

From the collection



Back in the 1960s, most pottery thrown in New Zealand restricted itself to the natural earthy colour range produced by a standard, cone ten reduction.

This tendency was reinforced by visits from the great masters of that tradition. Bernard Leach visited here in 1962, and the Japanese gurus, Takeichi Kawai and Shoji Hamada, followed in 1964 and 1965 respectively. The “truth to materials” approach reigned in their wake. Serious potters did not dare to dally with brighter colours for fear of being cast into the realm of the lady amateur where gaudy lead-glazed earthenware was rampant.

One exception was Graeme Storm. Influenced by his Finnish father, he had begun making

pottery and building kilns at his family home in 1956. It was soon evident from his colour preferences that he was more interested in the peacock blues and other brilliant colours being produced in the Arabia factory in Helsinki than he was in the Anglo-Japanese brown which characterised New Zealand pottery at that time.

Teachers’ Training College was where he had learned to pot in 1955 at the age of 19. He felt his opportunities were limited in New Zealand, and after becoming an art specialist for the

Education Department he travelled with good friend and fellow ceramics enthusiast Howard Williams to England in 1959.

In London, Graeme Storm studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts and found work with the highly successful potter (and New Zealand expatriate) Kenneth Clark. Clark experimented widely with a spectral colour palette, and this background, coupled with a trip to his paternal country of origin, Finland, introduced Graeme Storm to the ways of achieving bright colour glazes on pottery fired at high temperature.

Convinced of the viability of pursuing a career with non-conformist ceramics, he returned to

New Zealand and became a professional potter in 1964 when only 28 years old. His stoneware pots with their copper barium-based glazes in intense purples, blues and greens created a sensation at his first solo exhibition at New Vision, the gallery opened by Dutch immigrants Kees and Albertine Hos in Queen Street’s His Majesty’s Arcade in 1965.

Graeme Storm’s wide knowledge of European and Oriental ceramics and remarkable craft expertise led him in 1971 to establish the Pottery Department at Auckland Teachers’ College (now the Faculty of Education of The University of Auckland at Epsom). It was here that a generation of trainee teachers first learned to manipulate clay. His ceramic mural at the Satellite Earth Station at Warkworth was produced in the Teachers’ College kiln, before he had completed the large two-chambered oil-fired kiln at his home in Browns Bay the following year.

Local and international success was immediate: works by Graeme Storm were selected for a survey exhibition of Ceramic Arts at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1972, and the Dowse Art Museum honoured him with a solo exhibition in 1974.

A retrospective of the work of Graeme Storm is currently on display in the foyer of the Gus Fisher Gallery as part of the suite of three ceramics exhibitions entitled *Playing with Fire*, mounted as part of this year’s Auckland Festival, and to coincide with the New Zealand Society of Potters’ annual conference, *The Big Smoke*, which will take place in Auckland 1-3 April.

Graeme Storm will discuss his practice with curator and Arts Foundation Laureate, John Parker, at the Gus Fisher Gallery on Saturday 9 April at 1pm.

Linda Tyler