



Rika Herbst Portfolio 2026

Rika Herbst is a South African ceramic artist, researcher, writer, and cultural producer whose practice explores memory, material culture, heritage, and cultural exchange through porcelain. She established her ceramic studio practice in 2003 and has since developed an internationally exhibited body of work characterised by texture, translucency, atmospheric surfaces, carving, piercing, and layered construction.

Her work is represented in institutional and museum collections in South Africa, China, Korea, Slovenia, Croatia, Portugal, and Romania. She has participated in international exhibitions, competitions, symposia, and residencies, including recent residencies at the Ding Kiln White Porcelain Contemporary Ceramics Art Centre in Quyang and Taoxichuan International Clay Studio in Jingdezhen, China.

Her 2026 Quyang residency marked a significant development in her practice. Working within the historical context of Ding ware, she developed *Layered Histories*, an ongoing body of research investigating how historical surfaces, motifs, and material traces can be translated into contemporary porcelain. *Chinese Zodiac Hierarchy* emerged as a pivotal work from this research and established a new direction towards larger-scale, layered porcelain forms.

Alongside her studio practice, Herbst is committed to developing ceramic discourse and cultural exchange. She founded ClayConnect, produces and presents ClayChat, and has contributed to the development of the South African Clay Awards. Her writing includes contributions to *Studio Potter* and forthcoming writing for *New Ceramics* magazine.

She holds a BA in Art and Ancient History and a BA Honours in Ancient Near Eastern History, both from the University of South Africa, and is a member of the International Academy of Ceramics.



Artist Statement

I use porcelain as a way of holding memories and traces of cultural histories. I am drawn to textures, patterns, imprints, architectural details and decorative elements. The small physical traces that connect us to places, people and the past. Through layering light, material and form, these fragments are carried forward, shifting between what was and what is.

Through imprinting, moulding, carving, piercing, and layered construction, I translate these references into contemporary porcelain forms. Rather than reproducing historical objects, I fragment and reconstruct their surfaces, allowing familiar elements to become part of new sculptural languages.

My recent residency at the Ding Kiln White Porcelain Contemporary Ceramics Art Centre in Quyang, China, marked a significant turning point in this practice. Working within the historical birthplace of Ding ware, I developed *Layered Histories*, exploring the relationship between inherited ceramic traditions and contemporary material expression. *Chinese Zodiac Hierarchy*, created during the residency, became a pivotal work within this research.

I am now extending this investigation towards a broader exploration of material culture and cultural memory. I am particularly interested in historical artefacts, textiles, architectural fragments, and culturally significant objects as sources for new porcelain surfaces. The work is developing into larger sculptural cylinders and vessels, wall-based works, tiles, plates, and installation-scale forms.

I see each work as a tactile archive: layers of material, history, interpretation, and time brought together in a contemporary object. Through porcelain, I explore how histories are preserved, transformed, and continually reassembled, creating connections between past and present and between cultures across geographical boundaries.



Current research direction

The work considers the vessel as an extension of the earth itself: a form that holds, preserves, and bears witness to the memories embedded within our lives.

Working with porcelain as my primary medium, I explore memory as a process of accumulation, where each experience, relationship, and history leaves an imprint upon us. Through layers of lace, historical currency marks, and repeated patterns, the surface becomes a record of what is remembered, inherited, and carried forward.

Porcelain, carrying within it the memory of the earth itself, becomes both material and metaphor. The vessel serves as a repository for memory—a landscape of traces that speak to personal, familial, and collective histories. As layers build upon one another, they reflect the ways in which identity is shaped over time, each mark contributing to the stories that form us.

The terracotta vessels draw on the expressive qualities of clay through richly textured surfaces and contrasting fields of colour. Evoking processes of weathering, erosion, and renewal, they speak to the elemental nature of the material and the passage of time.



