

# A graduate's change of art

By CLARISSA BYE

ARTIST Petra Svoboda thought she might have a career in arts writing or curating, but then she discovered clay.

The National Art School graduate fell in love with making ceramic artworks and hasn't looked back.

"I really enjoyed my time as an art student – it was very intense, but very rewarding," said Ms Svoboda, who exhibits her work at the Inner City Clayworkers Gallery in Glebe.

"They give you a lot of freedom to explore what you need to, they don't impose a conceptual framework on you."

Ms Svoboda, 30, who works from her own studio, a converted garage in Mascot, now creates functional sculptural work using screen-prints and decals. She also wood fires her work and experiments with pushing domestic ware to the limits of functionality.

She studied art history and theory at the College of the Fine Arts (attached to the University of NSW), but found it too pretentious and competitive.

Then, in her mid-20s, she enrolled at the National Art School, formerly known as East Sydney Tech. It offers a bachelor of fine art, an honours year and a master of fine art.

"Studying at the National Art School full-time was great – I just wanted to explore the potential of clay and my teachers were really knowledgeable and hands-on. Every piece you build is a unique artwork."

In 2002 Ms Svoboda graduated with



ARTIST: National Art School graduate Petra Svoboda now exhibits her work and teaches pottery to willing students.

Picture: SIMON ALEKNA

honours and won the student award to have an exhibition at Mura Clay Gallery, run by Irene Schroder in Newtown.

"That was a great boost," Ms Svoboda said. She was also given the chance to join the Glebe Inner City Clayworkers Gallery, a well-regarded co-operative of artists.

"Embarking on the first year out of art school is always a challenge and I encourage other graduates to look to

network as much as they can – it's not a dirty word," she said. "Don't be afraid to get your CV together – build a web page, join the associations like NAVA [the National Association for the Visual Arts] and attend as many exhibition openings as you can."

Ms Svoboda now teaches at the Eastern Suburbs Evening College and also works at NSW Pottery Supplies. "In

the arts world it's important to be out there and interact with the community."

A spokesman for the National Art School said enrolment applications were due in September. Everyone who applies has to sit a drawing test, which is generally of a still life, and bring a portfolio of 10 pieces of artwork. The enrolment is about 120 students, and most of those are mature-age students.

## FEE AND EASY

■ Students will have to pay fees similar to those in the TAFE system. For the bachelor of fine art, the upfront fee is \$1800, although the course is Austudy approved and discounts apply for Centrelink clients.

■ NAS is in Darlinghurst and is the oldest visual arts institute in Australia, tracing its origins back to 1859, when it was the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts.

■ Students are taught ceramics, drawing, painting, photography, printmaking and sculpture, along with art history and theory.

■ Famous alumni in ceramics include Janet Mansfield, Peter Rushforth and Cameron Williams and, in painting, John Olsen, Margaret Olley, Rolf Harris, James Gleeson, Colin Lanceley, Sir William Dobell and Martin Sharp.