



CERAMICS IN THE CEDAR CABINET

Works by Merric and Doris Boyd, displayed at Bundanon Homestead from the Bundanon Trust Collection

EDUCATION GUIDE

BUNDANON

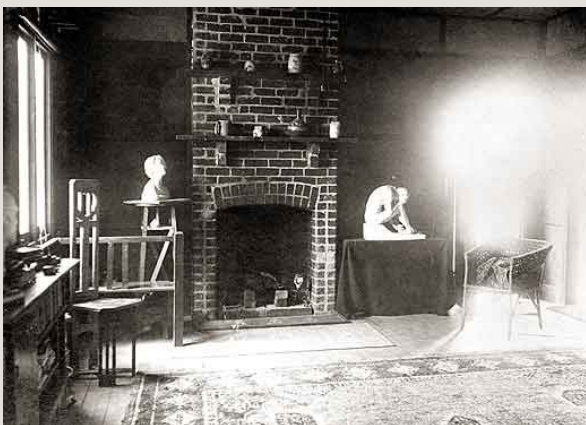


(Above) Merric Boyd's eight fire box kiln, Open Country, 1913-1917
(Cover) Merric Boyd, *Figure of Arthur Boyd aged three years*, 1923

INTRODUCTION: MERRIC AND DORIS BOYD CERAMICS

The cedar cabinet in the Music room at Bundanon Homestead houses ceramic works by both Merric Boyd (1888–1959) and Doris Boyd (1889–1960), the parents of Arthur Boyd (1920–1999). Merric Boyd was the second son of Arthur Merric Boyd and Emma Minnie a'Beckett. Merric's mother had a substantial inheritance; both parents were artists, and Victoria Hammond notes that in an environment 'suffused with the European culture of the 1880s and 1890s', Merric learnt to draw and paint 'as part of the natural process of growing up'.¹ The Cedar Cabinet was commissioned by Arthur Boyd and made from red cedar sourced from the Bundanon property by Shoalhaven furniture and instrument maker Robin Moyes.

In an effort to find him a suitable career, he spent some time as a jackeroo on a relative's property in 1905 — from where he remembered images of 'station life' that were to recur in his work, went briefly to Dookie Agricultural College, and also attended a Church of England theological college for a short while. In 1907 he moved with his parents to a dairy farm in Yarra Glen in the unsuccessful hope this would ensure his self-sufficiency. Here, instead, he became interested in clay modelling and sculpture through a family friend, Charles Web Gilbert, and attended drawing classes in the School of Design at the National Gallery School for one term in 1910. Around this time he met painter, Doris Gough, whom he would later marry, and modelled a bust of her that was shown in an exhibition of the Victorian Society of Artists in 1911.¹



The Brown Room at Open Country, 1917-19

Merric purchased clay for his sculpture from Archibald McNair's commercial pottery at Burnley, and became interested in making thrown pots, inspired by the experience of making one there himself. He taught himself how to throw, glaze and fire his work through experimentation and with help from the workers in the pottery who also offered him the use of a small kiln. From 1912 to 1914 he was employed by the manager, Hans Fyansch, at the Australian Porcelain Insulator works at Yarraville, where he was able to further develop his knowledge and skills.



Merric Boyd demonstrates throwing pots at the annual exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria, October, 1929



Doris Boyd sketching, date unknown



Merric Boyd at Open Country Pottery, Murrumbeena, c1914

In 1912, he showed what Peter Timms describes as ‘rugged-looking domestic stonewares and some small sculptural pieces’¹³ at the Centreway in Melbourne, the first solo exhibition of studio pottery to be held in Australia. Hammond suggests that: His early restlessness was a sign of the need to channel his boundless energies into work which required absolute commitment and devotion.

In 1913, Merric’s parents moved to Brighton, and at the same time purchased an orchard property for him at 8 Wahroonga Crescent in Murrumbeena, southeast of Melbourne, which he called Open Country. Here they financed the building of a cottage to Merric’s design, and he soon added a pottery studio. While ceramic industries had skills and equipment for making, for example, tiles, pipes and commercial wares, and while china painting was popular, especially with members of the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria after its formation in 1907, it was unusual to embark on the development of handmade pottery in this way. Precursors were Alan Finlay and Harold Swanson, who set up a pottery in the Melbourne suburb of Moreland in 1908, to be joined by Finlay’s brother, Ernest, in 1913.¹⁵ By the 1920s, making, as well as decorating pots, was to become a popular activity across the country.

