



# TILT

## Neville French talks about his latest collaboration with Belinda Fox

*How hopelessly we signal; how dark the sky;  
how big the waves. We are all lost at sea, washed  
between hope and despair; hailing something that  
may never come to rescue us.<sup>1</sup>* Julian Barnes

Last year I received an image from Belinda Fox of the masterful painting *The Raft of the Medusa* by 19th century French painter Théodore Géricault. It depicts a group of people shipwrecked on a makeshift raft. It is a poignant and unsettling image, particularly in light of the turmoil in the world at present.

We have been collaborating for more than six years and we began this latest project with discussions about humanity and the plight of refugees. Fox invited me to respond by creating ceramic vessels that would link to the ideas she was exploring and developing in her paintings. Fox's work *Tilt I* depicts waves that ebb and flow and grow into a raging sea – 'a metaphor for the world we live in', she says.

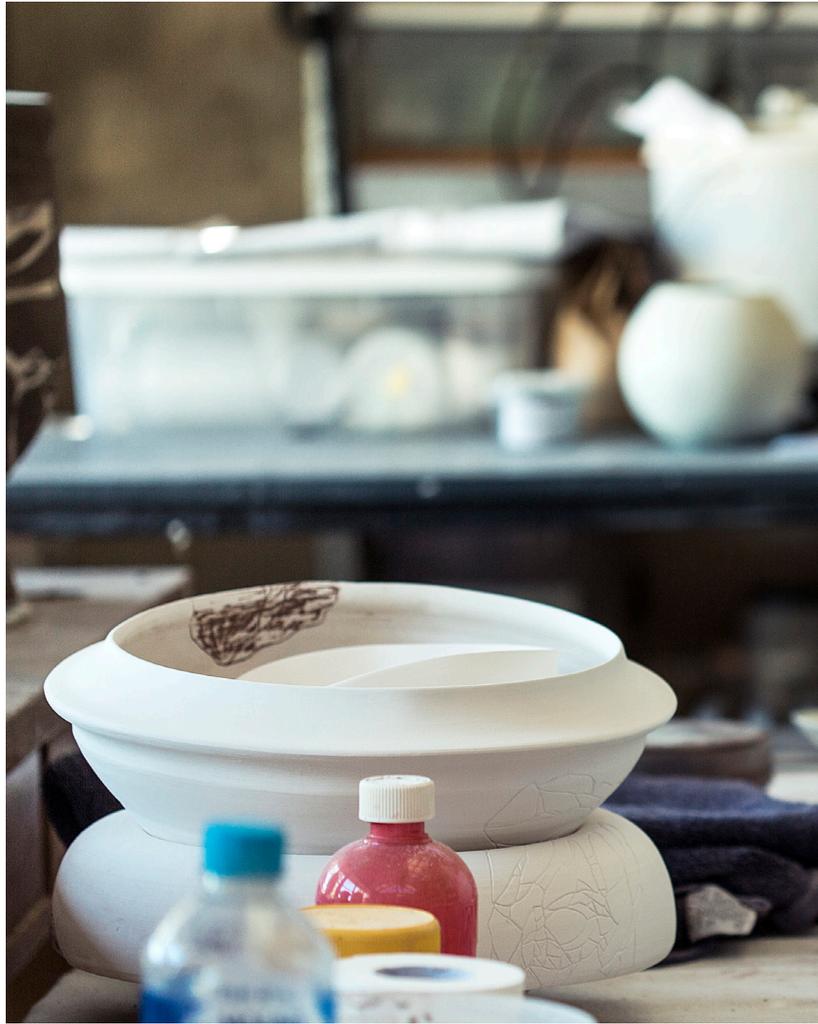
Within the wall of waves a ship is tipped on its side and the people are washed into the water. It is drawn from a news image of a boat of refugees and is a distressing record of an actual event.

Belinda Fox and Neville French, 2016  
Bunninyong, VIC; photo: Pia Johnson



## The Two of Us

Belinda Fox, 2016  
Photo: Pia Johnson



Fox says,

*... they hold on, let go, scramble, help, hinder; brave, scared ... Humanity in all its guises – survival, cruelty, luck, compassion, desperation, death, life, instinct, humility, harshness, family, fate. We all know this cannot end well – the ship is falling ... the world is tipping.<sup>2</sup>*

Our intention was to create ceramic vessels that reflected the feeling that Fox's drawings evoked. The tangible and evocative nature of the vessels would also give a heightened intensity and breadth to the concept, and would become fully integrated sculptural elements in a unique and dynamic installation – an exciting development in our collaboration.

