

*Musings on land and
material culture*



Glenday has a long standing preoccupation with theories of value, cultural capital, and the tensions between aesthetics and economic exchange. There is a tendency in artists to disavow the importance of commerce in art. The act of actually ascribing value to a piece is often left until the last possible moment, and is a foreign, uncomfortable and somewhat reluctant process for most. Contemporary ceramicists also have the added disadvantage of typically having their work labelled as craft, and therefore relegated to a status somehow less valued, critically and aesthetically as well as economically.

It is perhaps a little ironic that porcelain ceramics are often underappreciated and undervalued in this way now, when historically they have had enormous value placed on them and have been inseparable from stories of economic exchange.

Central to the expansion of international trade, porcelain pieces have been highly sort after commodities and considered indicative of social standing and wealth in many cultures. In addition, the secrets of porcelain's technical mastery have, over the centuries, been just as equally coveted as the pieces themselves. The history of the spread of porcelain can therefore be understood to have two concurrent threads: One tracks the acquisition and trade of porcelain pieces made in the Far East (the place of its original inception); whilst the other follows the various attempts of other cultures to mimic and compete with these.

This particular body of Glenday's work draws its inspiration from this complex history, and especially from its interaction with her own. As the descendent of both Dutch and English settlers in the Cape, Glenday's inheritance is rich with the fruits of both aspects of the history mentioned above. She has grown up surrounded by a collection of ceramics which includes export wares from China and Japan, and also the products of the English pottery industry which flourished to meet the demand for porcelain that international trade had generated. As a child the stories attached to these pieces, of settlers and shipwrecks, bored her terribly, but as an adult and porcelain ceramist herself now, Glenday has found engaging with these pieces and their histories all but unavoidable.

For this show she has therefore directly referenced various pieces from her mother's collection. Using her vessels as canvases she contrasts intense decoration with a distilled quietness. She also continues to push the boundaries of her chosen medium, playing strength against fragility, opacity against translucency and captured light – the self-same qualities that were so sought after by porcelain artists before her. Here her technical mastery of this fine white clay is used to pay homage to its own history, as well her own, and more particularly to the points where the two have run parallel to each other.