



ABOVE LEFT Katherine Glenday, vessels from the *Silent Earth Collection*, 2011. Photo: David Ross and courtesy Amaridian, New York **ABOVE RIGHT** Astrid Dahl, *Hellebore Seed Capsule*, 2012. Photo: David Ross and courtesy Amaridian, New York



“glocal” in their aspirations. While many of these ranges are rather predictable, depicting indigenous landscapes, flora and fauna, and obvious icons, or resembling gauche copies of trendy European creations, others are more conceptually sophisticated. Ceramic Matters, a collective comprising Gerhard Swart and Anthony Harris, produces wry and urbane domestic articles. Their upholstered pots invert basic expectations of everyday objects, and play with the fragility inherent in the ceramic medium. Similarly, Ceramic Matters’ recent crumpled table setting and crockery for the Iziko exhibition parodied slick, sanitised contemporary dining utensils through their sublimely ridiculous, warped forms!

White Light and Music

Various contemporary ceramic artists have, in recent years, developed bodies of work centred on an investigation of the luminous qualities of white stoneware or the fragile translucence of porcelain. Astrid Dahl’s sensuous organic forms are inspired by the botanical photography of Karl Blossfeldt (1865–1932). She argues that white clay offers an unblemished canvas for light and dark to “shape” the piece. While she starts with a drawing, she notes that the plastic quality of the clay enables the piece to evolve in the creation process. Exhibited internationally, her work conveys the delicate promise of sprouting seeds or exotic flowers, petrified and transformed into a magical matt, calcaneus medium.

The porcelain master Katherine Glenday has extended her creative energies to include musical performance, collaborative sound, dance and curatorial projects. Her extremely diverse body of porcelain works reflects on the ethereal nature of transfigured light and, according to the artist, her delicate vessels contain her “prayer for life”. Numerous ongoing, transformative series of “thematic” conversations characterise Glenday’s oeuvre. In her collaboration with the Malian textile artist, calligrapher and alchemist, Aboubakar Fofana, Glenday creates vessels with imported English porcelain stained with African oxides, including mud from the Niger River, given to her by Fofana. Glenday’s blue and white wares are inspired by family stories of her forbears

in the Dutch East India Company who trafficked Oriental porcelain, and her more recent English family’s love of “china”. The latter’s effusive surface pattern and decorative pastiche are associated with a superficial language that conceals underlying communication. While articulating her interest in trade routes and migrations of meanings, these works are also infused with her African experience. Another recent body of work investigates the relationship between surface decoration and the distilled gesture. Yet other vessels are conceptual explorations of medium: arrested sound and clumsy vessels versus poised forms. Her installations, which invoke an intimate alchemic osmosis between her vessels and rocks, shells, pebbles, water and other vegetal matter, collectively produce a refined, calligraphic symphony.

Afro-Contemporary

Creolised African references are at the heart of Ian Garrett’s oeuvre. His contemporary *uphiso* (standard Zulu beer pot) forms are rooted in his apprenticeship with the late Nesta Nala (1940–2005), but incorporate intricate surface decoration. His hand-built vessels continue and transfigure archaic ceramic techniques. Glossy burnished areas contrast with elaborate swathes of matt-textured motifs applied with a white mussel shell prior to being pit-fired. In an unpublished statement, Garrett notes that “many layers of expression are incorporated into my work: reference is made to archaeological vessel styles from pre-historic Europe and India to reflect my ancestral background, elements and ideas are influenced by the contemporary African traditions that I have studied and collected, personal expression is incorporated into the language of motifs used on each piece, and the works are presented in the context of contemporary international studio ceramic art.” Recent pots with raised decorative motifs recall *pithoi* from Greece and Cyprus. Garrett’s Dionysian receptacles are the embodiment of master craftsmanship and conduits for cosmological conversation with ancient gods. Majolandile Dyalvane often reinterprets utilitarian artifacts like the beer pot, wooden milk pails and platters of his native Xhosa culture. Recent work includes colourful references to surreal and cubist paintings. *Ukuqambisisa*