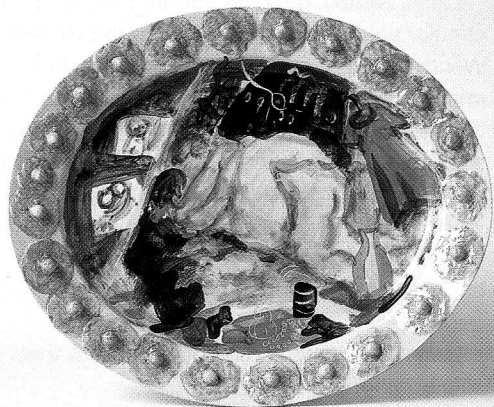


# wendy sharpe & janna ferris

LUCY BUTTENSHAW



Wendy Sharpe and Janna Ferris, *Too Many Nipples*, underglazes and coloured slips, h.43 x w.46cm.

## An interview with artist Lucy Buttenshaw

Artist Lucy Buttenshaw speaks to Janna Ferris (potter) and Wendy Sharpe (painter) over breakfast in Janna's studio in Erskineville in Sydney's Inner West.

**Lucy:** I enjoyed your exhibition of collaborative ceramics at Chapman Gallery in Canberra a couple of years ago. How did you come to work together?

**Wendy:** We've been friends for a long time and used to share a house. We've had various ideas about working collaboratively but it's only in the last couple of years we've thought of exhibiting a body of work. We have been able to see the changes and developments in each other's work which made it easier to empathise and communicate. It was really enjoyable spending days at Janna's studio working and swapping ideas. We have similar tastes in many things.

**Lucy:** Janna, What consideration did you have to make while designing ceramic pieces for Wendy to paint?

**Janna:** I wanted to give Wendy the opportunity to try different surface treatments – for example

working with wet or dry surfaces, carving or sgraffito and adding to the surface. It was important to find out what best suited her ideas and methods of working. Firstly I thought about flat surfaces for pictures such as plates, then we tried vases, jugs and later we worked on more relief pieces.

**Lucy:** Janna, what particular materials did you work with for this collaboration?

**Janna:** As Wendy uses a lot of colour, I thought we could include underglazes, coloured slips, enamels, lustres, and maybe try to approximate in ceramics what Wendy does with paint.

**Lucy:** Wendy, did you find the materials similar to what you usually work with or was it a difficult transition?

**Wendy:** Janna introduced me to ceramic pencils and crayons. I was fascinated that the effect when fired is so like charcoal and artist crayons, its amazing. The drawing on the plate, it's me and Janna in the studio, ceramic pencil and crayon looks like a charcoal drawing. There's the same spontaneity and gesture. I find it possible

to do almost anything with ceramics you can do with painting and drawing materials. It's always exciting to work in another medium because it can give insight into what you're doing, and make you think about it in a different way.

**Lucy: Wendy, did you find any limitations?**

Wendy: It's best not to try and impose restrictions on yourself, thinking you probably can't do this or that, but to come up with an idea and then find out if it is possible. The diversity of Janna's work is so inspirational that I realised we could do almost anything.

**Lucy: Janna, some of your recent work involves raised decoration, and it is interesting to see a number of collaborative pieces using this.**

Janna: In recent years I have been casting lots of fruit, vegetables and other assorted material to add as applied decoration to my own work. My patterns and ornaments are fairly orderly and precise. Wendy commented that the cast figs I was applying to one of my plates looked like nipples, so we cast a real nipple and used it as a repeated decorative border for the platter *Too Many Nipples*, when Wendy started adding to a surface with clay, I loved her lively and spontaneous approach. It was inspirational and something to aspire to in my own work.



**Lucy: Wendy, how did you find working on circular shapes and on objects in the round?**

Wendy: It was an interesting challenge to adapt images onto three dimensional objects. I needed to consider the whole form rather than imposing something on it that may have been designed for a two dimensional surface. When you are working in the round the image can be continuous rather than confined by a frame but basically I'll paint on anything.

**Lucy: Janna, what did you gain from this collaboration?**

Janna: I was taught the skill of making pottery at a time when there seemed to be a rigid set of ideas about how you approach ceramics. Working with Wendy made me realise what I'd always suspected, that there are no rules. Wendy sees things I don't. Under her influence, I feel I have learnt to see more, or take more in.

