



**Centre for
Contemporary
Asian Art**

Drawn by stones

31 July - 12 September 2021

Counihan Gallery Brunswick

**COUNIHAN
GALLERY
IN BRUNSWICK**

**Dean Cross
Ray Chan See Kwong
Ruth Ju-shih Li**

**Wen-Hsi Harman with Lakaw,
Dogin, Palos, Lisin and Byimu
Jody Rallah**

Drawn by stones brings together exhibiting artists from Australia, Hong Kong and Taiwan who utilise the ceramic medium to interrogate contested histories, stolen land, Indigenous sovereignty, and concepts of national identity. Taking its title from Marvin Bell's 1984 poem *Drawn by Stones, by Earth, by Things That Have Been in the Fire*, this exhibition recognises that the foundations of ceramic practice lie in the earth: demonstrating how the ceramic form in its connection to place can both memorialise and tell alternative histories.

Drawn by stones is an expansive project, commencing with the 2020 biennial installation of Dean Cross' major site-responsive work *Monuments*. Exhibited at 4A's Sydney gallery to allow for its timely appearance, Cross' *Monuments* challenges colonial concepts of ceramics, memorialising and memory. Using handfuls of white ochre – handfuls of Ngunnawal/Ngambri Country – Dean built a work that spread in a grid across the gallery floors, each mound marking a year passed since invasion. With permission from local elder and custodian of the land Aunty Matilda House, the ochre is gathered by the artist's father from the ground of their family property. As Kimberly Moulton writes in the article *Breaking ground: A history of Indigenous ceramics*: "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ceramic arts have been positioned as a fairly recent movement. However, for thousands of generations, Indigenous people have shifted the land to form installations used in ceremony, and painted and carved story into stone. Ochre has been gently extracted from the earth to be used on the body and moulded into cultural material made of fibre, wood and animal. The relationship to earth and the tangibility of its offerings have been connected to Indigenous peoples from time immemorial."^[1]

Cross' two works included in the 2021 iteration of *Drawn by stones*, *Nothing Changes (apart/hide)* and *Full Moon Dreaming* were created by the artist in 2016 as he "was beginning [his] dreaming around *Monuments*". *Drawn by stones* with the same white Ngunnawal ochre, these form part of a suite of drawings that act as a preface to the *Monuments* project. They consider pre-contact life, and the displacement, disruption of white arrival.

The disruption of daily life through periods of change, as Hong Kong based 'ceramic experimentalist' Ray Chan See Kwong sees it, creates embedded memories. In the community-engaged project *NEW RE NEW*, Ray worked with Chueng Lung community members, who live and work in the water-rich Tai Mo Shan area. Tea and watercress production has shaped the rhythms of community life in Cheung Lung for centuries, but as part of the rapidly changing landscape of Hong Kong's New Territories, the history and cultural memory of this area has been under threat. Chan designed the *NEW RE NEW* cups in a collaborative process with Chueng Lung community members who are part of the local restaurant and tea industries. Each cup is hand formed and glazed in a fluid pattern that mimics the flow of the water that ran atop this clay source and sustained agricultural growth. Placed in local restaurants, these cups were made to be used, a product of the land and memory, connected by earthy, local flavours.

Bernard Leach suggested in 1940 that "A potter's traditions are part of a nation's cultural inheritance"^[2] But can there be a singular set of 'potter's traditions' in colonised nations? In Taiwan, we see this complexity writ large in museums and academia, which often separate long-standing Indigenous traditions from a narrative of the nation's 'ceramic history'. Geoffery Gowlland's recent "Materials, The Nation and The Self" exemplifies this tendency to exclude indigenous practice in favour of more recent 'tradition':

"Ceramics production in Taiwan does not have the long and prestigious history of centres such as Jingdezhen (porcelain) or Yixing (stoneware) in mainland China. If we exclude the pottery production of the indigeneous peoples of Taiwan, and the ceramic tile production at the time when Taiwan was a Spanish colony in the 1600s, the current ceramics tradition can be traced back barely over two centuries."^[3]

