

The Chosen Vessel

Resource page for TCV on a non navigable web page for sharing with Shelley.

To create a navigable web page on our website with public information closer to exhibition time.

TCV 30 words

A drawing and ceramics collaboration.

Set during the gold rush, a woman avenges the murder of her mother by performing wild and powerful acts on a harem of enslaved men.

FIRST PRESS RELEASE

Introduction: The Chosen Vessel

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THE CHOSEN VESSEL
Belinda Michael & Tiffany Titshall

In an exhibition showcasing the collaborative work of Belinda Michael and Tiffany Titshall, two important central Victorian artists present a powerful new series of drawings and ceramic vessels of immense beauty and intrigue.

Set within the colonial Australian gold rush era, the artists challenge stereotypical narratives, recreating traditional scenes with a powerful female protagonist avenging the murder of her mother by performing wild and powerful acts on her harem of enslaved men.

Here, accepted histories are upended replaced by a potent gothic mythological tale of female power, lust and revenge!

NB: **(Gallery closed Fri 23 Dec 2022 to Wed 4 Jan 2023)

Image:
Belinda Michael & Tiffany Titshall
A Gothic Tale - 9, 2021
earthenware with slips & oxides, sgraffito, once fired
Courtesy the artists

The Chosen Vessel

“I want to see a man beaten to a bloody pulp with a high-heel shoved in his mouth, like an apple in the mouth of a pig.” Andrea Dworkin

A drawing and ceramics collaboration. The reinvention of local gold rush history featuring a woman with a harem. Australian written history is full of patriarchy and violence against women. We wish to playfully subvert this by depicting the story of a woman born on the goldfields who grows up to perform wild and powerful acts on enslaved men.

This is a first time collaboration between the artists Tiffany Titshall and Belinda Michael. The creative process involved collaborating to imagine stories used as reference for the images as well as experimenting with ceramic and surface decoration processes.

[125 words]

The Chosen Vessel - medium length copy.

The Chosen Vessel is a first time drawing and ceramics collaboration between artists Tiffany Titshall and Belinda Michael.

The collaboration began with the intention of introducing drawing to ceramic forms inspired by storytelling often used on ancient pottery. The process evolved over three years (partly due to the pandemic) - testing methods of building large forms, using sgraffito and layers of slips and oxides built up or scraped away and trialling different local clays and glazing methods. In the final stages they experimented with some mixed media and began to document the completed works.

The story is of a woman born on the goldfields who grows up to perform wild and powerful acts on a harem of enslaved men. The scene is an arid landscape surrounding an engineered and fluctuating body of water interrupted with outcrops of granite boulders. The seemingly barren backdrop of the landscape could be the foundation for Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights.

Belinda Michael created large gourd-like vessels that once might have been used by women to cart water. The decoration responds to the form yet tells a subverted story of female hedonism and sadism.

The technical challenges of vessel scale and image making on ceramics are visible in the evolution of the series of twelve vessels. The chemical process of applying and firing glazes resulted in many variables. 'Often in any artistic medium the most interesting things happen when the material fights back.' – Grayson Perry

[241 words]

The Chosen Vessel - full length copy

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As women living on Dja Dja Wurrung country for the past twenty years (Central Goldfields, Victoria, Australia) their idea was to reinvent colonial history with figurative representations of an imaginary woman with a harem depicted on ceramic vessels. "We want the viewer to re-examine the Victorian gold-rush from a gender perspective. It is as though we took the baby left behind in *The Chosen Vessel* - by Australian 19th Century Gothic short story writer Barbara Baynton in which the young mother is murdered with child in her arms - and allowed her to grow into a super heroine avenging her mother's death. The subject matter investigates niche elements of kink, power, and revenge and we attempted to create a character not afraid to assert her own pleasures

without fear or self-consciousness. Perhaps she is a libertine. She is certainly a hedonist!”

“Our character lives in her own world. She does not use slavery for any economical or physical gain, but simply as revenge and sadism, for personal satisfaction. She is responding to her unbridled urges.”

The first phase of the project involved discussion and development of a simple storyline inspired by literature such as Barbara Baynton’s *Bush Studies*, Margaret Atwood’s early feminist novel *Surfacing* and mixing classical mythology with their local surroundings. From this were planned roughly twelve scenes.

