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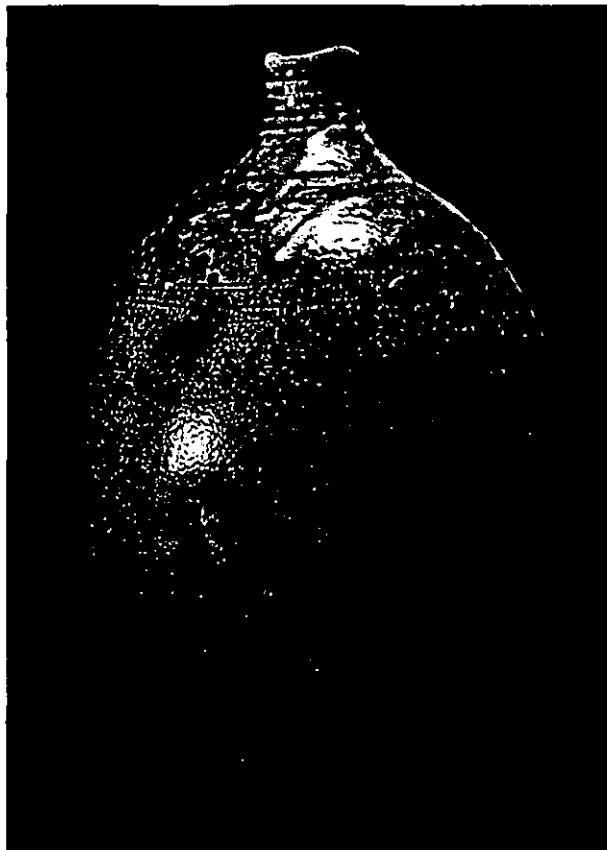
Intersect

A Thermal Shock Exhibition

Review by Ted Snell

AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE OF SHOWING TOGETHER the six artists from 'Thermal Shock' have combined for a final exhibition at the Gallows Gallery in Mosman Park, Western Australia. Since their first year of study at Edith Cowan University they have shown together as a consortium of like-minded potters who, despite quite different approaches to practice, have been sustained by the critical dialogue their collaboration has engendered and the dynamic of installation that emerged with each show. Searching for similarities is a fruitless activity when confronted with their current show because each artist is working independently and on quite different concerns. The congruencies are more in attitude and a dedication to their craft and its extension into an artistic practice.

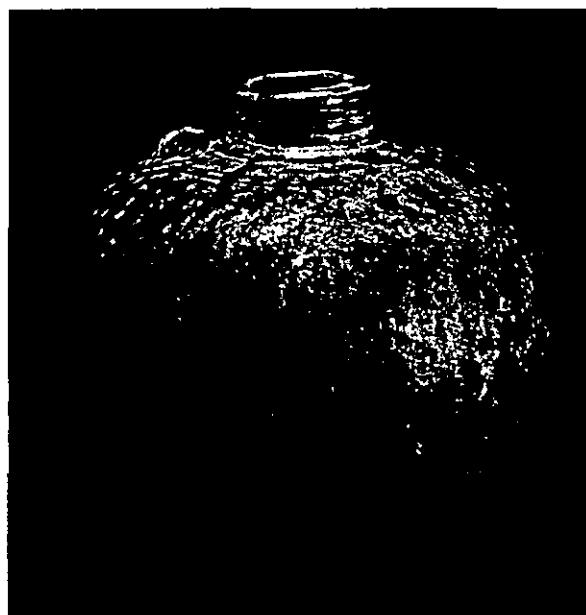
Stewart Scambler. Bottle. 2003. 25 cm/h.



Stewart Scambler's scarred and blushed stoneware pots speak eloquently of their ordeal in the kiln, some returned up to four times to ring one more nuance from the flames or to test the body to the limit once again to see how it will react. Each has a different story to tell: some have wilted under the pressure of the intense heat, others have accepted colour from their neighbours or have sheltered one side from the flames, which now glows miraculously. They are elegant forms that sit beautifully together and in the stacked display cases at one end of the gallery their joint presence is haunting and seductive.

On the other wall a similar exposure to heat, though at a much lower temperature, has produced different responses. Irene Poulton's slab-built raku shrines seem to have been unearthed from some long forgotten South East Asian culture, their stacked construction a pragmatic balancing act reflecting a sombre engagement with the world. The rusted, corroded tones of the glazes and the urgent act of assemblage a perfect foil for the elegantly thrown forms by Stewart Scambler on the other wall.

Stewart Scambler. Spherical Jar. 2003. 35 cm/diam.



For many years Graham Hay has been exploring the medium of paper clay and his current group of objects makes the most of the potential to combine variously coloured and textured clay bodies. They hover in a world between human extravagance and natural form, like creatures from an underwater garden or perhaps a boudoir, possibly growing or maybe recently constructed. The titles are similarly vague offering further potential for interpretation: *Horny*, *Squeeze*, *Flex* and *Flow*. They have a wonderful energy whatever they are, that oscillates between humour, titillation and objective analysis.

Dee Jaeger's whimsical figures have diminished in scale over the years though their presence has grown. Now perched on tall monoliths they teeter at the edge looking down, terrified of where they have come from and anxious about where they will end up. Made initially as a response to a self-help guru's 'fear of falling' they use humour to tap our insecurities and prick the anxieties that abound in our lives.

Combining ceramic forms with other materials has been an on-going focus for Christine Dyer and her current works are woven through and around with spidery threads that seem to bind some pots together while others in the collection appear to have spawned

Irene Poulton. Shrine II. Ceramic. 47 x 12 x 10 cm.