Quyang Residency : process/context images



Layered Histories: Chinese Zodiac Hierarchy

Created during my residency in Quyang, this porcelain work explores the layering of cultural memory through material, place and process. Drawing inspiration from Chinese cosmology, the form is structured through successive layers representing earth, water, air and dragon, creating a visual narrative that moves from the tangible world toward the symbolic and mythical.

The surface combines impressions from traditional factory moulds, including dragon and pomegranate motifs encountered during my time in Quyang, with my own hand-carved textures and stamps. These layers create a dialogue between historical ceramic traditions and my ongoing artistic vocabulary, reflecting the exchange of ideas that occurs through travel, making and cultural encounter.

The clear glaze unifies the accumulated imagery while allowing each layer to remain visible beneath the surface. As in my broader Layered Histories practice, the work considers how identities, places and traditions are formed through successive layers of experience, memory and influence. Rather than presenting a single narrative, the piece acknowledges the complexity of cultural continuity, where traces of the past remain embedded within contemporary expression.

This vessel serves as a record of place, process and exchange—a meeting point between my own practice and the rich ceramic heritage of Quyang. **JUNE 2026**



Layers of Light: 28 x 25 x 24cm (h)

This piece draws inspiration from the esteemed tradition of porcelain being treasured for its delicacy and strength, while being shaped from South African porcelain, a material rooted in my own landscape and history. In this work, South African porcelain joins a lineage of global ceramic heritage, becoming a vessel not only of clay, but of memory, history, and human strength — a shared language of fragility and endurance. The vessel becomes a meditation on how our experiences shape and transform us.

This porcelain vessel is composed of overlapping fragments, each carrying a unique texture and translucency. Together, they evoke the layered nature of human experience: moments of joy, loss, strength, and vulnerability. Just as porcelain reveals its quiet beauty when touched by light, so too do our stories emerge through the layers we carry, visible to those willing to look closely.

The vessel's form speaks to how every experience shapes who we become. The interplay of translucency and texture speaks to the paradox of human existence: how our most fragile parts often reveal our deepest strength. Even when we seem fractured or worn by time, our essence endures — intact, resilient, and able to tell our story.

Through this work, I explore the paradox of fragility and strength, the visible and the hidden, and how our layered histories give depth and meaning to who we are.

Through this work, local porcelain becomes part of a global ceramic heritage — a vessel of light and memory that honours both tradition and personal narrative, reminding us that what makes us vulnerable also makes us beautifully human. **JUNE 2025**





- **Epoch of Form: Stoneware 30cm x 30cm x 28 cm**

The ovoid shape serves as a metaphor for life's cyclical nature, inviting contemplation on how forces both seen and unseen influence our journey. The textured surface, crafted by hand, creates a rich tactile experience, drawing the viewer closer to engage. It represents the multitude of experiences and emotions that coexist within us. The viewer is invited to explore the intricate interplay of light and shadow on its surface, which alters with the movement of the observer. The folds imply a sense of depth and evoke feelings of vulnerability and strength, embodying the synchrony of opposing forces. Epoch of Form encapsulates the essence of hidden synchrony — a celebration of harmonies found within contradictions. It reflects the quiet resilience of the human spirit, encouraging viewers to contemplate their relationship with the abstract dimensions of their own lives. The artist conveys how beauty often emerges from complexity.

- **Jan 2025** – on exhibition at the Jan Rupert Art Centre,

Graaf-Reinet



Ubuntu: 40cm× 40cm× 55cm (h)

This large-scale tree sculpture is a visionary exploration of interconnectedness, rootedness, and collective growth. Constructed from terracotta clay, it embodies the enduring strength and timeless connection between humankind and the earth. The sculpture's form is composed of intertwining coils shaped into a majestic canopy of branches, symbolising the myriad relationships that bind individuals, communities, and nations—each coil a thread in the rich tapestry of cultural identity and shared dreams.

The coils, meticulously layered to form the canopy, evoke the complexities and nuances of cultural narratives, weaving together traditions, histories, and aspirations. Their entwined nature signifies unity through diversity—a testament to our collective resilience and the symbiotic bonds that sustain us. The sculpture, though rooted firmly in its material, reaches upwards into the sky, embodying the universal human desire for growth, transcendence, and connection beyond borders.

