



## AVITAL SHEFFER

b.1954, Tel Aviv, Israel

*Tumulus IV*, 2010

Earthenware clay, dry-glazed and printed,  
multiple-fired, height 54 cm (21¼ inches),  
width 54 cm (21¼ inches)

See also: *Basra*, *Kashan*, *Khaled Ben Slimane*

The magnificent curves, intricate arabesques and muted, naturalistic tones of this bottle form recall the ancient vessels of Mesopotamia and Persia. The tracings of script on the pot's surface bring to mind cuneiform tablets inscribed with Babylonian law. This is the vocabulary of Avital Sheffer's ceramic work. Born in 1954 in Israel, where she lived and worked for the first three decades of her life, Sheffer moved to Australia, where she became a potter. Now based on the coast of New South Wales, she brings to her ceramic work her profound knowledge of the Middle East and its restlessly transcultural artefacts and languages. Her pots are like palimpsests, written and overwritten with layers of culture, history, memory and meaning.

Sheffer's choice of clay is particular: this material contains, preserves and yields up archaeological remains and information. The Dead Sea Scrolls were stored in clay that Sheffer saw, and she felt the power of the material to communicate. It is the stuff that builds houses and that, as land, is furiously contested in the country of her birth. Contested land is also part of Australia's past and present. Sheffer researches and deploys ancient Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic and Persian texts and patterns, layer upon layer, in her work – a resonant reminder of the mix that forms her past and present.