In the work and process of Amis potters Lakaw, Dogin, Palos, Lisin and Byimu captured by Wen-Hsi Harman in *A Disappearing Culture – The Amis Earthenware Tradition In Taiwan* and shared through earthenware works *Diwas*, *Tatolonan*, *Koleng*, and *Atomo* in *Drawn by stones*, we see a ceramic history that stretches back much further than two centuries: generation after generation, through multiple periods of colonisation, Amis women have maintained a strong earthenware tradition that is specific in its crafting and firing approach. We see the intrinsically collaborative nature

To view a full list of works, artist biographies and explore the *Drawn by stones* reading list and public programs, please visit: 4a.com.au/drawn-by-stones/ Over 2021 and 2022, *Drawn by stones* tours venues across Australia, connecting with local communities through workshops, discussions and shifting site specific works. This exhibition is presented by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art in partnership with Counihan Gallery In Brunswick, part of Moreland City Council. Custom artwork display elements created by Mount Framing. Development support for *Drawn by stones* has been provided by the Taiwanese Economic and Cultural Office in Sydney and The Gordon

of making and its strength and endurance, with the collection, wedging, batting and shaping of local clay from Amis land and use of dried rice shells, small sticks and timber pieces from the seashore to build a unique firing environment, which produces beautifully fired, unglazed works for everyday and ceremonial use.

Wen-Hsi Harman's *Land Series*, from which we see two works – *Theory of Land* and *Territory* – in *Drawn by stones*, forms a personal interrogation into a complex national identity. *Theory of Land* and *Territory* are topographical porcelain 'maps' – formed through repetitive impressions of the artist's thumb, imprinting herself, literally, onto the 'land' of clay – inspired by the artist's experience discovering British maps of Taiwan within the collection of the British Museum. With the addition of gold lustre and enamel to this undulating 'land', Harman references Taiwan's history of colonisation: its gold mining during the most recent colonisation of Taiwan by Japan between 1895 and 1945, which peaked in 1938, when Jinguashi produced 2,603 tonnes of gold mined and refined by local people, all exported for Japanese profit. In attempting to materially reproduce this 'human geography', Wen-Hsi considers both her own place as a contemporary Taiwanese artist living 'between' Taiwan and the United Kingdom; and the challenge of finding identification points in a complex, multi-colonised land.

Continuing the exhibition's theme of personal topographies, over the course of the *Drawn by stones* exhibition tour, Ruth Ju-shih Li undertakes her most ambitious site-specific ceramics installation, *Topography of Memory*. *Topography of Memory* responds to site, and the artists' personal experience and consideration of the idea of nationhood, through the shaping of 'threads' of hand-rolled porcelain that weave through space. Li says of the work's concept:

"As a Taiwanese-Australian, the curatorial theme of contested histories and the exploration of the idea of Nationhood really hits close to home, triggering an array of questions surrounding how I see and define my own identity and, in turn, how I define my countries juxtaposed to how society or governments draw their boundaries."

In the time of COVID-19, this work is paused. With the installation stage ready, *Topography of Memory* will be realised at Counihan Gallery when the artist has the ability to travel and connect with Wurundjeri land, and the local community.

More than Stones – Throughout the Generations is an installation that contemplates the dynamic nature of clay as an 'alive' medium, through clay in various forms from the artist Jody Rallah's home Country (Yuggera). Echoing the experience of Harman, the work's focus stems from an experience at the Queensland Museum where Rallah saw a collection of her Ancestor's cultural objects stored within staid archival systems and away from cultural access. *More than Stones – Throughout the Generations* represents an ongoing commitment to allow audiences to experience cultural materials as current, interconnected and powerful. Rallah says that the installation: "underpins clay as a symbol of cultural connection which brings people and place together." In its gathering and activation of Yuggera clay, incorporating clay pigments, clay bodies and charcoal gathered respectfully after rainy periods on Country, clay fired into coolamon vessels, and audio storytelling, this work acts to decolonise the museological and colonial gaze that has sought to position Indigenous practice as inactive and tell new stories through this living material.

[1] Moulton, K. (2015). *Breaking ground: A history of Indigenous ceramics. Art Monthly Australia*, (281), 31–34.