Made of terracotta, a clay that speaks of earth and heritage, the piece is glazed with layered oxides and glazes, creating a rich, variegated surface that shimmers with subtle hues of warm terracotta, deep greens, and hints of metallic sheen. Fired at 1260 degrees Celsius, the sculpture's surface reflects the transformative process of fire—symbolic of the alchemy involved in cultural evolution and identity shaping over generations. The textured surface invites viewers to explore the tactile richness and the layered histories embedded within the material, emphasising the importance of tradition fused with innovation.

Personifying the interconnectedness of humankind, the sculpture visualises our rooted origins—each coil anchored in Mother Earth—while simultaneously reaching skyward, inspired by hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Despite our grounding, we are all part of a vast, living network, growing together in harmony and shared purpose. The intertwining branches serve as a metaphor for the fluid, dynamic nature of cultural exchange—an ongoing dialogue between the past and present, tradition and innovation, stability and aspiration.

"Ubuntu" is a powerful and recognisable term in South African culture that embodies compassion, community, and mutual care. This emphasises collective growth and a sense of rootedness and aligns with the sculpture's visual language of entwined coils and reaching branches, symbolising unity and shared effort.

Ubuntu, as the title of the piece, reinforces the message that our individual existence and growth are interconnected, both culturally and globally. It emphasises that the sculpture is not only an aesthetic object but also a poetic declaration of collective identity rooted in community and cultural heritage.

- June 2025





The Gathering

Set of 3 porcelain bowls created with Jingdezhen Porcelain. Carved, textured and pierced, fired 1260° in electric kiln.

Bowls ± 35 cm diam x 22/24 & 35 cm (h)

April 2024 - Quomo Art Gallery
Jingdezhen, China



Deep Forest (3)_± 35 cm diam x 35 cm (h)

Tall Porcelain Vase. Carved, textured and pierced, fired 1260° in electric kiln.

Oct 2023 – Shanghai Institute of Visual Art, China



Whisperings Trees

Purple Teapot Clay Bowl and Vase,
Porcelain leaves. Carved, textured and
pierced, woodfired in China 1260°. Bowl
36cm diam x 10cm, Bottle 65 cm x 28cm
diam, leaves set 30 x 30cm.

Oct 2023 -5th Shanghai – Yunnan Jianshui
International Woodfired Ceramics
Festival. Purple Pottery Museum Jianshui





Winter is coming

Set of 5 leaves, stained
porcelain, carved, textured and
pierced, fired 1260°. Set size 900 x
900 mm.

Oct 2017 - 3rd Cluj Ceramics
Biennale (2017) Cluj-Napoca
Romania



Cherry blossoms

Bone china, glazed inside,
polished outside, fired 1260°.
15cm diam x 11cm height.

Oct 2017 - XIII International
Biennial of Artistic Ceramics of
Aveiro, Portugal





Sycamore Forest

Paper porcelain – carved,
textured and pierced, fired
1220° C, unglazed. 25cm diam
x 12cm height.

Oct 2017 - 3rd Cluj Ceramics
Biennale (2017) Cluj-Napoca
Romania



Enchanted Forest

Paper porcelain, stained,
carved, textured and pierced,
fired 1220° C, unglazed with
guilders paste finish.

