

avital sheffer.

piryon iv, 2008

**Glazed and printed earthenware,
Shepparton Art Museum collection,
purchased 2010. 2010.13**

Presented by Linda Bryan, Visual Arts Educator for SAM



form.
Female figure and symbol
of fertility inspired by
antiquity

decorative text.
Hebrew, Biblical story of
Jonah and the whale

patterns.
Inspired by ancient
textiles

symbols.
Red birds





methods.
Hand-built ceramics,
coiling

media.
Earthenware, ancient
manuscripts, glazes, inks

subject/inspiration.
Middle Eastern heritage,
Dead Sea Scrolls, cultural
stories, history

avital sheffer.

**Is an internationally-renowned,
Australian-based ceramic artist.
She creates beautiful sculptural
vessels inspired by her deep
knowledge of the ancient cultural
traditions of the Mediterranean
world.**



Sheffer's meticulously constructed, hand-coiled vessels, employ a combination of ancient techniques together with her own innovative processes. Surfaces are decorated with delicate layers of stylised imagery and arcane text through a unique printing technique of Sheffer's own invention.

The immaculate texture of the earthenware is at times, enriched by beads of golden lustre.

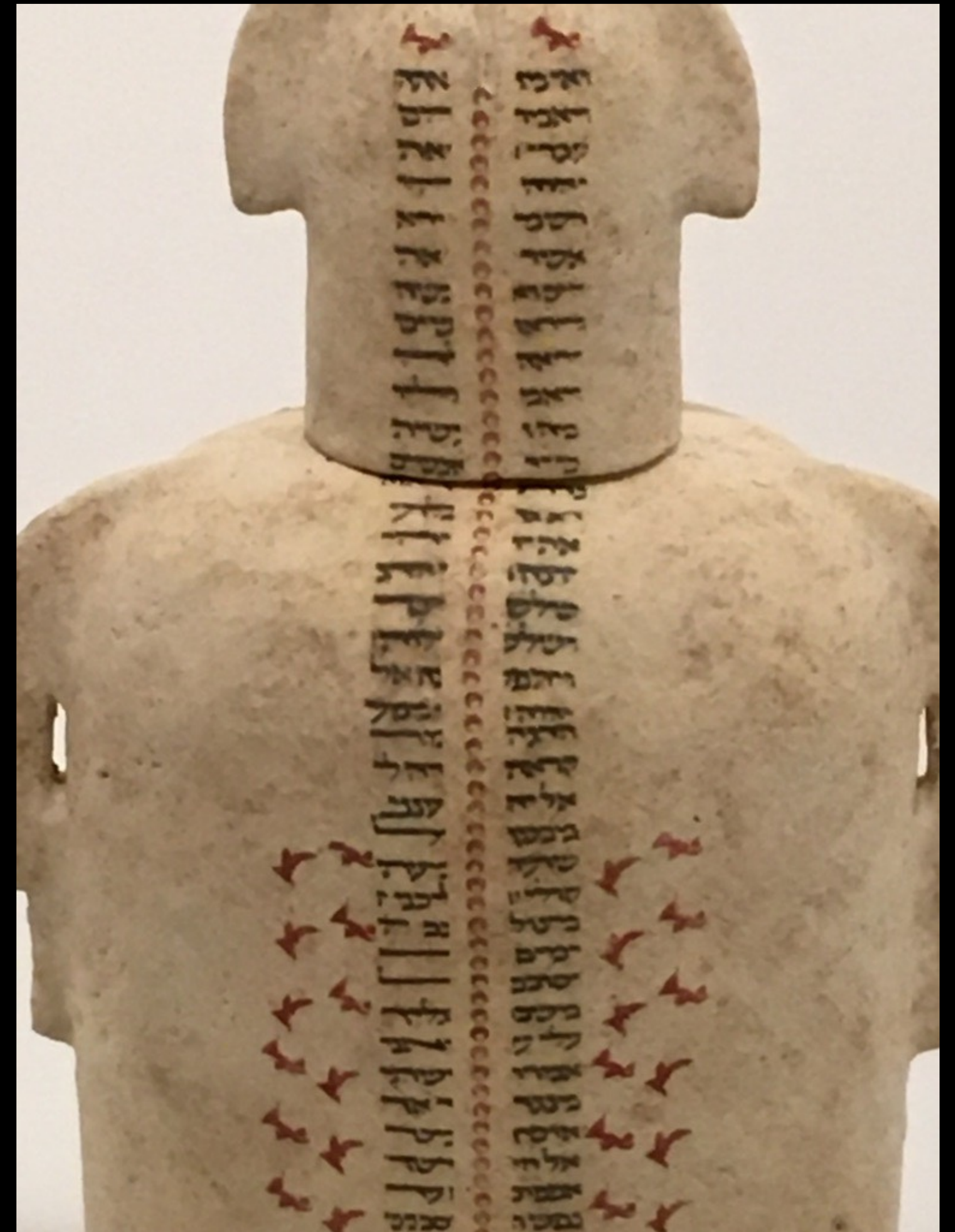


<https://www.facebook.com/theaustralianceramicsassociation/videos/1329960030475861/?t=47><https://www.facebook.com/theaustralianceramicsassociation/videos/1329960030475861/?t=47>

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inspiration.

