

NEW CERAMICS

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The European Ceramics Magazine



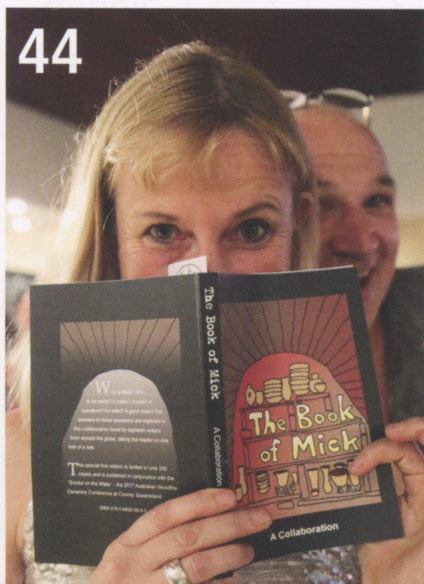
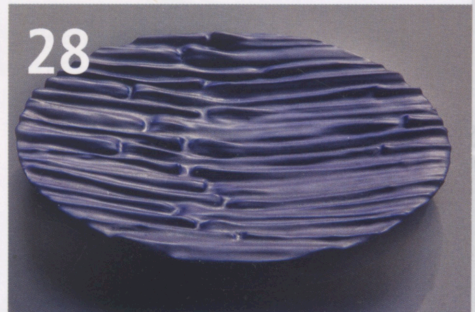
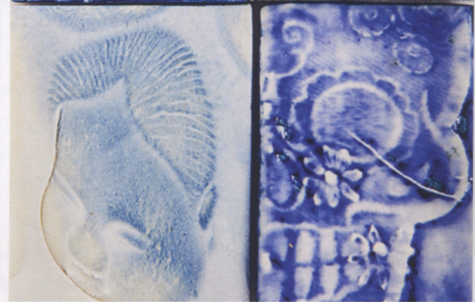
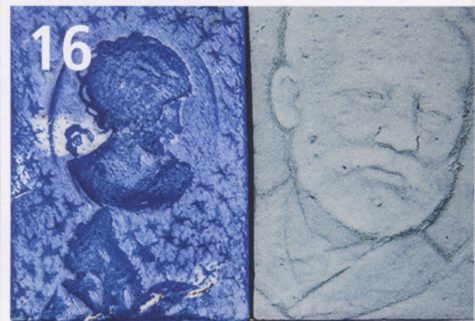
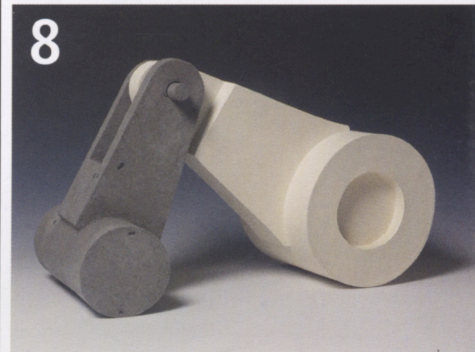
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Cover:
work by
John Bauer
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SMOKE ON THE WATER

2017 Australian Woodfire Ceramics Conference

By
MERRIE TOMKINS &
JENNIFER HALLI



Kobayashi Shirobey (Japan) playing the Didgeridoo at Arcadia

photos Merrie Tomkins

It began with careful consideration, the small town of Cooroy tucked in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast, would become the gathering place for the 9th Australian International Woodfiring conference. The triennial congregation held in the Australian winter months gave

Hillary Kane, Kobayashi Shirobey, Daniel Wall, Tania Edwards in front of the new Anagama at Arcadia



way to four days of thoughtful camaraderie under the mild Queensland weather.

Welcome to Smoke on the Water – a potters' party.

From 28 June – 1 July 2017, a youthful, energetic programme of preconference workshops, Big Fires, Small Fires (Ahi Iti), demonstrations, Pecha Kucha style talks, a Makers tent, exhibitions, book launches, a comedy night, Pots in Shops, a Potters Market, and a Potters' Street Party were savoured by over 200 participants keen on clay.

