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Rachel Kingston and Margaret Carlin are both Australian National University post-grad students. Amongst other research interests, they are currently exploring the potential of Keraflex within their art practice.

Unfired, Keraflex porcelain tape is a thin, flexible sheet which is available in A2, A3 and customized sizes. Produced in 0.5mm and 1.0mm thicknesses, it is based on ceramic raw materials and an organic binding matrix, which burns out when fired, resulting in a strong and translucent porcelain.

This article discusses the impact that this new material has had upon Rachel and Margaret's individual art practices, as well as a comparative analysis of some of the differences between Keraflex porcelain and slip cast sheets of Imperial porcelain.

**Rachel Kingston**

For my Master of Visual Arts (double major ceramics/photography, Australian National University) in 2005/06, I began an ongoing body of work that is focused around the objects or traces that we leave behind when we die. The Gesture series explores the notion of capturing a moment in time through almost one thousand small porcelain sculptures that are constructed by grasping and crumpling handmade paper-thin A4 sheets of Imperial porcelain.

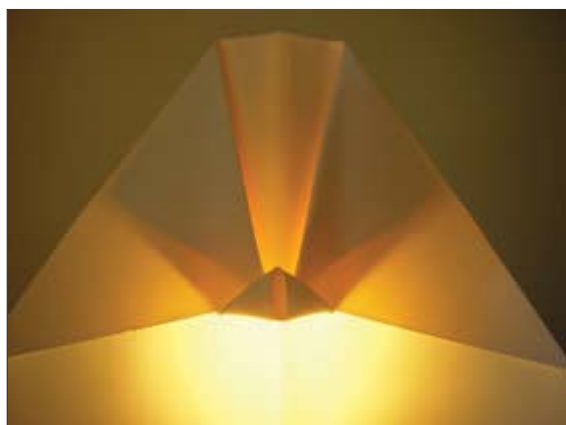
This work is centred around the desire to capture a life as a series of gestures or moments, a reflexive grasping at time itself. Fully embracing the knowledge of our own mortality enables us to experience the wonder and the transcendent beauty inherent in everyday objects and

occurrences.

For my MPhil (Research Student Ceramics Department and Inkjet Research Facility, Australian National University) in 2006/07, I have further explored the notion of what we leave behind, by taking a look at letter writing as a dying art form. This work combines the fragility of porcelain with a complex folded form.

The Love Letters series is the reproduction of email love letters that have been converted back to binary and printed onto porcelain paper planes. The porcelain plane is a metaphor for the fragility of online correspondence, a lament for the bygone art of letter writing. I am interested in the lack of materiality inherent in email correspondence. To convert these letters back into binary renders the communication visible yet incomprehensible, a tangible reminder of that which is absent.

*Above: Rachel Kingston, Love Letters, 2007, Keraflex porcelain, digital decals, dimensions variable (A4 sheet used), 1280??qC, installation view, Brenda May Gallery, Sculpture '07; photo: Andy Macdonald*



During my MVA, whilst developing the techniques necessary to make the paper-thin Imperial porcelain sheets, I experimented with Keraflex porcelain. I have been very interested in the differences between Keraflex and Imperial porcelain. Keraflex porcelain has not replaced Imperial in my practice. Both offer subtle differences that can be exploited for various artworks, depending on the results desired. For the purposes of this article, I wish to discuss the comparative differences that I have found between the two whilst making the same artworks in both materials.

The technique that I developed with Imperial porcelain gives the appearance of a handmade sheet of paper. Despite being paper-thin, it does have a slight surface texture which was important to me for the Gestures series, as it further pushed the notion of the handmade object.

One desired outcome however, was impossible with this technique. I wished to create a series of these crumpled Gestures with text on the whole sheet, which would render visible the text within, when held up to the light. This outcome was not possible due to the

necessity of crumpling the sheets of Imperial whilst still malleable. The unfired sheets of Keraflex have enabled me to apply the text in a variety of ways, prior to modeling the sheet into the desired shape.

*3 Rachel Kingston, Love Letters, 2007, Keraflex porcelain, dimensions variable (A4 sheet used), fired 1280??qC; photo: the artist*

The Keraflex sheets have a more mass-produced and smoother finish, in comparison to the Imperial handmade sheets. This appearance has been of value in my more recent MPhil body of work Love Letters.

