

HONOR FREEMAN



Adelaide-based ceramic artist Honor Freeman is inspired by everyday domesticity in her work. From recreating in clay a lifetime in old, used-up cakes of soap to making Besser Blocks or light switches from the same material, Honor captivates with her faithful reconstructions of the ordinary. An exhibiting artist since she left art school in 2001, Honor has maintained this love of capturing something of the everyday lived experience.

Sera Waters in her catalogue essay *The Care-full Craft of Lifetimes*, beautifully captures the essence of Honor's work, *Soap Score*. "While art undertaken over long periods regularly attracts the label 'endurance', stamina and duty play equally important roles against the doubts and tiredness that inevitably hover near unforeseeable endpoints. Stamina and duty are less about enduring and more about personal obligation to repetitive rhythms. When these envelop the maker to become meditative, a kind of comfort can be sought and otherwise undiscoverable discoveries realised."¹⁸

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The outcomes of Honor's practice are indeed calming and meditative but the process of creating things of domestic ordinariness in porcelain is painstaking and requires that physical endurance to achieve perfection. Her studio is an uninsulated shed so weather often dictates when and for how long she works as the clay, too, is affected by the weather.

Despite this, the rhythm of making enables an accomplished artist like Honor to find a calm place of flow in her work, evoking a comfortable ease in making akin to the domestic comforts of home. An honest and simple beauty comes from using a humble material from the earth and using that to recreate ordinary, everyday objects.



HONOR FREEMAN ON MAKING

There are many things at different times compelling me to make. It's complicated and I'm not sure I always know. Perhaps it's because an idea never really feels resolved or finished. This feeling of dissatisfaction compels you to keep making. Fundamentally, I draw inspiration from the minutiae of the very ordinariness of everyday life, the domestic landscape that surrounds us; the humble, democratic and overlooked objects and routines we engage with daily. This could be the dust that collects under the bed, a certain slant of light, a chip in the lip of a favourite cup, or simply when there's time to reflect and ponder. It all holds potential and is a rich vein for the many metaphors of life. Being lost in the rhythms of making is like the in-between spaces of long-distance travel. It gives the mind space to 'dreamthink' and for new ideas to percolate. Sometimes I feel as though I am chasing the thrill of that moment when a new idea takes hold. Sometimes just the idea is enough. But mostly, it's getting lost in the processes and trusting in the intuitive making to realise an idea. Inspiration is everywhere if the conditions are right. The possibilities of clay seem endless, the oldest of materials, shaped and formed by human hands since time immemorial, and still so seductive and relevant today.

Within the work, I play with ideas of the changing of states from liquid to solid, and of the objects that engage with these states, like buckets, plugs, soaps and sponges. Notions of half-full and half-empty occupy corners of the work. As banal and zen as it sounds, for those fleeting moments when you are in a good rhythm in the studio and making, understanding the material, the weather, the processes, there's a particular contentment and balance to everything. Though this is often fleeting, as porcelain will remind you of its capricious nature, and when you open the kiln to surprise and disaster, enter frustration and striving to solve technical issues that cannot always be embraced as happy accidents.

And I guess when it boils down to it, I like to make stuff. When the body performs a series of carefully choreographed

and rehearsed movements and actions, developing a rhythm, in the private space of the studio this repetition offers a sense of structure to the day. It quietens the mind and informs the work.

I come from a family of makers, my mum is a fabulous seamstress, my nan could really bake, and my dad and grandpa tinkered in the shed in their spare time designing and constructing trailers and trolleys and other metal contraptions. Folk always making with their hands and doing. My high school art teacher took me to visit a local potter on a farm on the outskirts of the small rural town I grew up in. I recall realising that this was a possibility: producing things in a studio for people to live with and use and cherish.

Most recently I was completely consumed with making Besser Blocks (or Breeze Blocks depending on where you're from). Hand-building, using a slab method to make an entirely hollow form, was a scale and method quite outside the familiar for me. I carefully nursed the pieces through the drying stages, wrapping and unwrapping them, and moving and rotating them in the limited available sun for weeks on end. I programmed what I thought was a gentle and long firing schedule to ensure the final piece would survive, taking all necessary precautions, and still the initial pieces did not survive the firing. I opened the kiln to heartbreak and disappointment.

Clay is both humble and humbling. It can be temperamental in nature and if ever you think you have it figured out, it will remind you that there is still much to learn. After many discussions with other pottery folk in my local community, troubleshooting and problem-solving, I took a stab in the dark, made some changes and hoped for the best. Waiting to open the kiln from that next firing was filled with equal parts anticipation and anxiety. To coin a phrase "the waiting is the hardest part". Thankfully, I opened the kiln to success. Problem solved (for the moment), clay can be a fickle, beautiful beast.



BIOGRAPHY

Honor Freeman is an Adelaide-based artist whose practice involves crafting objects that belie their materiality and purpose. Honor completed her studies (with Honours) in 2001 at the South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia. Following graduation, she took up an associate position and later a tenant residency in the ceramics studio at JamFactory: Contemporary Craft & Design.

Honor's work has been curated into major exhibitions at institutions throughout Australia, including the Museum of Contemporary Art's Primavera 2007, TarraWarra Museum of Art, and Adelaide's Samstag Museum. She has undertaken international residencies at Guldagergaard, Denmark's International Ceramic Research Center and, in the US, at Indiana University's School of Art, Architecture & Design. In 2006 Honor travelled to Chile to exhibit and participate in The South Project and to continue her ongoing project on/off/on, installing slipcast porcelain light switches and power points clandestinely in public spaces.

The relationship with time is an important one. The activation of time as both process and aesthetic is integral to my work – time is transferred from the making process to the viewing. The making is an exercise of physical and mental endurance, making against the backdrop of life's demands with a young family. It is deeply satisfying and frustrating (in equal measure) to make. The studio offers a space to retreat and at times a space to stress. *Soap Score* in particular was an important work made when my youngest was still very little. I was in the fog of breastfeeding, and walking the floorboards at night. It's a work that feels significant to me, it's intrinsically linked with life and those early years of caring for babies – the grind and the magic. Moments in the studio was precious time for me; a retreat of sorts.

For *Obsessed: Compelled to make*, Honor Freeman's work is a ceramic work titled *Evaporate*.

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Honor has been exhibiting since 2000 and her work is held in numerous private collections as well as important public collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of South Australia, Artbank, Deakin University Art Gallery and Washington DC's National Museum of Women in the Arts in the US. Her porcelain works feature in the publication *101 Contemporary Australian Artists*, published by the National Gallery of Victoria.





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