

ARTS

Edited by Stephen Bevis



Sculptor eyes child's view

Amanda Shelsher is driven by her children's joy of discovery, she tells **Ara Jansen**

Sculptor Amanda Shelsher has bound together a love for nature, a fascination for the cycles of life seen through the growth of her children and the local neighbourhood.

Like a spider web, the themes and dimensions of her newest ceramic sculptures are a complex intertwining of these concerns mirrored in a layered execution. Her busts and human-sized sculptures have a childlike curiosity, a calmness and a touch of romance about them.

The sculptor works from home in Inglewood. While she has a big kiln in her shed, her workspace consists of two big tables in the middle of her lounge room. She builds each piece by hand and usually works into the night after her son and daughter are in bed.

"My work is a reflection of my everyday life and I want to be with the children," Shelsher says. "At the same time, it's also isolated and I like that."

Shelsher grew up surrounded by bush in Gooseberry Hill and was introduced to clay at 10 when her mother began her own career as a professional potter.

After first exhibiting at 18, Shelsher went on to teach art and in 1999 decided to practise full time. She has exhibited all over the world and is represented in prestigious public and private national collections.

Her latest exhibition, Bloom, opens today and is a joint show with painter Jenni Doherty, who also draws part inspiration from the poetry of nature.

Shelsher's 17 sculptures use the style sgraffito, which allows her to draw over the top of her clay figures like a tattoo.

Images of nature are overlaid on to the sculptures, giving them an ethereal, other-world feel.

Growing up in the bush and now living in suburbia, she says it's an ongoing tussle between those two worlds with the banksias, insects and houses which she hand paints on to her figures.

"The work very much also charts the growth of my children and their life force," she says. "At the same time I am very much deciding between the city and the country and that's coming out in the work too. On the pieces where I feature houses in my area, that's



the suburban part and then there is a nature aspect on other pieces.

"This has led me to observe my own children's fascination with nature in all its forms.

"I love this particular age of my children as they meet everything with a sense of wonder and an eagerness to learn and explore.

"They are great discoverers, finding insects, seeds and plants.

"We can learn so much from children as they take time to stop and study in detail the natural world around them."

Shelsher hopes the work opens our eyes to the inherent beauty around us and our interrelationship with nature.

"I hope to create works that reflect the energy of life, affirming not only the miracle but the cycle of life."

Bloom, featuring Amanda Shelsher and Jenni Doherty, is at LK Galleries, Subiaco until April 18.

BOOKMARKS

WILLIAM YEOMAN

• With the release on Monday of *The Striped World*, 32-year-old Emma Jones became the first Australian poet to be published by Faber & Faber, which this year celebrates its 80th anniversary. The poems in this, her debut collection, range in scale and complexity from the seven-lined *Goldfish* ("The sea's not wide but it is full.") to the Newcastle Poetry Prize-winning *Zoos for the Dead*. In this poem, the narrator finds herself the owner of a talking parrot which once belonged to a brother and sister of the *Stolen Generations*. "They lived there very

parrots." Jones might still be in search of a voice, her songs resounding with the sounds of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and the two Hughes. Ted and Langston, to name but a few. But there is also an original music here, one that moves in the manner of a dream between real and imagined histories.

• Perth's first weekly spoken word event, the Perth Poetry Club, is now open for business each Saturday from 2-4pm downstairs at the Court Hotel, Beaufort Street, Perth. People are encouraged to bring their own poem because there will be a short open-stage segment and featured guests every week. Tomorrow's guest is "the rockin' thesaurus" Allan Boyd the Antipoet. Entry is free but donations will be encouraged. Details: www.perthpoetryclub.com



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Blooming: Artists Amanda Shelsher and Jenni Doherty are exhibiting together at LK Galleries.
Picture: Robert Duncan

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