

Welcome everyone and thank you for coming.

Like the spirit of Christmas, the spirit of artistic endeavor frequently disappears in a cloud of commercial concerns, so in my opening remarks I want to refresh our awareness of the spirit in which art, especially ceramics, is made. If this sounds like I am delivering a lecture, I suppose I am, but don't get the idea that I am discouraging you from buying. Just pointing to the value of what you are buying.

Clay is the material that we take most for granted yet it is the one most deeply embedded in our lives. If you are lucky, the second thing you press to your lips in the morning will be your first cuppa in a ceramic mug.

Transformation of common clay into ceramic is **the** great gift and something akin to a miracle. The Bible tells us that God was a potter so I am sure when they remake the movie The Ten Commandments, starring Russell Crowe, truth will be revealed. Moses comes down from the mount, not with stone tablets, but tablets of stoneware - and the burning bush was actually a firing that just got a bit out of hand.

Clay is an immensely versatile material with a huge diversity of uses that renders it commonplace and therefore almost invisible. Clay suffers from its ubiquity. Not intrinsically precious, but just as we now decipher civilisations of the past traced on ceramics, it will be the durability of ceramics that tells our story in the future.

Clay is the material that has contributed more than any other to civilized development.

In skilled hands, the vast array of utilitarian things from bricks to fine porcelain.

In the hands of the skilled and knowledgeable, the science of clay is used in the silicon chip, the basis of our technological revolution.

In the hands of the skilled, knowledgeable **and sensitive** it is the material used for the creation of art of the highest order. - The pieces on display around you are the product of such a fusion of hand, mind and eye.

Importantly, each piece is unique and speaks of the character and individuality of the person that made it - a product of deep personal consideration - of trial and error - and the exercise of a highly developed critical sense.

I first met Joel at art school at Curtin University in the late seventies. They say a cauliflower is a cabbage with an art school education. We certainly didn't feel like vegetables. The Vietnam War had ended but the cold war was still on.

The trickle of interest in the crafts that started in the mid-fifties when my father was teaching had become a river and most of us thought we were hot – and cool.

Not Joel. Joel was the boy from the country. His feet were firmly on the ground.

Under the cloud of the cold war, something that unified us babyboomers was a desire to lift the facade of modern life and get underneath it to a stable truth. A truth and stability that could be found in the eternal constancy of earth, water and fire and for most of us that was enough.

Not for Joel. Joel is a classicist. His truth needs to be ordered and structured as well.

Clay has many qualities but tidiness and orderliness are not among them. That is where the drama and truth of this work resides.

In your engagement and appreciation of the work of this exhibition you will experience a classical constraint that pulls against the disorderly tendencies of processes that are not fully controllable. You will find principles of design applied in a way that sets up a tension between desired order and the unruliness of clay, glaze and fire. Constructed detail, upon constructed form, - with **rebellious** materials.

And it is within this balanced but dramatic tension we find a Mozartian beauty. Of satisfying harmonies within structure. Everything satisfyingly complete. A fulfilling unity.

Those of us that know Joel cannot be surprised by this. This work is a true mirror of his character. Disciplined, principled but within whom lives, in plain sight, the wild larrikin boy from the country.

Joel's search for truth and authenticity is a story of life where resolution is found, not in dissipating the forces at work, but in balancing them. The works in this exhibition are bookmarks in that narrative and we are here to share and enjoy the most recent chapter of that story.

I am very honoured to have played my part in the story and pleased to be asked to open this show. I unreservedly recommend Joel the artist and his work to you and declare this exhibition open.