



Kelly Austin, *Stilled Composition 90*.

## Stillness in porcelain and stone

Kerry-Anne Cousins

**Kelly Austin. Movements of darkness and of light: ceramics. Beaver Galleries. Closes November 22.**

Kelly Austin was born in Canada where she completed her early studies. In 2016 she obtained her Masters of Philosophy - Ceramics degree from the Australian National University. Although she currently lives in Tasmania, she has a close connection to Canberra where she has had exhibitions at Craft ACT in 2017 and at Beaver Galleries in 2018.

Austin creates ceramics traditionally, using wheel-thrown glazed and polished porcelain and stoneware. Her ceramics are loosely based on functional ware - the shallow platter, the deep bowl, the cylindrical vessel and the beaker. A tall cylindrical vase with an open neck in a soft green glaze ("Stilled Composition 94") stands like a sentinel at the beginning of the exhibition and the exhibition concludes with an impressive large grey straight sided vessel ("Stilled Composition 95"). This stoneware vessel has a pitted surface caused by the melting of

dolerite fragments in the firing.

Dolerite is a hard stone widely found in Tasmania that many millennia ago was originally molten liquid. Between these solitary works are assemblages of simple geometric forms in porcelain and stoneware that are the components of her "Stilled Compositions". The seductive power of these works lies in the artist's masterly orchestration of softly muted gloss or matt glazes aligned with polished surfaces and unglazed stoneware. In some works the colours are taken from a palette of muted tones of whites and creams including delicate celadon-like greens while in other compositions the muted tones are from a grey dark brown palette. From a distance, a work such as 'Stilled Composition 82' can resemble a painting as the forms lose their hard edges and dissolve in a study of light and shadow. Austin has cast discord into these serene groupings by introducing an interruption to their harmonious sightlines. This is as simple as introducing a different glaze on one or two objects or an unlikely pairing or balancing of forms. In "Stilled Composition 83", for example, which is a large work with

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several objects arranged on a long shelf, the muted tones of the soft glazed forms are interrupted by the inclusion of the stoneware objects in earth colours or in "Stilled Composition 90" where this same muted effect created by three white glazed cylindrical forms is interrupted by the presence of a reddish clay bowl.

Austin has noted her interest in the Canadian artist Agnes Martin (1912-2004) and South Australian artist Kirsten Coelho. Agnes Martin painted minimalist abstract works. She was interested the inward per-

ception of things "My paintings, she wrote, are not about what is known but what is seen - they are about what is known forever in the mind." This is a concept that informs Austin's own work.

Coelho has been a mentor for Austin and the sympathetic relationship between their two art practices is evident. Coelho works in porcelain with a limited repertoire of glazed forms that she assembles in related groupings. However her objects generally cluster together whereas Austin places much more emphasis on the space between and around each object. It is the space in between that connects the objects - or rather it is our perception of this space.

Austin challenges us to look beyond the beauty of the object and to consider how and why we make connections between one object and another. It is surely of significance that Austin calls her works "Stilled Compositions" instead of the more conventional "Still Life". Her objects exist in the space she has created for them and are not autonomous. Their relationship to one another exists only in a constructed reality based on our perceptions.