

In a daring departure from her earlier hand-thrown ceramics that responded to the tradition of domestic ware by rearranging the components of a pot to create sculptural objects for contemplation rather than use, Lauren Winstone has turned her attention inwards to create a more personal body of work. The quiet, contemplative sculptures in *Things the body wants to tell us* respond to the rhythms and flows of the body and tune in to different qualities of consciousness.

In this exhibition, two distinct ‘families’ of forms are repeated in subtly different iterations – the regular folds in the tray-like forms bring to mind corrugated roofing material or ripple patterns in windswept sand dunes. The spherical forms are more delicate – they seem to float above the plinth; their gently undulating edges are like the rippling margins of lily pads on the surface of a lake and they seem more aligned with the world of nature than with culture. Winstone developed the spheres as paper prototypes that she then translated into clay, stretching and moulding it by hand and being careful to retain the lightness of the originals.

Taking a painterly approach to glazing these sculptures, Winstone paid attention to the way liquid travels across the undulating terrain of the clay, pooling in the hollows and skimming more rapidly over the peaks. The cool, blueish-white glaze draws our attention to surface details – the spoke-like lines radiating from the centre of the spheres, the intersection of two planes whose ripples travel in different directions. Details like these invite us to attend closely to the form, colour and texture of these artworks. Their tightly controlled formal qualities encourage us to notice small differences within each ‘family’ and the meditative process of looking at them echoes the quiet, reflective process of their making. The works were inspired by Winstone’s meditation practice and her desire to give form to a heightened awareness of the body achieved through the practice of focusing on the rhythms of the breath and other physical sensations. She likens the wavelike forms in the tray-like objects to repetitive thoughts streaming outwards – the mind’s ongoing, unwanted ‘chatter’ that can dominate our thoughts and make it difficult for us to be in the present.

*Things the body wants to tell us* continues Winstone’s longstanding desire to provoke a haptic response in the viewer; in her exhibition *Leanings* (2016) we felt the impulse to reach out and touch the smooth, tactile forms, to grasp what looked like handles protruding from rounded vessels, but this desire was thwarted because the handles were not attached to anything. The new works also provoke our curiosity about what such fine-grained, clay surfaces would feel like under our fingers, how heavy they would be in our hands and how variations in the thickness of the clay would feel. Through uniformity and repetition, they suggest the phenomenon of time passing and how we experience this as a haptic sensation in our bodies – the length of a minute, an hour and a day measured by the intervals between each breath, each heartbeat – sensations in our body that usually go unnoticed.

The exhibition marks a shift away from Winstone’s earlier critical engagement with the theory and practice of ceramic history and is a celebration of a more intuitive and gentle approach to art making. She says the new works engage with the notion of beauty – a quality that is often assumed to be antithetical to academic art practice – and she wants this exhibition to express her belief that being human is a gift, albeit one that involves much struggle and suffering; she hopes these artworks will speak of the need to show loving-kindness and compassion for oneself and others.

Although it is possible to read Winstone's sculptures through a modernist lens because they reject ceramic tradition, experiment with new and innovative forms, emphasise materials, techniques and processes and embody a belief in progress towards a more awakened state of being, it also makes sense to think about them from a new materialist perspective. Especially relevant in considering *Things the body wants to tell us* is Jane Bennett's concept of 'vibrant matter' – a way of thinking about the world of objects and entities that shifts the emphasis away from the human experience of things to the things themselves. Bennett argues for a 'vital materiality' that travels through and animates both human and nonhuman bodies. This is a way of understanding the material world that encourages us to escape the deadening binaries of subject-object and human-nonhuman. In a similar but not identical spirit, Winstone's ceramic artworks are animated by the invisible currents and eddies of the body, and they traverse a series of binary categories, existing in an intriguing, ambiguous zone – somewhere between sculpture and painting, nature and culture, art and craft, human and more-than-human.

Virginia Were, March 2024