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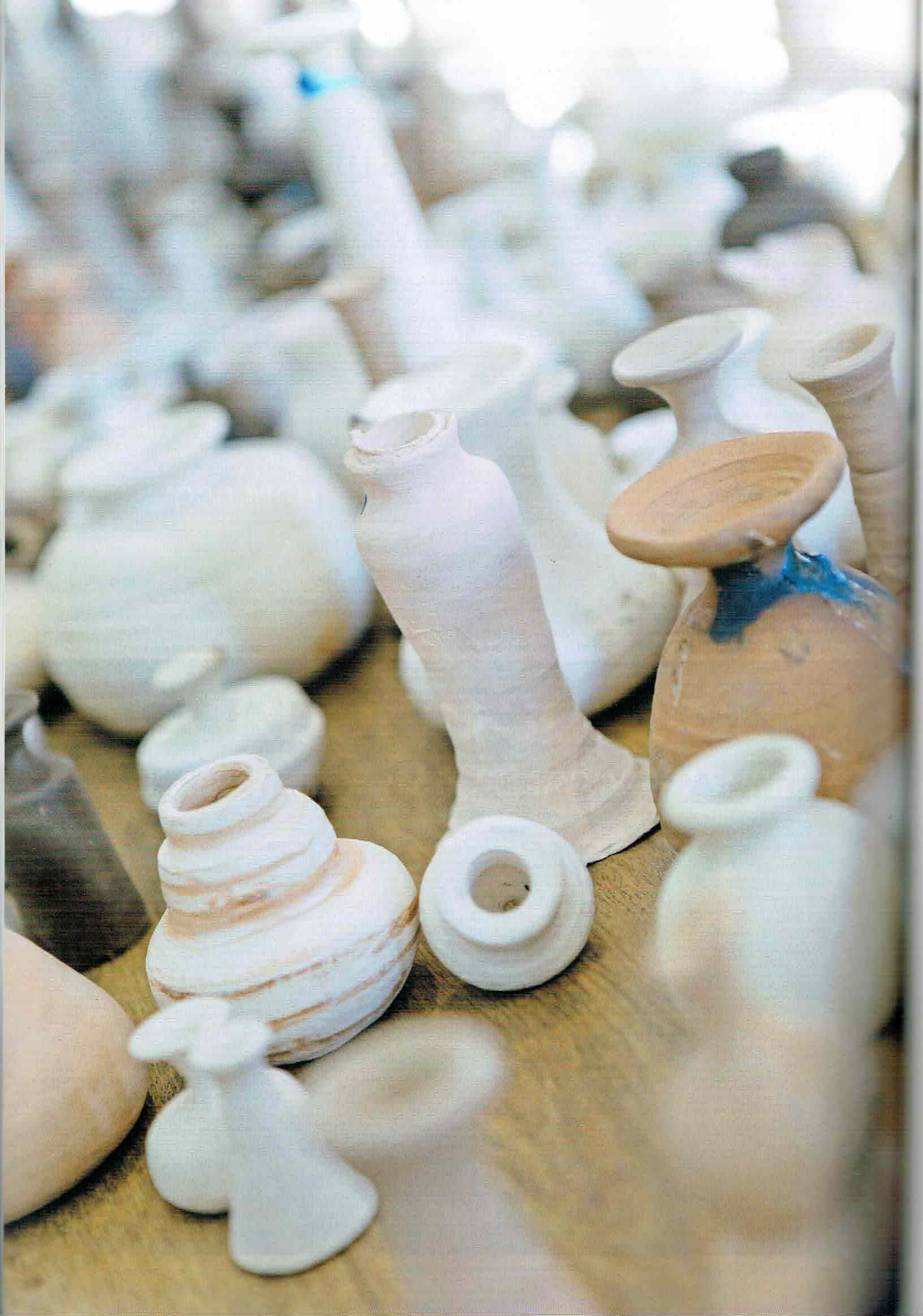
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DEVOTIONAL ART

Now in its second event, the Chaiya Art Awards supports artists inspired by their faith. We speak to their Lymington-based founder Katrina Moss

WORDS: Sandra Smith ♦ PHOTOS: Jonny Back

Faith and art. While most of us appreciate the combination is a match made in heaven, Katrina Moss has gone one step further.

To be specific, she's taken quite a big leap. You see, for this lover of "big projects" these two subjects have such a natural symbiosis that the link between her personal faith and a lifelong appreciation of the arts prompted her to establish the Chaiya Art Awards, a national competition judged by a well-respected panel of judges, culminating in an exhibition at a prestigious London gallery and with a generous amount of prize money at stake.

"I've been a Christian for about 30 years," says Katrina from her Lymington home. "When my mother died I was praying what to do with the next stage of my life. As I went into my 60s I really felt that spirituality and faith are important to a lot of people but often artists don't get a chance to express this because mainstream galleries aren't so interested."

Katrina created an award for artists "wherever they are on their spiritual journey." And

LEFT: *Thousand Bottles of Tears* by Deborah Tompsett which won the inaugural Chaiya Art Award in 2018

BELOW: The judging panel from the Chaiya Art Awards make their final decisions ahead of the 2018 event. From left Marcus Lyon, Katrina Moss, Laura Gascoigne, Ghislaine Howard and Mark Dean

although this is only the second Chaiya Art Awards, the backers on board are impressive. One of the main sponsors is The Jerusalem Trust, a Sainsbury Family Charitable Trust, while the exhibition's venue is none other than Gallery@Oxo on London's Southbank.

This year's theme, God is... , is open to all manner of interpretation. "We are looking for people to be innovative and thought-provoking," says Katrina. "Artists can answer that sentence in their head any way they choose – positively, or with mystery, confusion even. Then they should take that answer and create something that reflects it."

Anonymous online submissions are critiqued by five judges each of whom has a faith or art connection. Whether from professional artists or hobbyists (minimum age 16 at the end of January 2020), every entry is judged on merit. And this year's competition includes a new criteria. "Doing something creatively together is fantastic so we've introduced the Community Entry. Whether you're a knit and

natter group, art group or use art therapy to work with people who have disabilities, creativity is such a rewarding experience."

Katrina is experienced in sculpture, jewellery making and, currently, mosaic. But what was the thinking behind the competition's name? "I was looking through a name book for babies and came across Chaiya. It means treasure in heaven. The whole thing about art is that it's bigger than the substance of its parts; it can move you on a deeper, emotional level."

The inaugural competition attracted several hundred entries. This year looks set to beat that figure. The final decision won't be made until the exhibition opens next Easter. "The judges get together to make a short list but the winner isn't decided until the night the show opens. Sometimes different pieces can connect with you in a gallery."

The £10,000 top prize reflects the value the organiser puts on the arts. After the opening night, entry to the exhibition is free. There will also be a coffee table style book for sale.

Katrina is a woman who thrives on challenges. "I get to encourage artists, and hopefully inspire them to think about things which are important to them. Chaiya Art Awards introduces new artists to new audiences, and puts the spiritual conversation into our national conversation."

The work level will intensify over the coming months. Katrina confesses that "voices of sanity" suggest she has taken on too much. "After the first one I was so exhausted it took me a while to gear up to do it again. I'll do it again, as long as people have the desire to enter and I can find sponsorship, including some long-term partners." 🐌

chaiyaartawards.co.uk