After deliberating over forms like plates or bowls Belinda decided to build a more impressive gourd-like vessel. From this Tiffany was instantly inspired to sketch out twelve scenes. As she faced the challenges of drawing figures in a bush setting a perfect stage came to mind. The large feminine forms seemed suited to a local body of water as a classical backdrop for the scenes; their shared local landscape. More detailed drawing plans were made as each individual vessel was built over the following months, so there is an evolution in the method and detail of the surface decoration as well as the built structure of the ceramic forms.

The technical process involved gathering a selection of local clays for some of the surface colours, and together with oxides a series of potential textures and colours were assessed that would or would not hold clarity at different firing temperatures. For Tiffany there were still many uncertainties making every step of the process something to learn from. Glazing pencil was trialled and put aside, lack of use of texture resulted in potentially vague image results. Technical choices made by Belinda regarding spray glazing over unfired imagery allowed for surface decoration to be made on ‘green’ vessels. Tiffany could then scratch the outline drawings through white slip into the red clay. The actual vessels allowed for a thicker layer of white slip and the larger curved canvas meant many discoveries were made in the process of working on the final pieces. For Belinda the process of hand-building large vessels was physically challenging, and also required technical solutions combining methods of coiling, moulds and wheel thrown parts.

As they had envisaged a large portion of the project became about

making discoveries and developing their skills in ways that would inform their personal practice. Without specified funding and through the pandemic they gave time to trialling and producing work they really wanted to make. “Collaboration is not seen as easy but we feel we have inspired, complimented, and disciplined each other whilst giving birth to our dominatrix.”

The project was completed with the help of technical over-glazing and kiln firing assistance by Jason Luca, advice and curation by Shelley Hinton - curator Fed Uni gallery, copy editing by journalist Caleb Cluff, letters of support from Art Gallery of Ballarat; local indigenous artist Georgia MacGuire; and Central Goldfields Gallery, and will be on display thanks to the recognition and support of Federation University Post Office Gallery.

[872 words]

Tiffany Titshall bio [possibly just middle para]

Tiffany Titshall completed her honours degree in Printmaking at Monash University 1995, then participated in several group shows in galleries such as Studio106 and Roar studio until the late 1990s when she turned to event management and public mural works for several years. After moving to Majorca, central Victoria in 2002 she began freelancing as a graphic designer, returning to her studio practice in 2007. Drawing became her central medium and she participated in several group shows, a large solo show at Central Goldfields Art Gallery in 2013, a collaborative exhibition at Space 39 Little Collins St, Melbourne in 2016, and various group shows before showing as a solo artist in the Biennale of Australian Art in 2018. Her work is held in the Central Goldfields Art Gallery permanent collection.

Tiffany Titshall works in charcoal on paper. From landscapes and follies to darker, more overt images of animals and devils, her work simmers with glimpses of her inner world. She uses symbolist and surrealist methodologies with a romantic eye. Her interest in seeing through things in our relationships, in our voyeurism, in pleasure, desire, eroticism, ethics and libertinism are both autobiographical and timeless fascinations.

Tiffany and her husband have lived in a timber-lined colonial school house in an old gold town surrounded by bush since moving from Melbourne in 2002. It is much like a backdrop described in a Barbara Baynton novel.

Belinda Michael bio

Belinda has been working with clay for over a decade, having fallen in love with the medium while studying for a law degree. In 2008 she moved from law studies to embark on formal studio training at the University of Ballarat and in 2012 completed her Diploma of Ceramics.

Belinda was the recipient of the Vice-Chancellors Acquisition Award from the University of Ballarat in 2012 and the Australian Ceramics Association Award for Excellence in 2014. In 2018 her work was exhibited at the Maryborough Art Gallery as part of a 3 person show entitled "Cold". She has been involved with numerous community groups in her arts practice, both as teacher and a volunteer. She was a director with the not-for-profit organisation "Clayspace" from 2013 – 2014 in from 2016 - 2017 ran weekly pottery classes at the Clunes Neighbourhood House. In 2018 Belinda was employed as a professional artist with Central Goldfields Shire Council, working with community groups in Maryborough to produce work for Creative Goldfields.