The party was well on the way, with two preconference workshops filled to capacity at Quixotica and Arcadia. The inspired studios of Quixotica, established by Rowley Drysdale, invited Korean artists Kim Jong Pil and Kim Se Wan to offer demonstrations, hands-on making, loading and firing two anagama kilns. Perched atop a hill around the corner, is Tania Edwards' Arcadia – a new fire on the scene welcoming Japanese master Kobayashi Shirobey to lead discussions and demonstrations in firing the newly built anagama kiln. Participants were free to shift between the studios and take in Japanese vs Korean style techniques. Ceremonies in lighting the kilns were each unique with Japanese, Korean and Australian styles in the mix. Arcadia enjoyed Shirobey's talented didgeridoo

playing while over at Quixotica, a Korean style ceremony had everyone moving to the sound of the drum played by Singaporean artist Steven Low Thai Kwang whilst giving blessings to the kiln god.

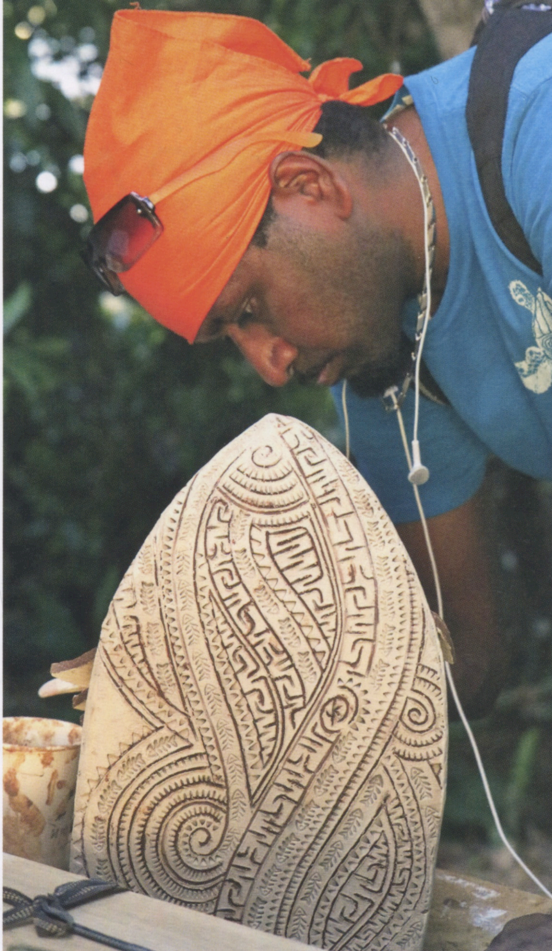
As these two events were taking shape, pots began to appear in shop windows, banners began to appear along the street, and the pubs, schools, churches and Scout Hall of Cooroy made way for ceramics. And, the Gubbi Gubbi Aboriginal language group prepared to welcome us.

The presenters and guests: Alix Brodeur (USA), Steve Bishopric (AUS), Tim Christensen (USA), Lynette Griffiths, Lavinia Ketchell, Jimmy K Thaiday (Torres Straight, AUS), Jennifer Halli (USA), Hillary Kane (USA/Bali), Aki Katayama (Japan), Heidi Kreitchet (USA), Kim Jong Pil (Korea), Kim Se Wan (Korea), Derek Larson (Japan), Sandy Lockwood (AUS), Stephen Low Thia Kwang (Singapore), Moraig McKenna (AUS), Todd Pletcher (USA), Owen Rye (AUS), Kobayashi Shirobey (Japan) and Kasumi Ueba (Japan) made their way to the iconic Cooroy Butter Factory Arts Centre, the hub of the main conference. On arrival, every participant was presented with a Smoke on the Water canvas tote filled with delights including a ceramic cup made by Ray Cavill's clay school students. This environmentally friendly practice was a quick conversation starter and the only way to ensure you would be served wine, beer or even tea during the conference.