[2] Leach, Bernard, "Toward a Standard", in *A Potter's Book*, 1940, Faber and Faber, London.

[3] Gowlland, Geoffery, "Materials, the Nation and the Self Division of Labor in a Taiwanese Craft", 2016, in Wilkinson-Weber, CM & DeNicola, AO 2016. *Critical craft : technology, globalization, and capitalism*, Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London ; New York

Exhibiting artists: Dean Cross, Ray Chan See Kwong, Ruth Ju-shih Li, Wen-Hsi Harman with Lakaw, Dogin, Palos, Lisin and Byimu and Jody Rallah

Exhibition curator: Bridie Moran

Exhibition assistant curator: Annette An-Jen Liu

As the first stop in its national exhibition tour, this iteration of *Drawn by stones* is staged at Counihan Gallery, Brunswick on sovereign Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung land. 4A acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Moreland. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging.

LIST OF WORKS

Ray Chan See Kwong
NEW RE NEW
2018
49 teacups: various local Chuen Lung clays, glazed and fired
Produced as part of the 2018 public art and community project Hi! Hill!, by the Hong Kong Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Organised by the Art Promotion Office with Curatorial Partner (art in-situ): Make A Difference Institute, Hong Kong
Courtesy the artist

Ruth Ju-Shih Li
Topography of Memory
2021- ongoing
Unfired raw clay, porcelain and string [forthcoming]
Custom installation setting with black aluminium gloss floor plinth and ceiling mounting system, w.3050mm d.1500mm
Commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, 2021
Courtesy the artist and May Space, Sydney

Dean Cross
Nothing Changes (apart/hide)
2016
Ngunnawal Ochre and fibre-based pen on craft paper
Triptych w.2280mm h.1020mm, comprising three artworks w.760mm h.1020mm each
Courtesy the artist and Yavuz Gallery

Dean Cross
Full Moon Dreaming
2016
Ngunnawal Ochre and fibre-based pen on craft paper
Diptych w.1520mm, h.1020, comprising two artworks w.760mm, h.1020mm each
Courtesy the artist and Yavuz Gallery

Wen-Hsi Harman
Theory of land, from *Land Series*
2015
Handbuilt royale porcelain, with enamel, gold lustre, multiple firings
h.60cm, w.52cm, d.3cm
Courtesy the artist
Mounted on: blackwood bench and assorted recycled hardwood legs, shou sugi-ban finish, wax, by Bryden Williams of Mount Framing, commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, 2021.
Pictured on cover of this roomsheet.

Wen-Hsi Harman
Territory, from *Land Series*
2015
Handbuilt royale porcelain, with enamel, gold lustre, multiple firings
h.60cm, w.52cm, d.3cm
Courtesy the artist

Lakaw, Dogin, Palos, Lisin, Byimu with Wen-Hsi Harman
A Disappearing Culture – The Amis Earthenware Tradition In Taiwan
2015
Video, 10:06 minutes
1. *Diwas*
Ceremonial Amis earthenware pottery, h.8.3cm, w.7cm, d.8cm
Ceremonial cup used for alcohol
2. *Tatolonan*
Amis earthenware pottery, h.9cm, w.8.5cm, d.5.5cm
Used for the steaming of vegetables
3. *Koleng*
Amis earthenware pottery, h.13cm, w.9cm, d.7cm
Used for general cooking
4. *Atomo*
Amis earthenware pottery, h.12cm, w.10cm, d.9cm
Storage container
All works courtesy the artist and Amis earthenware potters Lakaw (born 1932), Dogin (born 1953), Palos (born 1948), Lisin (born 1956), Byimu (born 1957)
Mounted on: blackwood bench and assorted recycled hardwood legs, shou sugi-ban finish, wax, by Bryden Williams of Mount Framing, commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, 2021

Jody Rallah
More than Stones – Throughout the Generations
2021
Clay bodies, charcoal (Yuggera Country), fired ceramic coolamons, looped audio track, wall drawing with Yuggera clay bodies and charcoals
Commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, 2021
Courtesy the artist