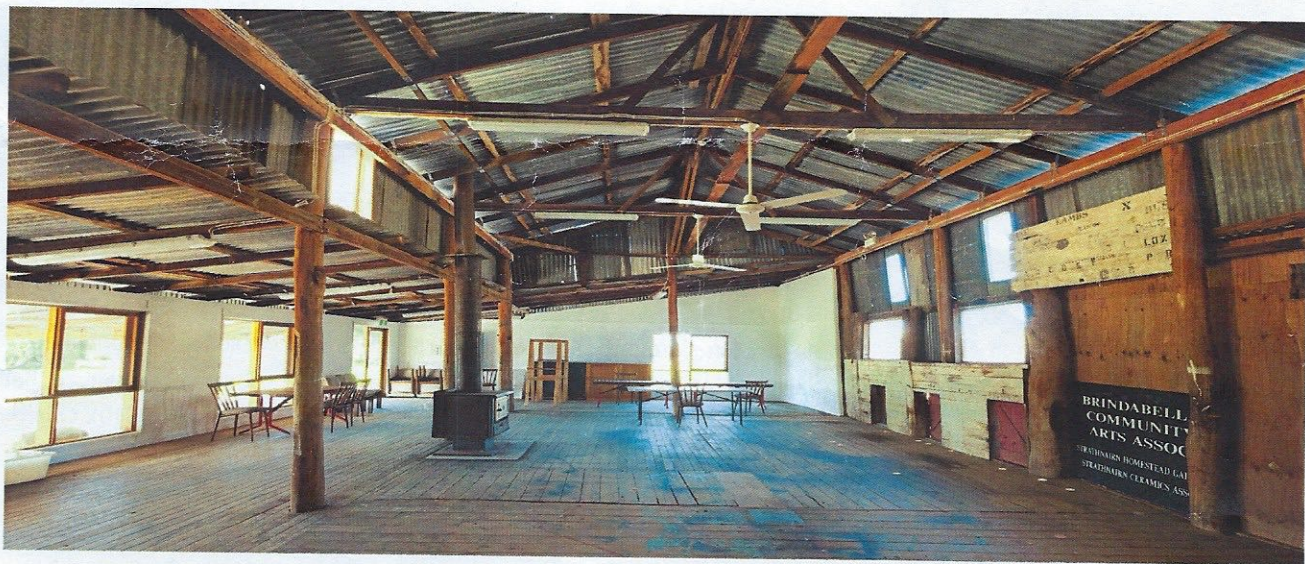


3 Sculptors. 3 Spaces

Shaun Hayes, Michael Le Grand
Peter Vandermark



3 Sculptors. 3 Spaces is an interrogative exhibition that investigates a selection of works by 3 local artists – Shaun Hayes, Michael Le Grand and Peter Vandermark. Each body of work is displayed in 3 (relatively) discrete spaces within the 1930s Wool Shed situated at the top of the property that is Strathnairn Arts. Each artist uses a visual language that marks his art as highly individual and hence the decision to place works by each artist in his own spatial area within the Wool Shed space. While these are essentially *separate*, the open spatial character of a wool shed means that there are numerous sight lines connecting each artist's works with that of his co-exhibitors. The decision to enforce individual and group engagement within the exhibition spaces was of course a deliberate one and one that announces the interrogative stance that binds the exhibition. As stated above each artist works within idiosyncratic aesthetic and conceptual modes and formally each embraces the challenges innate in the choice of materials. Hayes uses clay, Le Grand steel, and Vandermark found objects and materials more usually used variously as components of the built environment. While there may be formal congruities, even confluences between and among the various works these have more to do with accidental circumstance than purposeful selection. The thread that moves through each and all of these artists' oeuvre is the celebration of *the object* and the multivalent possibilities inherent in that celebration. Each capitalises on those possibilities with his own personal take and imbues his objects through *his* artistic persona, with *its* own persona, meanings, interpretative possibilities and ability to speak beyond itself.

