



FIRE
AND
ASH



FIRE AND ASH

Woodfire Pottery of Arthur and Carol Rosser

AN ARTSPACE MACKAY EXHIBITION



An Artspace Mackay **20**
Twentieth Birthday Exhibition

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Cover image

Left to right:

Arthur ROSSER

Lidded cylindrical vessel c. 2010,
wheel-thrown, natural ash and applied
Shino glaze, wood fired, 20 x 12 x 12 cm.
Collection of Carol Rosser.

Photo: Jim Cullen Photographer.

Carol ROSSER

Lidded cylindrical vessel c. 2010,
wheel-thrown, applied blue ash glaze, wood
fired in Anagama kiln, 21.5 x 11 x 11 cm.
Collection of Carol Rosser.

Photo: Jim Cullen Photographer.

Inside cover image

Arthur ROSSER

Teapot c. 1995, wheel-thrown, salt glaze,
wood fired, 23 x 17.5 x 15.5 cm.
Mackay Regional Council Art Collection,
donated by the Pioneer Potters 2005.

Photo: Jim Cullen Photographer.

Inside back cover image

Carol ROSSER

Casserole c. 2013, wheel-thrown, natural
ash and applied Shino glaze, wood fired in
Anagama kiln, 18 x 18 x 18 cm.
Collection of Carol Rosser.

Photo: Jim Cullen Photographer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional owners of the land upon which Artspace Mackay stands, the Yuwi people. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the young emerging leaders.



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Foreword

Deeply connected to place

Arthur and Carol Rosser moved to Dalrymple Heights, close to Eungella National Park, in the late 1970s after a year-long sabbatical in Japan inspired them to take up pottery full-time, and begin their dream of a self-sufficient lifestyle. When they purchased the neglected farm of just over 250 acres, much of the land had been cleared. Arthur and Carol Rosser spent decades re-foresting the property by planting 10,000 trees.

The Rossers' pots were the very essence of this place; they were made from local clays, and local timbers fuelled the up to 100-hour long Anagama kiln firings. The duo's scientific backgrounds drove a desire to intimately understand the elements they were working with, thus establishing for both Arthur and Carol a deep connection to the sub-tropical environment of Eungella.

'Fire and Ash: Woodfire Pottery of Arthur and Carol Rosser' celebrates the legacy of this husband-and-wife team, bringing together over forty years of their creative practice. Their simple, unpretentious, and functional pots are revered possessions of many in our community; their everyday use bringing immeasurable pleasure. Friend and fellow potter Len Cook remarks, 'I used one of

Arthur's mugs for about twenty years. It was a cup with a side handle on it. I broke the thing and felt as though I'd lost a dear friend. Every morning I had a coffee in that mug. It becomes an acquaintance.' [see interview, page 8]

Arthur Rosser's sudden passing in 2020 and Carol Rosser's need to go into full-time care has meant the end of an era for two dedicated, unassuming local pioneers of Australian wood fired ceramics. We thank daughter Zoe Judge for her generosity in sharing her parents' story, loaning us much of their personal collection, and opening her home to our curatorial team. Thank you Ross Searle, for your thoughtful essay, and Anneke Silver, for bringing the idea of this exhibition to us in the first place. Thank you also to Anneke and Len for sharing your personal memories of Arthur and Carol with curator Lauren Turton.

We hope you enjoy this special Artspace Mackay 20th anniversary exhibition.

TRACEY HEATHWOOD
Director, Artspace Mackay

Arthur and Carol Rosser

Ross Searle, Queensland writer, curator, and visual arts researcher

The exhibition 'Fire and Ash: Woodfire Pottery of Arthur and Carol Rosser' brings together over forty years of creative practice by this husband-and-wife team who worked in the high country of the Mackay hinterland, near the township of Eungella, Queensland. This was an environment which allowed the Rossers to live sustainably and thrive artistically. The heartbreaking event of Arthur's unexpected passing in 2020, has meant the end of an era for two creative spirits who contributed so much to the field of wood fired ceramics in Australia. Arthur is survived by wife Carol, son Matthew, and daughter Zoe. Carol's need to go into care has brought final closure to this chapter. In reflecting on her parent's life together, Zoe Judge wrote that they were 'inextricably linked to their connection to and love of their land in the rainforest', referring to their property at Dalrymple Heights close to Eungella National Park and their shared artistic pursuits. Their land, of just over 250 acres, was a mix of pristine rainforest, crystal clear mountain streams, and areas of cleared, overgrazed

paddocks which were later restored and planted with 10,000 trees.

Their creative journey began in the mid-1960s when Carol Rosser visited a friend's house filled with Bernard Leach pots, an experience she vividly recalled over fifty years later.² Such was the impact of these memorable pots, she was inspired to take lessons. Carol also taught her husband Arthur to pot. Arthur was an academic who taught mathematics at the University College of Townsville (later James Cook University) and, while living in Townsville, they both began throwing and experimenting with clay bodies, glazes and firing techniques.

