

# The new DRYSDALE

***Internationally acclaimed ceramicist and sculptor Pippin Drysdale has turned her distinctive style on its head and come up with a tour de force in her exhibition of 250 new works, writes Sally Cox***

Early one crisp May morning a truck pulled up outside a tiny limestone cottage in WA's port city of Fremantle.

Its arrival marked the beginning of a new journey for one of Australia's most highly regarded international ceramic artists, Pippin Drysdale.

That evening, after several hours of hard, slogging work, the truck left carrying a valuable cargo representing a lifetime's work from Drysdale.

Along with some of the finest vessels from her three-decade career the truck carries 250 new forms signifying a major change in direction for the artist, who was recently honoured as one of just 10 Masters of Australian Craft by Craft Australia.

The new work will be unveiled to the public for the first time on June 22 at the John Curtin Gallery in one of the IBT Education Australian Artist Series of exhibitions presenting major surveys of work by three leading Australian artists.

"This body of work marks Pippin's progression from ceramicist to sculptor, explained Professor of Contemporary Art at Curtin University of Technology, Ted Snell,

"It's a phenomenal body of work — 350 pots were carried out the door that morning," he said.

"I thought to myself 'how extraordinary that this comes from one person'."

Snell and his wife, artist Mary Moore, have spent many hours with Drysdale during the past 18 months nurturing the fragile self-belief of the artist as she produced what Snell describes as her greatest achievement.

Known for her elegant and colourful open vessels represented in private and public collections throughout the globe, Drysdale has literally turned them on their head in her new work.

Named for the Kimberley landscape that has been her inspiration, Snell says the 200 individual closed forms of the Kimberley Series are a tour de force.

"Each one is a small gem that requires close inspection, and together they coalesce into a vast panorama that is awe-inspiring in its scope and scale - just like the Kimberley itself," he says.

A risk taker in life and in art, Drysdale's career typically began with a bang.

Left with a pile of clay, a potter's wheel, a wood-fired kiln and a broken heart from a failed love affair, the single mother in her 30s set about restoring her emotional health by sitting down at the wheel.

"I knew nothing about clay but spent three weeks making terracotta coiled pots,," she recalls.

"I put them in the kiln, lit the fire, and the whole lot exploded.

"I thought to myself: 'This is ridiculous,. I better go and learn how'."

Enrolling at the then Perth Technical College she made her first bowl.

It was the beginning of an enduring romance, which saw her travel the world absorbing knowledge and inspiration from leading ceramic artists in Italy, Russia, Japan, and the US

"Right from the beginning I have always had a love of the pure form of the vessel," she says.

"The form goes back to the ancient traditions of the Japanese tea bowl."

With a personality as big, bold and colourful as her pots, Drysdale has always been one to rise to a challenge. Again with aesthetics of the Japanese tea bowl in mind she chose to work with the most difficult of all mediums — porcelain.

"It takes a massive amount of preparation, is hard to throw and requires restraint and discipline — completely at odds with my personality!" she laughs.

Porcelain provided the perfect canvas for Drysdale's extravagant and inspired use of colour.

For two decades she explored, sought inspiration and developed her technique to produce the big, colourful, gravity-defying open porcelain vessels, which have become the signature of her more recent work.

But the risk taker sought new boundaries to push.

Drysdale explains:

"For seven years I wanted to do the reverse of my open forms.

"Inspired by the aerial photographs of Richard Woldendrop and the work of Aboriginal artists Queenie Mackenzie and Kitty Kantilla I strived to capture the essence of the Australian landscape.

Working with gifted thrower and long-time collaborator Wawick Palmateer, Drysdale constantly experimented, to achieve the elasticity and the strength in the raw material needed for the tall closed forms Drysdale had envisioned.

Finally the breakthrough came in early 2006.

The Kimberley Series was born.

Despite the difficulties encountered by the artist, the forms of the Kimberley series with their tangible link to the striped mounds of the Kimberley's spectacular Bungle Bungle ranges seem a natural progression from Drysdale's earlier Tanami and Pinnacles series. Snell believes the launch of the series at Curtin will offer a rare opportunity to see the Drysdale's works as a whole.

"Most often sales from national and international exhibitions disperse works from an artist's series before they can be seen in total," he says.

"As a group the closed forms of the Kimberley Series are like a topography of the land, each relating to one another and the whole.

"This is a rare and wonderful opportunity to see the flow of ideas, the rich play in shape, line and colour and the passage of light across the surfaces that together recreate a series of snapshots brought together to document the artist's vision of the Kimberley."

A beautifully illustrated book by Ted Snell will be launched in tandem with the Kimberley Series Exhibition.

Published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Pippin Drysdale Lines of Site explains the influences and traces the evolution of Drysdale's work as she grew from rebellious child to artist of international repute.

Books can be ordered on-line at [www.fremantlepress.com.au](http://www.fremantlepress.com.au).