Graham Hay. Mixer. 2003. Earthenware. 150 x 50 x 55 cm.

a sympathetic parasite that winds around and through them. The use of a recurring decorative border, eroded or softened by touch and the blue and white colouration suggest histories bound together.

The only artist to move away from clay, at least in the final presentation, is Bill Jeffrey whose cast bronze figures entwined with unicorns retain an edge that just tips away from kitsch. The most successful works, like the *Unicorn/Man*, is a powerful and compelling image.

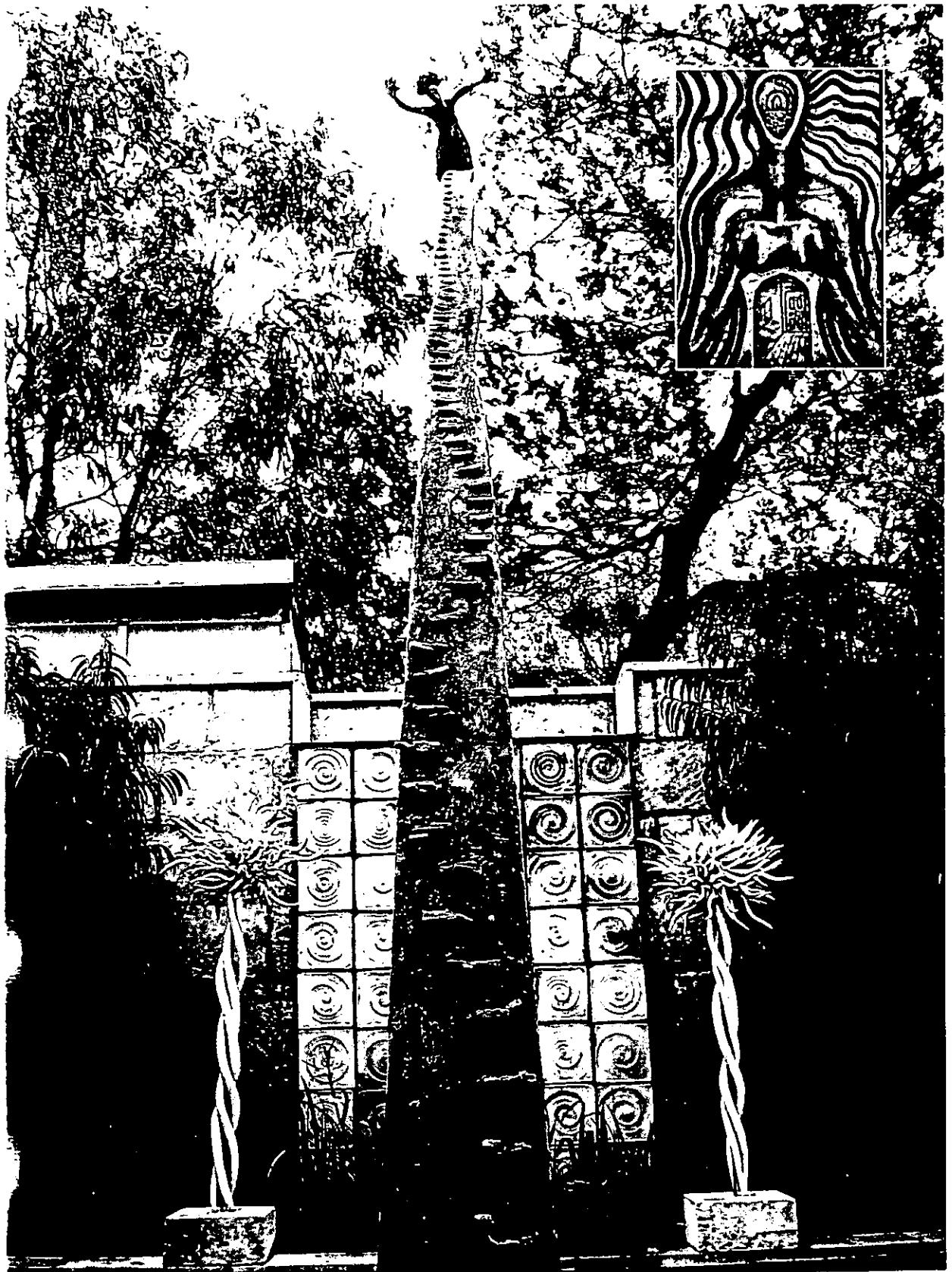
It will be interesting to see in what ways the enforced separation announced by the disbanding of the group will have on these six artists. Most likely it will act as a catalyst for new work that pushes at boundaries already identified in their current practice, but the courage to take those steps was generated in part by the community of support they have created around themselves. Creative practice is essentially a solitary engagement so the support of friends and colleagues is essential. It has certainly worked well for 'Thermal Shock' over the past 12 years and seven exhibitions. Let us hope they can find something to replace it.



Ted Snell is Professor of Contemporary Art at Curtin University of Technology in Perth, WA, and Dean of Art, John Curtin Centre. He is Chair of Artbank, the federal government's art lending agency and a Board member of the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA). An artist and writer who contributes to many journals, he is the Perth visual arts reviewer for *The Australian*. The exhibition was held at Gallows Gallery in September/October, 2003. Email: dianne@gallowsgallery.com
Photographs: Victor France.

Below: *Dee Jaeger. Summit in Stilettos. 2003. Detail of figure. 30 x 30 x 255 cm. Above: Graham Hay. Bound. 2003. 38 x 27 x 24 cm.*





*Dee Jaeger. Summit in Stilettos. 2003. Full view in courtyard. 30 x 30 x 255 cm.
Inset: Bill Jeffrey. Moving Toward Yourself. 2003. Bronze. 14.3 x 24 cm.*