



PHOTO: JELLY TREE STUDIO



## SACRED PIECES

**Ashley Fiona's** distinctive handmade jewellery and home wares are adored around the coast. She spoke with us about her Ashkeepers, unique pieces created to keep a tactile connection with loved ones.

“My mother was only 44 when she died suddenly leaving behind my father and three teenage daughters. I was the youngest and for many years felt very alone. No one we knew had been through the same experience. We struggled with how we should remember someone so immensely important to us.

I was only 13 when my mother died and I still remember the plastic container that held her ashes for so many months. It was unsightly and unrefined – everything she wasn't.

12 years later, post ceramic studies, my beautiful grandfather died. My Nan was saddened that his ashes were contained in such an ugly box. I thought ‘I can create something so she would always have a beautiful vessel for her beloved.’ I created the very first porcelain Ashkeeper for my dear grandfather. My Nan still has his ashes and when she dies, she wants them to be scattered together – eternal love.

The Ashkeeper concept came about because I wanted to create an urn or vessel that instead brings life to the sadness of death and encourages us to cherish positive memories forever. Talking about death helps to ease the pain of loss.

The Ashkeepers are high fired porcelain and are intentionally spherical as the sphere is a familiar, immediately relatable form and is connected to the cycle of life: birth, death and rebirth.

The surface designs are handpainted and inspired by mandalas. The intricate pattern evolves organically as I hand paint directly on the surface of the Ashkeeper. Creating such personal and meaningful pieces is a very meditative process where each one is unique.

An outcome of my own personal healing, an Ashkeeper is designed to do just that. The Ashkeepers are my souls purpose – it's my heart work. They are artworks to be interacted with. Once inverted, the lid creates a special candle holder for times of remembrance. An important note is that the Ashkeepers don't have to contain ashes – I don't have any of my mother's ashes. I use mine for keepsakes that I hold tenderly when I want to feel a deeper connection.

We need to talk about death, it's the one thing we are all destined to experience. I honestly believe 'you've got to feel it to heal it.' We've forgotten our traditional death customs. Families no longer wear black when they've experienced a recent death. There's no outward



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sign to the public that perhaps you need to be more gentle around the family.

Last year I participated in Deathwalker Training with Zenith Virago. We learned a whole spectrum of death; what to expect and how to journey with the dying – from illness to sudden death to ceremony and loss. I find it incredibly fascinating and I'm ready to discover more.

I don't believe death is the end. My Nan's grandmother used to say to her "We will all meet again, in a more beautiful place." 🌿

You can find Ashley Fiona's jewellery at Gnostic Rocks. See more at [www.ashleyfiona.com](http://www.ashleyfiona.com)



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