

Vonney Ball

Text Helen Schamroth | Photographs Geoff Ball

Vonney Ball
Ceramics



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Introduction

Vonney Ball's light-filled, spacious studio is in a semi-industrial corner of Northcote in Auckland. The space is dominated by her ceramics and the tools and accoutrements of an established ceramics practice. One can tell that she loves tools, many of which date back to her childhood and student days in England. A number of unusual ones sit on her workbench, including a penetrometer, with which she can measure the depth of a glaze. Like many of these well-used objects, it was a gift from her father.

Multiples of pots at various stages of development populate the studio. These represent the main body of work that has characterised Vonney's oeuvre since her student days. There are indications that the pots are not the full story: two very large wire-mesh sculptures, the antithesis of her carefully crafted pots, occupy part of the central studio space. They evoke containers but also tell a new and different story, as do the drawings and paintings on the walls in her 'dry' area.

Carefully labelled test tiles reveal an ongoing reference 'library', as important as the shelves of books. One wonders what could become of these attractive objects, many of archival value only. The top of a cabinet is covered with a cluster of small hand-built, honey-coloured works that can nestle in the hand, each sporting a tall slender chimney, each exuding an individual personality. They are fresh out of the kiln and cooling. On one of many shelves sit the results of an earlier firing of these Chimney Pots. Made with an assured hand, they reveal Vonney's thumbprint, a gestural mark or texture, and her process, all of which is in stark contrast to the sleek, classically inspired slip-cast pots that fill shelves elsewhere in the studio.

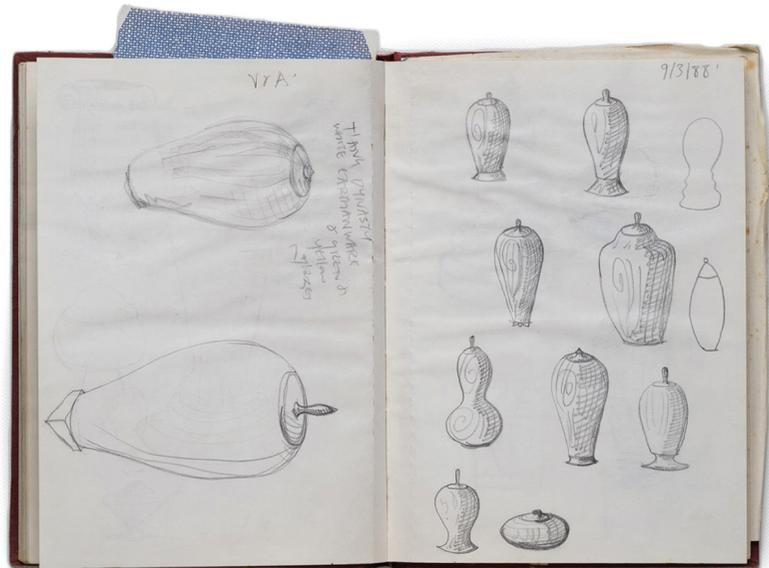
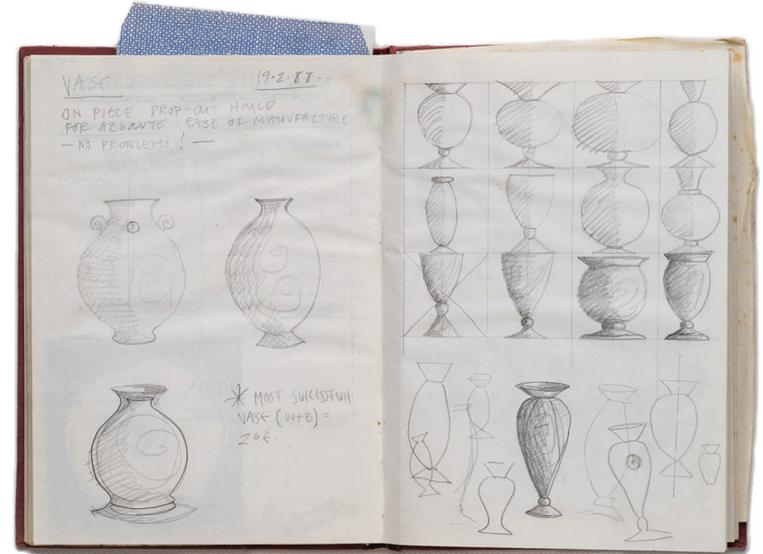
This could be any one of a number of ceramic studios in New Zealand, except that it is characterised by a significant range of pots with roots well and truly embedded in the ceramics design industry in England. Vonney Ball's output reflects a sound education in ceramics design, a practice that encompasses a number of art forms, a singularity of purpose and a drive to keep making work. The most comprehensive strand of her work, the one with the longest





history, has its origins in a range of plaster moulds she has made, and these occupy a significant space. Rows of slip-cast matching pots produced from these moulds are ready to be developed, each in its own unique way. It is the surfaces of these pots that tell her narratives; they reveal her ideas and philosophy and reflect her love of the multiple processes involved. And it is through the individuality of the finished works that Vonney expresses that sense of ambiguity which is located somewhere in the space where art, craft and design meet and overlap. The pots are designed as multiples in true ceramics design fashion, yet hand-crafting and individual personality prevail — this in an era when computerisation and industrialisation rule.

The elegance of these forms speaks more of a Eurocentric than a New Zealand heritage, which is easy to understand given her background. Twenty years on from her arrival in New Zealand, Vonney's work reveals how she continues to negotiate a path that connects cultural experiences from opposite ends of the earth. Some of the forms she creates remain constant, but their embellishment has taken on a different presence. They have developed and flourished in a unique way, leaving behind the tumultuous days of British craft industries when they were driven, manipulated and in many cases closed by the effects of Thatcherism. Now, more and more, her work reflects the joys and challenges of her new physical, social and cultural environment — a place she happily calls home. This book seeks to understand the origins and scope of Vonney Ball's oeuvre and the impact of migration on her practice.





MURRAY 1st JUNE :-

①



carving new shape
scaling up in size.
make a mold to cast up
shape.



Drill holes
in mold. / poke in
holes into cast
shape
then fired

② THROWN
PROJECTED
IMAGES



LOPP / QUICKTIME
COLLECTED IMAGES



③



skin-dip









Detail of *Settled in the Soil*. Slip-cast earthenware with rose detail transfers.