

Barbara Campbell-Allen

GONDWANA

HORIZON

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An Australian Landscape Narrative

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Presented by Art Weaves

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GONDWANA HORIZON

Australia is often described as the oldest continent in the world, part of the legendary Gondwanaland that stretched across the southern hemisphere 500 million years ago. But ancient Australia isn't what most visitors to this country, or locals for that matter, see of it. Most of us are content with the coastlines, the cities, the populated extremities. Ceramic artist Barbara Campbell-Allen, on the contrary, likes to venture into the interior of Australia and to the far north to experience first-hand the power of these remote and largely untouched environments.

Here she encounters vast expanses of country where the earth and enveloping sky are one; rugged, uncompromising landscapes full of great emptiness and powerful presence. They're places of extremes, (it's either drought or flood) and high drama – the relentless harshness of the desert will suddenly produce a surprising pocket of lushness or refuge. "You go somewhere like Kakadu and you're overwhelmed by waterfalls that are just so high, rocks that are so bright, and skies that are so vast. It's not a comfortable landscape, but it is exhilarating!" says Campbell-Allen.

"I knew this body of work was coming to India and I really wanted to communicate my experience of Australia to people who may not know it at all except through a few images." In taking up this challenge, to express the vastness of the country and the intensity of her experiences of it, Campbell-Allen has created a unique collection of ceramics with a depth, subtlety and complexity that will reward close viewing and contemplation.

Gondwana Horizon is an installation of works on three specific themes which, when seen together, evoke a much larger whole. There's a range of rugged, angular objects Campbell-Allen has called Fossil Rocks – sharp, bright and expressive forms that bring to mind the dry desert watercourses, long-forgotten, where fossils might be found. Bearing the marks of cutting and tearing, the forces that shaped them, these are fully three-dimensional works that can be turned and explored from any side.

In contrast, there's the Cloud Series, comprised of softer, barely swelling forms that seem to disappear at the edges. These larger, lighter works have a gentle, painterly finish that reflects soft nuances of colour. Campbell-Allen recalls the day that inspired them out in western New South Wales, describing a seemingly endless expanse of sky with the mesmerising shapes of high

clouds drifting across it. "You put your stories into the clouds. They become vehicles," she says. "It's just lovely to work with that form because it allows you to conjure up all sorts of emotions and experiences."

Then there's the Ancient Rivers Series, which tells a progressive tale. It starts with full, rounded forms that are awash with detail, as if whole braided river systems are moving across them. Following these, and running the course of all river systems where the water slows and spreads, there are River Reed works, which remind us of billabongs surrounded by tall grasses that bend in the breeze. Finally, we come across smooth, dark red forms that resemble the rocks in a river that have been worn by water and time. These vessels capture a sense of stillness, creating a kind of full-stop that informs us that the journey down the river is complete.

A defining feature of these objects is their clarity of form. Campbell-Allen works in a way that is direct and confident, (make your mark, then let it be), an approach that suits the process of wood-firing she's been exploring and refining for several decades. "Wood-firing has always intrigued me," she says. "It's a very powerful process and there has to be an immediacy in the making, a simplicity, to meld with it." While much that Campbell-Allen does is intuitive, wood-firing not only provides her with an aesthetic framework it literally finishes the objects she makes. This is where the great excitement of the process presents itself – the surfaces are formed by the manipulation of flame, ash and ember to create depth and intricacy, an extraordinary variation in colour, dramatic contrasts in adjacent textures and tones and nuances all round.

What's also fascinating is that almost all of the objects exhibited here were produced in a single firing. It's not that it's necessary to understand the wood-firing process to appreciate them, but for anyone who's interested, here's a bit of background.

Campbell-Allen uses a single chambered tunnel kiln she built herself, an anagama kiln commonly used in Japan, that has a firebox at one end and a chimney at the other. In this instance she (and a small team) brought the kiln to 1300°C in an 85-hour firing, feeding in timber every ten minutes and regular stoking...("Who in their right mind becomes a wood-firer?" asks Campbell-Allen.) As always, she enlisted all the principles and strategies at her disposal to create the effects she envisioned. Those strategies start with the carefully considered placement of objects in the kiln. They include the management of flame, air, fuel, moisture and deposits of ember and ash, and continue to the choice of different timbers to create different effects and the timing of each intervention. Success comes down to experience, but as Campbell-Allen freely admits, "I don't have a lot of control sometimes." Described by wood-firing practitioner Owen Rye as *The Art of Uncertainty*, the whole process can be a risky business, but when extraordinary results also make surprise appearances those risks are deemed worthwhile.