To begin I developed new glazes with redgum and poplar wood-ash, and limestone glazes with varying alumina and silica values to create different types of glass. These were coloured with small blends of mineral oxides and stains. The glazes were layered and fused to porcelain test tiles to develop



tactile surfaces with depth and luminosity, colour and nuance. I created frosty and watery blues, grey/greens, whites, and metallic browns – some were flecked with ash, others were crazed, crystalline, fluid and viscous, matt and opaque or glossy and transparent. I contrasted these different glass properties to create shifts in the surfaces and reference the waves and imagery in Fox's paintings.

I threw large porcelain vessels on the wheel to create forms with a sense of fluidity. Further pushing and pulling of the pliable shapes created flowing contours and altered the movement of forms. I stretched, bent and juxtaposed forms to evoke the power and action of the sea while Fox made her marks: engraving, inlaying and painting their surfaces. Some pieces were made with small bases so they would appear to float, while others have been pushed off their axis and lean precariously. Vessels were placed on their sides, and on top of one another as though they had been tossed over, or nestled inside as if to protect and harbour them.



Above: **Neville French**, *Tilt 16*, 2017, thrown and altered porcelain, slip, wood ash and limestone glazes  
h.24cm, w.32cm, d.28cm; photo: Christopher Sanders

Below: **Neville French**, *Tilt 15*, 2017, thrown and altered porcelain, slip, wood ash and limestone glazes and acrylic  
h.24cm, w.30cm, d.20cm; photo: Christopher Sanders



I like the way Fox uses line and builds a dynamic play of positive and negative spaces in her drawings. She incorporates natural, organic washes of colour and texture to give the work material beauty. Together we experimented by brushing, scraping and inlaying slips and oxides and building up layers of glazes to create evocative surfaces that would resonate with the 2D works. She is fearless in her exploration of processes and extends my ceramic skills and approach by introducing unconventional techniques and expressive surface qualities – like using solvents to dissolve slips in some areas, or by incorporating jarring colour contrasts like fluorescent orange.

Fox is a multidisciplinary artist and highly skilled in her craft, and when we work together we explore a shared vision and integrate our skills to create new work. It is an intimate and stimulating process that involves trust, courage, skill, knowledge and intuition and has enabled us to create unique ceramic works that have a strong affinity with the drawings and add to the visual and sensory expression.

Fox says,

*There is something dangerous about collaborating, which is the hardest part but the most compelling...I am always excited and nervous working on French's forms. They are always so beautiful and evocative – I choose the ones that speak to me with instant clarity. I usually begin by smoothing out the surfaces first. In a way this allows me to feel the form. The cool clay in my hands, to navigate the beauty already present in the form, not to distract from what is there but to compliment and enhance French's work. Then I start the engraving or painting. I refer back to the 2D work that will also be on display, how to connect them. People often ask us: why don't you make your own pots? Or to French, why not draw on your own pots, why do you need each other? For me, I want to work as a team rather than as an individual, to respond to another artistic creation not my own, I want to have a dialogue with their artwork, I want to be challenged to think differently...<sup>3</sup>*

We are really excited about *Tilt*; it is our most ambitious show to date.

**Neville French and Belinda Fox's exhibition *Tilt* is on show at Manly Art Gallery & Museum, Sydney, from 14 July to 3 September 2017.**

**Neville French holds a Masters of Arts, Research (Ceramics) from RMIT University and was awarded Vitrify Alcorso National Ceramics Award in 2012. His work has been exhibited internationally at Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Galerie Rosenhauer, Germany, and Nancy Margolis Gallery in New York. He is represented in major national and international collections including the National Gallery of Australia; [www.nevillefrench.com](http://www.nevillefrench.com).**

**Belinda Fox is an Australian multidisciplinary artist currently residing in The Netherlands. Her work explores the contradictions of human nature in all its guises of beauty and indifference, cruelty and compassion. Fox is represented by Arthouse Gallery, Sydney, Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong, and Chan Hori in Singapore; [www.belindafox.com.au](http://www.belindafox.com.au). Instagram: @foxbelinda**

1 Julian Barnes, 'Keeping an Eye Open', *Essays on Art* (Jonathon Cape, London 2015), p.38

2 Belinda Fox notes to author 2017

3 Belinda Fox notes to author 2017