Their first firing in 1966 was in a small, simple kiln located at the University College. The studio was located at the front of the large suburban block in Mundingburra, Townsville where 'the pots would be laid out for inspection for many days afterwards'.³ Arthur worked part-time as a potter in Townsville from 1972-1976 before the move to Eungella. Their story was one shared by

pioneer stoneware potters in the mid-1960s in Australia. Many were self-taught and took their guidance from a few scarce books on technical aspects of stoneware firing.⁴

The influence of the English potter Bernard Leach and his ground-breaking publication 'A Potter's Book' (1940) contributed to a worldwide interest in Japanese ceramics. Leach had himself been fully immersed in Japanese pottery during his decade of study in Japan with master potters. In 1920, Leach returned to England and, with his friend and fellow potter Shōji Hamada, established The Leach Pottery in St Ives, Cornwall, England. There, Leach produced ceramics in the tradition of Asian pottery, especially Raku. It was Leach's refined aesthetic that had so much impact on Carol Rosser when she first encountered his work. In Australia, the studio ceramics revival began in the mid to late 1950s, when the stoneware pottery movement was in its formative stage with Harold Hughan in Melbourne, and Peter Rushforth and Ivan McMeekin in New South Wales.⁵ McMeekin's

first-hand experience of the Leach tradition at St Ives was to be an important stimulus on Australian stoneware. With a knowledge of Chinese ceramics, he made his way there in 1949, and was quickly introduced to Bernard Leach, where he became a student of his son Michael at Penzance School of Art. McMeekin then went on to work with Michael Cardew and first encountered wood firing at Cardew's studio, taking the design of the somewhat temperamental kiln and perfecting it when he returned to Australia in 1952.⁶ Such were the circumstances that forged the first generation of stoneware and woodfire potters in Australia.

The Rossers began their journey well before there was widespread production of stoneware in north Queensland and they are rightly considered local pioneers in this field. It wasn't until the 1970s that the consciousness raising and activism of the national craft movement and the expansion of tertiary training to include dedicated specialist courses in ceramics began to emerge. This was reinforced by the coming together of like-minded people to form potters' societies. Townsville's

North Queensland Potters Association was established in 1972 and parallels the establishment of the Queensland Potters Association in Brisbane four years earlier. Closer to home, Pioneer Potters Mackay was formed in 1975 by a small group of potters whose aim was to have a working studio and place for aspiring ceramicists to meet, create, and grow.

The Rossers' natural curiosity and thirst for adventure saw them spend the year living in Japan in 1971 where Carol Rosser undertook formal training at the Tokoname Ceramic Centre. She noted that 'the endless throwing and unforgiving critique of her pots was an effective way to rapidly hone her developing throwing skills'.⁷ This was, as Zoe Judge observes:

a turning point in my parent's lives, cementing their rapidly growing fascination with all aspects of pottery. They connected on an emotional level to the beauty and serenity of such places as the created moss gardens, the bamboo forests and the mountain temples. Many regional production potteries and potters were

visited, and the variations in kiln designs [were] observed ... Their love of Japanese pottery was reflected in the reverence and respect they paid to the works of masters such as Shōji Hamada, and others, and they were both deeply affected by the power of intentionally simple, understated forms and glazes, exemplified by those of the humble tea bowl.⁸

Returning to Townsville greatly inspired their desire to take up pottery full-time and culminated in the decision to relocate to a more suitable location to forge a new life as studio potters. They traded the comfortable life in suburbia, along with financial security, for a leap into the unknown.

By 1976 they had purchased a neglected farm on an elevated rainforest tableland. The early years were 'defined by a great deal of physically demanding work as they sought to make the farmhouse liveable, and not only establish their pottery but also begin their dream of a relatively self-sufficient lifestyle, including food gardens and a menagerie of animals'.⁹ The challenges on their new property were immense. Early construction

Below left to right: First kiln (Townsville), July 1966. Throwing in the studio (Townsville), May 1967. Arthur Rosser in the studio (Townsville), 1967. Digging for clay at Mount Spec, August 1974. Photos: courtesy Zoe Judge.



of the huge pottery shed was also a priority to begin providing a source of income as soon as possible. The search for a local clay body began, visiting many local farms until clay was discovered that proved suitable. This was to evolve as different clays were needed when they commenced Anagama firing in late 1995.¹⁰ While the local clays reacted better to salt glazing, there was a great deal of experimentation and continuous refinement of all aspects of their pottery over the years. Focussing initially on developing the right clay bodies and glazes and the interactions between the two, then progressing the nuances of kiln design and the firing process. There were many iterations of firing, including gas, a variety of wood kilns, and eventually a wood fired Anagama kiln.

The challenges and technical aspects of the kiln design process greatly appealed to Arthur's analytical mind; however, it was the long firing of the Anagama kiln using local wood that most intrigued him. His daughter Zoe commented that: 'They were captivated by the unpredictable interplay of fire and wood, reflected in the marks shaped by the flames'

path and the deposits of ash on the surface of the pots'.¹¹ This is exemplified by the Japanese in their reverence for the unexpected and accidental effects of wood fired ceramics. It has also inspired potters worldwide to see the very special nature of these surfaces. A memorable effect that Carol perfected was a 'shell enhanced comet' which occurred when the pot was supported by a seashell, leaving a beautiful textured marking on the surface with a small comet-like tail once fired.

Gradually, as they began to experiment with Anagama firing, they adapted their forms. Their natural affinity with tableware shifted to vases and bottles which they judged were more suitable for long 100-hour firings where handles and other appendages can become damaged in the more volatile Anagama kiln.