After Merric and Doris married in 1915, Doris became closely involved in his work, painting landscapes on many of the pots he made. Merric was sent to England and France as an air mechanic with the Australian Flying Corps in 1917. At the end of the war, for about six months in 1918–19, a British government training scheme allowed him the opportunity to study ceramic techniques and kiln technology at the Stoke Technical School, under Dr Joseph Mellor, and to visit local potteries, such as Wedgwood, in Staffordshire.¹⁶ On the troopship journey home in 1919, Merric taught pottery classes to returning servicemen as part of an Army Education Service rehabilitation program.

Merric’s practice as a studio potter was quite unusual for its time, when pottery was generally produced commercially. His studio, set up at the family property Open Country was the focus for production. Merric was an inventive potter who frequently prepared his own materials.

Victoria Hammond explained that in his studio at Open Country, Merric Boyd:

... had a very elaborate pottery containing pug mills, grinders, numerous plate presses, ball mills, all kinds of throwing wheels and motorised shafts to drive these machines ... He invented his own version of a multi-purpose clay preparation machine called a ‘blunger’ which he attached to the big pear tree in the back-yard of Open Country.¹

Typical of his sense of humour, Merric gave alliterative names to machines as well as to children and pets; he referred to the blunger as the ‘bumble bumble’ because of the noise it made. His inventiveness extended to the preparation of his materials; as well as buying basic glazes from commercial potteries, he mostly purchased various oxides and mixed his own glaze compounds. His experiments were also reputed to include collecting dog droppings, for their calcium. This resourceful characteristic appears have been shared by Arthur in later decades in his development of ceramic painting mediums and printing techniques for his own use. The work in the pottery was central to the children’s lives; Merric taught all his children to work with clay.

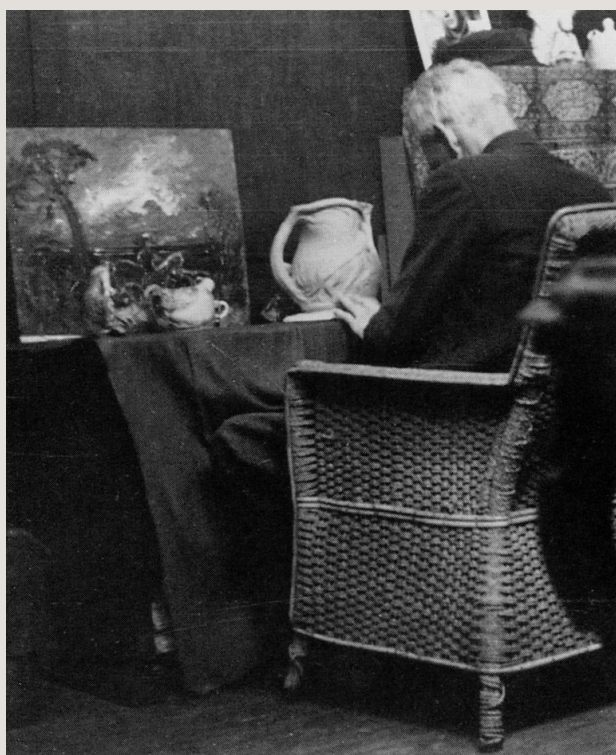
Works in the cedar cabinet include vases, jugs and figurines. He applied koalas and possums to the handles and rims of his pots, embedding them in the swirling twigs and branches of the tree. Some of these were decorated by Merric's wife Doris Boyd, also an artist. Merric applied shallow relief and incised decoration using Australian flora and fauna, including recurring use of the white gum motif. He and Doris sold their work at home and through exhibitions with the Arts and Crafts Society, but mainly took suitcases of pots by horse and trap, or later by train, to retailers in the city, such as the Primrose Pottery Shop.

In 1989, Arthur said of his father:

He felt very strongly that pottery ought not to be private, expensive, or special in the exclusive sense ... If you had a particular talent or bent, and you were able to organise it into creative effort that could serve others, then you should do that.¹

While the ceramics of Merric Boyd, and son Arthur Boyd are very different, many of the same attitudes and approaches to art influenced both. As members of a notably creative family, both had exceptional talent and originality as artists. It was expected of the children of both Merric's and Arthur's generations that they would explore creative ideas, and have compassion and respect for others.¹

Both Merric and Arthur were introspective and passionate, as well as generous; scholars have variously described the work of both as seeking love, while often expressing isolation or exclusion. Merric closely documented his family, animals, neighbouring people and the landscape around him through his drawings and ceramics.



Merric Boyd in his wicker chair, carving a pot in the 'brown room' at Open Country, Murrumbidgee, c1954

Arthur also said:

He was extremely generous with his time and loved teaching; by pure example he communicated his energy to us. It was absolutely impossible not to learn or be involved in some kind of creative activity. My mother, Doris, worked to keep this spirit alive. In spite of her physical frailty, she was the backbone of our family. Without her, our life would have fallen to pieces.¹

References:

This education resource is adapted from Grace Cochrane, Catalogue Essay, Whitegums and Ramoxes, 2009
All Quotes, other than those directly attributed to other writers, are from this source and the exhibition case labels.