Belinda works full time as a professional ceramicist, producing highly detailed & decorative works from her studio in Talbot, Victoria. Her work is now held in the Central Goldfields Gallery permanent collection.

A quote from Tiff as more background for talking about the show

We wanted to collaborate ceramics and drawing so we started talking about Greek vessels and my animal drawings, about sexuality and courtship and then we talked about local landscape and being women, gender and sexuality. We talked about the hard lives people lived during the gold rush in Victoria, Indigenous history and our own life experiences as women in this landscape. Then we discussed a theme relating to a girl during the gold rush who sees her mother raped but we turned the likely story on its head as she becomes a kind of mythical character. She sees a snake and wrestles it and turns it into her tail becoming a siren who lures men and makes them into her slaves. We listed tortures we could perform on them and decided upon a series of 12 vessels.

As we discussed the title we talked about Barbara Baynton who's work we had not read but had heard of. We read some extracts and titles and settled upon *The Chosen Vessel* without having read that story that I recall as the words seemed perfect. It was not until later I realised we started our story where she left off.

For me the challenge of drawing figures was new in terms of what I had been doing in the past 20 years and as I thought about trying to depict this in the bush I needed a backdrop that was more vast and classical and more like my dreams of this landscape and that is when I began to focus on Tullaroop reservoir as the backdrop for this theme. Over time it became clear that references to Greek islands and sirens were merging with symbolic and mythological references of many cultures and combining with us, our own experiences and our relationship with the space that surrounds us here in Australia.

We have lived in this fairly isolated area for twenty years and we have a strong sense of the nuances of this undulating and turned over land, of the original rocks, the remnant trees, the areas that were grassland and the creeks and dams where our story takes place.

BACKGROUND REFERENCE TEXTS (resource of these links for more written/visual ideas and background)

Article, Attitudes to wife beating in colonial Victoria, Public Record Office Victoria, (Australia).

<https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/provenance-journal/provenance-2019/attitudes-wife-beating-colonial-victoria?fbclid=IwAR1tav7cCx-BIQ5WgYpyvdQtjzNfvej3igrD8CQ1qdd-qaOI7tkeoRrDSqI>

Article, 'The Great Australian Silence': Sexual Violence in Australian History, (Australia).

http://www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/the-great-australian-silence-sexual-violence-australian-history/?fbclid=IwAR3AwTMjaJGOMrLtYKsWkv9mb4KLZ_FX6RpZdncC40GUuaQPAnLz01wA-_8

Cypriot vessel collection, Chau Chak Wing Museum, Sydney University.
<https://www.sydney.edu.au/museum/whats-on/exhibitions/crossroads.html>

Artist, Arthur Merric Boyd, (Australia). Platters 1952, 'the lovers' and other platters referencing mythical stories in collaboration with potter John Perceval.

<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/19906/>

Artist, Sidney Nolan, (Australia).

***Mrs Fraser* is one of Nolan's most disturbing works. A submissive, faceless female is placed on all fours in a mangrove landscape made impenetrable to her view. She is collecting wood for her captors' fire, and the sticks are scattered in her path like bones thrown out for a dog. The painting is cut across by a low horizon punctuated by three tall palms, testifying, with the intense, unclouded sky, to the vivid tropical geography she so desperately inhabits.**

<https://blog.qagoma.qld.gov.au/sidney-nolans-mrs-fraser-is-a-spectacular-colonial-narrative-queensland/>

Also, exhibition, Myth Rider at Tarrawarra Museum of Art.

