subject/object: the known known, the known unknown and the unknown unknown craftsperson.

Damon Moon responds to the collections of Shepparton Art Museum, Bendigo Art Gallery and the La Trobe Art Institute.

In 1972, an academic paper published The Unknown Craftsman, a small, originally written as a dissertation by the craft-bound genius Sono and later adapted by its first English translation by Bernard Leach. This research work, based on the Japanese potter, Shoji Hamada, completed an authorial triumvirate of enormous power and influence within the 20th-century craft movement, a kind of craft-theory ‘mansplaining’ on an unprecedented level.

As with the Arts and Crafts movement, movement, a reaction to the industrialisation that had developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where the prevailing theory of industrialisation and mass production was that the value of a product was measured in the speed of its production. This view was in direct contrast to the idea of a mass-produced ceramics, while at the same time being aware of the importance of the multiple within the wider field of contemporary art.

Another characteristic of vernacular ceramics is their role as markers of status. If the original post-war generation of Australian studio-potters chose to ignore the inherent value of traditional Japanese folk craft, the founding fathers of what is now known as Bendigo Art Gallery were also rather blind to the merit of this local work. They collected the finest European porcelain to grace their grand houses and bequeath to the public, while this other pottery – crude, lumpen, proletariat and made just down the road and brown wares used for wine and food, as housed in the collection of the Shepparton Art Museum. Closely following the materials and techniques of the originals, in contemporary reproductions serve as a bridge and are my acknowledgment of the value of our industrial culture.

In re-interpreting an object that by virtue of now being cast in a mould is made reproducible, I am introducing a sense of authenticity – an individual piece made as an art object, to the legacy of mass-produced ceramics, while at the same time being aware of the importance of the multiple within the wider field of contemporary art.

By incorporating certain items from the collection of Chinese ceramics at Shepparton Art Museum, I am following the techniques and influences of the mid-20th-century English artist-potter Robert Washington, which I originally designed for an exhibition at the JamFactory Gallery in Adelaide in late 2016. This vase was loosely modelled on a series of anthropomorphic ceramic forms by the mid-20th-century English artist Robert Washington, which he in turn had based on a famous 1700s so-called The Bather, made by William Staite-Murray, who had been Washington’s teacher at the Royal College of Art.

In addition, my work at the La Trobe Art Institute addresses a different set of criteria, namely the role of the building itself and how objects activate or inhabit the architectural space and perform a significant role within an exhibit and a metaphor for the spaces that contain and define aspects of our visual culture.

From occupying two historic museum display cases at Bolton Court within the original building of Bendigo Art Gallery to the large, vitrine-like display at Shepparton Art Museum, and then inhabiting the contemporary architecture of the La Trobe Art Institute, this work engages with the histories of these institutions by exploring how the anonymous, the under-valued, the vernacular and the built intersect with the self-conscious product we call art. The known (that which is already known and understood) and the unknown (that which is not yet known and understood) inhabit the contemporary architecture of the La Trobe Art Institute, this work engages with the histories of these institutions by exploring how the anonymous, the under-valued, the vernacular and the built intersect with the self-conscious product we call art. The known (that which is already known and understood) and the unknown (that which is not yet known and understood) inhabit the contemporary architecture of the La Trobe Art Institute, this work engages with the histories of these institutions by exploring how the anonymous, the under-valued, the vernacular and the built intersect with the self-conscious product we call art.

The Bather, made by William Staite-Murray, who had been Washington’s teacher at the Royal College of Art, is another example of an innovative and influential artist-potter. It is in this tradition that I have sought to work with a range of techniques and objects that I have chosen to work with in response to the collections held by the Shepparton Art Museum and Bendigo Art Gallery.

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subject / object.
Damon Moon
Shepparton Art Museum:
20 August – 11 November 2018
Bendigo Art Gallery:
10 October 2018 – 21 January 2019
La Trobe Art Institute:
10 – 14 October 2018

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Damon Moon wishes to thank Rebecca Grimes, Director of Shepparton Art Museum, for inviting him to realise this project across SAM, Bendigo Art Gallery and La Trobe Art Institute. His employers at the JamFactory in Adelaide, South Australia who have been very supportive in providing him with the time and facilities required to make the work, and the artists and staff of Bendigo Art Gallery for tasting pots to be included in the exhibition at Bendigo Art Gallery.

An exhibition developed by Shepparton Art Museum in partnership with Bendigo Art Gallery and La Trobe Art Institute. Subject / Object is a feature project of Artlands Victoria. Artlands Victoria, Australia’s largest regional arts gathering will be in the City of Greater Bendigo and Mount Alexander Shire from 10 – 14 October 2018.

www.artlands.com.au

SAM is proudly provided by Greater Shepparton City Council and receives operational funding from Creative Victoria, the State Government funding body for the arts.

70 Welsford Street,
Shepparton VIC 3630
p +61 3 5832 9861
e art.museum@shepparton.vic.gov.au
w www.sheppartonartmuseum.com.au
@SAM_Shepparton #SAMshepparton
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