32cm x 12cm x 2cm height

Oct 2017 - 3rd Cluj Ceramics
Biennale (2017) Cluj-Napoca
Romania

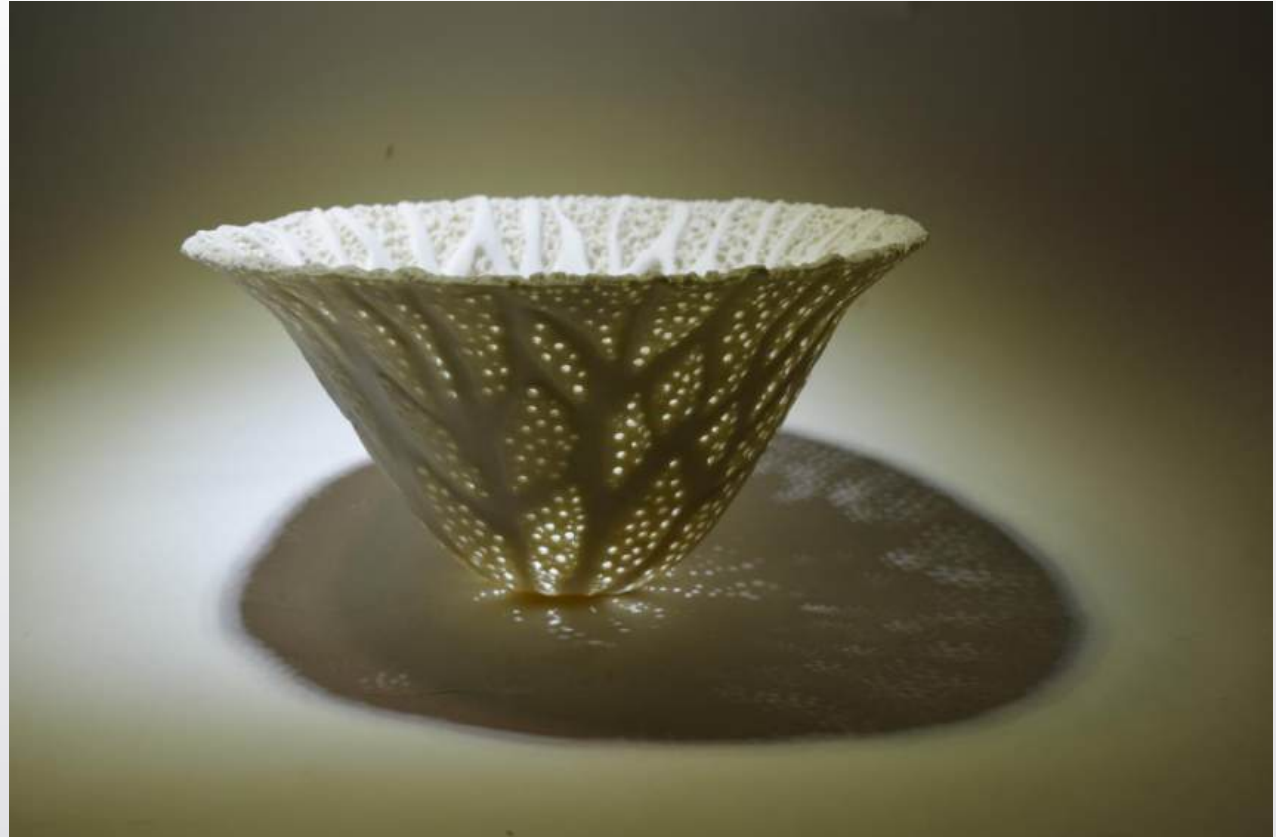




Deep Forest (2)

Paper porcelain – carved,
textured and pierced, fired
1220° C, unglazed. 22cm diam
x 12cm height.

Aug 2016 – Ceramica Multiplex
2016 Croatia



Poplar Forest

Paper porcelain – carved, textured and pierced, fired 1220° C, unglazed. 30cm diam x 22cm height.

July 2016, Changchun China

Collection: 5th Changchun International Ceramics Symposium, China 2016



Meltdown gold rim

Porcelain cast with gold lustre on rim fired 1220° C, glazed inside. 16,5cm diam x 7cm height.

Nov 2015 - XII Bienal de Cerâmica Artística de Aveiro, Portugal





Tree of Life

Paper porcelain – carved,
textured and pierced, fired
1220° C, unglazed 34cm diam
x 8cm height.