Michael Le Grand

Michael Le Grand is one of Australia's foremost sculptors with an abiding passion for the aesthetic and expressive possibilities of metal and particularly of steel. He came from a family of artists (both his parents were ceramists). His tertiary studies were undertaken at the (then) Victorian College of the Arts (1972 -74) and St Martin's School of Art, London (1976-77). He had a distinguished teaching career and was Head of the Sculpture Workshop at the Canberra School of Art from 1999 to his retirement in 2007. He continues to work as a full-time sculptor from his studio just outside Canberra at Murrumbatmen. Le Grand's experience of studying in England with major figures such as Anthony Caro and Philip King had a significant impact on his practice and indeed continues to do so. Le Grand rarely works other than in steel and in this exhibition all examples of his work are in this medium. The earliest work *Forum* (1984) powerfully exemplifies his 1980s works when the exemplars of particularly Philip King and Anthony Caro and the latter's Australian champion, Ron Robertson-Swann, were important to his approach to sculpture. In *Forum* the ostensibly simple approach of interlocking and layering a number of metal plates produces a visually and aesthetically complex sculptural form. The linear geometries and planar expanses in combination produce a dynamic and energetic structure. The layering of the planes allied with the negative spaces, conversely at once intrusive and apposite, activates the spatial configuration and induces the viewer to move around the work, testing positives and negatives, solids and voids, and the unifying surface treatment (here, rusted steel). The latter is for Le Grand an element throughout his practice that is an integral and determining factor in the resolution of each work.

Recent works (here post 2013) see the artist using colour to great effect. Colour is never simple decoration but rather a means to further consolidate the aesthetic resolution that so characterises Le Grand's art. *Vibe* (2013) is a powerful and confident work whose sculptural mass is, as often in the artist's work, beautifully underscored by the introduction of the euphonious injection of colour, here a gloriously lush red. Colour not only assists in the articulation of the various formal components but also adds another expressive layer, imbuing not only emotive qualities but reinforcing the elision of these with the essentially abstract nature of Le Grand's sculpture.

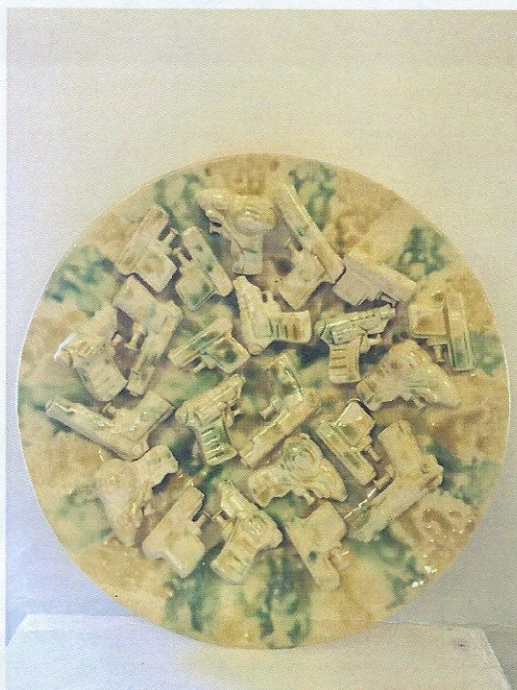
While solid substantiality is (often) a characteristic of Le Grand's formal apparatus a more open and languorous appearance is also present. In this exhibition a number of pieces exemplify this aspect of his oeuvre in delightfully playful ways. *Chortle* (2016) and *Chaise* (2018) appear as graphic delectations moving through their surrounding spatial configurations in ways that speak as much of linear explorations as they do of markedly 3-dimensional expressions. These formal opposites give an exquisite aesthetic tension to these works and add an extra frisson when they are seen in partnership with the declaratively sculptural pieces such as *Vibe*, *Robe* and *As is*. Le Grand's sculptural vision remains an important if not essential ingredient within the polyphonic admixture that is contemporary sculpture.



