Once I loved the torn ocean's roar



Gerry Wedd

Gerry Wedd spends a lot of time beside the sea, ploughing off into the surf with his board to commune with the elements, wandering along the beach near his Port Elliot studio, and restocking his image-bank with rustic snapshots of flotsam and jetsam, overheard conversations and sea creature carcasses. He is a prolific maker and the speed of that making—those 10,000+ hours of experience—is evidenced in his ability to put down the big ideas and the small ideas fluently side by side and have them sit together easily on the curvature of a pot. The heroic and the dark romantic; mermaids, sailing ships, skeletons and tempestuous waters share space with a surfer in long pants and a Holden Kingswood speeding to the beach. He does the same with the patterning on the pots, expertly morphing the traditional painted band of blue to reference an occy-strap. Other times he takes the decorative willow pattern and, with a nod to William Morris, grows it into a sea of marijuana leaves. There appears to be an endless stretching and twisting of conventional ceramic language that drives Wedd's practice, but rather than thinking of it as a bridging of historic and contemporary visual language, he encourages us to consider the presence of the mythical in the objects of today, sitting them together in a timeless conversation.



Dead fish resulting from the algal blooms across the southern coast of South Australia lie, face up, pallid in the water in Wedd's Bloom works. A stingray's ghostly eyes stare out from the glazed surface; could there be a more real and present reminder of our mortality? At the same time, those cold eyes transport us into the world of the sober and macabre vanitas paintings of 17th Century Dutch Golden Age. This conjuring of imagery exemplifies Wedd's knack for dissolving time to retrain our gaze on the present.

The works in this exhibition unite under the title *Once I loved the torn ocean's roar*—a line of verse lifted from a Dave Graney compilation album title, in turn taken from a Lord Byron poem: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto III*. And while Dave Graney and Lord Byron are separated by 200 odd years and 15,000kms, there again is the dissolving of time and the entering into a unified dream space where Byronic verse meets its contemporary protagonist: the lone surfer surveying the breaks before heading out into the waves.



Gerry Wedd grew up with pottery; his mother made her own pots, and he lent a hand in her studio, first drawing recklessly on their surfaces and later helping her make larger items. He was a young teenager when he first threw his own lumps of clay. By the time he'd decided to take pottery seriously, he was already familiar and experienced with the mechanical and chemical processes involved. Gerry describes being fascinated with the narrative possibilities of potting—the opportunity to tell stories as the driving force behind his younger imagination. While he then went on to study and make jewellery he never stopped potting. At 28 he began formal training in visual art at the South Australian School of Art and in 1986 found himself as a core artist for the iconic Australian label Mambo, where he worked across media creating ceramics, textiles, posters, clothing, metalwork and surfboards. Wedd had also become a studio tenant at the original JamFactory Workshops (Adelaide) where he worked in the ceramics studio, developing his skills for three years. In 2005, he completed a Master of Fine Art at the University of South Australia where he also tutored and lectured.


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While Wedd is a prolific maker, much of the warm attraction of his pots comes from an organic approach to making—to working with and through the clay and leaving a window open for the alchemical reactions and anomalies that can then pose new ideas and directions for a piece.

While the technical decisions around making works are precise, there is also a sense that Wedd wants the material to show something of its own naked composition in the work. In the studio he hand-builds the pots, preferring to use a coiling technique for construction before the works are decorated. This process often begins with the application of a slip glaze of liquid clay and mineral colourants. From here, Wedd can work by adding sprigged (relief) motifs and more glazes, then painting, drawing or sgraffito—a scratching technique revealing contrasting layers of the surface beneath.

From his small rustic and salt-sprayed backyard studio, Wedd makes thumbnail sketches to plan out the drawings on a pot, often referring to old sketchbooks, photos, song lyrics and film references. Painting with a blue cobalt glaze using a fine paintbrush, he will often revise, rethink and improvise the design as he moves around the vessel. And then there is the final firing, the last piece of alchemy that makes or (literally) breaks the artwork.

—Chris Clements (Curator)

Image credits:

Cover: Gerry Wedd, *Maelstrom*, 2026, handbuilt mid-fired clay with cobalt underglaze. Photograph: Sam Roberts.

Gerry Wedd, *Michael Petersen Sequence 3*, 2026, handbuilt mid-fired clay with cobalt underglaze. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Gerry Wedd, *Lorelei*, 2026, handbuilt mid-fired clay with cobalt underglaze. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Gerry Wedd in his studio, 2018. Photograph: Andrew Cowen.

Gerry Wedd, *Bloom dish*, 2026, handbuilt mid-fired clay with cobalt underglaze. Photograph: Sam Roberts.

Gerry Wedd, *Shark plate*, 2026, handbuilt mid-fired clay with cobalt underglaze. Photograph: Sam Roberts.

Back cover: Gerry Wedd, *Bloom pot* (installation view) 2025, handbuilt mid-fired clay with cobalt underglaze. The Little Machine Gallery, Adelaide. Photograph: Sam Roberts.



Acknowledgements
The Riddoch Arts and Cultural Centre acknowledges that the land that we work on is the traditional land of the Boandik people. We recognise the Boandik people as the traditional owners of this land and respect their living culture.

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