

## *Domestic Bliss*

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Throughout history, women have shouldered the responsibility of the majority of domestic duties and household chores. They have had to cook, clean and look after the children while their male counterparts went out and work and were responsible for the jobs outdoors such as gardening and home maintenance. I wanted to explore this gender stereotyping in my artwork this year as it has long been a preoccupation of mine, and one I have never been comfortable perpetuating.

I started my journey by researching the many sexist 'throw away' comments boys and men use to subjugate and belittle women. I explored the predominantly text based works of artist Rora Blue, and was intrigued at her use of words and sexist quotes, juxtaposed with images of young, vulnerable women. This was something I could easily relate to. Her work consists of photographs of various parts of the body and added a poignant comment which sends a powerful message. After looking at her work I decided to create my own versions and see where it took me. To create my own version of Blue's work I photographed a friend. Using Photoshop I incorporated a blue and white background behind her. I then printed off the picture and wrote and quote on a white cloud that had been painted on. I realised this was certainly the theme I wanted to explore through my work, but I was dissatisfied with the media I was using. I considered a change in direction with the materials I was using.

I have always enjoyed making things, and have an affinity with clay and making ceramic vessels which I felt I needed to further explore. I researched the work of the New York based Guerrilla Girls, whose activism over many years has brought into the spotlight women's rights, not just in everyday life but in the art and media worlds. This led me to an investigation of 1950's advertising for household products. Many of the advertisements depicted women alongside various products with seemingly harmless yet fundamentally derogatory slogans. Many products such as vacuum cleaners were advertised as the perfect gift for the 'little lady' in a husband's life. After considering these advertisements, it gave me the idea to create everyday household items such as a bowls, vases and water jugs, complete with recurring symbols of traditional 'women's work'

Many artists inspired my collection of domestic vessels. The simple, pared back forms of Australian female ceramic artists Gwyn Hanssen Piggot, Kirsten Coelho and Prue Venebles hold enormous appeal for me. I incorporated this same minimal aesthetic into my own work, especially with my bowl and vase pieces in white clay. I was also inspired by the Surrealist works of artists such as Salvador Dali, Michelle Nikou and Marcel Duchamp. Their juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated objects to create sculpture gave me the idea to add items such as a power cord and broom bristles to my ceramic ware. On my vase I made small

holes on the surface before I fired it and inserted the bristles and glued them in place after it was fired. The ceramic work of figurative sculptor Liz Williams also provided inspiration for this piece. Her work on the virgin Saint Agnes who sprouted hair from her body helped me resolve this work. I feel this addition of other materials creates another dimension to my work, and hopefully invites the viewer to further consider the meaning behind the work. I hope it adds an element of humour to the work also, forcing people to think about the ridiculousness of traditional male and female jobs in the home in our modern world. Interestingly, these artists were all challenging our preconceived ideas of what art can be. I am asking people to reconsider their ideas about gender stereotyping.

Adelaide artist Helen Fuller also provided inspiration for my work, particularly with my 'Gingham Tea Set'. Fuller grew up in 1950s Adelaide and her work deals with what it meant to be a girl during this time in history. Her work deals with the male/female domains within the house and it often references gingham tablecloths and cross-stitch patterns, all found in the woman's domain of the kitchen. I painted a gingham pattern on my white teapot set I made from raku clay. The subtle texture of the clay and the pattern of the grid of the gingham provide a nostalgic feel to the work. I also painted small white crosses on the gingham pattern to resemble cross-stitch.

I made my water jug work in two parts using white clay. I decided to physically stitch the two separate pieces together to once again reference female domestic chores. I painted the jug in soft pastel colours using ceramic underglaze pigments, then used hot pink thread to join the two sections. This bold colour acts as contrast for the softer colours. I also hand-painted various domestic symbols on some of my pots. I once again used soft, pastel colours and decided not to glaze my work as I appreciated the matte finish of the bare underglaze pigments. When painting objects on my work, I investigated the hand-painted ceramics of artist such as Patsy Healy and Stephen Bird to gain inspiration and ideas about technique.

All my works are hand-built. I either coiled their forms or used slab construction methods. I enjoy the slow, therapeutic nature of creating works in this way. They are ancient, simple techniques yet I hope my works have a contemporary feel to them. They deal with issues which are still relevant today as women still do most domestic chores, even though they are often undertaking paid work outside the home as well.

I wanted my works to be subtle and gentle enough to convey my message, without being too direct or preaching to the audience in an overt way – quite the opposite to the work of my original inspiration the Guerrilla Girls! The colour palette of soft pastel and subdued hues was deliberately chosen to convey this. These colours also reference those found on 1950s Tupperware containers and other kitchen canisters and objects from this time.