

CHAPTER 18

MARTIN POPPELWELL

> BEING THERE WHEN IT HAPPENS

AS BOTH A PAINTER and a potter, Martin Poppelwell maintains two studios. He is also qualified to comment on the relationship between these creative activities: 'For some reason we get tricked into thinking that different mediums have different statuses, and we all know it's not true ... the proof's in the pudding.'

Poppelwell's current painting studio is in his house on Napier's Bluff Hill. He bought the 1881 vintage cottage in 2007, and has had to adjust to its low ceilings and small spaces: 'I use every room, except my bedroom, although I've been using that to store some things ... you have to try and find areas you can operate as practically as possible, because the practice of making art is very elusive ... so it's a matter of how do I make it as easy for myself as possible?' No doubt it will become easier in his new painting studio, which is currently under construction in the lower corner of his property.

His pottery studio is in a shed beside the house: 'I've always wanted to have a pottery handy to where I live, simply because the nature of the process requires you to be at close hand ... You don't want the kiln to be separate from your home when you're firing on a regular basis ... it's just too difficult.' He describes pottery as the art form with 'the lowest emission rate ... it takes a long time to get a sense of what the object is trying to do. And the more basic and subtle and reserved the object is, then the longer it often takes ... Whereas, with painting, graphics or printmaking, the medium itself demands a much more instant sensation.'

He considers his own pottery work 'a bit funky', and part of a movement away from the main studio pottery tradition in this country. After studying at the Elam School of Fine Arts in 1991–2, Poppelwell went overseas, and returned to spend two years living and working in Whanganui. He was interested in the idea of applying drawn or painted images to clay forms, a process which demanded 'one take full responsibility for the object and make it oneself'. From Whanganui potter Ross Mitchell-Anyon he learned how to 'make very basic ready-made traditional shapes and then use those as a surface or a structure that could receive information in the form of lines or diagrams. I really see them as three-dimensional diagrams that happen to be made out of clay ... First of all I made them and lived with them—I didn't want to go and buy them—cups, plates and vases, which were quite primitive.' He then moved to Hawke's Bay, to continue his pottery, painting and drawing.