1. Victoria Hammond, *Merric Boyd, Studio Potter, 1888–1959*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1990

CERAMICS: THE CEDAR CABINET

The cedar cabinet in the Music room at Bundanon Homestead houses ceramic works by both Merric Boyd and Doris Boyd, the parents of Arthur Boyd. Arthur Boyd commissioned instrument maker Robert Moyes c1981 to construct the cedar cabinet from Red Cedar (Toona Australis) found on the property. The cabinet is constructed in three parts: the base timber-fronted cupboards, the glass-fronted cabinets and the pediment. The cupboard was built to hold the Boyd family ceramics.



The Cedar Cabinet, Music Room, Bundanon Homestead



DOOR 1



DOOR 2



DOOR 3



DOOR 4

SHELF 1

SHELF 2

SHELF 3

SHELF 4

DOOR 1

SHELF 1 & 2



DOOR 1 / SHELF 1 LEFT
 Vase, Horse and figure with plough, 1949
 Jug, Horse and cart, 1947



DOOR 1 / SHELF 1 RIGHT
 Jug, Man riding horse, kangaroo and emu, 1951
 Candlestick, Gumtree, a log hut, 1949
 Jug, Hut, early settler, Circa 1949



DOOR 1 / SHELF 2 LEFT
 Vase, The Koala, Australian Native Bear, 1932



DOOR 1 / SHELF 2 RIGHT
 Vase, Koala and tree, 1933, Merric and Doris Boyd,
 Jug with trees, 1925

Many of Merric Boyd's pots reflect his interest in documenting the rural life he remembered, the Murrumbidgee landscape in which he lived and the beaches that the family knew well, especially at Rosebud on the Mornington Peninsula. Some of the scenes inscribed or painted on the forms relate to his drawings of fences, horses in harness, boats, roads and buildings. He also refers to his memories as a jackeroo on a sheep station.

DOOR 1

SHELF 3 & 4



DOOR 1 / SHELF 3 LEFT Bowl,
Gum Trees, 1938



DOOR 1 / SHELF 3 RIGHT
Jug, Gum Tree, 1931
Jug, Australian Gum Tree, 1938 Jug
with tree trunk handle, Unknown



DOOR 1 / SHELF 4 LEFT
Jug with tree trunk handle, 1944 Jug
with tree trunk handle, C 1912 Jug
with tree trunk handle, 1944



DOOR 1 / SHELF 4 RIGHT
Vase, The Australian gum tree, 1939

By 1915, with his underlying interest in sculpture, Merric had started to distort the thrown pots and apply clay to the form, to model features that became part of the form itself. A constant motif was a windswept tree — often a gum tree, but also ti-trees. His work can be identified as in the prevailing Art Nouveau style, recognised by its use of fluid lines and organic forms, and for a genre of 'decorative landscape' within it, of which he may have been aware through the Studio magazine in his parents' house. However, this was underpinned by his 'passion for the primitive element' in the Australian landscape. He was both expressive and inventive, and interested in abstract organic elements, later making complex double-walled and pierced pots.²

2. See extended reference to Boyd's links with Art Nouveau, in Christopher Tadgell, *Merric Boyd Drawings*, un-numbered, p8

DOOR 2

SHELF 1 & 2



DOOR 2 / SHELF 1 LEFT

Teapot with tree trunk handle, 1945, front
Vase, Landscape, 1937
Bowl with trees, 1945
Vase, 1925



DOOR 2 / SHELF 1 RIGHT

Vase with boat scene, 1947
Vase, Blue and white landscape 1932
Vase, Landscape with gum trees, fence and house, 1944



DOOR 2 / SHELF 2

LEFT Jug with trees, 1942
Blue vase, 1924



DOOR 2 / SHELF 2 RIGHT

Vase, Landscape, 1947 Vase
with landscape, 1935 Vase
with trees, 1940

Working in local earthenware clay, Merric Boyd inscribed and painted drawings on his 'special pots'. A favourite motif was that of groups of gum trees with tall white trunks. Boyd had learned to throw pots at a commercial pottery while collecting clay for his sculpture in about 1910. He established his Open Country cottage and pottery at Murrumbena, near Melbourne, in 1913. While in England after World War 1 he also studied in the technical school and famous potteries in Stoke-on-Trent.