Nov 2015 - XII Bienal de
Cerâmica Artística de Aveiro,
Portugal



Odyssey 2

Porcelain, slip cast, carved. Fired
1220° C, unglazed and polished.
11,5cm diam x 6cm height.

May 2015 - III Triennial of
Ceramics UNICUM 2015 Slovenia

Collection: National Museum of
Slovenia, 2015

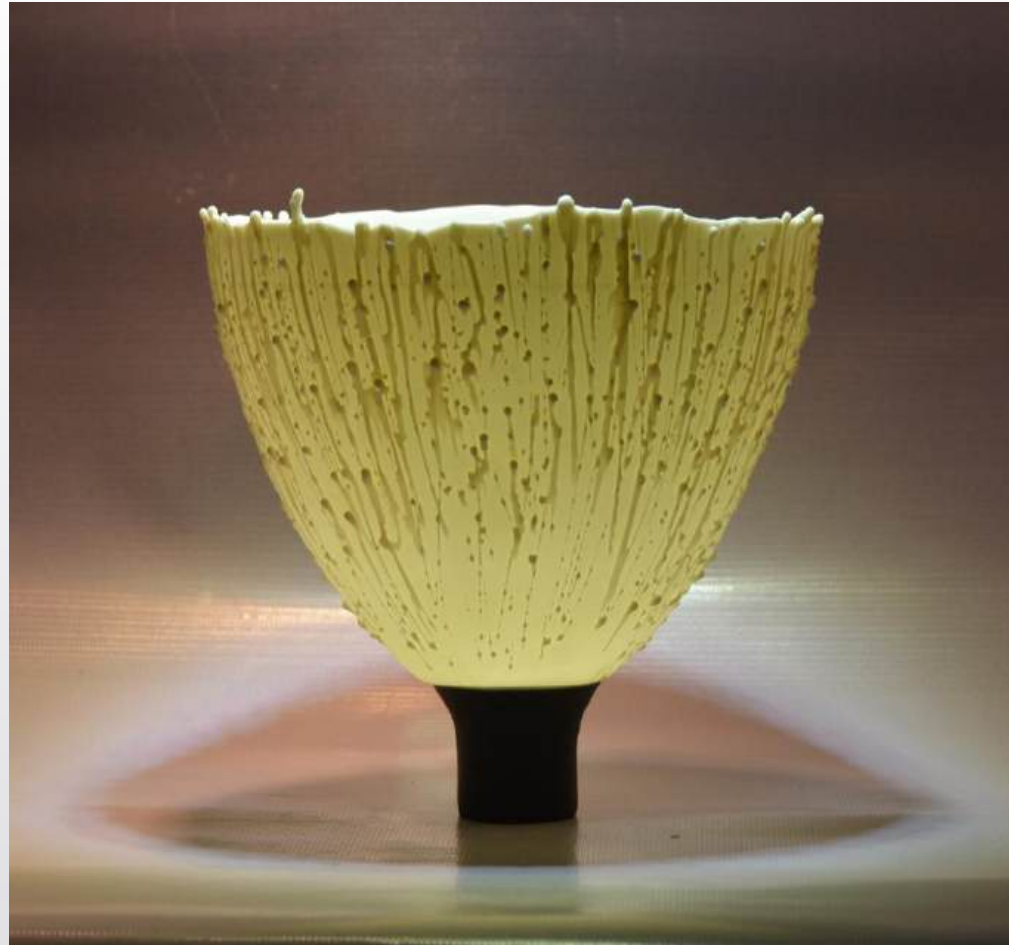


Meltdown 2

Porcelain, slip cast, added texture.
Fired 1220° C, unglazed and
polished on Pate de Vere foot.
20cm diam x 25cm height.

