

**There were audible gasps  
of awe and delight at the  
beauty and diversity of the  
work in ConVerge, which  
opened at the Verge,  
Triennial National Ceramic  
Conference in Brisbane  
on 12 July.**



BY CATH FOGARTY

**THE BRISBANE OPENING OF CONVERGE WAS JUST THE BEGINNING of what will be a two year voyage for this stunning collection of ceramic art works by twenty of the Northern Rivers' finest ceramic artists – an intrepid journey to fourteen galleries in Queensland and New South Wales which, we hope, will elicit similar responses amongst audiences everywhere.**


International cultural and stylistic influences can be seen in the thirty six forms – from the functional to the abstract, the traditional to the contemporary – that make up ConVerge. The unifying element is the region from which they come – the Northern Rivers of New South Wales.

With a budget of approximately \$120,000 – or around \$6,000 per artist, ConVerge is a big investment by Arts Northern Rivers: art and culture is one of the greatest assets of the region, and artists are one of its greatest resources. For the next two years, ConVerge will provide valuable exposure for twenty artists and promote the Northern Rivers as a centre of creative excellence everywhere it goes. The exhibition catalogue will also be a self-promotion tool for each artist as well as providing an ongoing record of the event.

The Northern Rivers region is renowned for its creative communities and beautiful coastlines. Academic research has shown it has one the highest concentrations of artists outside any capital city. It is also home to an established regional cluster of ceramic artists. In his catalogue essay, Kerry Selwood highlights the international feel of ConVerge by saying of the selected artists' works "could have been sourced from anywhere in the world."

## September

15 – 17 September

 Moorambilla Festival – Community choirs and composers work together to create new Australian works. Boys choirs, Songs in the Key of Bloke **COONAMBLE**  
Website [www.moorambilla.com](http://www.moorambilla.com)

16 September

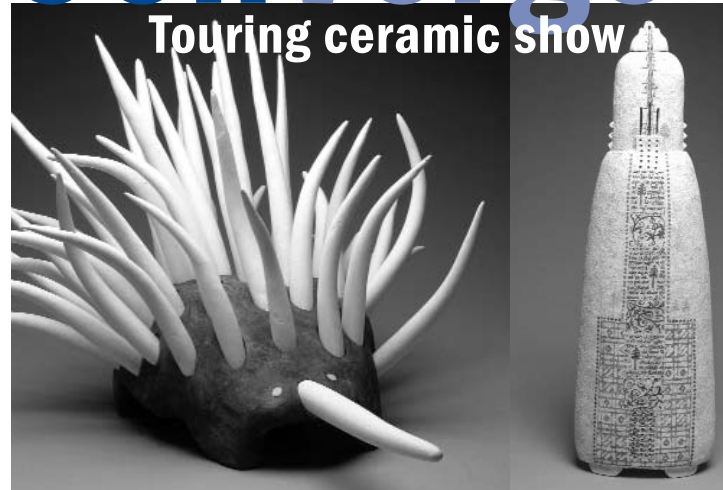
 Christine Rafferty Studio concert at the **GOULBURN** Regional Conservatorium, 11am Tel 02 4821 8833

One of the challenges for any regional arts organisation is how best to respond to and support the unique cultural character of a region. Another ongoing challenge is to counter metropolitan prejudice towards regionally based arts practitioners, to overcome the perception that 'regional' equates to amateur or sub-standard work.

From the day Arts Northern Rivers opened its doors for business in October 2003, it was inundated with requests for advice and assistance from visual artists. By mid 2004 the Visual Arts Network concept (the VAN plan) was being developed – a strategic initiative to enable artists to reach beyond the region to access broad national and international audiences and markets; to provide professional development opportunities for visual artists and to further the international profile of the Northern Rivers as a vibrant regional centre for the arts.

# ConVerge

Touring ceramic show



**L: Garth Lena, Porcupine, 2005 Porcelain and wood 38 x 50 x 47cm**  
**R: Avital Sheffer, Kedem (East), 2005 Handbuilt earthenware form with engobes 71 x 23 x 11cm**

ConVerge, along with VAN, is a strategic initiative of Arts Northern Rivers which responds to two of the organisation's key objectives: to foster and promote the culture of the region and to promote the arts, and achievement in the arts, to enhance social and economic community development.

Having already undertaken significant groundwork and planning, gaining interest from artists, sponsors and the regional galleries, exhibition curators **Geoff Crispin** and **Bob Connery** approached

16 – 17 September

 Camden House Open Weekend Visit the Historic Mansion built for John and Elizabeth Macarthur in 1835. **CAMDEN**  
Tel 02 4655 8466

16 – 24 September

 History Week 2006 Fascinating treasures, forgotten places, hidden histories, recreated pasts and unique personal stories. Massive program of events **STATEWIDE**  
Website [www.historyweek.com.au](http://www.historyweek.com.au)

Arts Northern Rivers to support their proposal. It was easy to see its merit. As well as being an artist-led initiative with strong interest from local artists, it had the potential to be a touring ceramic exhibition — something that is rarely available to galleries due to the fragility of the work and associated freighting logistics.

