

THE WOLF IS ALWAYS NEAR
An Exhibition of Vases

Lucinda Mudge

BIOGRAPHY

Lucinda Mudge is a contemporary South African artist working primarily in the medium of ceramics. After graduating from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town (1997-2000), she spent the following years between Cape Town and the UK before moving to Keurboomstrand, Plettenberg Bay, where she now lives and works. *The Wolf is Always Near* is her seventh solo exhibition.

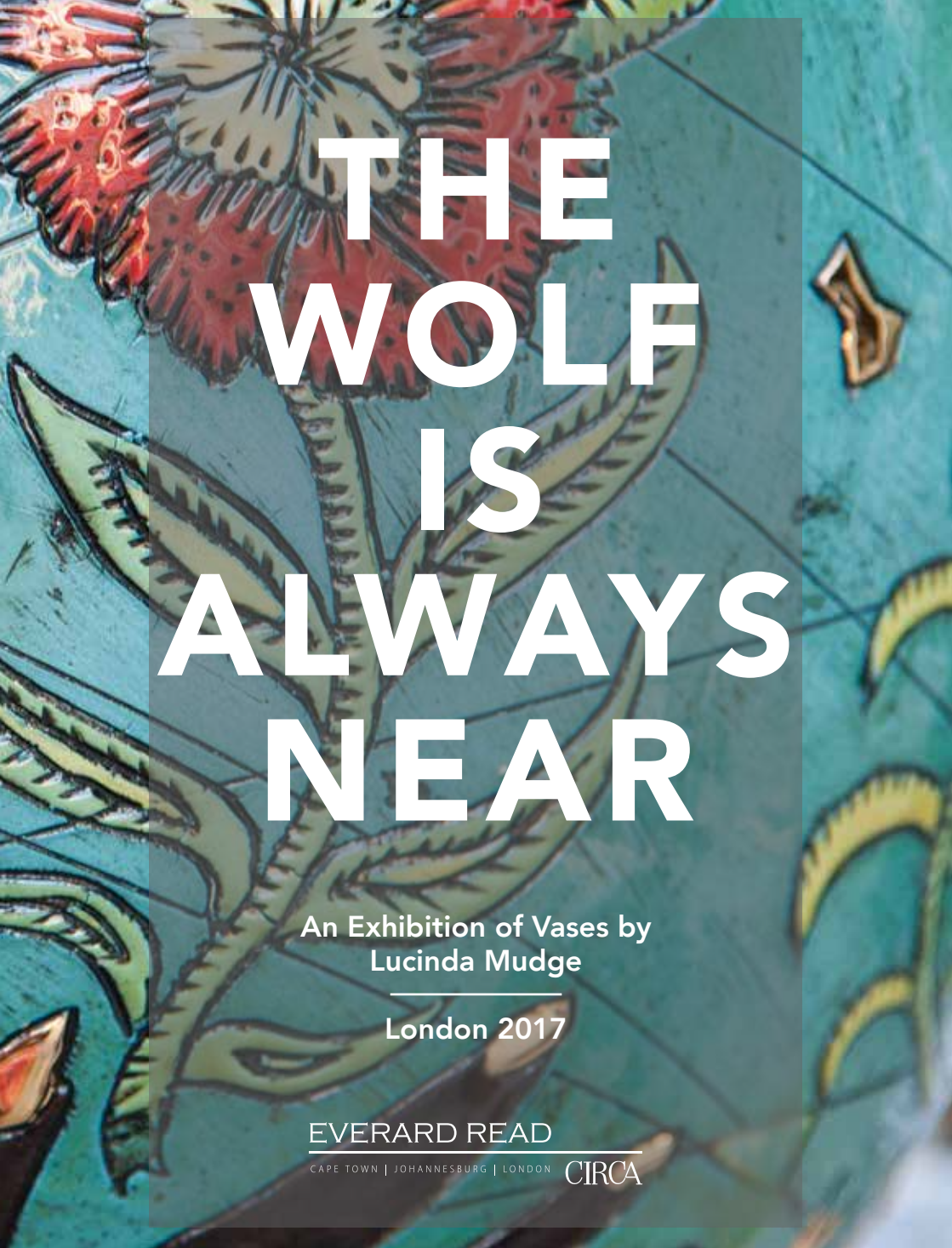
Recent solo shows include: *Kill You Eat You*, Everard Read/Circa Johannesburg (2016); *Take What You Want*, Knysna Fine Art, Knysna (2015); *Lasers in the Jungle*, The Gallery at Grande Provence, Franschoek, (2014); and *The White Tiger and Other Stories*, Knysna Fine Art, Knysna (2013).

