

# CREATIVE WHITEHORSE

## A Passionate Collector The GK Lesselyoung Collection



Koji Hoashi, *Blossom Jar 3, Multi Colour Diamond*, 2022 in situ at 'Zen and Now' exhibition opening, Skepsi Gallery November 2023.

### A Collector – G K (Keith) Lesselyoung (b.1943 USA – d. 2023 Australia) The Ceramics

*"The journey of collecting art is not about knowing everything; it's about following curiosity and intuition."*

Keith Lesselyoung, a retired financial manager and artist, collected ceramics and art intuitively. In the 1940s, he received his first artworks as a child: two glossy-brown spotted Piggy Bank ornaments made by Bennington Potters (Vermont, USA).

Art influenced his life considerably, leading him to study at the Tyler School of Art and Architecture in Philadelphia. Recognising the financial challenges associated with an artistic career, he later studied business management before relocating to Manhattan in 1978, where he met his partner Don, an Australian professional. Early in his career, he began collecting studio ceramics, particularly those in earthy tones. His acquisitions included two large glossy dark-brown American ewers from the early 19th century, a robust George Weltner lidded casserole dish, a teapot, and two functional bowls crafted by Matthew Tell during the early to mid-1980s.

In the late 1980s, Lesselyoung moved to Australia with Don. He expanded his collection by acquiring durable domestic ware from Australian potters and antique blue and white pottery from China and the UK, predominantly produced in renowned factories, some featuring hand-painted decorations.

During travels to Japan in 2014 and 2015, he discovered the *Roku Koyō* - the ancient cities of Bizen, Echizen, Seto, Shigaraki, Tamba, and Tokoname. These six cities have produced



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Japanese pottery since the middle ages. He learned about the tea ceremony and collected over 45 tea bowls, along with cups, caddies, and vases. He used his favourite tea bowl daily, which was chipped and featured gold inlay known as “Kintsugi,” a technique where imperfections are repaired using gold.

Lesselyoung developed an interest in Japanese ceramics, initially focusing on acquiring esteemed Bizen ware from the Bizen province, now part of Okayama Prefecture. His collection features twenty rustic Bizen tea bowls, sake bottles, cups, and vases of various sizes. Fired in wood kilns at high temperatures, Bizen ware vessels are waterproof. These ceramics are distinguished by their hardness, reddish-brown colour, and absence of glaze. Originating in the 14th century and reaching its peak in the 16th century, Bizen ware continues to be produced and used regularly for Japanese tea ceremonies.

Lesselyoung's collection of Shigaraki ware includes a tea caddy and eight tea bowls from Shiga Prefecture. The collection also features Echizen ware and Tamba ware, including a Tamba Tea Caddy by master potter Ichino Katsusuke, whose work is in the Brooklyn Museum. Tokoname ware is represented by two bright blue tea bowls by Yamade Sou, grandson of Yozan Yomade III, one of Japan's Living Treasures.

As a financial manager at an art college in Melbourne, Lesselyoung became a member of the Whitehorse Visual Arts Advisory Committee (VAAC) at Whitehorse City Council. As a valued member for over 15 years, he introduced several works by artists he was familiar with to the VAAC. He shared his knowledge and learned about emerging and established Australian artists and ceramicists from other members.

Later, Lesselyoung collected works intending to donate his collection to the City of Whitehorse Art Collection. In 2019, at Heide Gallery, where he volunteered, he acquired a sculptural work by Franco-Beninese ceramic artist King Houndekpinkou. This piece complements a VAAC purchase of a sculptural work by Thai-Australian ceramicist Vipoo Srivilasa.

In his final years, Lesselyoung acquired ceramics to donate to Whitehorse. He bought pieces by Gary Bish, David Pottinger, Su Hanna, Sue McFarland, Ted Secombe, and Kevin Boyd from Skepsi gallery shows and directly from potters. Notable items include First Nations ceramics from Alcaston Gallery, such as Rona Panagka Rubuntja's lidded vessel. Lesselyoung fully supported the collection of First Nations art and ceramics.

Before his passing in December 2023, Lesselyoung purchased ceramics from Skepsi Gallery's *Zen and Now* exhibition. He selected outstanding pieces from Japanese/Australian potter Koji Hoashi, and his former teacher Peter Pilven, with the Whitehorse Art Collection in mind.

Lesselyoung's Piggy Banks were prominently displayed at his Nunawading home, "Braeside," which he bought with his partner in 1988. His collection filled the house completely, with overflow stored for future display. Whitehorse benefits significantly from Keith Lesselyoung's poignant bequest to the Whitehorse Art Collection.

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