric light recalls (some of) the productions of the Romantic sublime. Historicism (and horizontality) is quietly subverted by the inclusion of two sets of vertical lines (tree trunks?) set at the front of the picture plane, providing a visual immediacy that underscores the distance between them and the mountains beyond.

The platter form offers morphological consistency while simultaneously and conversely providing possibilities for multifarious creative excursions. McIntyre will capitalise on the elision of these ostensible opposites throughout her career and with exceptional expressive results. Another work from the 1980s (Untitled ("Fragments", 1986) exemplifies this. Again the rectangularity of the form alludes to the format of a framed/stretched painting. Decorative bands of mille fiori (squares and rectangles) are dispersed across (and through) the clay surface. The use of intertwined and repetitive motifs invests the surface with an active and energetic character, coercing the viewer's eye into constant movement. There is also present clear indications of

the making processes adopted by the artist. The bands of mille fiori are integrated into the surface not just sitting on it. They are layered within the overall structure and in that reference the layerings found in the natural landscape. This characteristic continues the artist's investigations into the expression of the *experience* of a landscape as much as it does the expression of a landscape, into the expression of *place*.

Two platters from the 1990s show the enduring viability of that format in McIntyre's art. Untitled from "The Inland Sea" series (1993) is a tonally extraordinary extrapolation of the natural to the pictorial. The *red* colour is dense and defiantly so as it covers the entirety of the platter's surface. The overall intensity of colour is perhaps literal and of course raises the notion of the *Red Centre* and indeed is meant to do so. The bare simplicity of the form's rectangularity is offset by the addition of physical elements along the top edges, referencing the topographies of the outback but visually absorbed by the overriding *redness* that so powerfully articulates the phenomenon of Australia's outback and the artist's experience of that natural and imaginative phenomenon. "Tanami Track"(1997), also from the ongoing "The Inland Sea" series, is another raised platter. The viewer is placed *in* the work yet is also looking down into the landscape as depicted. Indigenous ways of seeing are quietly alluded to here and the pictorialisation of layered simultaneities is beautifully achieved. McIntyre's use of the mark reinforces her attraction to and understanding of the motif. The *mark* here carries not only visual reference to the sparse environments of the outback but also illustrates those elemental signs of *places* visited that have etched themselves into the artist's aesthetic vocabulary and will reappear throughout her oeuvre.



8. Untitled from "Home Country" series, 2017
paper porcelain, reverse inlay,
terra sigillata, screenprint
40.0 x 50.0 x 4.5 cm



The notion of the *journey* is a given in McIntyre's art. For her each one adds to the layered narrative that is each individual's life. One of the ways the artist looks at her own family history is to explore those *places* that make up that history. A tool for doing that is the map. Maps allow her to explore and embrace her past and to consequently place those experiences into her present. The data found in maps provides not only historical context but also personal identity or at least ways of determining personal identity. McIntyre uses maps as both private documents and public disclosure. She places them in a range of expressive and associative contexts that announce their historic role but simultaneously articulate a range of aesthetic possibilities. The convergence of the actual and the imaginative is a hallmark of McIntyre's art whether it is dealing with the natural world or family history and imbues a finely tempered tension that is thematically and aesthetically powerful. "Fagan's Creek" (2010) uses a real historic document as its chief pictorial motif. The map shows her family's property as held in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries. It is accompanied by extracts from letters, diaries and personal anecdotes. While these are personal to the artist they provide a starting-point for viewers to begin investigations into her family history. The map provides multiple ways of seeing the land, ownership, the landscape, all informed not only by geographic identity but also by historic, social and cultural activity. McIntyre's multilayered approach is signature and its effect insinuating in its embrace.

The vessel form is omnipresent in the history and contemporary iteration of ceramics. For McIntyre it has, over the years, taken a number of forms, but arguably most potently in her use of the *boat* form. For her the

boat is evocative not only of a journey but the person(s) undertaking that journey. There is implicit in the notion of a journey the notion of *place*, the thematic *sine qua non* of the artist's approach to her art. The *boat* as carrier of people, property and message is a direct and easily comprehended symbol. The *boat* as manifestation of the artist as traveller/explorer is a concept integral to her art since the form was introduced into her morphological vocabulary in the early 2000s. The *boat* holds the capacity to simultaneously express universal notions of history and contemporaneity. The extension of these into the personal and subjective imbues it with a particular narrative and aesthetic force. The coexistence of multiple characteristics – real, historic, personal, universal – holds immense appeal for McIntyre and has been and remains essential to her artistic expression from its beginnings.

