

"In the final analysis, style is art."
SUSAN SONTAG

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the clay after

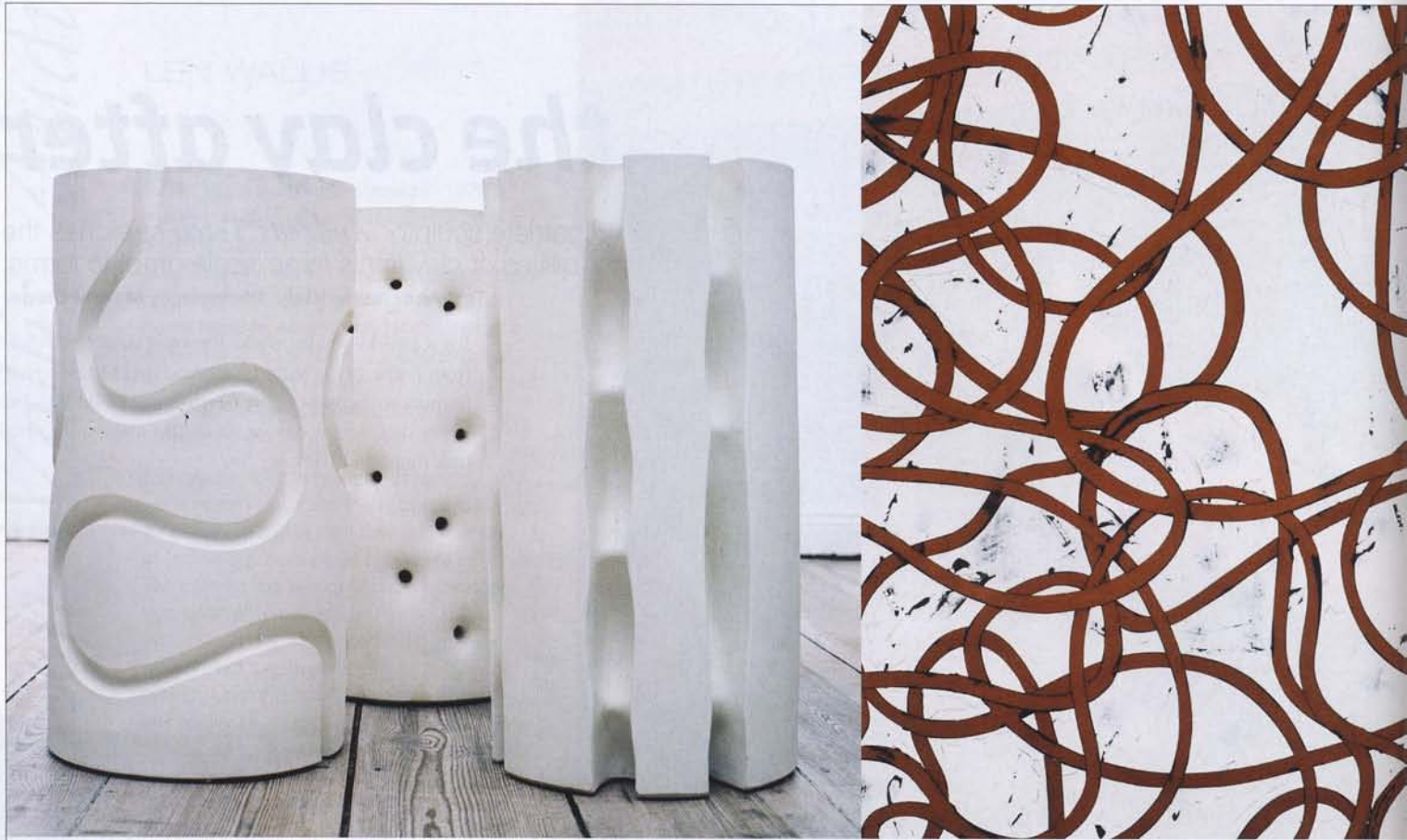
Australian expatriate sculptor *Andreas Tesch* stretches the possibilities of clay in his large-scale graphic forms.

Text **Annemarie Kiely** Photography **Marcel Steger**

It's a two-kilometre walk, for artist Andreas Tesch, from home to his studio – a crumbling old porcelain foundry to the west of the German capital Berlin – but every day, seven days a week, he makes the ritual trek there and back. >

Surface tension

Andreas Tesch's ceramics display characteristic distressed surface effects that allude to his memories of the Australian bush. *White Clubs 2005* is a single work of six ceramic pieces given a bleached white slip treatment. The chalky surface was achieved by sanding it back after the first firing.



Bold gestures Andreas Tesch forms monumental, architectural shapes in finishes that range from bleached bone to weather-worn metal, conjuring with his memories of the Australian bush. He works every day in his Berlin studio, but Australian viewers can see his work in Melbourne from August 31.

“I JUST LOVE CLAY. I HAVEN’T WANTED TO WORK IN ANY OTHER MEDIUM. I JUST LOVE THE PROCESS.”



Most days it’s a 9.30am to 7pm slog, but right now, in the lead-up to a major show in his home town of Melbourne, it’s a marathon of creativity that, when “the zone” is hit, may exclude the simple necessities of sustenance and sleep.

“I don’t ever want to do anything else”, says the artist who, in spite of living and running a studio practice in Berlin for the last 20 years, still does a very good Aussie drawl. “I just love it. Ever since my HSC art teacher Beth Brown introduced me to clay, I haven’t wanted to work in any other medium. I just love the process.”

Shaping large-scale graphic forms with a complexity of construction and an attitude that could only be described as architectural (a characteristic not lost on Europe’s design elite who commission major works for both private and public spaces), Tesch invariably takes six weeks to produce a single piece. And, whether freestanding or wall hung, it will ultimately be paired with another similar piece or be grouped into a family of shapes.

But time is of no issue to this self-described perfectionist who, in the absence of existing techniques that could make possible the vision of his mind’s eye, has spent two decades



Clay job

Andreas Tesch at work in his studio, an old porcelain factory in Berlin, surrounded by the tools of his trade and accompanied by Trigger the weimaraner.

developing procedures that ensure his monumental shapes will survive the extremes of high-temperature firing and also a range of surface effects that imply the degenerative processes of the Australian bush.

The results of the often agonising pursuit are profoundly evocative. Some works conjure smoothly hewn slabs of termite-tracked wood, some a section of crazed, sun-bleached bone, others a weather-worn block of metal that the elements have oxidised to black.

"The scale and the surface treatment of the

works are informed by botanical and natural phenomena specific to Australia," explains the artist, qualifying that the signature inlays, fissures, protrusions that disrupt the surface of his clay aren't literal representations of species or biological processes but rather allusions to his memories of the bush – sort of informed concoctions.

"Recalling these memories has profoundly shaped my artistic experience as an Australian artist living and working in Europe. I believe the geographical displacement has allowed me to reflect upon my homeland with increased

objectivity and romantic displacement." This parochial, deeply personal content aside, Tesch's ceramic sculptures seem to resonate with a universal audience – "two of the Rolling Stones own major works, as does Luciano Pavarotti, the Sultan of Brunei, and the homewares buyer of Ralph Lauren..."

All of which is very nice, but of no real consequence to one who works to satisfy only his desire "to forever play with the clay".

Andreas Tesch at Craft Victoria, 31 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, (03) 9650 7775, August 31 – October 7.