Arts Northern Rivers sought funding for the exhibition and received \$50,000 from Visions of Australia, \$10,000 from the Gordon Darling Foundation and \$5,000 from Arts NSW. Exhibition fees paid by galleries to host the exhibition provide another source of project income. Arts Northern Rivers has also contributed over \$15,000 in project management and administrative costs.

Launching ConVerge in conjunction with the triennial national ceramic conference, Verge, was a central aim of the project. As the main event for Australian ceramics, the conference attracts national and international ceramic artists, experts, curators and buyers. Another aim was to demonstrate the continued vibrancy of ceramic production in this region, despite curators' perceptions of a demise of interest in the art form in metropolitan areas.

by **Aine** have an organic feel as does the installation piece by **Liz Stops**. More traditional woodfired pieces are included by artists such as **Andrew Stewart** and **Judy Martin**.

Grace Cochrane, freelance Curator and editor of *Object* magazine, officially opened ConVerge to an audience of around 150 people. In her opening remarks and catalogue essay, Grace identified that apart from the converging influence of the region bringing the artists together, there was also a diaspora whereby "what has developed and grown in this region has in turn made its mark the wider world: many [artists] have taken their regional experience elsewhere," contributing to national and international framework of workshops, conferences and exhibition programs.

Because ConVerge was an official exhibition of the Verge 2006 Conference, many of its delegates attended the opening including Robert Bell, Senior Curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the National Gallery of Australia, Janet Mansfield from *Ceramic Art and Perception* magazine and other leading ceramic artists and experts.

A beautiful catalogue has been designed and produced to accompany the exhibition with curatorial essays by Liz Stops, one of the exhibiting artists: Kerry Selwood, a professional artist and former Head of Art and Design at Lismore TAFE from 1976 to 1995 and Grace Cochrane — offering a national, a regional and an artist's perspective on ceramic practice in the Northern Rivers. The catalogue lends additional weight and credibility to the exhibition and is being acquired by library collections of State and National galleries and tertiary institutions.

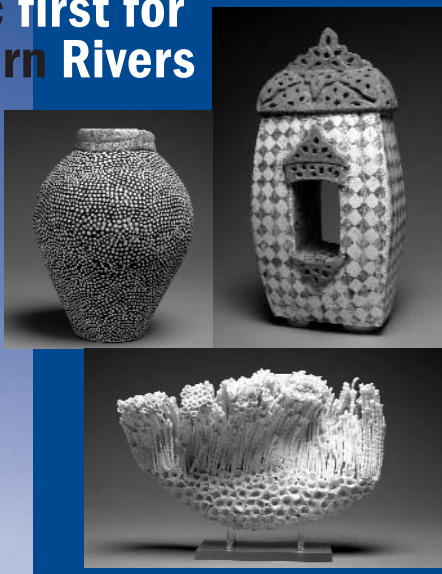
The ConVerge exhibition has already received an extremely positive response from visitors and prospective reviewers and it will continue to build its profile with upcoming articles in magazines such as *Australian Ceramics*, *Ceramic Art and Perception* and Craft Australia's 716 *craftdesign* e-newsletter — and other media — as it tours over the next two years.

The arts are essential contributors to the regional distinctiveness of the Northern Rivers. Together with other Visual Arts Network initiatives at Arts Northern Rivers, ConVerge will increase the profile of the region's artists at both a local and national level, cementing — or should I say firing — the reputation of the Northern Rivers as a centre for creative excellence. ■

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**VAN Website** [www.visualartsnetwork.net.au](http://www.visualartsnetwork.net.au)  
**Catalogues (\$15) also available from Arts Northern Rivers.**

*Clockwise from left: Catherine Lane, Hanging Space, 2005 (40x19x30cm); Bevan Skinner, Stars of Banyabba, 2006 (28x18cm); Margaurite Josephson-Buivids, Toledo, 2005 (45x25x19cm); John Mawhinney, Untitled, 2005 (18.5x33x11cm)*

## An historic first for the Northern Rivers



The arts works in ConVerge present an incredibly diverse range of cultural references, influences and styles. This convergence of creativity is exemplified by the work of selected artists.

Emerging Indigenous artist **Garth Lena** combines abstract organic forms in porcelain with timber, powerfully transmitting his sense of cultural heritage. **Margarite Josephson Buivids'** stunning vessels are infused with the language, symbols and architecture of her own Middle Eastern heritage. Abstract porcelain sculptures

## September

19 September

👉 Introduction to Gilding With Martin Adlington, presented by BACCI, **BALLINA**  
Tel 02 6686 6585

Until 20 September

👁 Exhibition of Mixed Media by Sue Morrison Featured artist of the month at **GOULBURN** & Districts Arts & Crafts Centre. Tel 02 4822 7889

21 September — 18 October

👁 Exhibition of Paintings by Barbara Nell Featured artist of the month at **GOULBURN** & Districts Arts & Crafts Centre. Tel 02 4822 7889

22 — 24 September

👂 Two Rivers Festival Circus Acts, fire twirling, lantern parade and arts under the trees. Wolseley Park, **GUNNEDAH**  
Tel 02 6742 1612