Lucinda's work was recently exhibited at the Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain, as part of the exhibition *Making Africa* (2015).

Lucinda Mudge has work in major corporate and private collections nationally and internationally, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Guernsey, the Netherlands, Italy and Russia.

Her work is included in the following publications: *Making Africa - A Continent of Contemporary Design*, (2015); *The Bauhaus: #itsalldesign*, published by Vitra Design Museum, edited by Mateo Kries, Jolanthe Kugler (2015) and *VASE: Function Reviewed*, curated by Brian Kennedy, Kilkenny Arts Festival, Ireland (2016)





THE WOLF IS ALWAYS NEAR

An Exhibition of Vases by
Lucinda Mudge

London 2017

EVERARD READ

CAPE TOWN | JOHANNESBURG | LONDON

CIRCA

INTRODUCTION

DR JONATHAN FOYLE

If names drink deep through their historical roots, the tangled etymology of Mudge is something to behold. One theory of the word's origin proposes a Scottish imperative to shift someone, perhaps a portman-teau of 'move' and 'budge'. Another claims it's a place-name for a fellow who dwells by the mud. A further supposes that it simply echoes an ancient proper noun, someone called 'Mugga.' Movement, clay and earth, echoes of the past, an arresting informality. That goes far in describing Lucinda Mudge and her work.

Her maternal line stems from Staffordshire, home of the English potteries, while her father's father moved from Scotland to what was then Rhodesia. She identifies as South African and belonging to Knysna, the town she was brought up in near her present home at Keurbooms Beach, close to Plettenberg Bay. Mudge returned here in 2010 after four years in London working as a photographer. In Brixton, happily adjacent Edmund de Waal's porcelain-crammed studio, she took an evening class in ceramics. An interest developed in Staffordshire slipware, a three-and-a-half century-old palette of chocolate and honey-hued glazes, drizzled and streaked and combed on teapots, jugs and platters.

How was it achieved? She experimented, asked, and tried some more. The solution was slips with lots of lead oxide. It's base, filthy stuff, but yields a wondrous lustre and refinement.

Mudge is a person of striking straightforwardness and almost unfiltered honesty, whose vivid artworks dive headlong into subversion and paradox of all kinds. She cheerfully explains her intention was not to make vases. She liked platters.

"My first vases were in 2013, made for Trent Read [Director of Everard Read Franschhoek and of Knysna Fine Art]. He saw my exhibition of platters and said 'you need to make vases'. I was barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen. I had no idea how to create one."

So she learned how to shape vessels from clay in the style of Korean earthenware jars, a tradition called *onggi* dating back about 7,000 years. A disc provides the platform for consecutive rings of wet clay, kneaded and slapped into shape as the rising wall of the pot. The simplicity of the process belies the difficulty of its mastery. Mudge found it a struggle, a frustration. That may seem at odds with her joyful colour and subversive humour. But jokes provided a vent.

"I can now reflect on that after six years.

Part of the humour was mocking myself. In a lot of ways the vases could be technically bad. They're painstakingly laborious, and even before they reached the kiln some would crack and fail. I'd think 'this is crazy', but I couldn't stop. My humour was partly a response to a relationship with an unforgiving medium."

Detachment makes self-mockery easier she says, while allowing her to treat the pots as characters that can express what is normally unspeakable.

"I can look at them and laugh because they're so appealing, traditional- easy on the eye... there are so many beautiful things about them. But because I didn't decide to make them, I can laugh at them and subvert them."

Some distance is an emotional necessity when chance is your collaborator. It takes three months to make a vase, and when Mudge opens the kiln door, she can do nothing but accept "the rawness of the process" that determines the final effect. Each pot is a weighty investment, manifesting extraction from the earth, her labour, the application of intense heat. Their fragile mass becomes a metaphor for burden, a theme that pervades her work.

Resetting in South Africa brought the

joy and responsibility of parenthood, one of life's fundamental paradoxes that shaped her outlook.

"When you have children, you're immediately connected to every other person in the world who has children. It's a powerful sense of belonging. Until that point, you just don't ask the same questions."

