

# Avital Sheffer

## *Memory And Desire*

April 27 – May 11 2024

Memories both personal and historical, as well as a desire for collaborations that transcend complex cultural dichotomies, imbue internationally recognised Avital Sheffer's current exhibition of ceramic vessels. "Memory feeds desire and desires feeds memory," relays Sheffer. With an aesthetic rooted in millennia-old Mediterranean and Middle Eastern traditions, the forms manifest a sense of wholeness - a continuity and interconnectedness between the earth, the human body and mankind's endeavour to record aspects of time, place and esoteric understandings.



The *Lusitana I* vessel has a subtle anthropomorphic ambience. In the semblance of prehistoric fertility figurines it has a cleft base. Rudimentary tiny arm-like handles are positioned at the neck. The stopper could be envisioned as a little top-knotted head, its gold lustre contrasting with the porous tactility of the calligraphy covered body. The vessel's title refers to the encircling, undulating zigzag appliqué. "Lusitania is the name of ancient Portugal and Lusitano is that which comes from there," Sheffer explains. "In the black and white stone paved sidewalks of Lisbon and towns this undulating pattern often appears. When touring Iberia, I found the design very seductive and intriguing. I felt I had to adapt it into works.."

In the *Luminaria I* and *Luminaria III* ceramics, rotund arrangements again covered in swirling calligraphy, rise in decreasing size towards an elongated neck which may be thought of as stretching to receive creative sustenance or etheric nourishment for future sharing. The midsections of these vessels have unusual panels leading the eye up to pointed, gold lusted stoppers enclosing the mystery of what lies within. Sheffer conveys that *luminaria* translates as 'light that emanates from sacred objects' or 'illumination that reflects intelligence and arcane knowledge'. "I'd been thinking of innate female wisdom when making these curvaceous forms," she furthers. "The central panels are inspired by the endless design possibilities evidenced in geometric Islamic tiles from the Iberian Peninsula - here contrasting, yet complementing the rounded formations."

A prodigious technical process is required to actualise Sheffer's quest to create vessels that evince the archetypal and meld dichotomies. Working in her studio amid the hills beyond the small northern NSW town of Mullumbimby, Sheffer's practice articulates a long historic continuum. In the tradition of ancient ceramics, she builds her ware with coils of clay. From a predetermined base each vessel develops gradually and intuitively to assume its idiosyncratic character. When the form has been resolved, attention is focused on the surface of the raw clay. Textural enhancement is created with decorative incisions and appliquéd pieces. Engobes and dry glazes are subsequently applied. Following several firings, the surface is clad with calligraphic imagery and then the vessel is again fired. Recently Sheffer has been using small lustrous areas in her works. Liquid gold or copper is applied to the ceramic that is refired at 700 degrees to ensure stability and permanence. "I love using lustres to highlight details that contrast with the dry surface of my vessels," she tells. "I also want to make reference to the magnificent metallic lustre techniques first used in Mesopotamia and then spreading through Islamic cultures to Europe."

Although inspired by the forms, patterns and colour palette of the archaic, Avital Sheffer's art resonates a thoroughly contemporary aesthetic and relevance. The *Memory and Desire* vessels encompass a universal principle that promotes the hope for past, present and future collaborations and congenial interactions between disparate narratives.

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