

“Intertwined”, an exhibition by Taryn Walker and Shannan Jackwitz

The Write Gallery, The Lighthouse Toowoomba, 10th March - 5th April 2023.

The Write Gallery at The Lighthouse, Toowoomba is a white, light-filled space with an ambiance that envelops the intentions of the participating artists while revealing the artwork as both spectacle and meditation.

“Intertwined” the current exhibition, continuing until 5 April, comprises a collaborative installation by sisters Taryn Walker and Shannan Jackwitz. This impressive body of work introduces another aspect of the gallery space, its role as sanctuary: a quiet place of almost spiritual respite in which to contemplate, consider, and acknowledge personal associations through memory and experience.

The artists have combined the disciplines of ceramics and the textile arts in ways that reference the history of these modes of practice while producing individual statements of creative expression. Ceramics and textiles are some of the earliest means of documenting the development and survival of human civilization. Initially ceramic objects were used for storage and transport of commodities such as food and water. Later decorative elements determined different and specific uses. As belief systems explored the cycles of birth, life, and death clay shaped vessels of containment and reverence. Reliquaries to hold sacred talismans, urns, and funeral jars to keep safe the remains of the dead, and chalices for sacrament and sacrifice. Textiles too became more than fabric to make garments for warmth and protection. Textile skills created vestments and altar cloths, robes, curtains, tapestries, and rich carpets.

Walker’s uniform clay vessels have an elegant spareness that provides a perfect ground for her own painterly surface decoration. Many are incised with strategically placed holes forming an armature for the intricately detailed hand embroideries by Jackwitz. The long row of decorated vessels has a crypt-like resonance suggestive of the shelves of canopic jars shrined in an Egyptian pyramid. The imagery is symbolic. It pays homage to nature, legend, and folklore across different cultures. Keys unlock possibilities, the phoenix transforms into new energy, light illuminates shadows and dispels fear, truth offers reassurance, the dove placates the tiger, and Vesta, the goddess of home and hearth honours the familial. These vessels are the tactile embodiment of shared interests, but they are more than this, they honour the framework of values and a collective humanity that have shaped the artists’ lives. They offer a story about friendship, understanding, and unconditional love that goes beyond family connections and embraces the beautiful and spiritual connotations expressed by the Celtic words, *Anam cara* meaning “soul friends”.

The sense of intertwined lives, visual language, and creativity is epitomized by the four by seven metre wall installation. The woven wool with its linked chains and teased and carded hanks of fleece forms a cloud-like vision in nuanced tones of white and cream. Interspersed with the wool are ceramic chains made from dipping wool into a clay slip. The firing burns away the fibre leaving fragile ceramic

carapaces that form delicate and brittle chains of connection that become a metaphor for life itself.

This exhibition ticks the “must see” box. The atmosphere generated is reverential. It invites us to look deeply and carefully, to pause and consider, to imagine flurries of cello music, and to lose and find ourselves.

Sandy Pottinger

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