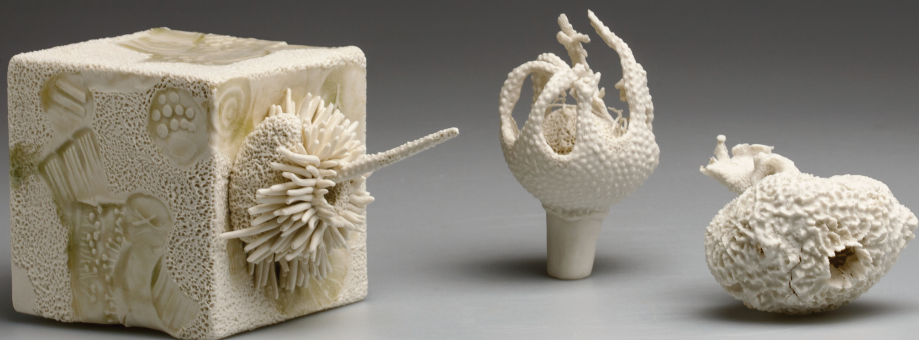


# Avi Amesbury



Country – ancient lands

A S O L O E X H I B I T I O N



*Monaro to the Coast, Series – East to West II.*  
2018. Porcelain, clay from Monaro Plains,  
NSW. Dimensions H95 x W45 x D45 mm.

## Avi Amesbury. *Country – ancient lands.*



*Bogong High Plains to the Coast – Here to there.* 2018. Porcelain, Bogong wood-ash. Dimensions: Vase H110 x W60 x D60 mm; Rock H25 x W55 x D30 mm; Rod Length 65 mm.

The notion of *place* is integral to Avi Amesbury's art. For her *place* is not concerned with simple connectivity to a specific site but a layered and complex phenomenon that informs, provides and generates her conceptual, philosophical, aesthetic and imaginative ideas and practices. Allied with this is her emotional experience of various *places*, an experience that is essential to the preceding and that is the *raison d'être* behind her art. For her *place* is also a real entity that exists geographically and topographically and whose physical characteristics begin the processes of imaginative re-construction. *Place* is a site of memories embedded within the artist through her experience of *places* (re-) visited and experienced. Her work speaks not only of her connectivity to *place* but is an affirmation of *place* as impetus and source for artistic explorations. Each art object resulting from her experience of *place* is a vehicle of individual reconnection to the *place(s)* that prompted its creation

and as such is embedded with personal history and memory. For Amesbury the object is intertwined with its source and any meaning invested in her objects is predicated on the powerful yet intimate relationship between *place* and object.

Working in series allows Amesbury to manifest her (re-)visits to sites in ways that speak of the idiosyncratic character of each visit, and to subsequently imbue each object with a singular and individualised identity within the aegis of the *place* that prompted each series. **Country – ancient lands** – references *places* in Australia and sites in Israel where the artist undertook a residency in late 2017. *Country* has specific significance to indigenous Australians' deeply spiritual connection to the land; *ancient lands* resonates with the historic Holy Land of the Bible. For Amesbury the words simultaneously hold a range of meanings that embrace the contemporary world, history and the (very) ancient past. These are never specifically delineated in her objects. Rather it is the particular





*Monaro to the Coast, Series – Ancient highland.*  
2018. Porcelain, clay from Monaro Plains, NSW.  
Dimensions: H105 x W105 x D105 mm.

characteristics and aspects of *places* that concern her. Her search results in expressions of her wonder of discovery, of the initial emotional impact that prompts her philosophical, imaginative and aesthetic responses. While elements of real topographies are present in her work it is the elision of the real with the imaginative and creative couched in an intelligent and incisive aesthetic language that is instilled in her finished objects.

The following discussions examine works from each of the series. While individual series explore specific and geographically and topographically different *places*, the highly refined and articulate language of the artist overlays the entirety of the exhibition and in this asserts the aesthetic maturity and authority of her vision.

