



Photographs p24. Manesha Caldi for LOOKBOOK; p25. Adriaan Louw for Southern Guild (left), Alix-Rose Cowie for LOOKBOOK (right)



of the earth

As the ceramic movement grows, the medium redefines everyday fine art and documents the narrative of our time

Words / Tracy Lynn Chemaly

For centuries, clay has been experienced as a cultural craft. Ceramic pots and vessels found throughout the ages have existed as archaeological informants of distinct moments in time, indicating man's development, social evolution and creative capacity. These objects have captured thoughts, norms, skill sets and advancements, explaining history through their shapes, decorations, colours and uses.

The current pull towards ceramics seems to indicate our need to hold onto a story. With forms and sculptural shapes often defying any practical utility beyond decoration, we have become increasingly drawn to the narrative with which these objects are ingrained. Form has begun to supersede function.

Whether coiled by hand, finger-pinched or thrown on a wheel, there is a transmutation of energy that occurs in the making of such pieces; a dynamism that draws us in and is transferred when you come into contact with them. The transformative process solidifies and, quite literally, allows us

to touch intimate tales of ancestry, culture and home, told by storytellers such as Chuma Maweni, Andile Dyalvane, Madoda Fani, Zizopho Poswa and the late Nesta Nala, whose coiled and burnished traditional beer pots became prized collectors' items.

In the realm of dreamy organic creations, gazing at a delicate, ethereal vessel by Astrid Dahl is meditative, and it would not be at all surprising if it stimulated an autonomous sensory meridian response. Ceramic art possesses both an element of beauty and a praxis for pleasure. Ben Orkin's pieces blur amorphous and anthropoid characteristics in charmingly surreal vessels that look like they might stride off your mantelpiece. In the tilt of the neck of a vase, or the splash of a contrasting colour, Lungiswa Joe adds her signature personality and whimsy. The marks left by Ceri Müller's hands on her crinkled vessels artfully make them appear even more like something found in nature. And, as there is in nature, there's a celebration and acceptance of the imperfect.

Opposite 'Sea Candelabra: 3 Arms 2 Legs' in white stoneware by Jan Ernst. **This page** 'iMpepho' ('clary sage' in isiXhosa) in terracotta clay from the *iThongo* series ('ancestral dreamscape' in isiXhosa) by Andile Dyalvane, represented by Southern Guild. (Read about it on p215.) 'Xam se Kind' by Lungiswa Joe.



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Owning a fragile, handmade one-off feels like a statement of our desire to nurture that which is precious. You know if you manage to acquire a sought-after Jade Paton or Eva Ceramics vase that it's unlikely there'll be another one quite like it. In our homes, interaction with these ceramics allows us to create very personal narratives through the things we choose to live with. Utilitarian pieces are elevated beyond form and there's a sense of craving tactility and organic shapes just to look upon or hold. You might drink tea from a cup by Clementina van der Walt or you could simply display it on a shelf and admire it. There's an appreciation for the artisanal nature of the art form. Twirling spaghetti while cradling a voluptuous bowl by Alistair Blair becomes an experience.

Will it be that one day, when the archaeologists of the future discover the clay gems we currently cherish, and wonder about their abstract forms and utility, they might unearth our yearning for connection and story? ●

Clockwise, from top left 'uTatazala' ('father-in-law' in isiXhosa) in glazed stoneware and bronze, a one-off piece from the *iLobola* series by Zizopho Poswa, represented by Southern Guild. A gift from Andile to his family and elders when he revealed the *iThongo* collection at his homestead in Ngobozana. 'Veld Candelabra: 7 Tiers in Terracotta' by Jan Ernst. 'Definitely', resting on 'Inland Sea', both glazed pieces from the SS2020 collection by Ceri Müller. **Opposite** 'Cactus Candy' by Eva Ceramics for The Cosmic Crafters collaboration with Frances van Hasselt. (Read about it on p216.)

