

# HONOR FREEMAN

*Ebb*



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ART



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IMAGES > [Front cover] Honor Freeman, *And the tide rises, the tide falls*, 2022, porcelain, stoneware, enamel bathtub, 94 x 152 x 76 cm. Image courtesy of the artist. Photograph: Sam Roberts.

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IMAGES > Honor Freeman, *Soap + Sponge study* [installation view], 2022, porcelain, 13 x 20 x 2.5 cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

# HONOR FREEMAN

## *Ebb*

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*"Tears are the most substantial and yet the most fleeting, the most obvious and the most enigmatic proof of our emotional lives."*<sup>1</sup>

*Ebb* is a solo-exhibition by South Australian based, ceramic artist Honor Freeman, that showcases a new series of intricate porcelain sculptures. Featuring a bathtub, plugs, soaps, sponges and an intriguing series of vessels including rain gauges and buckets, the exhibition explores water as a potent metaphor to describe our fluctuating and often turbulent emotions.

The works evolved from a research residency, called The Collections Project, undertaken by the artist at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2018-19, facilitated by Guildhouse. Freeman became intrigued with

a particular item in the collection; a delicate Roman glass flask from 2nd century AD. The form resembled that of a vessel known as a lachrymatory, or tear flask. Much mythology surrounds these objects, including their function in grief and mourning. They were found in Greek and Roman tombs and were thought to hold the tears of loved ones. In her research, Freeman discovered that this theory has been debunked in recent times, "but the poetry of objects collecting tears and being buried with the dead is a potent idea that resists being extinguished".<sup>2</sup>

The exhibition presents work that has been made as part of the artist's own mourning process following the death of her father. Titled *All the tears I cried*, the series of cast porcelain buckets, each seemingly full to the

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<sup>1</sup> Lutz, T. *Crying The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*. W.W. Norton and Company, 1999, p.29

<sup>2</sup> Freeman, H. Exhibition statement, April 2022.



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IMAGE > Honor Freeman, *And the tide rises, the tide falls* [detail], 2022, porcelain, stoneware, enamel bathtub, 94 x 152 x 76 cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.



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IMAGE > Honor Freeman, *All the tears I cried* [detail] [Installation View], 2019, porcelain, dimensions variable.  
Photograph: Shelley Xue.

brim and gleaming with a watery pearlescent sheen, are a tribute to the tears shed from this loss. Freeman has written, "The porcelain buckets represent my own personal grief and the manner in which it manifested in public and private spaces following my father's death. I'm attempting to make sense of and measure the immeasurable."<sup>3</sup>

The mysterious nature of tears is repeated in most texts exploring the subject. From biological, physiological, philosophical and sociological investigations, and within many other lines of enquiry, conclusions are tempered with a lament that more is not known about why we cry. Despite our lack of ontological knowledge about this phenomenon, tears are still one of the strongest and most affecting demonstrations of emotion. Perhaps tears are one of the main reasons that the language used to convey emotional states is frequently linked to water. We have outpourings and waves of emotion, we drown our sorrows, well-up, produce rivers and floods of tears and just sometimes we manage to keep our heads above water.

Freeman has masterfully employed everyday items, such as the bathtub and pillow, to convey a mixture of sorrow and solace, drawing on an intuitive and highly evocative visual vocabulary of sadness and relief. Crying is commonly believed to be a form of purging or purifying and a way to release overwhelming emotions. Similarly, a long bath can bring a sense of both physical and mental cleansing, a comforting ritual of self-care. Intimate, private and quiet, to be immersed in warm water is an innate antidote to pain.

The ready-made bathtub is mounted on Besser blocks, as if trying to escape a flood, which is curious as its normal function is to be filled with water. The poignant personification of the bathtub is clear. We often resist our own floods (of emotion), whilst being full of water (tears). The bath's ebbs and flows are evidenced by the tide lines applied to its interior surface. The water has receded, yet the marks of its presence remain. Around the bath the residue left shows just how high the water came.

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<sup>3</sup>Freeman, H. Exhibition statement, April 2022.



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IMAGE > Honor Freeman, *These tears* [Installation view], 2022, porcelain, 23 x 90 x 4 cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.



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IMAGE > Honor Freeman, *Reservoir of tears. Sandbag for a flood* [Installation view], 2022, stoneware, lustre, gold leaf, 13 x 52 x 36 cm (approx). Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

We all have such tide lines, measures of our sorrows, the innumerable signs of life's downpours. Similarly, tears themselves can be an indication of the level of someone's emotion. As James Elkin has written, "when there are no tears, there is no way to gauge the depth of a person's feeling."<sup>4</sup> or as, in his reading of Descartes, Tom Lutz concludes "The more loving we are, the more prone to tears".<sup>5</sup>

Freeman's practice is soaked in the deepest of emotion. Tears were even cried in making the work itself due to the risky nature of firing clay and the inevitable failures along the way. The fragility of the porcelain also reflects the all too easily damaged human psyche. A small, precarious stack of soaps and sponges sits on the edge of the bath, which could easily be swept away should the foreboding flood arrive.

