

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 21 November 2019**



Premier Award Winner Mark Mitchell's *Slice*, 2019. Photo by Haruhiko Sameshima

### **Winning vessel pulls at heartstrings**

Te Uru is pleased to announce Northland-based potter, Mark Mitchell, as the Premier Award Winner of the 2019 Portage Ceramic Awards for his work, *Slice*.

The Award, with a value of \$15,000, was presented by this year's guest judge, Sydney-based artist and teacher Merran Esson, at a ceremony held at Te Uru in Tltirangi on Thursday 21 November.

Esson says, "There was one vessel, which on taking it out of its crate, tore at my heartstrings. I was looking into the inner world of a drying and shrinking surface that was clinging onto the outer structure to survive and yet there was a fragile support between the outer and the inner worlds of this vessel."

"In this one piece there is a fine balance between success and failure. I returned to this piece throughout my considerations, I lifted it up and felt its weight, heavy enough to be robust, but just light enough to show the skill and mastery of its maker."

Mark Mitchell, who has a studio and gallery in Haruru, says his ceramic interests lie predominantly with the vessel as an archetypal form, combined with the rich and long history of decorative arts. “I use pattern to create illusionary planes, explore the boundary between surface and form and how the two relate.”

**Esson also presented two Merit Awards** to Dunedin-based artists Blue Black for *Musical Chairs*, and to Kylie Matheson for *Yoke*.

A further two **Honourable Mentions** were awarded to Aaron Scythe for, *Pairing*, and to last year’s Premier Award winners, Sang-Sool Shim and Keum-Sun Lee for their work, *Where the Wind is Born*.



Merit Award winner Blue Black, *Musical Chairs*. Photo by Haruhiko Sameshima.

When selecting finalists and award-winners, Esson says “I was searching for a sense of the human hand and of the thought processes that the maker may have had; I was looking for knowledge and experimentation with process, clay manipulation, firing results; in other words, how concept and technical skills created the work.”

This year’s strong selection demonstrates the good health of New Zealand pottery, says Te Uru Director, Andrew Clifford. “Merran’s contribution reinforces the reputation of the Portage Ceramic Awards as an annual update on developments in ceramic practice. We are excited that she has introduced a new winner to enter the illustrious company of those that have achieved success in previous years.”



Merit Award winner Kylie Matheson's *Yoke*. Photo by Haruhiko Sameshima.

Established in 2001 and administered by Te Uru with support from The Trusts Community Foundation, the annual Portage Ceramic Awards are Aotearoa New Zealand's best-known survey of contemporary ceramic activity.

The *2019 Portage Ceramic Awards* winners and finalist works will be on display at Te Uru in Titirangi from 22 November 2019 - 23 February 2020.

Hours: 10am – 4.30pm daily  
Address: 420 Titirangi Road, Titirangi, Auckland  
Website: [www.teuru.org.nz](http://www.teuru.org.nz)

For interviews with the winners, high-resolution images or for further information, please contact: James Anderson, 021 144 9608, [james@teuru.org.nz](mailto:james@teuru.org.nz)

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## **Notes to Editors**

### **About the judge:**

The 2019 Portage Ceramic Awards judge, Merran Esson, has been working internationally for more than 40 years. Her own work is distinctive for the textures and large forms that express the contrast between the extremes of country and city. She uses clay and glazes to reference water tanks, silos, corrugated iron and trees, which remind us of the influence of history and place, and recall her rural childhood.

Esson recently retired as the Head of Ceramics at The National Art School in Sydney, and is currently Lecturer of Ceramics at the Australian Catholic University. She has spent much time teaching in Scotland, including Glasgow School of Art and Edinburgh College of Art. Esson has exhibited in The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Galerie Rosenhauer in Germany, Gaffer Gallery in Hong Kong, as well as being an exhibitor and visiting artist in Korea, Taiwan, Sweden, Pakistan, Spain and Japan.

### **About the artists:**

**Mark Mitchell** is a ceramic artist currently working from Haruru, Northland where he has a studio and gallery. He has been working with clay since high school. Self-taught as a domesticware potter, he then moved into sculptural ceramics. In 1997 he began a Fine Arts degree at Wanganui Quay School of Art, completing his final year at Otago Polytechnic School of Art.

**Blue Black**'s recent method of working came about by handling play dough. This led to squishing and ripping clay and constructing objects. He has been working with clay for 30 years and been around the block a few times. For Blue, being surrounded by creative folk gives a certain presence and flow to the current.

**Kylie Matheson** has a Diploma in Ceramics and is a practicing artist. She draws inspiration from animals and their behaviours. Her hand-built sculptures evoke an emotional response in the viewer by setting up relationships in a scene which draws the viewer in to create their own narratives.

## **About the Portage Ceramic Awards:**

Established in 2001, the annual Portage Ceramic Awards are Aotearoa-New Zealand's best-known survey of contemporary ceramic activity. Administered by Te Uru Waitākere Contemporary Gallery with support from The Trusts Community Foundation, the awards are a hallmark event for the New Zealand ceramics community, showcasing some of the best contemporary work, and serving as a platform for dialogue about developments in the ceramics field. The awards are open to all New Zealand artists and are a key outlet for new work and new voices.

The Premier Portage Ceramic Award carries a prize of \$15,000. Up to three Merit Awards totaling \$3,000 are also on offer, and a People's Choice Award is announced at the exhibition's conclusion. The overall winners are announced at a ceremony held at Te Uru on 21 November 2019.

## **About Te Uru:**

Te Uru is a regional gallery based in scenic Titirangi, gateway to the Waitākere rain forest and en route to Auckland's famous west coast beaches. We are locally rooted in West Auckland but globally minded. As a destination gallery, Te Uru operates from an award-winning purpose-built building, which opened in November 2014 as part of the redeveloped Lopdell Precinct. The gallery originally began in 1986 in the historic Lopdell House building as the Waitemata City Arts and Cultural centre, later known as Lopdell House Gallery. Now sited next-door, we continue to present a diverse programme of contemporary exhibitions, events and activities, complemented by exceptional architecture and spectacular views of the surrounding area. Te Uru receives core funding from the Waitākere Ranges Local Board of Auckland Council.

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