The exhibition brings together the two main strands in the Rossers' studio production. The ash and salt-glazed tableware that dominated their early years from 1976 to 2000 and the challenges of Anagama firing which occupied them for a further twenty years. Their initial focus on ash and salt-firing was as much

economic as aesthetic. The use of local clays gave them ready access to raw materials which were more reliable and provided the effects they desired. They weren't tempted to use commercial clay bodies which they felt were 'unsympathetic to use and uninteresting when fired'.¹² During the early years they maintained a practice of firing ash glazed pots in a top hat gas kiln and salt glazed pots in a wood fired kiln. The Rossers' pots were deeply connected to place, much like traditional Japanese potters who worked with what they had available to create shapes and glazes particular to their village or region. Carol and Arthur felt the resulting effects were worth the effort as it gave their work a connection to their environment; be it 'where the clay is dug, where the tree that provides the wood and ash actually grew'¹³ and even where the salt was collected.

While there were plenty of useful local clay deposits, it was not always practicable for the Rossers to make use of them all. The kaolinitic clay which forms the basis of the local soil at Dalrymple Heights has a high iron content (8%), which they managed to adapt with other

Below left to right: Salting at Dalrymple Heights, July 1978. **Photo:** courtesy Zoe Judge. Carol stoking the salt kiln, April 1987. **Photo:** courtesy Zoe Judge. Arthur ROSSER *Teapot* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired in Anagama kiln, cane handle, 23 x 17 x 14 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photo:** Jim Cullen Photographer. Anagama firing, Dalrymple Heights, January 2007. **Photo:** courtesy Zoe Judge.



local clay with a 2% iron content and used it for decades for glazed ware fired with gas and wood. For their later work in Anagama firing, it had to be diluted. Any additives had to be freighted from the south at great cost. Also, the local fuel had to come from further west where there was plentiful access to Eucalypt forests. Later, the trees that were planted to revegetate cleared areas of their own land included Flooded Gum (*Eucalyptus grandis*). Rainforest species were not particularly useful, but one of the pioneer regrowth trees, Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), was a very suitable fuel for long wood firings.

Their outstanding glazes were often inspired by the shape or size of the pot, whether salt-glazed or the more robust ash glazes in the Anagama kiln. Their preference in Anagama firing was to produce effects with copious ash but with very few external glazes or slips, and to use wads of clay and seashells in the packing which added to the decorative effect. The exhibition brings together tangible evidence of fire and kiln atmosphere in the range of surfaces such as the 'orange peel'¹⁴ quality of many of the larger works, which are

remarkably textured and beautifully tactile. In the older works, especially the vapour glaze, quality contrasts with smooth interiors and occasional overlaps of pale celadon or iron. Underglaze combing adds to widely variegated effects of salt that is the main surface quality of many of the table wares.

Although living and working closely together, Arthur and Carol have always maintained their own professional identities, with separate directory entries and marks. Their studio workspace was never separate during their entire careers, and was always a simple, open space, sharing a single old worktable and drying shelves. They even shared an electric wheel early on, but at Dalrymple Heights, Arthur eventually had his own wheel right next to Carol's, separated by a small area of bench space. They enjoyed working in the same space together as their creative process was always individual, yet collaborative in terms of constantly giving feedback to each other and bouncing ideas around. There was much mutual respect for each other's work and creative input.¹⁵

The Rossers' core tenets as potters were based on a simple belief in the integrity of the form. They both deeply respected and identified with the traditional values and simplicity of pottery, and the making of functional ware. They did not like the term 'ceramicist' and what they saw as unnecessary pretentiousness and instead, always wanted to be referred to as simply 'potters'.¹⁶ The Rossers wanted their work to speak for itself, and the greatest honour someone could bestow was to use their pots and get pleasure from their form and function during everyday use; valuing the intimate connection between their work and the end user.¹⁷ This sustained commitment to making useful pots paid off in terms of the refined nature of their forms and glazes. As noted in the review of 'Australian Woodfire: Curator's Choice' exhibition, 2015,¹⁸ Arthur Rosser's *Twin bowls* 1997 exemplify individual evocative markings that give these small bowls their own voice. In the same exhibition, Carol's *Teapot* 2014 shape is austere, and the ash effect is serenely subtle. An emotional artist, she drew her inspiration directly from nature.

Below left to right: Arthur Rosser and kiln wood stack, February 2017. **Photo:** courtesy Zoe Judge. Carol ROSSER *Circular platter (detail)* 2004, hand-built, shell imprint decoration, wad marks and natural ash, wood fired in Anagama kiln, 6 x 34 x 34 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photo:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



Widely respected as specialists in wood firing and the use of local clays with ash, salt and Shino glazes, this was to be the last exhibition that would feature major exhibition works by both artists.

After the initial struggle to regenerate the landscape and establish a secure financial base, they found their artistic Eden.

As their daughter Zoe Judge reflects:

It was a lasting source of joy to us all (and one of my parent's proudest life achievements) to see these trees mature and watch the rainforest re-establish under their canopy. It was greatly heartening to

see the environmental benefits that could be achieved within a few short decades. Looking out over the stunning vista they had created from the veranda during morning and afternoon tea, was a defining ritual of my parents, and provided a daily source of contentment.¹⁹

Decades honing their craft resulted in them producing tableware and exhibition pieces of great distinction and as potters they rightly gained national recognition for their outstanding creative work. This exhibition profiles the Rossers' remarkable artistic journey as it highlights their extraordinary achievements and dedication to their craft.