<https://www.twma.com.au/exhibitions/sidney-nolan-myth-rider/>

Throughout these interconnected series, Nolan employs his remarkable visual and mental acuity to meld classical allusions, literary sources, historical references, and his own personal response to war and its disastrous consequences, to convey a series of powerful insights into the broader mythic dimensions of human conflict. Combining compelling subject matter and a highly inventive approach to a wide range of media, the rich array of works in this exhibition reveal Nolan's innate understanding of and facility for mythopoesis—the making of myth—**whereby past and present, ancient and modern, legend and history are conflated and vividly reimagined.**

Although exhibitions of Nolan's Gallipoli series have highlighted his references to classical sources, this will be the first exhibition to show these works in the context of the development of the artist's vision of the tragedy of warfare from his early works on Hydra (1955–56), through his Leda and Swan series (1958–60), and culminating in his large scale statements on Greek mythology (1966). – Curator Anthony Fitzpatrick

Historical item, scolds bridal to punish women.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scold%27s_bridle

Artist, Francisco de Goya, (Spain). Ink drawing series such as, 'Who can think of it'.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Goya_Draw1.jpg

Artwork, Roundel with Souls Tormented in Hell, 1500-1510, after Dieric Bouts (Netherlands). MET cloisters collection. Stained glass figures in landscape.
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471106>

Artist, potter, Katy Stubbs, (UK/South Africa). Decorated pottery figures and sculpture, stories and imagery on ceramics. Interesting to note very shiny glaze and how hard it is to document. Pieces 'just my luck' 2020, 'Oh Shit this doesn't look too good' 2020 and 'Death of a Nymph'. Whimsical, funny and violent political and psychological content. Gender politics and environment.
<https://www.katystubbs.com/>

Album, Jean Lee and the Yellow Dog, (Australia).
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Lee_and_the_Yellow_Dog

Poet, Forough Farrokhzad, (Iran). Feminist poet, erotic poetry.
feminize-your-canon-forough-farrokhzad

Artist, Felix Vallotton, (Switzerland). Use of figures, possibly from different painting references, pertains to use of figures traced and retraced and arranged together on pots. In particular a painting of bathers. 'L'ete-le bain', 1892.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/nov/03/art.julianbarnes>

Artist, Adrian Varejao, (Rio de Janeiro). Large ceramic mosaics that become abstracts or landscapes.

<https://gagosian.com/artists/adriana-varejao/>

<http://www.adriavarejao.net/en/imagens/categoria/18/exhibitions>

Artist, Charles Garabedian (US). paintings of large figures at waters edge. Some interesting articles about his themes.

<https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/35969/charles-garabedian/>

<https://www.painters-table.com/link/hyperallergic/charles-garabedian-interview>

<https://hyperallergic.com/588216/charles-garabedian-outside-the-gates/>

Artist, Marcelle Hanselaar (Netherlands/UK). Raw, expressionistic images of strong, fighting, female figures.

“balancing out of **secret fantasies and fiery desires** against a socially acceptable form.”

“As an artist Hanselaar looks for ways to express those illusive questions of who and what we are when the mask is off, and how we appear when the mask is on.”

<https://marcellehanselaar.com/>

Artist, Miguel Covarrubias, (Mexico). Illustration inside 1st edition cover and on a later cover of novel Mules and Men by Zora Neale Hurston. Had seen this image of trees in water and figure arms stretched with candles and related it to a work I had created in the local landscape here without knowing the context of the novel, worth exploring, includes race and **slavery**.

<https://50watts.tumblr.com/post/84900832412/miguel-covarrubias-illus-for-zora-neale-hurston>

<https://www.raptisrarebooks.com/product/mules-and-men-zora-neale->

hurston-first-edition-signed-1935/

<https://thirtiesculture.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/hurstonmules.pdf>

Also of interest this image of a woman carting things.

http://www.artnet.com/artists/miguel-covarrubias/tehuantepec-river-71x_CrwcjrvLD_wNcwGbiw2

Artist, Jessie Makinson (UK).

<https://jessiemakinson.co.uk/>

In concurrent solo shows at the Lyles & King gallery, two painters—one British and one South African—conjure different, but equally opulent, mythic worlds. The London-based Makinson depicts sinister pleasure gardens and twilight pavilions, populated by women, animals, and sexy hybrids of the two. The witchy, conspiratorial mood of her exhibition is conveyed by its title, “Stay here while I get a curse.” The panoramic centerpiece features an orgiastic vision of chaos, equal parts Bruegel and Leonora Carrington.

— Johanna Fateman

Artist, Ross Taylor, (UK/Australia). Painter landscapes showing progress of painting colour and segments such as simplified rocks and trees with complex colour arrangements.

