



Henry Trumble

ALFRED LOWE

Combining the personal and political through sculptures, this artist explores Country and body image in his work.

Alfred Lowe makes sure his ceramics don't hold water. It's a political move, he says, aimed at those "who think they can buy themselves into being good people" and who collect Aboriginal art to signal that they're First Nations allies. "Part of me makes them non-functional so they can't be put in someone's house, used for flowers and forgotten about. It's a deliberate piece of art, not a vase."

The 27-year-old Arrernte artist started working with ceramics two years ago, after burning out post-pandemic as a support officer for the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia. "A lot of the things that make COVID dangerous in communities are poverty-based – overcrowding in houses, no access to water to wash your hands. All of these very simple fixes were being ignored. I ended up taking extended leave from that job and fell into the APY Collective. I never made a conscious decision to become an artist."

The son of an artist and a musician and raised with 12 older siblings in Alice Springs, Lowe remembers peering over the fence as a five-year-old to watch his neighbour, famed artist Clifford Possum, paint in his backyard. "I was just fascinated by it." Living opposite the Araluen Arts Centre, Lowe would go in to use the water bubbler and marvel at the paintings of Albert Namatjira.

Now a resident artist at Adelaide's APY Studio, he draws on the Central Desert landscape for the surface of his works, while the form examines body image. "I'm quite a big person and when you're big and queer and Aboriginal, you find that you're often shrinking yourself and dimming your light so I want to create forms that reject that. These forms are big and clunky and misshapen but they own the space they're in." ●

Exhibited at:

APY Gallery, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney; Sabbia Gallery, Sydney; Sydney Contemporary 2022; Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin

Breakthrough moment:

Showing at Sydney Contemporary last year. "It's this meeting of Australia's best artists so being able to show in the same space and seeing my work hold up to that standard was unbelievable."

What the experts say:

"Alfred has embedded himself in an Anangu art community where history, tradition, ambition and innovation complement and compete. In his work, it manifests in large-scale organic forms often interrupted by high colour or bold lines to create something contemporary and unique."

– Bruce Johnson McLean, Head Curator, First Nations Art, NGA

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