Endnotes

--1-- Zoe Judge, 'Cups of tea and misty mountains. A Daughter's tribute to her parents, woodfire potters Arthur and Carol Rosser' (2021) 60(2) *The Journal of Australian Ceramics* 9-10. --2-- Ibid 8. --3-- Email from Zoe Judge to Ross Searle, 27 February 2023. --4-- Harry Memmott's 'The Australian Pottery Book' (1970) was to be transformative to the next generation including preparation of clay bodies, throwing, aspects of hand building, use of moulds, decoration, the application of textures to surfaces, glazing and firing. It became an essential handbook for all studio potters in Australia. --5-- Terence Lane, 'Harold Randolph Hughan (1893-1987)', 2007 17, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Web Page, 12 January 2023) <<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hughan-harold-randolph-12664>>. --6-- Owen Rye, 'Ivan Junior McMeekin (1919-1993)', 2007 17 *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Web Page, 12 February 2023) <<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcmeekin-ivan-junior-17849>>. --7-- Ibid (n 1) 8. --8-- Ibid. --9-- Ibid 9. --10-- Arthur Rosser, 'Degrees of Intimacy' (1998) 37 (December)(4) *Pottery in Australia* 13. --11-- Ibid (n 1) 10. --12-- Arthur Rosser, 'Continuity and Change' (1994) 33 (Summer)(4) *Pottery in Australia* 8. --13-- Ibid 8. --14-- Jeff Shaw, 'Arthur and Carol Rosser - review' (1990) 4 (August)(8) *Craftlink* 32. --15-- Ibid (n 3). --16-- Ibid. --17-- Ibid. --18-- Kerry-Anne Cousins, 'Australian Woodfire: Curator's Choice is diverse', July 24, 2015 *Sydney Morning Herald* (Web Page, 10 February 2023) <<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/australian-woodfire-curators-choice-is-diverse-20150722-gihy2m.ht>>. --19-- Ibid (n 1) 9.

Right: Salt kiln at Dalrymple Heights, February 1980. **Photo:** courtesy Zoe Judge.





A potter, a painter, and a curator

A conversation between Len Cook, Anneke Silver and Lauren Turton

'Fire and Ash: Woodfire Pottery of Arthur and Carol Rosser' traces the careers of two prolific artists who quietly dedicated a lifetime to their ceramic art practice. Intended as functional items, their work survives the wear and tear of the everyday, robust, demonstrating the artists' mastery in their chosen medium. Each Rosser pot tells a story—from how it was stacked in the kiln, where flames have danced across it, the unexpected dribbles of ash or salt deposits, and on top of this, the story of the clay itself, often sourced from neighbouring properties in the Mackay hinterland.

It was humbling to look back upon the holistic approach that Arthur and Carol Rosser took to their craft over forty years of practice. Throughout my research, I heard many fond stories about these two personalities and the pots they created, over cups of tea from much-loved Rosser teapots. Here is one such conversation with two of their contemporaries and friends, Anneke Silver and Len Cook. Silver, a well-known Townsville painter and printmaker, has been creating work in North Queensland

for over forty years. Cook, a studio potter, is part of the same niche community of woodfire potters dispersed around Australia, connecting him with the Rossers. He continues to practice from his Paluma studio, west of Townsville, remaining active in the resurgence of wood firing in Australia.

LT: When I started my research for 'Fire and Ash' I thought I'd discover one narrative that would start and finish with the refinement of firing techniques. What I've discovered is that this story is not only about the work. I've learnt about Arthur and Carol's connection with the environment, how this was inextricably linked to their practice and I've enjoyed discovering how Rosser pottery continues to infiltrate people's lives. To begin, can you step me through your early encounters of Arthur and Carol?

AS: It was in the late 1960s and James Cook University was newly established, attracting staff from diverse places. Arthur came here [Townsville] as a mathematics lecturer and Carol was a geologist. Artists and academics

interacted on many levels, sharing ideas as well as flagons of red wine. I met them at this time through mutual friends. We were all swept up in the wave of interest in handmade ceramics—greatly stimulated by newly arrived young potter Nola Davis, who was one of the initiators of North Queensland Potters Association. Eventually many of us built simple updraft brick kilns in our backyard. After a few firings, my brick kiln was repurposed into a garden bed, but Arthur and Carol's became more and more sophisticated, as did their glazes, thanks to Carol's knowledge of rocks and minerals.

LT: So it was the late 1960s and the Rossers were already interested in ceramics?

AS: That's right. Arthur and Carol built a kick wheel; 4 x 4 metres, hard wood, with a fly wheel that you needed to kick with your feet to get speed, otherwise you would lose your centre.

LC: Back in those days, owning an electric wheel was almost impossible. Everyone was hands on and was experimenting with

different kick wheels, kiln shales and fire brick. Arthur was a bit of a character—he used to make do with whatever he had.

AS: Arthur's whole lifestyle was like that. He liked to build things, he didn't like trendy, rubbishy things.

LC: When Arthur and Carol moved to Eungella, I used to go up there for an afternoon visit and cuppa. I was amazed with the house and pottery. They had donkeys and they used them to cart in the wood and all sorts of things. Their whole lifestyle was grassroots.

