



STEWART SCAMBLER

F R A G M E N T

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery
5 May – 18 August 2018

Stewart Scambler: Fragment

Stewart Scambler arrived in Perth from Manchester in 1956, at seven years of age. The Australian landscape made an immediate impression on the young boy, no doubt heightened by contrasting memories of a city still in recovery from wartime bombings. A fascination with the natural world has been central to Scambler's work as a potter for over 40 years.

A talented science student, Scambler attended the University of Western Australia on a Commonwealth Scholarship in the late 1960s but found his true calling when he began to study ceramics at Fremantle Technical College in 1973. The analytical and technical aspects of the potter's craft intrigued the scientist in Scambler. His passionate interest in 'how the world works' led him to build a kiln before he had even commenced his art studies.

At art school Scambler was mentored by teachers Heather McSwain, who inspired an appreciation of ceramic traditions from across the globe, and Michiko Love, who introduced students to the enduring forms and principles of Japanese ceramics. Scambler travelled to Japan in 1986 but did not undertake an apprenticeship there, as did many potters from Australia, Europe and America at the time. Rather, he was increasingly interested in making pots that reflected the experience of being in Western Australia.

Scambler developed a working method such that his vessels, in both a material and visual sense, are of this place. His clay bodies and the constituents of his glazes are largely sourced from the local environment, and wood

used in the firing process is from trees native to Western Australia. His pots take on the earthy, muted colours of the local landscape, from which they are made. Respect for the land is at the core of Scambler's art practice. Up to one hundred trees are planted annually on Scambler's property at York, in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia, to replace those used in the firing process.

Scambler has been wood-firing at York since 1995. He describes the labour-intensive process of wood-firing as a 'commitment to a lifestyle',¹ which involves chopping and stacking wood, and monitoring the temperature and kiln atmosphere over the several days of firing. The kiln can only be unloaded after cooling down for a week, and even then some work requires another firing, or further layers of glazing, to achieve the right effect.

Firing with wood, as opposed to the more predictable results of a gas or electric kiln, means the artist must relinquish some control. The pots are affected by the subtlest changes in the kiln during firing. A certain equilibrium, as well as determination and optimism need to be maintained in the mind of the potter. As Scambler notes, no matter how meticulous the organisation of a firing, 'Some control is always given away when I fire with wood. It's a risk, but one I am prepared to take for once in a while the results transcend what I obtain purely from experience and knowledge'.²

This exhibition presents a new body of work – a striking assembly of large-scale sculptural forms and murals, inspired by the artist's journey through the Pilbara and Kimberley regions of Western Australia in 2016. Rather

than imitating natural phenomena, the works convey aspects of these vast landscapes, often in abstract form. As the artist notes, 'The land is so large that moving through it means that we can only experience and remember a small fragment at any time'³.

As Scambler explains, the tiles in *Fragment I* reflect the desert earth – 'dry, textured, wide and brown'; *Fragment II* recalls gorge walls and the hard-edged hills – two of the forms 'are almost sail-like to echo the journey that the land takes us on', and the smaller third form 'is a remnant, mined and reduced'; *Fragment III* is inspired by the Kimberley and the Ord River, and highlights the significance of water in arid country. The groups of vessels, *Sentinel Bottles* and *Travellers*, represent the presence of people; and *Offering* shows a bowl reflecting the colours of the land, and which holds dust from Scambler's journey.

Sally Quin
Curator
The University of Western Australia Art Collection

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1. Stewart Scambler, interview with the author, 11 July 2017.
 2. Artist statement at <http://www.stscambler.com.au/woodfired/>
 3. Artist email correspondence with the author, 10 April 2018.



STEWART SCAMBLER FRAGMENT

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Image credit:

left: Stewart Scambler, Trowellers, 2017, wood-fired stoneware, hand-blended clay from local materials (York and Beverley)
right top: Stewart Scambler, Sentinel Bottle, 2017, wood-fired stoneware, hand-blended clay from local materials (York and Beverley)
right below: Stewart Scambler, Bottles, 2017, wood-fired stoneware, hand-blended clay from local materials (York and Beverley)



Work displayed following a firing at York, Western Australia, 9 July 2017

LIST OF WORKS *

Fragment I, 2017-2018, wood-fired stoneware, hand-blended clay from local materials (York and Beverley)

Fragment II, 2017-2018, oxidised stoneware, manufactured clay from Kalamunda kaolin

Fragment III, 2017-2018, oxidised stoneware, hand-blended clay from local materials (York and Beverley)

Sentinel Bottles I, 2017, wood-fired stoneware, hand-blended clay from local materials (York and Beverley)

Sentinel Bottles II, 2017, wood-fired stoneware, hand-blended clay from local materials (York and Beverley)

Travellers, 2017, wood-fired stoneware, hand-blended clay from local materials (York and Beverley)

Offering, 2017, wood-fired stoneware, hand-blended clay from local materials (York and Beverley), Australian desert dust

* All dimensions variable

The Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges the Friends of the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery for their support of *Stewart Scambler: Fragment*

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Cover image: Stewart Scambler, *Fragment II* (detail), 2017-2018, oxidised stoneware, manufactured clay from Kalamunda kaolin



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