In Barbara Campbell-Allen's able hands, the power and integrity of the environments she has drawn on for inspiration can be felt in the forms she has made and the expressive detail she has coaxed from her kiln. It's as if these objects have somehow condensed the vast landscapes of Australia within their modest boundaries, creating microcosms that still manage to contain all that space and all those harsh forces of nature within them. This is an art of compression. Look closely and *Gondwana Horizon* brings those unimaginable expanses of outback Australian land and sky within intimate touch.

Jan Howlin BVA (Hons I), MFA is a Sydney based Ceramicist whose mostly sculptural works refers to a range of ideas about contemporary life and culture.



CLOUDS



Cd 1 Desert Dawn



Cd 2 First Light



Cd 3 Night Sky



Cd 4 Sunburst



Cd 5 Cumulus



Cd 6 Comet



Cd 7 Stratus



Cd 8 Cirrus



Cd 9 Sunburst II

Cd 10 Storm at Sunset



FOSSIL ROCKS



Rk 1 Rocks I



Rk 2 Rocks II



Rk 3 Jurassic Brachiopods I



Rk 5 Jurassic Brachiopods III

Rk 4 Jurassic Brachiopods II



Rk 6 Fossil Relict I



Rk 8 Fossil Relict III



Rk 7 Fossil Relict II



Rk 9 Torn Rock



ANCIENT RIVERS



Ar 1 Deluge



Ar 2 Dark Waterhole



Ar 3 Fresh Rains



Ar 4 Stony Reaches



Ar 5 Billabong



Ar 7 Deep Waterhole



Ar 10 Riverbank Reeds III



Ar 8 Riverbank Reeds I



Ar 11 Black River Stone

REFERENCE SHEET

CLOUDS

Cd 1 Desert Dawn 2015	41x55x12cm	Stoneware, earthenware slips, wood fired
Cd 2 First Light 2015	44x59.5x16cm	Stoneware, fireclay slip, natural ash glaze
Cd 3 Night Sky 2016	31x40.5x11cm	Manganese Clay, natural ash glaze
Cd 4 Sunburst 2016	28x36x8cm	Manganese Clay, various feldspathic glazes
Cd 5 Cumulus 2016	33.5x43x9.5cm	Stoneware, fireclay slip, natural ash glaze
Cd 6 Comet 2016	32x43x10cm	Stoneware, flashing slip, natural ash glaze
Cd 7 Stratus 2016	30x39x8cm	Stoneware, fireclay slip, soft natural ash glaze, twice fired
Cd 8 Cirrus 2016	22x33.5x7cm	Stoneware, fireclay slip, natural ash glaze, twice fired
Cd 9 Sunburst II 2016	32x41x12.5cm	Manganese clay, various feldspathic glazes
Cd 10 Storm at Sunset 2016	24x26x8.5cm	Manganese clay, various feldspathic glazes

FOSSIL ROCKS

Rk 1 Rocks I 2016	20.5x25.5x19cm	Stoneware, red iron slip, natural ash glaze
Rk 2 Rocks II 2016	23x25.5x19cm	Stoneware, red iron slip, natural ash glaze
Rk 3 Jurassic Brachiopods I 2016	20x23x22.5cm	Stoneware, white earthenware slip
Rk 4 Jurassic Brachiopods II 2016	17x22x18cm	Stoneware, white and iron earthenware slips, natural ash glaze
Rk 5 Jurassic Brachiopods III 2016	13.5x14x11cm	Stoneware, white earthenware slip, natural ash glaze
Rk 6 Fossil Relict I 2016	19x16.5x17cm	Stoneware, white earthenware slip, natural ash glaze
Rk 7 Fossil Relict II 2016	18x12x11cm	Stoneware, white earthenware slip, natural ash glaze
Rk 8 Fossil Relict III 2016	17x19x15cm	Stoneware, white earthenware slip, natural ash glaze
Rk 9 Torn Rock 2016	22x18.5x20cm	Stoneware, iron earthenware slips, natural ash glaze