AS: That's right, they were interested in preserving the environment.

LC: I reckon there's three good types of people in the world – one is you're very good with your hands, second type – you're very good with your head and brains, and then there are the very few that are good with both. He [Arthur] was one of them.

LT: Arthur wrote often about a delicate balance between nature and firing, referring to what they were taking and giving back to the land. It seemed to be a life philosophy. Do you think this always guided their approach?

AS: I think it was always there, yes.

LC: I think it came from their trip to Japan, actually. There were certain well-known villages for ceramics in Japan that specifically make a type of pot for that area—the clay there tells them what shapes to make. Everybody knows where all the pots come from because they are signature pieces, like the Bizen pots from central Japan.

LT: This idea that, 'pots have their own identity'. What would you say was the identity of Arthur and Carol's pots?

AS: Carol's hands were incredibly elegant and when she made pots, they sort of grew out of her hands. Equally elegant and strong. It was lovely to see.

LC: It's the same thing I was talking about with Japan—and I'm doing the same thing—you make your own clay, use your own timber, make your own pots and basically no one can copy you.

LT: Interesting, so you're unique because of your materials, which in turn is informed by your surroundings.

LC: I think most woodfire potters have that aim. If you've got access to clay and timber, you're going to get different effects. They might only be slightly different, but they will be different. And of course, everyone's kiln will fire differently. It comes down to who fires them and how they fire them.

AS: I like what you [Len] said about the clay dictating the form. It applies to all arts really, across all mediums.

LT: Len, you're a ceramic artist and you share the Rossers' love for long wood firings. Can you tell me about this community of potters?

LC: The community for starters was very small because there's not enough crazy people out there who do this stuff. There was Peter Thompson in Kuranda, me in Paluma, going south you had Arthur and Carol and down to Byfield, Nob Creek Pottery. We all owned Anagamas but were very far apart. The community was basically held together with Arthur's Side Stoke webpage, which was invaluable. He must have had a hell of a time getting that page up because it included lists of potters and you could go into their name, and their work, and their kiln.

Below: Glen O'MALLEY *Carol Rosser in the studio, Townsville* c.1970, photographs. Images courtesy the artist.



LT: Did you fire with Arthur and Carol?

LC: I gave Arthur a hand to build their Anagama and went down and fired the first one with him in the mid-90s. There was a dividing pillar in the middle of the kiln and he used two different types of wood. Again, you saw those experimental and scientific sides of him.

LT: There's the idea that an Anagama is an experimental type of kiln. Do you agree with this?

LC: It's got to be experimental to a degree. Anybody who has had one always expects something better from the next firing. But it boils down to doing new stuff and putting in new things to see what happens; new glazes, new forms, new clays. If you don't experiment, you might as well just fire a gas kiln. I'm not sure if 'experimental' is the right word, it's more like researching. But having said that, you can do your research and have nothing come out at the end either.

LT: It sounds like you must possess great patience as a woodfire potter. Also, a great love of process, a connection to the environment and an understanding of the elements you're working with.

LC: It makes you very tough in a way because you never have any preconceived ideas. I

used to think that's going to come out like this, but... no.

LT: That's really interesting—there is such precision and science informing this artform but in the end, you're giving up control for chance.

LC: Yes, it's down to the weather and the timber basically.

LT: Arthur wrote about the move to long wood firings as not being a financial decision.¹ Experimentation comes with the high chance of loss of work—that's a big risk if it's your livelihood.

LC: Absolutely, you've got to be resilient and just say, next time, and give it another go. You build this massive construction and then you're totally committed to keeping it going.

LT: Another question I'll pose to both of you, I've heard Arthur described as a scientist and Carol as an artist. What do you think of this statement?

AS: That's probably what I thought early on, but then I changed my mind. I think they were both artists. Arthur grew into that role more after his time at the University. It was after their trip to Japan for their sabbatical year that they decided to go to Eungella. I think it nurtured their enthusiasm to a degree. It

was also a bit of a 70s thing, an alternative lifestyle.

LC: I think they were environmentalists before the word became trendy.

LT: Thinking back on their work and long careers, what image comes to mind when I say 'a Rosser pot'?

AS: A beautifully conceived curve, and an earthy, exciting glaze.

LC: Their quality control was exceptional. If they weren't happy with it, it didn't exist. And because they put so much love and time into each piece, everything was well finished and there were no shortcuts. Beautiful design, great decoration, and sometimes minimalist decoration, which was getting back to the Japanese aesthetic. They didn't go overboard. They knew when to stop.

AS: Absolutely, yes. So often it is a certain mark from the firing, a blaze of deep orange. You can say it was a decoration and think it was premeditated? But as they say, if it's a gift from the Gods, you keep it! It's the artist's eye that keeps it or uses the hammer if it's not good.

LT: Absolutely. There's still that curation, even though in many ways they couldn't forecast exact results.



AS: It's lovely really, isn't it?

LT: On reduction firing effects, this became synonymous with the work they produced during the latter part of their career. For me, I think of soft applied Shino glazes alongside brilliant flashings of bright red in the work they produced. What skills were needed to achieve these results?

