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ART ARTS

Karmic ceramic



Minnal Khona
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An Australian ceramic artist's new work is inspired by India, writes MINAL KHONA



"I love India," says Sally Walk, an Australian ceramic artist who recently exhibited in Hyderabad, India.

"Of all the countries I have visited, I have never connected with a country or a culture in the way I did with India. I love the food, the people are captivating, the colours and patterns mesmerising and I even loved the heat and the traffic!"

She adds, "There was so much beauty and so much inspiration that I know I will return again and again. Of course all of these feelings found their way into my work. Usually my work is quite monotone and I favour the use of black and white, but for the first time in a long time, I was inspired to use more colour. So you could say there is a little bit of India in (my recent) works."

Sally Walk, a senior ceramic artist based in Warragul, Victoria has participated in several international exhibitions and workshops including a recent one in India. Her works are unique, highly creative and draw inspiration from human nature.

Naturally, Sally has many ceramic artist friends globally and she works and collaborates with international artists frequently.

Her tryst with India began when, as a member of the International Ceramics Association (ICA) Forum, she attended its third Forum held at the Uttaryan Art Centre in Vadodara recently.

"What an amazing venue," says Sally. "I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Rakesh Agrawal for

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the amazing opportunity to work at the art centre and for his outstanding hospitality.”

The pieces she displayed were unique but the size of the work for this exhibition were on a smaller scale than her current work, due to the fact that she had to transport it to India.

“Some of the greatest friendships I have made are with artists from India. I met Indian ceramic artists Madhur Sen and Vineet Kacker in China, and Vinod Daroz recently in India and they have become wonderful friends,” she says.

In fact it was Daroz who invited her to take part in the ‘Fired Up’ exhibition in Hyderabad.

“I have a great respect for his work and I am in the process of trying to reciprocate the favour and have Daroz exhibit his work in Australia. I think it will be received well here,” she states. “That is the beauty of being able to work in partnership with other international artists, it is a chance to be presented with new opportunities, learn new skills and techniques and develop lifelong friendships.”

Sally’s interest in ceramic art began during frequent childhood visits to galleries and museums across Melbourne. At secondary school, she excelled in the arts thanks to a very enthusiastic ceramics teacher. She went on to complete her Bachelor of Arts in Ceramic Design from Monash University, and followed with a year’s residency at a ceramic art gallery. “During this time I focused on Raku and Saggar firing and became quite adept at being able to predict and create surface flashing and patterning in my work using oxides, seaweed and sawdust,” says Sally.

The talented artist admits that there has been a decline in the appreciation of ceramics over the last 20 years. However, there has been a revival of late.

“Ceramic work is being selected amongst finalists in major sculpture competitions and more ceramic artists seem to be exhibiting,” says Sally. “In the beginning I sold my work for under \$100 per piece, even large pots of about 50 cms; now my work is smaller and many are sold as a group, so the prices vary. I have one artwork in the Cheongju Biennale in Korea at the moment valued at \$4000.”

The source of inspiration behind Sally’s artwork is varied, but revolves around the spectacular colours and textures of Australia.

