

Honor Freeman

ordinary alchemy



WRITER: LEANNE AMODEO

odes to ordinariness

It's no surprise to discover Honor Freeman loves reading anything by Helen Garner. She's one of Australia's finest writers after all and can tell a story like no other. Honor would blush at the suggestion the things she loves about Garner's writing are actually the things that characterise her own practice. Yet it's often the case that our heroes tend to embody qualities like our own and every one of these standout qualities is there in Honor's work too. Not in words. But in form.

As a maker, Honor champions the everyday, the ordinary and the often overlooked. She does this with elegance and restraint, a pared-back expression that's as highly resolved as it is understated and an unmistakable ability to make multi-layered narratives appear effortlessly uncomplicated. While other artists have celebrated the common and utilitarian by re-imagining found objects, Honor meticulously crafts and expertly finishes individual slip cast ceramic pieces. Her collections of small-scale delicate porcelain sponges, buckets and soap fragments always truly delight instead of shock.

The sense of familiarity they evoke speaks to the minutiae of our lives and the simple things that connect us all. As Honor continues to mine the repetitious and mundane in search of subject matter, she also reminds us there's beauty to be found in unexpected places. For a season she cleaned hotel rooms and based a body of work on that. Then there was the Tupperware series, collections based on kitchen clutter and a collaboration with a Barossa Valley cheese maker.

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Her odes to ordinariness are about the nature of domesticity, about familial relationships, home and a sense of belonging. She's inspired by her own working class upbringing and an appreciation for those closest to her; the life she had and the life she currently leads. But there's also more to it than that. Time is a potent theme. It pops up again and again and with its passing, forms a greater narrative manifest as explorations of place and memory.

If it's possible to pinpoint the exact moment Honor began making, it would be well before any professional experiences and exhibitions listed on her CV. As a child she used to write stories about toothbrushes and in recalling her tales of Casper the Toothbrush, who adventured through drains and sewers, she remembers a work she made at university. The bright blue American funk-style vase covered in miniature sculptures of orange toothbrushes may leave Honor cringing, but she's the first to recognise its significance.

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Time has provided the opportunity to refine and perfect her skills. Porcelain is an unforgiving material and anything less than a masterful approach and technique will show. In his essay 'An Architecture of the Seven Senses', architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa considers the sensual nature of materials and the way they contribute to our sensory experiences noting how, "Natural material expresses its age and history as well as the tale of its birth and human use". Honor's new collection of clay besser blocks, stealthily taking the place of plinths, perhaps best embodies the tale of her practice. These objects have been painstakingly built by hand and their perfect fondant-like glaze belies the complexity of their making and the expertise and patience of their maker.

It's again subject to time and Honor has officially been mixing, pouring, moulding, throwing, sculpting and sanding for fifteen years now. Her current studio is nestled in between her house and garage; an otherworld of test pieces, newly fired objects, slabs of clay, buckets of slips and glazes, tools and objects drying prior to firing. Everything is perfectly ordered and covered in a fine film of clay dust, the reassuring memories of works past.

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Above: **Evaporate**
2017, slipcast porcelain, handbuilt stoneware, 59 x 27 x 24cm

Left: **Midden (bleached)**
2017, slipcast porcelain, 25 x 60 x 30cm (dimensions variable)



It feels like she's been here longer than two years. The space possesses a warm lived-in familiarity Pallasmaa suggests only comes through the unfiltered presentation of an accumulated history. In this respect, Honor's studio is an open book of vignettes with slip cast moulds telling the story of moving from house to house, a charmingly makeshift sink that looks like it might groan out loud but continues to faithfully serve its maker and a small kiln the site of many doings (and a few undoings). To fresh eyes, it's a magical place and there's indeed magic to be found here.

Honor isn't turning mercury into gold, but she is practising a particular type of alchemy no less fascinating.

Here the act of making itself is Honor's philosopher's stone. That point where liquid becomes solid, when fluid clay is poured into the custom plaster mould and all the moisture is sucked out, leaving a small hollowed form in the shape of soap. Honor calls them 'ghost objects'. And their precious artisanal fragility gives them new life, sitting alongside stacks of fired blue slips left in buckets or candy coloured sponge works, which remember their shape in porcelain after the material sponge itself has disintegrated on meeting the kiln's heat.

Honor's approach has always been based on experimentation, yet nothing in her practice feels random and her longevity attests to that. In the studio, her relentless investment is measured by the rhythm of her making, where everything becomes a carefully choreographed action of movement, rehearsed endless times over. The spill from the bucket is a reminder of what was and the jar's silver lining is the promise of what's to come.

www.honorfreeman.com



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sabbia gallery

Honor Freeman is represented by Sabbia Gallery
www.sabbiagallery.com

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Above: **Next to godliness**
 2017, slipcast porcelain, 34 x 34 x 2.5cm

Cover: **Saturate (acid to alkali)**
 2017, porcelain, 30 x 168 x 2.5cm