"Mekong boat" (2016) exemplifies *boat* as journey and traveller. It becomes surface for the recording of *places* and events and memories of these – a very idiosyncratic visual diary. The imagery moves through simple marks to carefully delineated subjects that provide a discontinuous narrative of the artist's journey. Images/marks are incised into the hull in random order reinforcing their role as personal palimpsests rather than factual records of retraced topographies. The artist's pictorial language evokes memories and the *boat* becomes holder of these, a sculpted equivalent, a reliquary of *place*.

7. "Mekong boat", 2016
porcelain paper clay, linoprint, slips, stamping
10.0 x 37.0 x 8.0 cm



1. Bowl, 1970
Raku-fired, glaze
7.5 x 24 x 10 cm



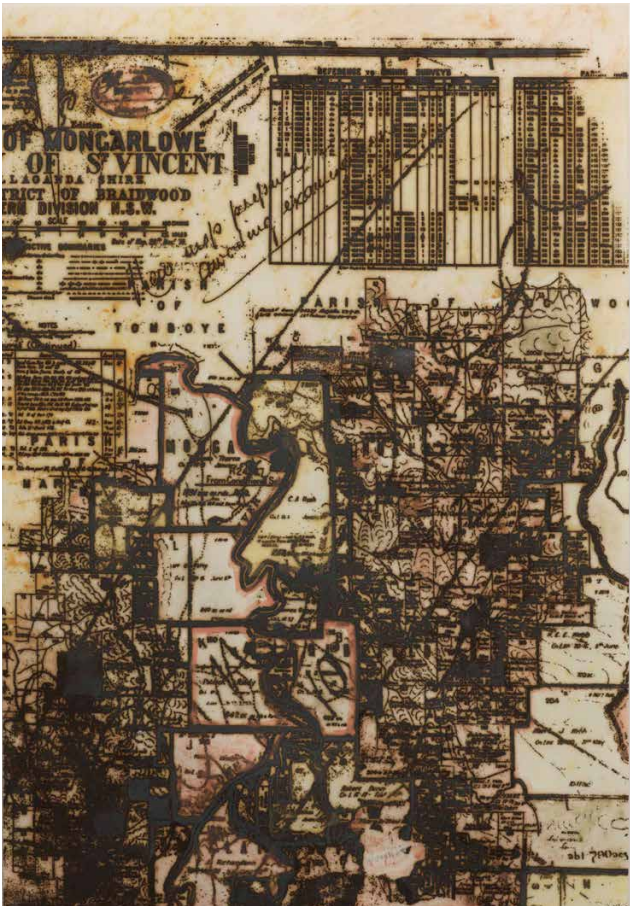
4. Untitled from "Inland Sea" series, 1993
porcelain, terra sigillata
1.5 x 20.0 x 30.0 cm



2. Untitled from "Brindabella" series, 1982
stoneware, coloured slips, stencil, sgraffito
5.0 x 41.0 x 30.5 cm



3. Untitled ("Fragments"), 1986
porcelain, mille fiori
5.0 x 40.0 x 29.0 cm



6. "Fagan's Creek", 2010
Kerreflex porcelain
37.0 x 30.0 x 2.0 cm



9. Untitled, from "Incompatible Clay" series, 2020
Different incompatible clay bodies, stoneware, earthenware, porcelain, bone china
11.7 x 10.0 x 30.0 cm