DOOR 2

SHELF 3 & 4



DOOR 2 / SHELF 3 LEFT
Figure, Man with reclining dog, 1949
Figure of Kneeling boy with koala, 1947
Figure of boy with dog, 1947



DOOR 2 / SHELF 3 RIGHT
Figure of Arthur Boyd aged three years, 1923
Head of Arthur Boyd aged three months c1920



DOOR 2 / SHELF 4
 LEFT *Jug with Ti-Trees, 1937*



DOOR 2 / SHELF 4 RIGHT
Vase with landscape, 1945
Vase with post-and-rail fence, 1935
Vase, Landscape with post-and-rail fence, 1949

Boyd became interested in sculpture around 1910, and spent a brief period at the National Gallery School in Melbourne. His first encounter with clay was as a material for modelling, rather than for making pots. As well as carving and modelling his pots, he constantly made small models of his children and their friends, including a head of Arthur aged three months, in 1920, and a small figure of him at the age of three. In his old age, when he could no longer make pots, Merric Boyd continued to make small figures of people and animals.

DOOR 3

SHELF 1 & 2



DOOR 3 / SHELF 1 LEFT
 Vase, 1927
 Blue vase with gum leaves and nuts, 1934
 Vase, 1927



DOOR 3 / SHELF 1 RIGHT
 Jug with gum nuts and leaves, 1941
 Vase, 1927



DOOR 3 / SHELF 2 LEFT
 Jug with tree trunk handle, 1926
 Vase, Koala's Australian Native Bear, 1930



DOOR 3 / SHELF 2 RIGHT
 Statuette, A poultry family, 1950
 Vase, 1948

After some experience of working on stoneware at the Burnley Pottery, Merric worked in local earthenware clay, dug, at first, from a pit at Open Country. He made a distinction between his commercial wares and his 'special pots', on which he inscribed and painted drawings. In his colour range he favoured soft blues, greens, greys and yellows, often allowing the pale colour of the clay to show through the painted oxides and coloured engobes (clay slip with additives), under an overall clear glaze.

DOOR 3

SHELF 3 & 4



DOOR 3 / SHELF 3 LEFT
Figure, Girl with bucket, 1947
Figure, Boy with bucket, 1948
Figure, child weeping, 1950
Figure, Shearer, date unknown



DOOR 3 / SHELF 3 RIGHT
Figure, Kneeling man with pup, 1947
Figure, A shearer, 1950



DOOR 3 / SHELF 4 LEFT
Bookend, 1944
Bookend, 1944
Jug with connected saucer, date unknown



DOOR 3 / SHELF 4
 RIGHT *Ceramic vase, 1948*

His rural observations included drawings of koalas and kangaroos, possums, birds, pigs and milking cows 'where the milk commences', cats and dogs —both working dogs and the family pet, 'Peter the dog'. He modelled a number of these and, especially with koalas and possums, often applied them to the handles and rims of his pots, embedding them in the swirling twigs and branches of the tree-forms.

DOOR 4

SHELF 1 & 2



DOOR 4 / SHELF 1 LEFT
*Jug with grapes, 1937 Jug
 with grapes, 1924*



DOOR 4 / SHELF 1
 RIGHT *Jug with grapes,
 1941 Jug with grapes, 1950*



DOOR 4 / SHELF 2 LEFT *Green
 jug with gum leaves, 1922 Green
 plate, 1929
 Green vase with grape leaf, 1931
 Jug without a handle, 1925*



DOOR 4 / SHELF 2 RIGHT
*Blue vase, 1924
 Blue vase, 1924
 Blue vase, 1925
 Vase with gum nut and leaf motif, 1934*

Merric Boyd not only threw these pots, but carved and modelled them and applied the grapes and leaves. On one jug he has made the leaves from a mould of an impressed leaf itself.

DOOR 4

SHELF 3 & 4



DOOR 4 / SHELF 3 LEFT

Vase with rabbits, 1933, Doris Boyd Vase with landscape, 1945, Doris Boyd Honey pot and lid, 1915, Doris Boyd Vase with tree, 1923, Doris Boyd



DOOR 4 / SHELF 3 RIGHT

Jug with leaf on handle, 1943 Vase with blue tree, 1931, Doris Boyd Jug with trees, 1930, Doris Boyd



DOOR 4 / SHELF 4 LEFT

Rear Jug, blue and cream landscape, 1922 Jug with landscape, 1922, Merric and Doris Boyd Humanity, 1931, Doris Boyd
Front Bowl, sheep in a paddock, 1956, Doris Boyd Bowl with sheep in paddock, 1956, Doris Boyd



DOOR 4 / SHELF 4 RIGHT

Vase, Landscape with house, 1938, Merric Boyd Vase, Tree and post-and-rail fence, 1930, Doris Boyd Plate with trees, 1949, Doris Boyd Bo, 1952, Doris Boyd

Doris painted some pots in his style, and he threw others for her to paint with her own delicate landscapes.