

THE STUDIO CERAMICS DINNER SERVICE SHOW

Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga

Peter Lange, Auckland

This exhibition of dinner ware and commercial crockery provided by the *Studio Ceramics Factory* and decorated or reconstructed by 17 of Auckland's top artists was officially opened with a speech by **Sir Tom Clarke**, driving force behind the *Crown Lynn* legend. He remains openly bitter about the demise of his company which has been crated up and sent off to South East Asia and the vast site bulldozed as flat as a level playing field.

He chose to blame its closure on the opening of the economic *Pandora's* box of the '80s and neglected to consider the catalogue of banality that the design team at the factory produced over the last 15 years.

One of the ironies of the show, and there were many, was that directly across the gallery as he spoke, was a dinner set decorated in a couple of days and hot out of the kiln, that could have saved *Crown Lynn* almost by itself, with its exuberant weathered timber and cow-skull design that would probably sell like hot cakes in the South West USA.

In some cases the basic ware was not up to a good standard with uneven casting, slumping and glaze runs and with dated profiles. This meant that the more refined work that went into some of the exhibits - finely detailed gold decals for example - lost some of the quality and substance obviously intended.

There were very few attempts at a conceptual approach - the bisqued surface as a canvas was the clear favourite, and there was irony in the one major sculptural piece being produced by one of this country's finest ever potters.

The concept of media-crossing is an interesting one and of course is not uncommon, from **Picasso** on down. However, it can often feel patronising to those involved with the medium that is crossed to, and is a bit like the *All Blacks* turning out for a charity match against the *Silver Ferns*. They mostly do not cope with the demands of the new discipline, but invariably show moments of ingenious, lateral thinking and rule-breaking before being comprehensively beaten.

In this case many of the exhibitors had no more than a month or so to come to terms with the technical problems of earthenware. That should allow some sympathy, but in an *Arts Council* funded show, and in a prestigious public gallery, there really is no excuse for such a high failure rate.

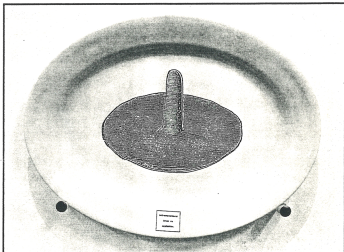
There are flashes of brilliance in the show, particularly from those previously involved with clay or glazing, but there are a lot of mediocre pieces and some inept. Leaping from one discipline to another usually requires quite a head of speed, and there is an awful pit to fall into without a decent run-up.

The *NZ Symphony Orchestra* should be allowed to do an evening of *Bon Jovi*, or the *Royal Ballet Company* a version of *Ladies' Night*, but until they are up to scratch it must be in their own time and at their own expense. The concept is not new, but is a good one and will hopefully be repeated, though with more favourable conditions - more time and greater quality control.

The potters of Auckland had little to fear during this year's invasion of their territory, but the seed has been sown and many of the exhibitors have admitted to being drawn to the medium. The combination of the *Ceramic Studio's* facilities and systems, and the abilities of some of the artists involved could see the renaissance of a new *Crown Lynn* type company. I'm sure Sir Tom would feel happy about that. ■



Carole Sheppard. "Promise of Pleasure". Gold transfers on glazed earthenware. Photo by Brian Kitchener



Fiona Pardington. "Donna Matrix" Transfer and glaze platters. Photo by Brian Kitchener

Richard McWhannell. Thirty-six piece handpainted earthenware. Photo by Anne Nicholas

