

# everyday works of art

words leigh robshaw portrait photo kate johns

When contemporary ceramicist Shannon Garson first started learning her craft she had one goal: to make fine white porcelain pots as a base for her drawings.

IT WAS AN OBSESSION that 15 years later still excites her, an infectious passion for her craft evident in the way she lights up when she talks about it.

"I remember when I first started I was making lumpy little pots, but I would lie in bed and the wheel would be going over and over in my head," she laughs. "I persisted through that difficult learning stage. I was really clear and consistent with what I wanted to achieve."

A tertiary-qualified artist who spent two years honing her skills in Europe, Shannon's goal has always been to create art that becomes part of people's lives.

**"What I'm trying to do is encourage people to look more closely at the natural world."**

"I wanted to make art for people to use in their houses," she says. "I love it that people are using my art, interacting with it. It's more direct, more powerful and more useful to society."

Showing off her pots in her studio beneath her quaint Maleny home, crisp light streaming in through white timber-framed windows overlooking her garden, Shannon describes the more than 20-step process she follows to transform lumps of Australian-made 'southern ice' porcelain clay into exquisite yet functional pieces.

"I'm feeling quite confident with the medium now," she says.

"When I draw magnolias, I have a flower in front of me and draw freehand onto the pot. It has taken a few years to perfect that, but now I've done it I can really push the boundaries."

Shannon's muse is nature, her translucent pots a perfect canvas for images like a lone sepia-toned eucalyptus leaf, its beautifully drawn lines merging with the curves of the pot. I touch the delicate pieces cautiously, but Shannon handles them with the confidence of artisan's hands, encouraging me to hold each pot and engage with its story.

"With my work I am connecting the world of nature to the world of culture," she says. "The domestic and the artistic are brought

together in one object. What I'm trying to do is encourage people to look more closely at the natural world. The pot is telling a story by being so detailed. When you turn it over you might see something underneath that you didn't know was there, or when you wash it you might feel a certain texture."

Shannon makes two ranges: limited edition tableware in designs she can repeat and her exhibition work, which is conceptually more complex and commands prices well into the thousands of dollars. She has won major awards and recently received a \$40,000 grant from Arts Queensland to collaborate with jeweller Rebecca Ward on a project based on the wallum swamplands.



Successfully combining the artistic with the utilitarian is what motivates Shannon. Her family, partner Trevor and young daughters Daphne and Pearl, eat dinner off her pieces every night.

Shannon's exceptional work has become highly prized, and she enjoys a loyal following around Australia and internationally, which is now growing due to the success of her blog, Strange Fragments.

"I'm in a tiny little town but I have a huge community," she says with zeal. "I don't have to go to galleries and knock on doors anymore - people approach me now, but that took ten years of working really hard. In the obscure world of contemporary ceramics I am well-known!"

While Shannon is at the forefront of her chosen field, she believes there's always more to learn.

"What I observe with pottery is that people in their late 50s and 60s are making beautiful accomplished work. If you were to say anything is perfect or reached the zenith of its creation, it would be that kind of work. Maybe when I'm in my late 50s I'll be doing this amazing work, though I think I'll always keep up with the domestic work because it's lovely to do and it has this connection to people in the community that I really like." □

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