

Artist Statement – Andrea Vargas

My practice is rooted in the emotional and cultural layers that shape identity, memory, and belonging. Born in Concepción, Chile and based in Melbourne for over nine years, I draw deeply from my Latin American heritage to create visual narratives inspired by Gabriela Mistral, Latin America's first Nobel Prize-winning poet. Her reflections on nature, love, childhood, and the spiritual bond between people and land continue to guide my creative direction.

Working across ceramics, mixed media, sculpture, photography, and installation, I explore the four elements: Water, Fire, Earth, and Air, as metaphors for transformation. Clay, with its tactility and ability to hold gesture and memory, remains central to my process. My visual language is also influenced by Impressionist and Expressionist movements, particularly in my use of intuitive colour, emotional mark-making, and the desire to capture both atmosphere and inner states. Through form, texture, and colour, I create pieces that invite emotional connection, contemplation, and healing.

My journey began with *Water*, reflecting on movement, migration, and renewal. This developed into *Ebb & Flow: Water and the Moon*, a deeply personal exhibition exploring fragility, strength, and resilience. Influenced by Mistral's poem "*Water*," the works draw on my lived experiences, migration, childhood trauma, and the profound loss of an Australian partner to suicide. These themes surface through sculptural forms that mirror the ocean's rhythms: rising, falling, breaking, and beginning again.

The exhibition also incorporates *Kintsugi*, where intentionally broken ceramic pieces are repaired with gold leaf. Each golden seam becomes a visible reminder of resilience, proof that healing does not hide our fractures, but transforms them into something luminous and strong.

Currently, I am developing my *Fire: Ashes to Rebirth* series, inspired by Mistral's poem "*Fire*." This project explores passion, warmth, destruction, and renewal, an evolution of the elemental themes in my practice. These ideas are woven through personal experience, cultural memory, and a growing relationship with the landscapes of Australia.

Having lived in Elwood for over five years, the coastal environment has become an important source of colour, rhythm, and texture. Melbourne's diverse landscapes and the deep cultural respect for Country have greatly influenced how I engage with space, material, and symbolism.

Community work is also an essential part of my practice. As a CALD artist, I value creating spaces for people to explore creativity and personal storytelling. My ceramic charm workshops invite participants to connect with clay, memory, and their own narratives through a playful and accessible process.

My art continues to evolve as an act of reflection, an ongoing dialogue between past and present, nature and my sense of belonging, fracture and repair. My work honours the stories that shape us and the beauty that can emerge from our most vulnerable places. Clay has become the medium that best holds this journey: we shape it, we fire it to give it strength, it can break, and through repair it gains a renewed shine again.