LC: To simplify reduction; you've got mainly three atmospheres that can happen in a kiln. Oxidation, meaning you've got more oxygen than fuel in the firebox; a neutral atmosphere, which means you've got equal parts oxygen and fuel and that's where you'll get temperature increase, and then on the other end you have got more carbon or fuel than oxygen, and that's the reduction. What happens is that in reduction, the flame is starving for oxygen, so it pulls oxygen out of the body and glaze. Put simply, that's how reduction works. The process is not too difficult, the difficulty comes from endurance—you have to maintain it and monitor it. When the wood burns down, it goes into a neutral atmosphere and that is where you have got your temperature increase and if you don't put more in, it will oxidise, because there's more air than fuel. Then you put more wood in and it's that cycle again.

AS: Oh, so you put it in again at the end to get the reduction?

LC: Yes, and it keeps going—reduction, neutral, oxidation... reduction, neutral, oxidation... and that's why wood fired pots are very difficult to replicate in a gas kiln because you would be continually changing the temperature.

LT: And what's a typical firing time for woodfire kilns?

LC: Most potters will fire for at least 100 hours. Some fire a little less—seventy or eighty hours. Arthur was using acacia melanoxydon, black wattle. I would use pine and if you were firing up to, say, two and a half days, you would finish the last day with black wattle so that you're getting your two layers of ash.

LT: They had a lot of beautiful blue and green ash glazes on their pots.

LC: The blue and the green would have been ash glaze made up as a recipe by Arthur and then cobalt carbonate would have been added.

LT: Anneke, if I switch to Carol, could you talk to me about your memory of Carol as an artist? You've mentioned before the beautiful shape of the bowl and that's what you really think of when you think of a Rosser pot.

AS: I think this is revealed through the form. Reflecting on what was made by Arthur and by Carol, I think there's quite a difference.

There was an elegance to Carol's pots and an earthy solidity to ones that Arthur made.

LT: That's a beautiful way to describe it.

AS: And they were both very passionate about doing functional ware because that fitted in with the whole aesthetic, there were no frills. They would not make something for view only—it had to have a function. There was a solidity about everything. Their forms were appreciated for use, but they also became artworks at the same time. A lot of people still use them.

LC: I used one of Arthur's mugs for about twenty years. It was a cup with a side handle on it. I broke the thing and felt as though I'd lost a dear friend. Every morning I had a coffee in that mug, it becomes an acquaintance.

LT: Salt firing was another important part of the Rossers' careers—from the late 70s in Eungella. You've lent us a beautiful salt glazed pot, Len. Can you tell us about it?

LC: She [Carol] used homemade stamps as decoration with an undulating line and a small amount of cobalt ash on the band. The ironic part about firing a salt kiln is the more you fire it, the richer the results become and the more likelihood of the whole thing collapsing too. It's a real problem, because the salt is so destructive.

LT: Janet Mansfield [OAM] was an important figure in the context of salt firing in Australia. She wrote of “the exciting challenge of mastery over the elements of earth, water and fire offers tremendous scope for fulfillment”.ⁱⁱ That stuck with me. Does that sum up the sentiment of what it is to be a woodfire potter and, more broadly, an artist?

Both: Yes!

LT: That idea of mastery over the elements – can that ever be achieved?

LC: Not really, no.

AS: I think also because you’re very much immersed in that natural environment. You’re using the basic elements.

LC: It’s a primitive art form, that’s for sure.

AS: When you’re living with elements like the weather and the bush, it’s not romantic, it’s hard living. Working with fire and wood and earth—it’s tough. Getting in touch with the basic elements is seen more in woodfire ceramics than any other artform.

LC: I don’t know if it’s because of the tiredness of concentrating on the kiln, but it almost becomes its own voice. It starts to talk to you and it’s like a personality that will tell you what it wants. You’re totally in tune with what’s going on and that’s a beautiful feeling, to have this inanimate object working with you.

LT: That makes perfect sense, as a potter you have got to know your tools. Something else that I thought was beautiful that Arthur wrote in 1994, was that he and Carol were particularly concerned with those aspects of pots revealed by touching and viewing at close range. I thought that was a nice reference to the fact that their pots were made to use. In galleries, we often put pots in glass cases.

LC: It’s sort of a Zen thing in a way. It can be just an ordinary mug and you’ll sit there and have a coffee, but it will take you to another world if you’re a potter. A lot of people would say, it’s just a mug.

AS: I know exactly what you mean.

Endnotes

--i-- Arthur Rosser, ‘Double or nothing’ (1997) *4 Ceramics Technical* 68. --ii-- Janet Mansfield, *Salt-Glaze Ceramics: An International Perspective* (Chilton Book Company, 1992) 28.

Right top to bottom: *Makers mark stamp (CR)*. Collection of Carol Rosser. *Makers mark stamp (AR)*. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.







Above: Anneke SILVER *Nights to remember* (page detail, 'Arthur and Carol's at Eungella') 2014, permanent ink on paper, 15 x 40 cm. Collection of Anneke Silver.
Photo: Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts.