ANCIENT RIVERS

Ar 1 Deluge 2016	28.5x27x27cm	Stoneware, flashing slip, natural ash glaze
Ar 2 Dark Waterhole 2016	20.5x22x22cm	Stoneware fired in firebox
Ar 3 Fresh Rains 2016	20x20x20cm	Stoneware, natural ash glaze
Ar 4 Stony Reaches 2016	17x21x21cm	Stoneware, fired in firebox
Ar 5 Billabong 2016	16.5x18x18cm	Stoneware, natural ash glaze
Ar 7 Deep Waterhole 2016	13x16x16cm	Stoneware, firebox ash glaze
Ar 8 Riverbank Reeds I 2016	36.5x35x1cm	Manganese clay, red earthenware slip, natural ash glaze
Ar 10 Riverbank Reeds III 2016	37x34.5x12cm	Manganese clay, red earthenware slip, natural ash glaze
Ar 11 Black River Stone 2016	31x28x20.5cm	Manganese clay, thin feldspathic glaze, natural ash glaze



BIOGRAPHY

Barbara Campbell-Allen

Acclaimed ceramic artist, respected teacher and curator, and a leading figure in the ceramic art community in Australia, Barbara Campbell-Allen has quietly and generously made a remarkable contribution to Australian ceramics over several decades.

Campbell-Allen was introduced to clay through high school art classes and the immediate affinity she felt for the material has not only stayed with her but directed her life. This was not her only interest, however. She was fascinated with natural environments – with the earth, rocks and water-courses and the processes that created them – which led her to a double geography degree (Bachelor of Arts, Macquarie University 1975) where she specialized in geomorphology, the study of the formation of landscapes. It's a field that still excites her. But in her mid-twenties, to accommodate a young family into her working life, she returned to clay and trained in ceramics at the National Art School, Sydney, where she developed a passion for wood-firing. Graduating in 1981 she became a full-time production potter for eight years, intense and demanding work, before taking up teaching at the highly regarded Workshop Arts Centre, Sydney, and establishing her own art practice.

Through the Gippsland Centre for Art & Design, part of Monash University, Campbell-Allen completed a Graduate Diploma of Arts in 1994, the year of her first solo exhibition, and a Master of Arts (Visual Arts) in 2000. She was president of the Australian Ceramic Association in 2005 and 2006, and for these efforts and much more, in 2010 she was awarded the Clay Energy Hamada Medal for her contribution to ceramics.

Campbell-Allen built her first anagama kiln, a Japanese-style wood-firing kiln, in 1988 and her work has been devoted almost exclusively to wood-firing ever since. For the last 15 years that work has been inspired by the many hikes, treks and camping trips she has taken with her husband through the remote landscapes of Australia. In response to her immediate experience of these extraordinary places she would intuitively create new bodies of work. The nature of the work she made evolved through these years, as she adopted a more conceptual and experimental approach and embraced installation and collaboration. Notable amongst more recent exhibitions was a collaboration with video-artist Alex Kershaw at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2013, where his *Fantasticology Tokyo: Faults, Flesh and Flowers* was complemented and given material substance by Campbell-Allen's *Aftermath*, created in response to the Japanese tsunami of 2011.

Other solo exhibitions include *Terra Alterius: Land of Another*, at Ivan Dougherty Gallery, UNSW, Sydney, in 2004 which then toured regionally in the eastern states; *Overland: From the Cradle to the Lake* at The Incinerator Art Space, Willoughby, Sydney, in 2013; and *From Both Sides Now*, at MU Ceramics Studio Gallery, Mosman, Sydney in 2014.

Along with these and other solo shows, Campbell-Allen has exhibited in scores of group shows. Her work has been collected in Australia and abroad, and publicized in the leading ceramics journals in Australia and the United States.

Formally and conceptually distinctive, Campbell-Allen's work is distinguished by strength, restraint and often richly detailed surfaces. The highly personal aesthetic she has developed eloquently evokes the two powerful wellsprings of her motivation – her intimate appreciation of the art of wood-firing and her deep emotional connection with natural landscapes. Through the refinement of her artistic process these two are embodied as one.

Jan Howlin BVA (Hons I), MFA

CREDITS

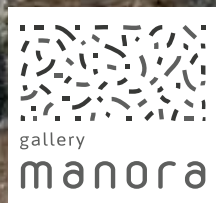
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