

AS YOU WALK into the space of ceramicist Eugene Hön's solo exhibition at FADA gallery, there's an element of the sacred that enfolds you. And it isn't about being there alone in a mask, honouring coronavirus protocol. It's about objects created with a robust mix of skilled preciousness and conceptual wisdom that whip you into a whirligig of thoughts, but leave you nakedly in the presence of sheer beauty.

And this is not sheer beauty ramped up through quick and dirty manifestations of technology and fashionable wit. Representing some four years of intense work, this exhibition is a celebration of immense skill. Hön's primary medium is the humble ball point pen: the instrument capable of, with filigree-like line work, creating layers of line and gesture, description and nuance to create dragons and beetles of significance and mastery.

The drawings are transferred and fired onto the surface of ready made ceramic vessels but the narrative of fragility and soccer, broken birds and five-toed dragons resonates with great integrity and wisdom here. Comprising seven series of platters and vessels, the exhibition is not just a foray into old ceramic traditions with a new set of skills. It's a thoughtful exercise in commodity and investment, wrapped between myriads of delicate linework.

Arguably the heart of the show is captured in a glass cabinet toward the back of the gallery. A drawing is contained there: one of a sheep's head, colloquially known as 'Skopo', a South African dish that offers a solid meal for a few rand. This sheep's head is stripped of its fur, and has its swollen tongue pushing rakishly through its dead jaws. On most accounts, a ghastly thing. And yet, and yet, as you look, so do you realise that it is the nobility of Hön's ballpoint pen lines that embrace this thing and raise it to become monumental, godlike.

It is these cabinets at the back of the gallery that give this exhibition an underbelly of context. They offer you an understanding of how the works are made, and play with your sense of preciousness, provocatively.

This is not an exhibition that you can glibly swan in and out of in a few minutes. The vessels will grab you by their sense of design andchutzpah, by the segueing of a flaming pearl and a soccer ball and the use of gold lustre and kintsugi-style repairs to shattered vessels. It's an exhibition that delicately takes technology for a dance with ancient traditions. And one that you will emerge dazzled from – but with a great sense of moment intact. If you see one exhibition this year, choose this one.

*Manufactured Distractions and Intersections* is an exhibition of digital ceramic transferware by Eugene Hön, at the FADA Gallery off Bunting Road in Auckland Park until the end of September. Access to the gallery is by appointment only, due to the ongoing lockdown.

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