In the work, *Bogong High Plains to the Coast* three elements (a cube, a flower and a sponge) are placed together. Each is fashioned from porcelain with Bogong wood ash; the sponge is cast from the actual object. The cube is a container but a container that cannot be opened. Its surface is enlivened with marks, impressions and an intricate mesh-like veil. On one face a sea creature is placed with a single



*Coast Series – Rocks.* 2018. Porcelain. Dimensions:  
H110 x W80 x D60 mm.

antenna pointing to the accompanying elements. The enclosed status of the cube is a metaphorical inclusion referencing the undisclosed memories held by the artist. Also present are the possibilities for the activation of memory that comes from making connections to the land as travelled. There is a quietly insistent acknowledgement of the original indigenous inhabitants. The notion of artist as pilgrim sits comfortably with this and other of Amesbury's work. There is an (assumed) dialogue between the 3 objects established by the artist through their physical arrangement, in the unifying palette and in the intimate scale adopted by the artist. The latter invites an ability to hold the work and further reinforces notions of memories contained. The dialogue is aesthetic and conceptual. The use of clay (porcelain) is especially moot. Its transformative qualities bring exceptional thematic and aesthetic relevance. The transformation of material imbues the transference of experience and meaning from the artist to the viewer and establishes a dialogue between artist, *place*, materials and beyond.

In the series *Monaro to the Coast* Amesbury employs a darker palette than



*Makhtesh Series – Mitzpe Ramon. 2018. Porcelain, clay from Mitzpe Ramon, Israel. Dimensions variable.*

in the preceding. The cube appears most effectively in *Ancient highland*. Here the marks, impressions etcetera are clothed in rich browns and ochres and surrounded by a white ground embellished with multiple tiny black dots. These also appear on the exotic vegetation that straddles the cube with its extended tendrils. Notions of contained memory continue. The aesthetic tension imbued through the contrast of the strict geometries of the cube with the organic twists of the tendrils is particularly effective. In a series within a series – *East to West* – Amesbury uses an open vessel form to great effect. The six objects are scaled to fit into a hand. Each is constructed of superimposed coils – white and decorated with the same black spots seen above. The spiralling effect of the coils is beautifully controlled by the swathes of ochre and brown that literally and aesthetically ground each of the works. The intimacy of scale and the concomitant aesthetic experience of holding these exquisite objects speak of the multivalent nuances of the artist's creative experiences

and the real experiences of travelling through the landscape that prompted her aesthetic responses.

In late 2017 Amesbury spent six weeks in Israel at the Benyamini Contemporary Ceramics Centre in Tel Aviv. During that time she *travelled extensively collecting soils and clays*. The results as exemplified in the *Makhtesh* and *Negev Desert* series attest to the impact of this experience on the artist's creative imagination. The colours and textures of the desert along with the exotic vegetation provoked new forms and surface decoration. In *Mitzpe Ramon 1* rectangular, brick-like forms in porcelain and local clay the Negev Desert are cut into and given additions referencing local vegetation. The walls are activated with various motifs and grainy, sand-like textures. The motifs are not so much delineated as intimated – a process that is informed by the artist's encounter with the exotic, with the apprehension of absorbing a new (yet simultaneously ancient) land. The cube reappears in *Drimia*

*maritima* and *From the Negev*. Again the notion of memories contained asserts itself. The inclusion of a large wall-based piece (*From the Negev*) creates an "expanded universe" in that individual objects comprise the totality of the installation. This imposes a physical record of the journeys and experiences associated with those undertaken by the artist during her sojourn in Israel. The wall installation is a compendium of memories, a visual diary of cues and clues into Amesbury's art as reconnection, art as affirmation of *place*.

**Country – ancient lands** is a beautiful and highly individual exhibition. The artist's connection with *place* as exemplified in the objects displayed is a powerful aspect of her life. Traces of memory, memories felt and experienced and possibilities for memories to come coexist within single objects and within the totality of the exhibition. That these are articulated through Avi Amesbury's exquisitely nuanced aesthetic and plastic senses and finely-tuned visual language result in an invitation for viewers to participate and be absorbed by the artist's motivations and to find our own connections with *place*.

**Peter Haynes**  
Canberra July 2018

Cover: *Bogong High Plains to the Coast I*. 2018.  
Porcelain, Bogong wood-ash.  
Dimensions: Cube H105 x W105 x D105 mm;  
Sea-flower H110 x W65 x D65 mm;  
Sea-sponge H60 x W85 x D115 mm.



*Monaro to the Coast, Series – East to West VI*.  
2018. Porcelain, clay from Monaro Plains, NSW.  
Dimensions H55 x W60 x D60 mm.



*Makhtesh Series – Drimia maritima*. 2018.  
Porcelain, clay from Mitzpe Ramon, Israel.  
Dimensions H450 x W105 x D105 mm.

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