

# A Human Connection



With her intuitive, homespun works, Alana Wilson has become a commanding voice in studio ceramics.

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*“Pots, like all other forms of art, are human expressions. Pleasure, pain or indifference before them depends upon their natures, and their natures are inevitably projections of their creators.”*

– BERNARD LEACH, POTTER

Alana Wilson unifies the material and immaterial in the making of her ceramic vessels. She sculpts by hand from a sandstone garage in Tamarama, Sydney, forgoing precision in favour of antiquated techniques and experiments in natural glazing (most notably in sea salt and Shino). Her works, which appear like archeological artefacts excavated from sites of legendary ruin, possess an empyrean quality, like an ancient relic concealing a long-lost mythological prophecy. In an era of mechanical gestures and simulated living, her pieces remain volatile, imperfect, and unabashedly human.



*Ceramics is an ancient and meditative process that is associated with the natural world and our most basic human faculties. Do you find your practice ever moves beyond expression into a more spiritual space?*  
Definitely. Although I don't feel like both of those realms have to be embedded in the work for someone else to read them there. Whether someone perceives my work as purely functional or draws spiritual meaning from it just depends on their conditioning. From working in ceramics, I've had to form a rounded approach. On the one hand, there's function, aesthetics, and technique. On the other, there's concept, theory, deeper meaning, and spirituality. Personally, I lean more towards a theoretical, conceptual, and spiritual point of view, but the functionality and tactility of ceramics are what enables the work to intersect with someone's everyday life. The works are functional, but you can also derive different interpretations from them depending on what your mind may link to, their function, and how they fit into space.

*How would you say your relationship to your practice has evolved?*

With ceramics, there isn't really a well-beaten path. I've become more embracing of what my body naturally makes, of different things that occur in the creative process, and of experimenting with less traditional ingredients, materials, and textures over time. In many ways, that mirrors life: as you grow older, you learn to go with the flow and gain more confidence in what you create. I used to idolise specific objects, colours, and textures. Now I feel much more attached to the thought-processes that lead up to the objects I make. About a year ago, I started feeling guilty about creating physical objects that would just go out into the world, because there is so much of that; so I've become more aware of really sitting with

ideas before producing something, so it doesn't feel as fast or disposable. By creating objects myself, I found that I don't want as many objects in my own life. That's not to say certain objects don't have value, but that what you seek in them changes.

*What other discoveries have you made about yourself through your work?*  
Embracing change and not expecting things to last forever.

*That makes sense, as the practice of ceramics itself is based on transformation.*

Right. It teaches you not to have expectations but to still find something positive in the outcome, whether the result is what you expected or not.

*As artefacts, ceramics have historically provided insight into past civilisations and cultures. Your work takes inspiration from the historical, specifically from archeological and ancient artefacts. Why are these important primary references for you?*

I did a lot of study into ancient and primitive cultures. I would build using their tools and processes, which felt much more instinctual and interesting to me than throwing. While my shapes and forms definitely come primarily from the ancient world and ceremonial objects, I would say my inspirations come equally as much from nature as they do from history and ancient culture. For example, my textures and ingredients derive from the natural world – they are the kind of surfaces that would traditionally build upon artefacts over time. I don't use any synthetics in my practice, only things that have come from the earth, and this informs my overall approach, including everything from how I establish colours to materials.



*Perhaps because of this association with the natural world, your work has often been connected with the Japanese tradition of wabi-sabi, which is characterised by asymmetry, imperfection, and the integrity of physical objects. Are these aesthetic philosophies that you identify with?*

I lean in that direction naturally, but it's not intentional, and I don't want to fit in that category. I don't believe that perfection exists. People might think that something is perfect to them, but that same thing will be so imperfect to someone else.

*Would you say that the coastal setting of your studio in Tamarama is also a source of inspiration?*

I've always been around water. When I was younger, both of my parents were swimming coaches and eventually set up a swim school, where I would go every day before and after school. I need that alive space of an open expanse of water – something that you can immerse yourself in, as opposed to escaping from – in my life. As a kid, collecting stones and shells, I had a detailed interest in what nature could create. That early fascination has just instinctively weaved its way into my work. It makes more sense in hindsight, but I guess you never really see how everything is so holistic.

*You've said that you spend a lot of time considering your overall body of work: on trying to establish the relationship between all the objects you create versus focusing on a singular object...*

I feel that what I create in my life will make much more sense viewed together as a progression or complete body of work. With each piece, I think I'm throwing around the essence of what I want to create, but I don't believe that there is one single piece that embodies that 100%. Obviously, as I'm so ingrained in the process, my perceptions and associations are going to be very different from someone else's. For me, certain pieces are connected and lose something when they are separated, but you may not associate them with one another at all.

*Why do you think you feel compelled to create these objects at all?*

Ultimately, it is to connect with what I believe in and what I think is essential to communicate to others, but through a process that I enjoy and that helps me evolve as a person as well as an artist.