Those parental questions concern the merged distinctions between custody for a life and the necessary autonomy that must develop. The mother helps the child navigate newness and tradition, innocence and experience, protection and exposure, joy and grief. Truth can be brutal; fables beautiful. One is not better than the other.

"When you are working with beauty and ugliness there's a duality of experience", she says. She relates this duality to the wondrous luck of contentedly raising a family, yet within a culture of social division in which privilege is constantly measured, causing unease. "In London, it's there to some extent but not in your face. In South Africa it's something South Africans have to take on and chew over." This paradise sees a quick turnover of life and death, nature and casual violence acting as judge and jury. "I've been grappling with it for 16 years or so."

Mudge's navigation of the multivalent modern world is a long journey, each exhibition series adding a chapter. "The Wolf Is Always Near" at Everard Read London takes truth and fable, beauty and danger, for a fascinating ride.

'If I Ever Had to Run For My Life I Would Probably Die' adopts an elegant palette of celadon, gold and white. Within the panels of fleet Art Deco deer and precise Japanese patterns are dancing Moomins, Tove Jansson's characters. They seem angelic presences here, non-judgmental bystanders from an unfathomable realm acting as intercessors. They playfully undermine the title by persuading the viewer of the necessity of fantasy.

'Yesterday is History, Tomorrow a Mystery' is a counterpart. Its graphic panels, framed by gold, alternate between fractured shapes like parched earth or plant forms as if half-remembered or yet to be formed, and a pattern of grasped knives held as no level-headed cook ever would.

The word we settle on for this long thread of danger and violence is 'predation'. Some of it acknowledges her own hunter instinct, for "as an artist, you have to go straight for the jugular." But as much is about anxiety.

'Is it Too Late Now to Say Sorry' is a lip-stick-red vase with glazes of black and that

Staffordshire honey-yellow. The coloured sgraffito drawing conjures naively cheerful flowers beneath a lion of Assyrian ancestry of the sort that is inevitably speared on ancient palace reliefs. Here it is dismembering a generic dark figure beneath barbed wire ornamenting the neck of the vase. At a desperate moment of remorse, the dark figure is guilt, its killer being ennobled, natural and righteous.

The black vase labelled 'Holy Shit' is both simple and intriguing. Its deep lustre reflects and absorbs all that surrounds it, conveying what Mudge felt in a moment of epiphany, having rescinded her usual detachment to comprehend the constellation of work she had created. Whether it is a commentary on established belief is an open question. "I'm not at all religious- almost anti-religious" she says.

A final Mudgean paradox is her profound admiration of a religious artist. "[Hieronymus] Bosch has been an important source of inspiration. His paintings are hilarious, crazy scenes. People can engage with it, it's timeless, because ultimately his subject is the human condition." And so is it her subject, each vase standing as a character asking us profound questions about ourselves. Indeed, they test our character in answering them.





More Than a Feeling

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

52cm high



**My World's On Fire,
How About Yours?**

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

61cm high





Baby I Live for Danger,
mmm yessss
2016
Ceramic, gold lustre
46cm high





**Vase with Art Deco
Design and Arrows**

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

50cm high



Holy Shit
2016
Ceramic, gold lustre
61cm high



Everything is Amazing

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

52cm high

Amazing



Fuck Fear

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

45cm high









**Deep Blue Vase With
Gold Razor Wire**

2016

Ceramic, gold lustre

49cm high



**If You're Feeling Guilty
It's Because You Probably Are**

2016

Ceramic, gold lustre

59cm high





Here, I Got You Some Flowers

2016

Ceramic, gold lustre

46cm high









The Wolf is Always Near

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

59cm high







It's Finally Happened

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

60cm high







All That I Am I Give To You

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

56cm high





**Vase with Catteau Pattern and
Vipoo's Peace Sign**

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

46cm high



**If I Ever Had to Run For My Life
I Would Probably Die**

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

55cm high







Sorry 4 U
2016
Ceramic, gold lustre
56cm high



**Tread Softly BC U Tread On
My Dreamz**
2016
Ceramic, gold lustre
62cm high



MS TREAD SOFTLY BE



OH OH OH

2017

Ceramic, gold lustre

60cm high







Vase with Gold Stripes and Animals

2016

Ceramic, gold lustre

50cm high



Is it Too Late Now to Say Sorry?