Left: Arthur ROSSER *Large platter* c. 1978, wheel-thrown, blue chun and tenmoku glaze, gas fired, 5.5 x 45 x 45 cm. Collection of Lachlan and Helene Marsh. **Above left:** Carol ROSSER *Casserole* c. 1980, wheel-thrown, stamp decoration, brown ash with applied yellow, grey and tenmoku glazes, gas fired, 14 x 15 x 15 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Above right:** Carol ROSSER *Lidded tureen* c. 1980-1990, wheel-thrown, tenmoku glaze, gas fired, 11 x 19 x 11.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



Above: Carol ROSSER *Bowl* c. 1980-1990, wheel-thrown, incised decoration, green ash glaze, gas fired, 5 x 24 x 24 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Right:** Arthur ROSSER *Large vase* c. 1980-1990, wheel-thrown, cream matte glaze, cream slip overlay, gas fired, 32 x 20 x 20 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Far right:** Arthur ROSSER *Storage jar* c.1980-1990, wheel-thrown, incised decoration, applied green ash and salt glaze, wood fired, 40 x 41 x 41 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.





Left: Carol ROSSER *Jug* c.1976, wheel-thrown, comb decoration, natural ash and salt glaze, wood fired, 31 x 18 x 13 cm. Collection of Lorraine and Simon McConnell. **Above:** Carol ROSSER *Vase* c. 1980s, wheel-thrown, applied blue and green ash with salt glaze, wood fired, 18.5 x 18 x 18 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



Above: Carol ROSSER *Casserole* c. 1990s, wheel-thrown, stamp and line decoration, natural ash and applied cobalt carbonate with salt glaze, wood fired, 21 x 19 x 19 cm. Collection of Len Cook. **Photo:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



Above left: Arthur ROSSER *Demijohn* c. 1985-1990, wheel-thrown, stamped decoration, salt glaze, wood fired, 25 x 16 x 16 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Above right:** Arthur ROSSER *Demijohn (detail)* c. 1985-1990, wheel-thrown, stamped decoration, salt glaze, wood fired, 25 x 16 x 16 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.

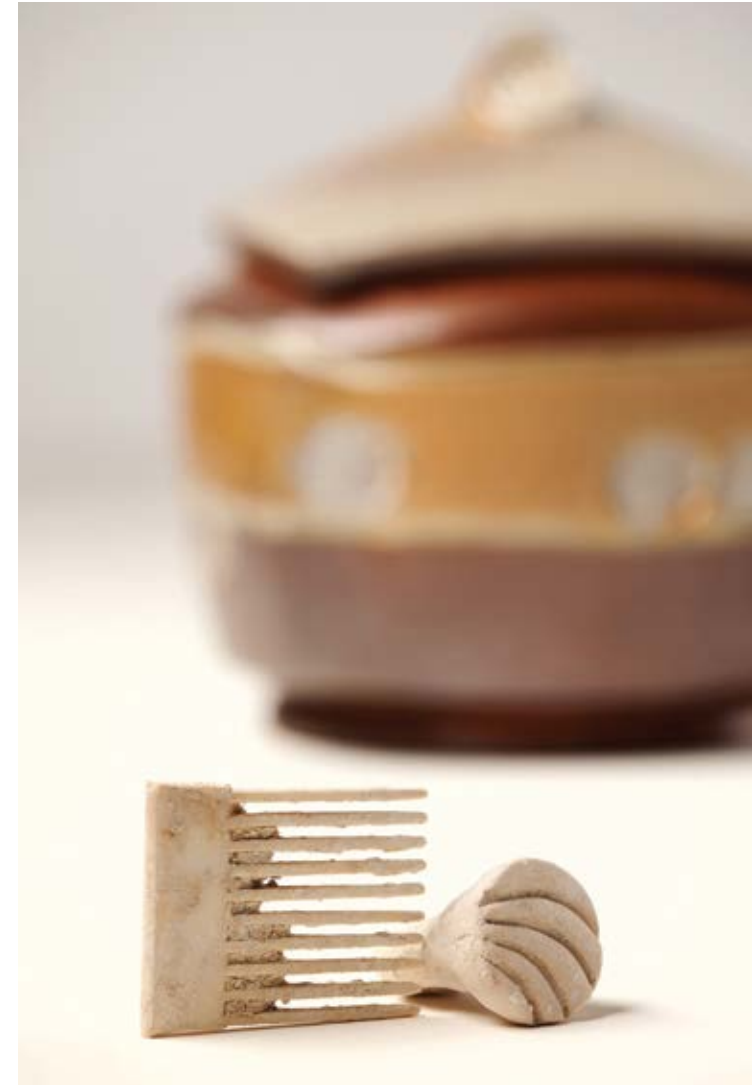


Above: Arthur ROSSER *Teapot* c. 1985-1990, applied green ash and salt glaze, wood fired, 22 x 18 x 14 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Right:** Carol ROSSER *Pitcher* c. 1985, wheel-thrown, incised decoration, applied green ash and salt glaze, wood fired. 35.5 x 20.5 x 16 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.





Left: Carol ROSSER *Vase* c. 1985, wheel-thrown, incised decoration, natural ash with salt glaze, wood fired, 31 x 15.5 x 15.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Above:** Carol ROSSER *Casserole* c. 1980-1990, wheel-thrown, incised decoration, salt glaze, wood fired. 18 x 26 x 26 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



Above left to right: Carol ROSSER *Casserole* c. 1990-2000, salt glaze, wood fired, 17 x 14.5 x 14.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Casserole* c. 1990-2000, salt glaze, wood fired, 15 x 11 x 11 cm. Collection of Lachlan and Helene Marsh. *Artist tools*, comb and hand-made stamp. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.





