

uncivilised

BRETT SMOUT

5 November - 29 November

Concept

An installation of ceramics that encourages us to consider our responses to the imposition of bystander status by exposure to news of local and global events. We are confronted with clashes of culture, power imbalances, polarised opinions, echo-chambers, bubbles, hallucinations, algorithmic distortions and deep fakes. We can no longer easily trust what we are told, or even what we are shown. We have evolved to rely on stereotypes to enable us to make choices in the face of information overload. We have experiences of taking sides, perhaps taking action, or managing feelings of powerlessness when faced with apparent injustices.

Staging

Contrary to traditional exhibitions of functional studio ceramics, the initial staging does not seek to provide a spotlight on each individual piece. Instead, two cultures, represented by vessels, are the immediate focus. They are displayed as two non-aligned collectives. One culture is polished, controlled, technically advanced, proud, and disciplined. It values uniformity, symmetry, and precision. Size reflects accomplishment. The other culture is rough, sometimes ragged or damaged. It is inconsistent in form. It values spontaneity and serendipity and allows or even celebrates flaws. Symmetry and precision are avoided.

First impressions

"Our first impressions are generated by our experiences and our environment, which means that we can change our first impressions ... by changing the experiences that comprise those impressions"¹.

There is an opportunity for visitors to take action – to reposition pieces to change the dynamic of the display. This may address feelings of powerlessness, capitalising on the comparative robustness of ceramics as a medium and providing relief from the usual hands-off policy of art galleries. What other associations, thoughts and feelings will be evoked?

Based on the assumption that we experience unfamiliar cultures as a monolith, and that stereotypes will be overcome by meeting with and engaging with individuals from unfamiliar cultures, we see a large screen featuring individual members of the less accessible or mainstream of the two cultures.

Pricing of Works

Pricing of individual pieces is determined by an algorithm based on weight. This removes my aesthetic bias or judgment as to their relative worth, and reflects the notion that all human beings, being made of the same 'clay', have equal intrinsic worth, despite their apparent status. It also directly contests an aspect of ceramic dogma which sometimes holds that lightly constructed ware is superior. The mechanistic method of pricing is a comment on two aspects of algorithmic decision-making: for decision-makers (in this case the artist) there is relief from cognitive demands, and for those impacted by decisions (in this case potential buyers), there is dissonance regarding the validity of decisions made without allowance for additional information related to exception or nuance.

Algorithm

Price = 32c/g

The current price of 24 carat gold in Australia is approximately \$196.35 to \$207.50 per gram, based on several leading bullion sites as of November 3-4, 2025. Pots are priced at the price of 24 carat gold divided by 600. 32 cents per gram, rounded to the nearest \$10.

Price = one 600th 24 carat gold price/g @3/11/2025

Specialty spice suppliers list cardamom at 28-32c/g.

Japanese importers quote ceremonial matcha at 30–40c/g

¹ Gladwell, M. (2005). *Blink: The power of thinking without thinking*. Little, Brown and Company