<http://www.rossptaylor.com/>

Artist, Joan Ross, (Australia). Multi-disciplinary practice including political observations of colonisation using ceramics and painting. ‘One of the reasons that I make the work that I do is that I’m very aware, and I don’t think you can be anywhere in Australia and not be aware, that we’re on Indigenous land. And I’m constantly aware of the colonial influence, and the disjunction between that and nature.’

<https://joanross.com.au/>

Artist, Giorgio De Chirico, (Italy). Bathers on the beach 1934. Classical nudes/surrealist composition, rocks, sea, drapery.

<http://art-now-and-then.blogspot.com/2013/04/giorgio-de-chirico.html>

Artist, Leonor Fini, (Argentina). ‘Donna del Lago’ (seemingly barren landscape stage) and other paintings of females in surrealist landscape.

<https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2021/impressionist-modern-art-day-sale-3/donna-del-lago-or-le-bout-du-monde-ii-2>

Artist, Joy Calobrisi, (US). Female sexuality. Male gaze revisited through female eyes.

<https://amandajoycalobrisi.com/home.html>

Artist, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, 1845, (Paris). Illustration of a man holding vessel erect on a woman's head in a romantic landscape for the protoromantic *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.

<https://www.akgimages.co.uk/archive/-2UMDHUQGKXJE.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sorrows_of_Young_Werther

Artist, Sara Anstis, (Canada). 'Sara Anstis was raised on a small island off the Canadian west coast and draws and lives wherever she finds good light. She uses sensuous soft pastels and paint to **build fantasy worlds at a remove from heteronormative patriarchy**, yet strikingly transformative of it. The predominant concepts that her works explore are "subjectivity, Eros, Thanatos, humour, personal **mythologies, misunderstandings and (mis)anthropomorphisms**." These themes are woven together in her images and installations alongside a plethora of otherworldly elements - strange creatures, surreal landscapes and plants - by which her figures lay claim to desire, for better or for worse.'

<http://saraanstis.com/selected-works>

Elisabetta Sirani, (Bologna), Timoclea of Thebes, 1659.

<https://artherstory.net/elisabetta-sirani/>

Artist/designer, Gerry Wedd, (Australia). Pot Songs, 2019. Examples of stories on ceramics.

<https://www.hugomichellgallery.com/exhibition/2019-exhibitions/gerry-wedd/>

I had been reading about Gorgons and other myths in a book of Greek vessels and noticing how twentieth century male historians would always describe these women as crazed. I thought looking at those myths now one would describe them differently. The women are not necessarily crazed or monsters then I read this. T

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/sep/09/if-looks-could-kill-how-medusa-became-a-potent-political-meme>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/arts/design/medusa-statue-manhattan.html>

flaws in this but flipping the narrative is relevant

TITLE REFERENCES

No Coward Soul is Mine - Emily Bronte
I am no bird - Charlotte Bronte
Bless, Pardon, Protect & Guide - Barbara Baynton
The Chosen Vessel - Barbara Baynton

LITERARY REFERENCES

“You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.”
—Maya Angelou, “Still I Rise”

“Someday, every woman will have orgasms—like every family has
colour TV—and we can all get on with the business of life.”
—Erica Jong, Fear of Flying

“The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to
dictate my own thrilling letters.”
—Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar

“I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an
independent will, which I now exert to leave you.”
—Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre

I always liked the scarlet letter and for me that might be another story
but I liked the idea that she embraced it.

Djuna Barnes - Nightwood

Surfacing - Margaret Atwood

MOVIE

The Love Witch - art film, ironic, makes humour of sixties film and 20th
century gender tropes, the femme fatale etc with finely detailed
references.

Media Links referring to the artists

Article, Tiffany Titshall, Ballarat Courier, 2018.

<https://www.thecourier.com.au/story/5663914/psychology-relationships-voyeurism-on-display-at-boaa/>

Article, quote Tiffany Titshall, RACV, 2019.

<https://www.racv.com.au/royalauto/living/community/country-town-revival.html>

Tiffany Titshall listed in record of Biennale of Australian Art.

<http://djprojects.net/boaa2108>

Belinda Michael

<https://www.hepburnadvocate.com.au/story/5910094/artists-preparing-for-next-makers-market/>