Left: Carol ROSSER *Large platter* c. 1988, wheel-thrown, applied celadon and salt glaze, wood fired, 8.5 x 55 x 52 cm. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection, donated by the Pioneer Potters 2005. **Above left:** Carol ROSSER *Teapot* c. 1999, wheel-thrown, stencil decoration, applied cobalt carbonate, blue ash and salt glaze, wood fired, 11 x 19 x 11.5 cm. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection, donated by the Pioneer Potters 2005. **Above right:** Carol ROSSER *Flat-sided bottle* c. 1988, wheel-thrown, salt glaze, wood fired, 34.5 x 27 x 9 cm. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection, donated by the Pioneer Potters 2005. **Photos:** Carl Warner.



Left to right: Arthur ROSSER *Long neck vase* c. 1980-1990, wheel-thrown, green ash and salt glaze, wood fired, 34 x 21.5 x 21.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Arthur ROSSER *Bottle* c. 1980-1990, wheel-thrown, incised decoration, salt glaze, wood fired, 18.5 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm. Carol ROSSER *Lidded storage jar* 2008, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired (84 hours) in Anagama kiln, 26 x 36 x 36 cm. Collection of Lachlan and Helene Marsh. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.









Left: Carol ROSSER *Teapot* 2014, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired in Anagama kiln, cane handle. 20 x 17 x 13 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Above:** Carol ROSSER *Teapot with two square cups* c. 2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired, cane handle. 20.5 x 15 x 12 cm. (teapot), 6.5 x 7.5 x 7.5 cm (cup, each). Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



Above: Arthur ROSSER *Vase* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired, 25 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Right:** Arthur ROSSER *Long neck vase* c. 2000-2015, wheel-thrown, applied blue ash glaze, wood fired, 38 x 15 x 15 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Far right:** Carol ROSSER *Flat-sided bottle* c. 2010-2015, wheel-thrown, blackwood and redgum ash over dry nepheline syenite glaze, wood fired (143 hours) in Anagama kiln, 34.5 x 27 x 9 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.







Above left to right: Arthur ROSSER *Teapot* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired in Anagama kiln, cane handle, 23 x 17 x 14 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Teapot* 2014, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired in Anagama kiln, cane handle. 20 x 17 x 13 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photo:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



Above left to right: Arthur ROSSER *Lidded cylindrical vessel* c. 2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash and applied Shino glaze, wood fired, 20 x 12 x 12 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Lidded cylindrical vessel* c. 2010, wheel-thrown, applied blue ash glaze, wood fired in Anagama kiln, 21.5 x 11 x 11 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photo:** Jim Cullen Photographer.





Left to right: Arthur ROSSER *Round bowl with foot* c. 2000, wheel-thrown, wad marks, Pinus Carribea ash glaze, wood fired, 7 x 17 x 17 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Vase* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired, 16.5 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Square cup* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired, 7 x 9 x 9 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Round bowl with foot* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired, 7.5 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Arthur ROSSER *Triangular bottle* c. 2000, wheel-thrown, Pinus Carribea ash glaze, wood fired, 32 x 13.5 x 14 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Oil pourer* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired, 19 x 8 x 7 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



Above left: Carol ROSSER *Petal bowl* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash and applied Shino glaze, wood fired, 9 x 13 x 13 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Above right:** Carol ROSSER *Footed cups* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired, 7 x 9 x 9 cm (each). Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



Above left: Arthur ROSSER *Two mugs* c.2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash and applied Shino glaze, wood fired, 10.5 x 12.5 x 12.5 cm (each). Collection of Carol Rosser. **Above right:** Arthur ROSSER *Bowl with foot* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash and applied Shino glaze, wood fired, 7 x 14.5 x 14.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Arthur ROSSER *Bowl with foot* 1997, wheel-thrown, applied natural ash glaze, wood fired, 8 x 14 x 14 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.





Above left to right: Arthur ROSSER *Rectangular platter* c. 2008-2015, hand built, shell imprint decoration, natural ash over nepheline syenite slip, wood fired (82 hours) in Anagama kiln, 11 x 56 x 34 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Arthur ROSSER *Platter* c. 2000-2010, shell imprint, wad marks and natural ash, wood fired. 6.5 x 42.5 x 27.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Circular platter* 2004, hand-built, shell imprint decoration, wad marks and natural ash, wood fired in Anagama kiln, 6 x 34 x 34 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Platter* c. 2000-2010, hand-built, wad marks and natural ash, wood fired, 6.5 x 32 x 20 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.





Above left to right: Arthur ROSSER *Platter* c. 2010, hand-built, shell imprint decoration, natural ash and Shino glaze, wood fired in Anagama kiln, 3 x 24 x 16 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Fluted cup* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash, wood fired, 11 x 9.5 x 9.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Carol ROSSER *Bowl* c. 1980-1990, wheel-thrown, incised decoration, green ash glaze, gas fired, 5 x 24 x 24 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. Arthur ROSSER *Round vase* c. 2000-2010, wheel-thrown, natural ash and applied green ash, wood fired in Anagama kiln, 16.5 x 11.5 x 11.5 cm. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photos:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



Above: Carol ROSSER *Hand carved stamps*, ceramic, bisque fired. Collection of Carol Rosser. **Photo:** Jim Cullen Photographer.



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