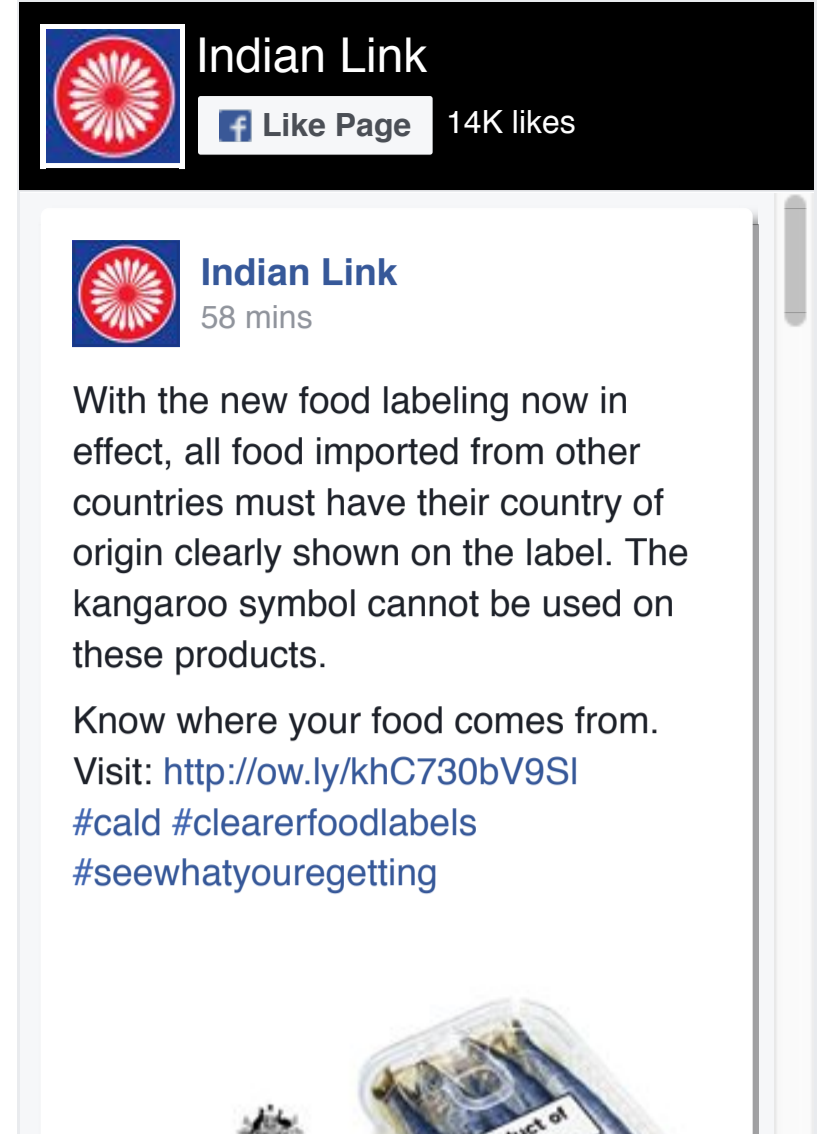
“I grew up beside the beach, and spent my childhood exploring rock pool, digging for fossils and observing the beauty in my surroundings,” she says. “Over time my work has evolved, but primarily the concept is the same. I am fascinated by human behaviour. Currently I am exploring the idea of disguised eccentricities. I am interested in how we as a society require a certain outward appearance to ensure belonging. I find this behaviour interesting. My various roles of wife, mother, daughter, sister, niece, friend, artist and teacher, seem to authenticate my own belonging in society”.

But there are, however, times when Sally desires to be a ‘recluse, selfish or eccentric’.

“The constraints of society’s rules enforce that I can’t have both, even on a temporary basis, without sacrifice. So really I am exploring the age-old notion of identity,” she reveals.

Sally’s current work is a combination of wheel-thrown forms and hand building. “I use stoneware and porcelain clays and slips. My style and taste in most things is minimalist, using block colours, but when I create art, I love extravagant texture and patterning. I think I find the repeated process of the adding of texture or appendages in a pattern formation quite meditative. It’s a very relaxing process. The time it takes to finish a single piece obviously depends on the size of the work. My work is quite detailed with fine appendages and these can take many hours to attach. In addition to the throwing and trimming of parts of the sculpture, there is the drying time between each addition to consider. One single piece may take 3 or 4 days just in the making stage, before drying, bisque firing and glazing. Ceramics is quite a long process,” says Sally who works from her purpose-built studio at her home in Warragul. She admits that she never makes two works exactly the same, ever.

“For me the (creative) process usually begins with an idea in my head; I may have seen a form or texture that day and need to investigate immediately,” explains Sally. “I like to create the ideas in my head by physically making, using a trial and error process. This may seem wasteful, but in reality most of the ideas work the first time, or evolve during the making process to be a success. I enjoy the development of an idea; the making of something without a predetermined outcome. For this very reason, my art will always evolve.”



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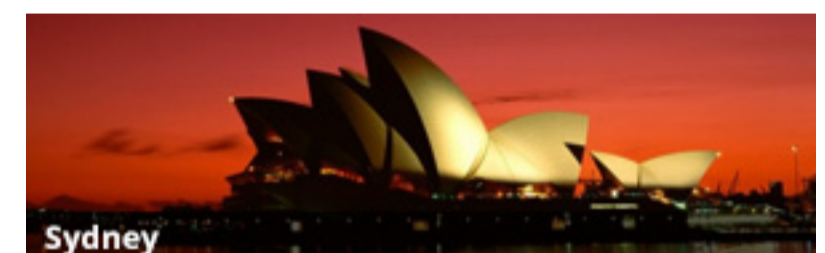
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