Freeman's technical process in making the works is also highly symbolic in its relationship to water and the capacity of liquid to be transformative. The artist has written, "I harness the mimetic qualities inherent in clay through the magic of slip

casting. The works playfully interact with ideas of liquid made solid. The porcelain casts echo the original objects; the liquid slip turns solid forming a skin and becomes a precise memory of a past form. A ghost."<sup>6</sup>

The pearlescent pillow, titled *Reservoir of Tears*. *Sandbag for a flood*, was the last work made in preparation for this exhibition. Freeman made three pillows in the hope that one of them would come out of the kiln intact. The pillow appears like a large magical liquid form contained only by its own meniscus. Drenched in tears perhaps, this exquisite work demonstrates Freeman's immense technical skill as well as her capacity to capture comfort and vulnerability in her work and to transform humble items into objects of bewitching beauty.

For all its liquid content and the confluence of references to the transience of human existence, there is something solid and reassuring about Freeman's work. These soaps will never dissolve. The bath is presented as dry, so for now the plugs lay in an unused pile and the soaps and sponges remain balanced. The tears are contained in



IMAGE > Honor Freeman, *And the tide rises, the tide falls* [Installation view], 2022, porcelain, stoneware, enamel bathtub, 94 x 152 x 76 cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

<sup>4</sup> Elkins, J. *Pictures and Tears*, Routledge, 2004, p.38

<sup>5</sup> Lutz, T. *Crying The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*, W.W. Norton and Company, 1999, p.75

<sup>6</sup> Freeman, H. Exhibition statement, April 2022.

their buckets, with an empty bucket waiting under the bath in case it should need to be drained again. The tide has ebbed, the deluge has subsided. Freeman's work is a gentle reminder that in moving through grief, small daily tasks can take us, moment by moment, into a time of less suffering. In washing our faces and cleaning our bathrooms, we can watch the water slowly circle and disappear down the plughole.

Juliette Hanson  
Curator, May 2022

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Elkins, James, *Pictures and Tears*, James Elkins, Routledge, 2004

Lennartz, N. *Tears, Liquids and Porous Bodies in Literature Across the Ages*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022

Lutz, T. *Crying The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*, W.W. Norton and Company, 1999

Schwenger, P. *The Tears of Things Melancholy and Physical Objects*, University of Minnesota Press, 2006



IMAGE > Honor Freeman, *Small comfort* [Installation view], 2022, stoneware, 34 x 18.5 x 5 cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.



IMAGE > Portrait of Honor Freeman in the studio, 2021. Image courtesy of the artist. Photograph: Alex Beckett

## HONOR FREEMAN

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Honor Freeman is an artist living and working in the Fleurieu Peninsula on Ngarrindjeri land in South Australia. Freeman completed her studies in 2001 at the South Australian School of Art. Following graduation, Freeman took up an Associate position and Tenant residency in the ceramics studio at Jam Factory Craft & Design. Her work has been curated into major exhibitions at institutions throughout Australia, including the MCA, Tarrawarra Museum of Art and The Powerhouse Museum. She has undertaken international residencies at Guldagergaard, Denmark's International Ceramic Museum and in the US at Indiana University's School of Art & Design.

Exhibiting since 2000, Honor's work is held in numerous public collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Art Gallery of South Australia, ArtBank and Washington DC's National Museum of Women in the Arts. Her works feature in the publication *101 Contemporary Australian Artists*, published by the NGV, and the international publication *Ceramics Masterclass: Creative Techniques of 100 Great Artists*, by Louisa Taylor.

Honor Freeman is represented by Sabbia Gallery, NSW

<https://www.honorfreeman.com/>



# LIST OF WORKS

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*All the tears I cried, 2019*  
 slipcast porcelain,  
 dimensions variable  
 \$16,500

*These tears, 2022*  
 porcelain,  
 23 x 90 x 4 cm  
 \$3,300

*Soap + Sponge study, 2022*  
 porcelain,  
 13 x 20 x 2.5cm  
 \$1,100

*And the tide rises, the tide falls, 2022*  
 porcelain, stoneware,  
 enamel bathtub,  
 94 x 152 x 76cm  
 \$18,500

*Small comfort, 2022*  
 stoneware,  
 34 x 18.5 x 5cm  
 \$1,900

*Reservoir of tears. Sandbag for a flood, 2022*  
 stoneware,  
 13 x 52 x 36cm  
 \$4,400

Melinda Martin – CEO + Director  
 Juliette Hanson – Curator + Exhibition Manager  
 Liam James – Gallery Manager  
 Shelley Xue – Design & Marketing Coordinator  
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