**Lucy: Wendy, did you look at the work of other painters who have worked with clay?**

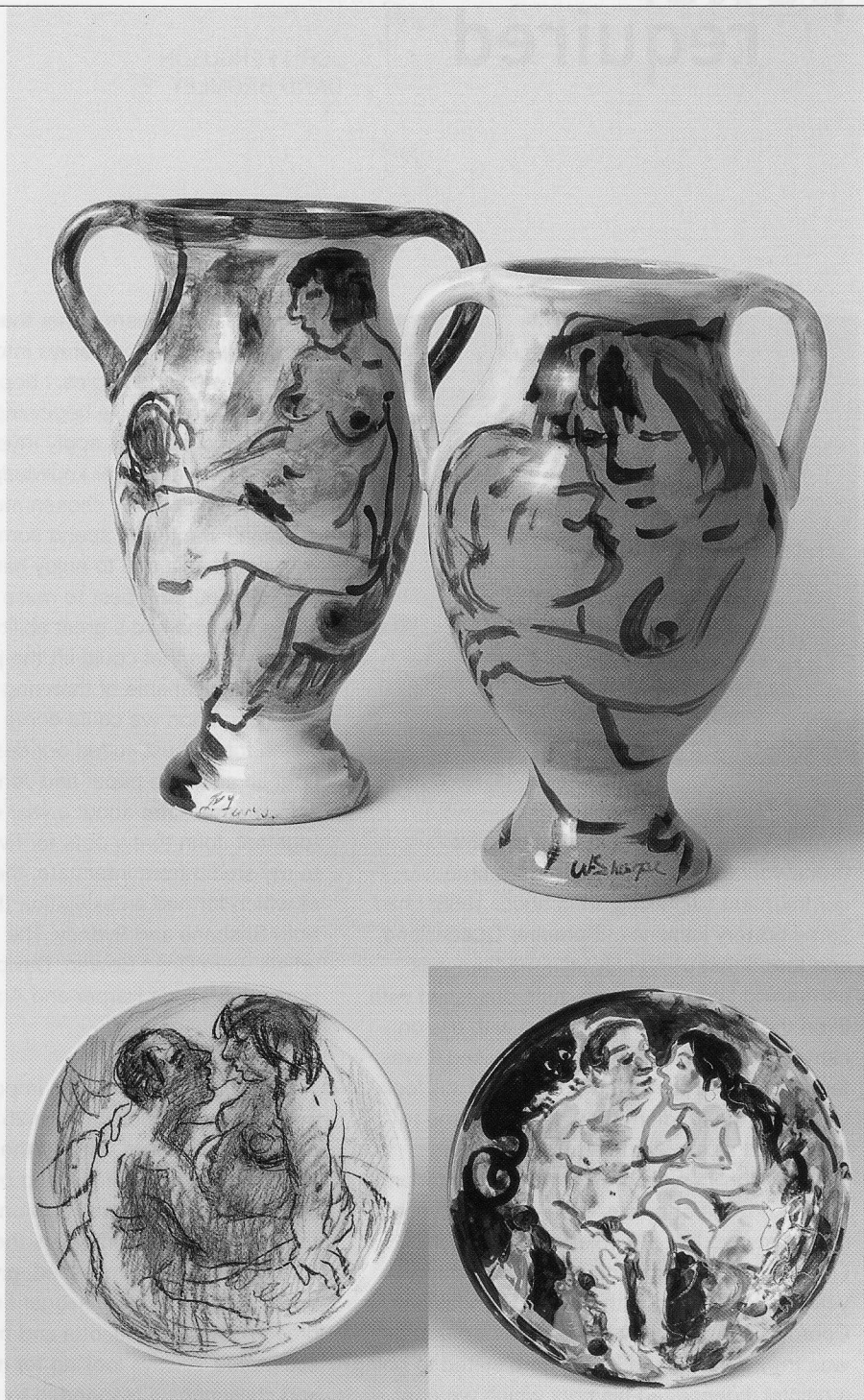
Wendy: Janna and I stayed at the Cite International des Arts in Paris a few years ago. We went to the Picasso Museum and looked at the ceramics. We also saw wonderful ceramics in Turkey. I think Chagall's ceramics are great too. There are quite a few others but you don't see that much. It is not well documented. It is something that many painters are interested to explore.

**Lucy: Do you intend to work collaboratively in the future?**

Janna: Yes, possibly including some sculptural objects.

Wendy: I find it extraordinary that a drawing on a pot would sell for a fraction of the price of the same drawing on paper, but it is such fun working together, I can't wait to do some more.

Photos: Michel Brouet



Clockwise from top: Wendy Sharpe and Janna Ferris, *Artists Model* vase, (left), h.28cm and *The Embrace* vase (right), h.27cm, underglazes and transparent glaze; *Man, Woman and Animals* plate, d.27cm, underglaze and transparent glaze; *Pregnant woman with man*, ceramic pencils and crayons, underglazes and transparent glazes, d.26cm. Facing page: *Woman with animals and man crawling away*, underglazes and coloured slips, d.27cm.