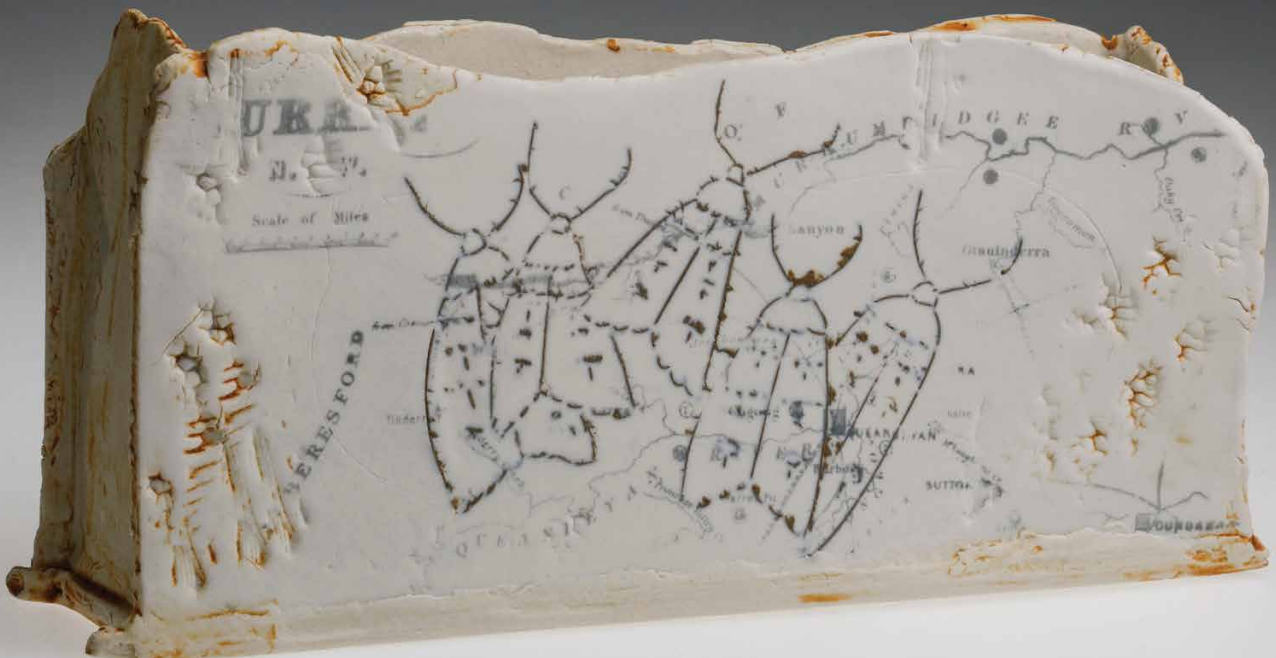
12. "Landscape" from "Home Country" series, 2022
Southern Ice porcelain, mille fiori
24.0 x 30.0 cm (fr.)

Vessels come in many forms in the ceramic universe and McIntyre's range across many of these. In this exhibition this is evinced in a number of examples. If a single work could be said to capture the aesthetic imagination, personal narrative and work ethic of the artist then arguably it is present in one of the most recent works made by the artist - "Storm over the Brindabellas" from the "Home Country" series (2022). This is not a large work (26.0 x 30.0 x 8.0 cm) but it brings together in its open rectangular format the pictorial, the cartographic, the familial, the historic and most characteristically, notions of place. The scene on the obverse is the Brindabellas, the landscape whose familiar presence replenishes the artist imaginatively, aesthetically and spiritually on a daily basis. The artist has used gestural brushstrokes to depict the mountains, elegant and eloquent calligraphic

equivalents of their natural solidity. Inserted through the loosely defined rectangle that comprises the work, are fragments of maps, text and named places, all of which extol the universal relevance of personal history. The imaginative, intellectual and aesthetic complexity that inform the making of this work have been and remain the hallmark of Anita McIntyre's approach to art making. Her experiences of people and places visited and remembered have found profound and beautiful expression through her understanding not only of the materials and processes of the ceramic medium but through her ability to digest and filter the personal to the universal.

Peter Haynes

Consultant Curator, Art Historian
June 2022



11. "Flight of the Bogongs" from "Home Country" series, 2022
paper porcelain reverse inlay terra sigillata
12 x 6.5 x 34 cm

Cover Image:

10. "Storm over the Brindabellas" from "Home Country" series, 2022
paper porcelain, coloured slips, reverse inlay, screenprint
26.0 x 30.0 x 8.0 cm

Anita McIntyre.

Survey 1970 to 2022

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