2016

Ceramic, gold lustre

68cm high







In Court of Cats Rats
Never win
2017
Ceramic, gold lustre
38cm high



**Yesterday is History,
Tomorrow is a Mystery**

2016

Ceramic, gold lustre

44cm high



S A MYSTERY



Lucinda Mudge in her studio

EXHIBITIONS

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS:

2017 Solo Exhibition, Everard Read Franschhoek, South Africa

15 Oct 2017 – 07 Jan 2018 Group Exhibition, MAKING AFRICA High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia

03 Feb 2018 – 06 May 2018 Group Exhibition, MAKING AFRICA Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico

14 Oct 2018 – 13 Jan 2019 Group Exhibition, MAKING AFRICA Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas

PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS:

2017 Solo Exhibition *'The Wolf Is Always Near'*,

Everard Read London, United Kingdom

2017 Cape Town Art Fair, Represented by

Everard Read Cape Town, CTICC, Cape Town, South Africa

2017 Group Exhibition, MAKING AFRICA,

Kunsthal Rotterdam, Rotterdam, Netherlands

2016 1:54 Art Fair London, Represented by

Everard Read London, Somerset House, London, United Kingdom

2016 Group Exhibition, *'VASE - Function Reviewed'*,

National Craft Gallery, Kilkenny, Ireland

2016 FNB Johannesburg Art Fair, represented by **Everard Read/Circa Gallery**, Johannesburg, South Africa

2016 Solo Exhibition *'New Work'*, **Agapanthus**, Cape Town, South Africa

2016 Group Exhibition, MAKING AFRICA, **CCCB Barcelona**, Spain

2016 Solo Exhibition *'Kill You Eat You'*, **Circa on Jellicoe**, Johannesburg, South Africa

2016 Group Exhibition, *Transmutation*, **Knysna Fine Art**, Knysna, South Africa

2015 Group Exhibition, MAKING

AFRICA **Guggenheim Bilbao**, Spain

2015 Group Exhibition *'MAKING AFRICA'*, **Vitra Design Museum**, Weil am Rhein, Switzerland

2015 Group Exhibition, **KKNK**, Oudshoorn, South Africa

2015 Solo Exhibition *'Take What You Want.'*

Knysna Fine Art, Knysna, South Africa

2014 Solo Exhibition *'Lasers in The Jungle'* **The Gallery at Grande Provence**, Franschhoek, South Africa

2013 Solo Exhibition *'The White Tiger and Other Stories'* **Knysna Fine Art**, Knysna, South Africa

COLLECTIONS:

Lucinda Mudge has work in major corporate and private collections nationally and internationally – UK, Australia, Dubai, Guernsey, Netherlands, Italy, Russia and South Africa.

PUBLICATIONS:

Making Africa - A Continent of Contemporary Design, (2015) edited by Mateo Kries, Amelie Klein

The Bauhaus: #itsalldesign, published by Vitra Design Museum, edited by Mateo Kries, Jolanthe Kugler (2015)

VASE: Function Reviewed, by Brian Kennedy, Kilkenny Arts Festival, Ireland (2016)



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May 2017

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CIRCA

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WORK

This collection of 22 new vases takes its title from a Russian lullaby. Like the vases themselves, the title offers a dual interpretation. It references predation - the very real fear in South Africa of violent crime, physical attack. It also, somewhat humorously, examines my own career as a contemporary artist - the pressure to create artworks that are “worthy” pieces, and the fear of failure in this regard.

Themes of beauty and violence are woven throughout my work. I am aware that the objects I create are very beautiful - the vases are alluring, they glisten. But there is also a rawness that stems from the harsh ceramic process that is visible in the final piece. The themes of beauty and violence will be recognizable to anyone who has been to South Africa. It's a country with staggering natural beauty but also one of the biggest gaps between rich and poor anywhere in the world, although here the divide is largely determined by race. We have a heavy history of repression. Our society is violent. I am constantly reminded of the violence around me and every story brings with it with it huge insecurities. This environment profoundly influences my practice.

Ceramics is my addiction and my use of humour in my work is partly a response to my intense relationship with an unforgiving medium. I use humour, irony and mockery as a way of asking authentic questions, some of which can make the viewer feel uneasy; unclear whether my questions are serious or not. This ambivalence is intentional. And, of course, part of the humour is mocking myself.

