

It's the collaboration of skill that makes the practice so uniquely special

By Jennifer Dean



Image: Jennifer Halli, Antipodeans Sculptures, wood fired. Image courtesy of the artist.

“When you imagine that some pots have been fired three or four times, (then you can understand that) they’ve been under the care of a lot of different people at very weird times of the day and night”, explains Rowley Drysdale of the combined effort involved in wood firing ceramics at Quixotica Art Space.

Wood firing is a big deal in the world of pottery. It can take days to fill and ready the potters’ kiln, just as it can take multiple days for the firing process to work magic on the hand thrown wares within. Some works might require the effort of multiple firings, and all performed without any guarantee for a successful result. Such a physically and mentally taxing process one can imagine would be difficult to perform solo.

At a basic level, wood firing historically has always been a team effort. With labour divided amongst a group of potters in support of one or two experienced makers, the collaboration inherent in the wood firing process speaks to one’s sense of community.

Reveals Drysdale, "Much knowledge and laughter is shared at firing sessions and I sometimes wonder whether this positive sharing is also somehow absorbed into the work. As much as a grandmother's love is felt in a hand-stitched patchwork quilt, the good vibes from a team of happy potters can perhaps imbue wood fired work also."

Established in 2000, Drysdale designed and built Quixotica Art Space with a group of friends, purposed as a shared place for art making. Consisting of multiple studios, kilns and a gallery set amongst a backdrop of trees and lake in the beautiful Sunshine Coast Hinterland, Quixotica has flourished into a well-known, specialist art precinct.

For the Australian wood fired ceramics ambassador, Drysdale's love of communal spaces and eagerness to share his passion prompted his vision. "I like the idea that I'm sort of there as a low tech events coordinator trying to cobble together things that look fairly mundane- pieces of clay and brick and a large fire. But the human side- I really appreciate that part" explains the highly respected visual artist and educator.

Like many art practices, wood firing is an art of passion and cannot be measured by its economic worth. However says internationally renowned US potter Mark Hewitt, it is extremely hard for anyone to make a living from the practice. "The problem is not one of exclusivity, but of impenetrability...it costs so much to get trained, to buy land and to buy materials, not to mention running a business."

Bridging that gap however is precisely what drives Drysdale's Quixotica vision; providing access through collaboration, mentorship, training and apprenticeship. Having forged significant relationships with other renowned international potters, particularly in South Korea, the widely exhibited and revered advocate for the handmade- Drysdale feels very strongly that Quixotica is a place existing to forge relationships with makers of shared creative vision and passion and all for the prosperity of the ancient art.

Setting out to survey the importance and impact of wood fired ceramic practices around the world, Drysdale's new co-curated group exhibition, 'Flame Path' pays particular attention to the uniqueness of wood fired practices in the Sunshine Coast's Cooroy region.

Featuring local and international wood firers personally selected by Drysdale, each have had significant engagement with Quixotica Art Space at various stages of their creative careers. Including Alix Brodeur, Angus McDiarmid, Barry Tate, Gyan Wall, Heidi Kreitchet, Isaac Patmore, Jackie Gasson, Jennifer Halli, Merrie Tomkins, Moraig McKenna, Neil Hoffmann, Owen Rye, Rowley Drysdale, Sandy Lockwood, Shirobey Kobayashi, Stephen Roberts and Wesley Denic, Flame Path highlights the significant impact the commitment to 'place' has had within the unique community of wood firers both in Australia and abroad.

Flame Path will be showing at Noosa Regional Gallery from 21 May until 11 July 2021.



Image: Shirobey Kobayashi, Oni Vase, wood fired. Image courtesy of the artist.

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