

## A Feast for her Senses

Sarah Tracton  
Northcote Pottery  
Supplies Artist in  
Residence talks with  
Claire Atkins



**Claire Atkins:** Congratulations on your residency! Why do you think you were selected, and what's your advice for applicants?

**Sarah Tracton:** As a graduate fresh out of the National Art School (NAS), it was the perfect opportunity to transition from student towards independent artist. Northcote Pottery Supplies (NPS) is all about education and supporting makers at all levels by selecting artists who can add originality to its workshop program. I was keen to share my skills in slip/slab porcelain construction. My advice for applicants is highlight what's unique about your technique to help your application stand out.

**CA:** Describe the facilities available.

**ST:** NPS incorporates a materials supply shop, manufacturing, *SMALLpieces Gallery*, residency program, workshops, technical advice, and a firing service with seven electric kilns. As artist in residence I had a sunny, private studio space, rent-free and accessible 24/7.

**CA:** Paint for us a typical day; what expectations did Northcote have?

**ST:** In the first week I launched into making plaster slabs. From there I finessed my technique in building architectural porcelain slabs, pouring slip onto the smooth plaster surfaces.

Artists in residence are expected to deliver a one-day workshop and floor talk on their practice. I shared my technical approach in working with porcelain, the tenuousness of wet and dry ratios, and guided students in building porcelain cylinders.



Opposite: Sarah Tracton, Northcote Pottery Supplies Guest Artist in Residence  
Above: **Sarah Tracton**, Sensory Series detail, 2016, porcelain, 1280°, h.15–43cm, w.13–27cm, d.13–20cm; photos: Jorge de Arauj

**CA:** How has the residency impacted your ceramics practice?

**ST:** It was an invaluable opportunity to further develop my technical skills and aesthetic. My NAS mentors, Sandy Lockwood and Tania Rolland, had encouraged my conceptual development throughout my degree, and now it was time to challenge myself post-graduation. Situated in the vibrant hub of Brunswick East, NPS is perfectly positioned within a thriving, creative scene. Spirited chats with fellow resident artists and staff created an energetic atmosphere. I was also able to make larger scale forms, all the while becoming more intuitive with my materials and joining technique.

**CA:** How did you challenge yourself?

**ST:** I was born with moderate hearing loss and became profoundly deaf in my twenties; my goal was to develop a lighting series as a metaphorical and literal expression of my journey to rehabilitate my hearing with a cochlear implant. Technology has enabled me a recent freedom, and the translucency of porcelain is a metaphor for my journey. Light has a powerful effect on those who experience sensory deprivation in the form of hearing loss. Sound brings an illuminating light. I'm now excited to be collaborating with *SMALLpieces* on a lighting showcase.

**CA:** Where to next?

**ST:** During my residency I was awarded a Creative Fellowship with the State Library of Victoria. My latest project, *Hearing it for Silence*, investigates the library's unique collection of manuscripts by Dr Pierre Gorman, the first profoundly deaf person to graduate with a doctorate from Cambridge University. My research explores neural reorganisation following sensory loss, and I'm excited to immerse myself in these historical archives over the coming months. In November I'm exhibiting in the group show *Ephemeral Nature* at Gallery Klei in Sydney.

**Sarah Tracton is an award-winning multidisciplinary 2D and 3D artist. In 2016 she was awarded a Skills and Development Grant by the Australia Council for the Arts, supporting her Guest Artist in Residency at Northcote Pottery Supplies; [www.sarahtracton.com](http://www.sarahtracton.com).**