I began by constructing these porcelain paper planes in Imperial, however I wasn't entirely pleased with the handmade quality for this

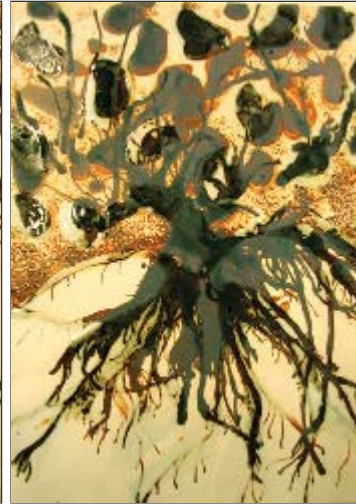
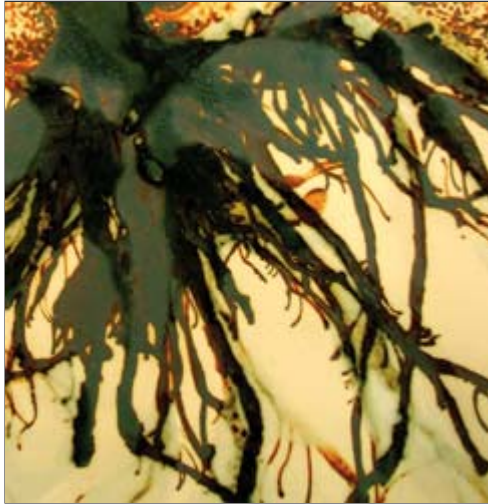


body of work.

Here, the Keraflex proved the perfect medium for a smoother, more industrial, appearance. Although my technique with Imperial produced a plane that was slightly thinner with finer folds achievable, the Keraflex provided a crisper more paperlike appearance.

Keraflex also enabled me to further explore the previously impossible desire to construct complex pieces that incorporate text and imagery, integral to the form itself.

*Rachel Kingston, Gestures, series 1 (detail), 2005/06, Imperial Porcelain, 1260°C; photo: the artist*



*Left: Margaret Carlin, Regeneration, Series 1 (detail), 2006, Keraflex porcelain, iron oxide, clear glaze, reduction-fired, 1280°C, photo: courtesy of the artist*

*Right: Margaret Carlin, Regeneration, Series 1, 2006, Keraflex porcelain, iron oxide, clear glaze, reduction-fired, 1280°C, h.18cm, w.25cm; photo: courtesy of the artist*



### Margaret Carlin

Within my Master of Visual Arts (Ceramics, Australian National University) I am exploring my notions of belonging and place that were challenged by the destruction of my immediate urban environment in the bush fires that occurred in Canberra in 2003.

I was living on the outskirts of the city where many of the markers and signposts of my physical environment were destroyed. Due to the previous planting of large pine plantations, very little regeneration of native vegetation has occurred. With much that is familiar destroyed, there is the need to re-establish links with the environment and landscape, as well as dealing with how a sense of place can be affected by such an event. The absence of large trees has opened the surrounding area up visually to create new views and vistas.

My connection with my local landscape and the sense of loss since the bush fires and the lack of regeneration is further articulated in the following:

The landscape also changes, but far more slowly; it is a living link between what we were and what we have become. This is one of the reasons that we feel such a

profound and apparently disproportionate anguish when a loved landscape is altered out of recognition; we lose not only a place, but part of ourselves, a continuity between the shifting phases of our life.<sup>1</sup>

Since starting my MVA in July 2006, I have taken the opportunity to explore the possibilities of this new material, Keraflex, as a vehicle to express some of these issues. In my previous BA work, I developed a technique which allowed me to construct very thin paper porcelain boxes. Even with the addition of paper pulp, these were extremely susceptible to cracking and breaking prior to firing. By contrast, the flexibility of the Keraflex in its green state allows for very easy handling.

Intending to include some form of drawing within the body of work for my MVA final show, I initially researched different inks and papers to try to attain the effects I was after. Having been given some A4 sheets of Keraflex to experiment with, I undertook some tests of mark-making, using iron oxide, to determine the possibilities of the material. Keraflex has a surface coating (which burns out during firing) which means that the oxide sits on the surface rather than being absorbed into the body. This provides an exceptionally smooth surface on which to draw, screen print or transfer images.

Due to the binders in the Keraflex, bisque firing has not been successful. Like the paper porcelain, after bisque firing it becomes quite brittle and easily broken. Once high-fired (1280°C), I have glazed it with commercial stoneware glazes. As my work is 2D, glazing flat sheets does not present problems when glazing the vitrified porcelain.

Once high-fired, Keraflex is translucent and is of a similar strength to the porcelain sheets I was using during my BA studies. It has an approximate shrinkage rate of 18 percent.

*1 A Writer's Britain: Landscape in Literature Margaret Drabble London 1979 p270*

*Above image: Margaret Carlin, Regeneration, Series 1, 2006, Keraflex porcelain, iron oxide, oxidation-fired 1280°C, h.35.5cm, w.47cm; photo: courtesy of the artist*

Article from The Journal of Australian Ceramics 46#1

[back...](#) [next..](#)