“art inspiration can come from anywhere, so I keep travelling and going to museums and seeing how antiquities can still talk to us today. I love how different cultures can talk to each other and find commonalities that are still valid”



cultural framework.

“I was always interested in history and archeology, but when I moved to Australia it gave me an opportunity to explore my heritage in a new light.”



My work is informed by an investigation of my Middle Eastern and Jewish heritage and an ongoing engagement with the landscape, architecture, languages and wisdom of that part of the world, and that way of being in the world. The world of antiquity, in its diversities and dichotomies, is a passion and an infinite source of inspiration. Ancient ceramics, glass, metalware and calligraphy employ universal aesthetic principles yet reveal intimate aspects of human idiosyncrasies and needs that are relevant to the present.

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I am interested in the frayed edges of religions and mythologies, where dialogue and cross-fertilisation with other cultures takes place. Personal experiences of conflict, migration, dislocation and renewal intersect with the dil between traditions and modernity.

I am challenged and fascinated by the materiality and discipline of clay, and the mysterious unpredictability of its nature. The act of making is a constant negotiation between creating a new entity and uncovering that which already exists, hidden within the folds of the material, governed by elemental principles. Through these slow processes, I endeavour to reveal forms and surfaces that evoke a sense of history, while carrying narratives that transcend the temporal.



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Sheffer has been experimenting with ceramics at her workshop on the North Coast for over a decade, drawing much of her inspiration from her Middle-Eastern heritage.

Her intricately patterned pots, vases and other vessels travel internationally, including London and New York.

A collection can sometimes take more than six months to complete. Often she works on a group of vessels (10-15) in a period of about three months. She likes the rhythm in the year as it corresponds with the seasons.

"Clay is a very slow type of art, you've got to work with time," Ms Sheffer said. With clay you've got to experiment and build up your skill over years, so it's not something that you can just jump out of or into. I'm totally committed to clay, I love this material and it really requires full dedication."



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methods and techniques...

- Avital Sheffer's vessel making practice is based upon the form of ancient vessels.
- She works from within, hand-building using coil construction methods.
- Sheffer creates a series of works before beginning the first firing.
- The pots are fired several times even before the printmaking process begins.
- The printmaking stage involves very slow application of oxides to small or sectioned areas. Sometimes multiple print firings follow.
- Dry glazes are used, in yellow ochres to reflect the earth and archaeological processes.
- Her vessels are not copies of old vessels but are her own interpretation of ancient artefacts

concepts...

- Avital Sheffer's vessel use text based upon the form of ancient vessels.
- The texts are often Hebrew and the stories inherent in them, expose the cultural complexities of Islamic and Jewish cultural history, eg The Book of Wonders.
- The female shaped vessels come from pre-language, Cycladic cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean that produced Bronze Age figurines from glass and clay. They are essentially fertility symbols and functioned to express what was of cultural importance. They are strongly connected with natural cycles.
- Although her interest in Hebrew language and culture is secular rather than religious.
- Ancient texts which inspire her include the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are in Hebrew as shown in Piron IV, showing the story of Jonah and the Whale.

“i am totally committed to clay”
Avital Sheffer



personal framework.

"I love how different cultures can talk to each other and find commonalities that are still valid."



Sheffer was born in Israel where she worked with textiles and studied homeopathy. Although she migrated to Australia in the 1990's, her activism for peace in Israel has remained a major theme, along with truth and harmony, in the texts and imagery incorporated in her work.

In 1996 Avital returned to Israel and was greatly inspired by viewing the containers that housed the Dead Sea Scrolls. This event changed the course of Avital's career and she dedicated her life to working with clay.



**Avital SHEFFER
Redoma X and
Redoma IX 2019,
hand-built, glazed
and stencilled
earthenware**

**Exhibited at the
Rebecca Hossack
Art Gallery, 2a
Conway Street,
Fitzroy Square,
London.**

cultural heritage - student activity.

- **Identify methods, media and subject/inspiration in Avital Sheffer's work.**
- **Research fonts and ancient scripts and pot shapes**
- **Plan a design using script/ text of choice related to student's cultural heritage. (could be more than one!)**
- **2D outcome, make a poster with mixed media or digitally**
- **3D outcome - make a hand-built coil pot and add decorative text and cultural patterns**
- **3D make a paper mache pot and decorate with paint/pen/mixed media**

victorian curriculum links.

- **VISUAL ARTS F- 10**
- **Explore and express ideas**
- **Visual arts practices**
- **Present and perform**
- **Respond and interpret**
- **ART ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES**
- **VCE ART – personal, cultural, historic, formal framework, artist studies.**
- **VCE STUDIO ARTS – Techniques, studio processes, where artists gain their inspiration, artist studies, industry context (gallery visit)**
- **VCD – typography, design process, DESIGN ELEMENTS & PRINCIPLES**