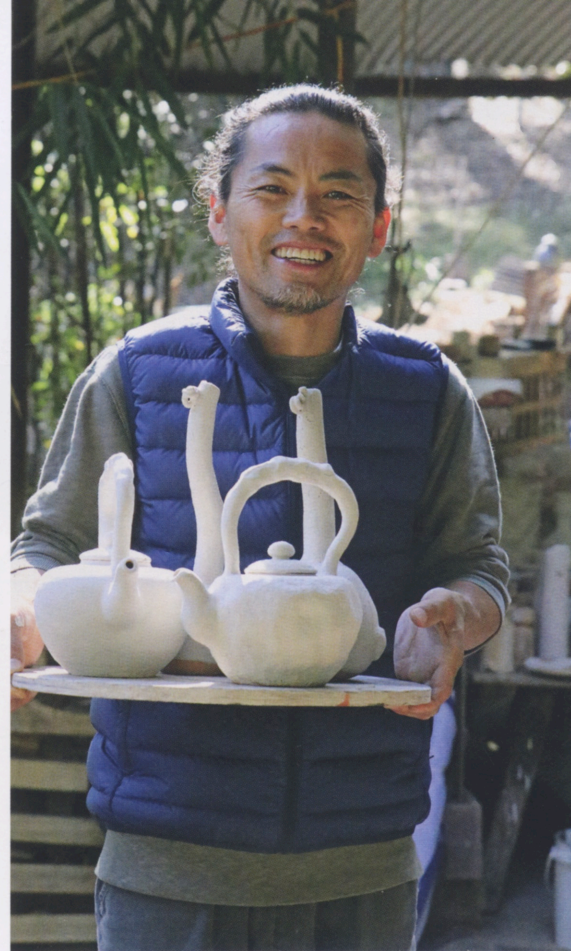
Down the road from the Butter Factory, an intrepid Queensland contingent delighted us with a creative and innovative project: Ahi Iti or small kilns. With an elan consistent to Smoke on the Water, Anna-Marie Wallace taught delegates how koala poo can make your plate fancy, Isaac Patmore built a kiln to house Anna-Marie's saggars full of poo, Grant Hodges fired his mini Cyber Slug kiln and Merrie Tomkins guided us through building small paper kilns using rolled newspapers and paper



Steven Low Thia Kwang from Singapore and his ware



Jimmy Thaiday one of the Darnley Island potters



Kim Jon Phil from Korea with his ware

clay, to be decorated by the international artists. Heidi Kreitchet added clay flowers, Stephen Low Thia Kwang included glass bottles, Todd Pletcher couldn't get a handle on his handles, so added one to the kiln as well as a sneaky rocket. Using slip and sgraffito, Tim Christensen, who was taken with the Australian wildlife after his adventure across the Pacific to arrive by way of container ship, painted a Tawny frogmouth, Derek Larsen and Kobayashi Shirobey threw a slip and sgraffito design to their kiln, and Jennifer Halli included long grasses from the nearby bush, as well as a few firecrackers for good measure.

Evenings included a street party with a live band (and yes, we danced as they played *Smoke on the Water!*), food trucks, and a Toyota Hilux Ute as the bar. A comedy night with Andrew Bryant's *Potters Party* tale and the infamous *Pot Quiz* found two teams battling it out with. 'Whose Pot Is This?' 'Family Feud' and an unlikely throwing competition on a child's plastic pottery wheel toy, the aim to mimic Kim Jong Pil's pot.

Among the many exhibitions, we were treated to *A Collectors Survey*, presented by Gunter Schwartz in the Cooroy Scout Hall. This was a collection of ceramics through the eye of a collector – pieces chosen to satisfy an audience of one, but I dare

say Gunter and this superb international survey of woodfired work enamoured us all. Maybe next conference he'll delight us with his Australian collection.

Later, at the Cooroy Sports Pub, an unusual book launch ensued – a book written for *Smoke on the Water* with Owen Rye at the helm and eighteen authors contributing chapters exquisite corpse style. This work of fiction came to life in *The Book of Mick*. With only 200 copies on offer, all supported the cause and took to passing them amongst ourselves like eager schoolies signing yearbooks with notes and memories for each other. Unlike high school, this was a time we had no desire to forget.

The closing ceremony took place as the Gubbi Gubbi dancers performed, lit the fire the traditional way, and passed the torch to the artists to light their kiln as twilight descended to nightfall. The kilns had been placed in kids paddle pools filled with water and within minutes – voila – *Smoke on the Water!*

As the kilns took light the energy of the week filled the air aided by the few cheeky artists who loaded their kilns with the odd fire cracker, sending gleeful shrieks amongst the tribe tied by clay and fire. With the kilns all alight, many shuffled to the pub to enjoy one last meal together as

Issac Patmore kept the small kilns firing and the party rolling into the wee hours of the night. Although the lighting of the kilns was the official closing of the conference, many of us gathered together the next day at the studios of Quixotica and Arcadia to view the opening of the big kilns. We lingered saying tearful goodbyes as you do when you do not want something significant to end, likely because the only thing missing was the promise it would happen again.

MERRIE TOMKINS & JENNIFER HALLI (both potters) at the closing ceremony