July 2013 - Cluj International
Ceramics Biennale 2013 Romania

Collection: Cluj International
Ceramics Biennale, Romania 2013



Meltdown

Porcelain, slip cast, added texture. Fired 1220° C, unglazed and polished on Pate de Vere foot. 22cm diam x 12cm height

July 2013 – 11^a Biennial
International Artistic Ceramics
Exhibition Aveiro, Portugal 2013

Collection: Ceramics Museum,
Aveiro Portugal 2013

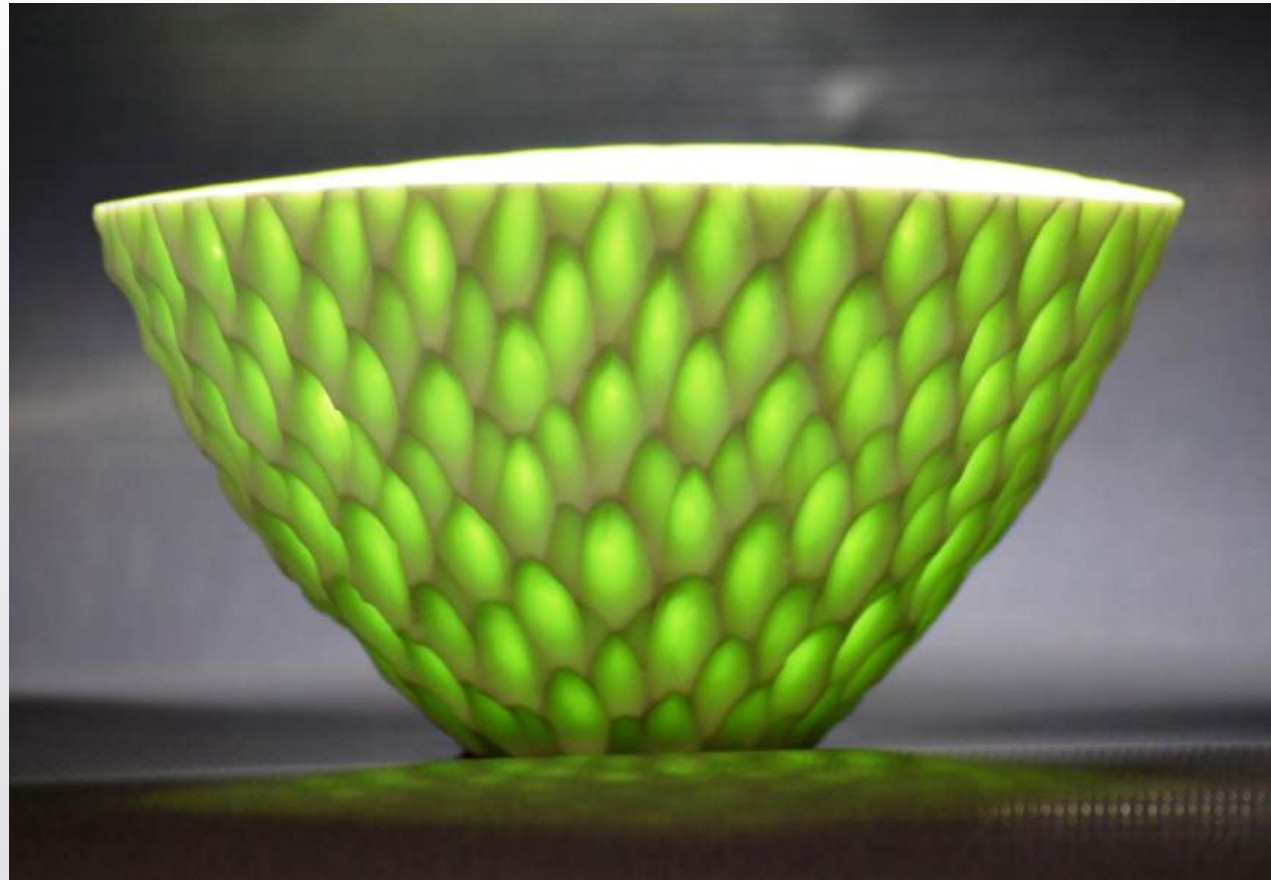


Green Odyssey

Stained porcelain, double cast, carved. Fired 1220° C, unglazed and polished. 15cm diam x 12cm height.