Top: *Chaise*, 2018, painted steel



Bottom: *Couple*, 2018, painted steel



Shaun Hayes

Shaun Hayes graduated with Honours majoring in ceramics from the (then) Australian National University School of Art in 2013. He was awarded a residency at Strathnairn Arts in July 2014 and has been a studio holder here since that time. Hayes' practice is a multi-layered one. Visits to China during his university years (2011, 2013) had a profound impact. The aesthetic longevity and morphological eloquence of Chinese ceramics (especially as seen in the Shanghai Museum) have provided an extremely fertile basis for his own formal vocabulary. Examples of vessels whose origins lie in the traditional Chinese canon are clearly seen in the current exhibition. For Hayes however, august ceramic progenitors are only the starting point. His thematic interests lie in the elision of the traditional with the contemporary and in this coalescence commenting on the history of his medium, environmental and social issues, and on his own development as an artist. The language he chooses to portray this complex amalgam is quirky, humorous, witty and subversive. Viewers will do a visual "double take" as they are confronted with the multifarious accretions with which he populates the surfaces of his vessels. While these do have a decorative function, they are also intrinsic to the effective conveying of Hayes's comments on the issues alluded to above that are important to him and that imbue a subtle but nevertheless present gravitas to his oeuvre. In this exhibition references to problems around waste are cleverly and quietly inculcated through the inclusion of, for example moulded copies of the tiny bottles of soy sauce that are included in take-away sushi packaging (see *Plenty of fish*, 2019). Our *throwaway* society is pointedly judged here but in an incisive and strategic way clothed in the inclusion of the unexpected on a vessel whose historic origins are familiar to many. With the use of plastic forms such as the soy bottles, Hayes is also raising questions about the endemic use of plastic in contemporary society. While plastic is disposable, transforming it into ceramic gives it a permanence quite at odds with its original substance. Another example of the artist referencing the problem of waste disposal is *Throw me in the garbage* where the inclusion of a range of cast plastic bottles of varying purpose embellishing an elegant vase form, provides a sardonically humorous look at a very serious subject. Hayes often incorporates plastic toys into his ceramic confections. Works such as *Is it a bird? Stick with me* and *Big splash* (all 2019) exemplify this clever trope. As well as providing visual humour (a humour added to by the artist's slick use of titles) and further references to society's continuing adherence to the disposable, these speak of childhood and impart a level of nostalgia and innocence. The latter qualities are quietly subverted by the insidious fact that even as children the habit of discarding something once treasured for something new is instilled into us. The choice of Chinese ceramic forms embellished with contemporary plastic ephemera further exemplifies this. It would be fair to say that Hayes is an artist constantly developing. He has a measured understanding of his chosen medium and its ability to comment on its own history and on broader social and environmental questions. His personal visual language is already highly polished and articulate. The combination of humour, social comment, cleverly refined forms and a markedly sophisticated aesthetic gives Hayes's work a special edge.

Top: *Big Splash*, 2019, glazed stoneware

Bottom: *Throw me in the garbage*, 2019, glazed stoneware

Shaun Hayes is represented by Stanley Street Gallery, Sydney



Peter Vandermark

Peter Vandermark also has an association with the Australian National University School of Art. He graduated in 1989, majoring in sculpture but originally studying in the Graphic Investigation Workshop. He has an extensive exhibition record and most recently (2019) showed in New York at Olsen Gruin Gallery. His work is broadly concerned with the interaction between those great Modernist shibboleths – form and function. The intersection of these in domestic and public fora (viz. in design and architecture), has provided for him a turbulently rich source resulting in a thematically and aesthetically diverse and (subtly) didactic body of work. My use of the word didactic is a careful choice. While Vandermark's thematic origins lie in the preceding, his expression of these is a questioning celebration of the myriad varieties of how we see our world (and for the artist the built world and all of its parts) and how in the seeing we make critical evaluations of that world. There is also in his ways of expressing his vision, interpolations of particular periods in the history of art and references to individual artists. These reverberations cue us into not just particular likes and dislikes but also into an active critique of the history of art as understood and re-expressed by Vandermark. Here, the subversion of medium as seen in Hayes's work becomes a subversion of how we see what we see. Across his practice oblique and clever references to art history and contemporary practice insinuate themselves into each viewer's ways of seeing and looking. Works like *Navel gazer* (2019) present as interactive games, something with a degree of levity that allows immediacy of action and reaction. It is this, but it is also a vehicle to make us consider the way that we might be coerced into looking in particular ways. The interaction between viewer, artwork and maker is in this work posited as the concrete manifestation of the artist's conceptual premise – what do we see when we look at a work of art? Vandermark's incisive intelligence and wit are joyful companions in his art of comment and interrogation. He has expectations of viewer involvement that exhort Marcel Duchamp's dictum that it is the viewer who completes the work of art. Vandermark's invitation is one that we should all accept.



Top: *Sit up/ stand down*, 2019, found chair, mdf, acrylic sheet, acrylic mirror

Bottom: *Chateaux d'eau*, 2017, cast concrete, cast glass

Peter Haynes

Artistic Director

Strathnairn Arts Association

June 2019

Peter Vandermark is represented by Olsen Gallery, Sydney