

Capturing the untouched

A painter has applied his skills to landscapes unshaped by human hands, reports **Sonia Barron**.

JOHN Caldwell is a landscape painter who travels extensively, photographing and sketching, and then returning to his studio to compose his images. In this, his second show at the gallery, there is a preponderance of images of rocky cliffs and hills in areas such as national parks — sites that in the main are untouched by human incursion or occupation.

In mixed media on paper and employing a limited palette of often muted colours, Caldwell would seem to depict still moments, early or late in the day, or in the quite before a storm. There is a quality of immutable physicality, of awe before the wonder of the natural world that is tantamount to a religious experience. A highly articulate draughtsman, Caldwell may take liberties in his formal resolution of a particular view, yet his images are meticulously detailed in their description and precisely composed.

There are several large panoramic views of which *Cudgegong River, Mudgee*, in a predominant palette of dark blues and greens, was the only one in which human incursion is



NATURAL SCENE: "Catchment to Coast" by John Caldwell evoke an "immutable physicality" through the use of a, muted palette.

evident in the ordered plantations which cut into the otherwise natural environment. Of his smaller works, *Rylstone Dusk* and *Inlet Reflections* are two that particularly drew my interest for their colour and play of light.

From his CV I note that Caldwell began painting while living in England, which leads to the supposition that his exposure to the great 19th-century exponents of landscape painting has encouraged him to taken on the mantle of a latter day romantic in his approach to the Australian landscape.

Amanda Shelsher is a young artist from Western Australia who has in recent times been the recipient of several prestigious awards for her ceramics. This is her first show at the

Beaver Galleries and the first time I have seen her figurative works, which are built in a combination of slab and coil using earthenware and stoneware with the addition of glazes, oxides, stains and slips.

A recent first-time mother Shelsher addresses the maternal and protective instincts that she has experienced. She draws analogies between humans and animals in the way she renders her figures, which cross over between the two in appearance and behaviour. This is certainly an amusing and playfully perceptive look at life.

John Caldwell, *Catchment to Coast*, and Amanda Shelsher, *Precious*, Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin, daily, 10am to 5pm, until August 30.



AWE-INSPIRING: West Australian ceramic artist Amanda Shelsher draws on her experience of being a new mother with "Precious".