Aug 2012 – Ceramica Multiplex
Croatia - Honourable Mention

Collection: KERAMEIKON
Collection of Contemporary
World Ceramics, Croatia 2012



Dark Forest

Stained Paper porcelain –
carved, textured and pierced,
fired 1220° C, unglazed and
polished. 32cm diam x 10cm
height.

Aug 2012 – The Iconic
Handmade Piece South Africa –
Decorex Gauteng South Africa

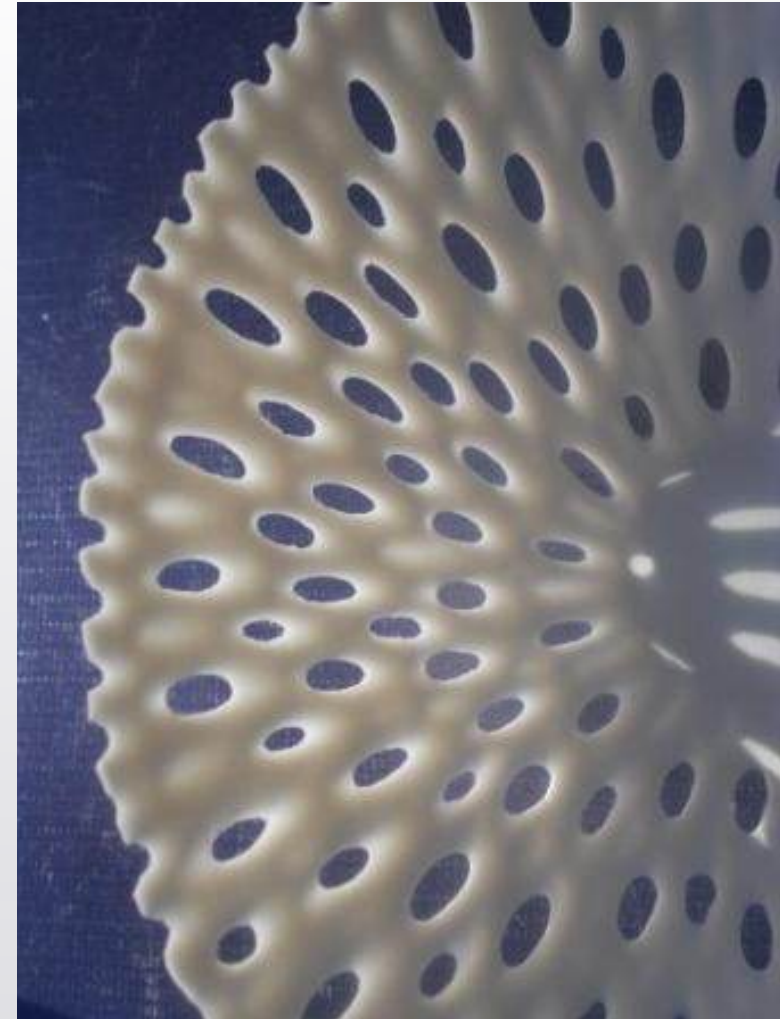


Southern Ice

Southern Ice porcelain bowl, carved.
High fired 1250°C, unglazed and
polished.

Aug 2011 – CSA Regional Exhibition -
Highly Commended Award South
Africa

Collection: Corobrick Collection
Pretoria 2011



Deep forest

Paper porcelain – slab, carved, textured and pierced, oxidation fired 1220° C, unglazed. 22cm diam x 12cm height.

Jun 2011 - Gyeonggi International
CeraMIX Biennale 2011, Korea –
Certificate of Honor

Collection: Korea Ceramic foundation
2011



Sickel Bush

Paper porcelain – carved,
textured and pierced. High
fired 1220° C, unglazed. 23cm
diam x 8cm height

Apr 2011 - 9th International
Ceramics competition Mino,
Japan - Honorable Mention

