

In search of a simpler life

MOTHERHOOD and a yearning for a simpler life in the country pervade *Garden of Curiosities*, an autobiographical exploration and the first solo exhibition for ceramic artist Amanda Shelsher since 2004.

With strong themes of nurture versus nature and the value of life, the sculptures are hand-made from earthenware, porcelain, stoneware and 'paperclay'.

They are hollow and often feature detail created by drawing with a different type of clay, painted then etched into the surface.

"All these works are a continuation of my life story, sharing my experiences as a mother and my place in the world," Shelsher said.

"Since having children, my works have changed to look more at plant-

life, being a mum at home but wanting to raise them in a more rural area and asking people to reflect on that."

Birds are often used to share the many facets of motherhood, using personal stories from her life as well as the concept of nesting.

Shelsher described how her interest was caught by instinctive behaviour, such as how birds and pregnant women alike are known for nesting, developing protective feelings towards their young and wanting to create a safe refuge for them.

She modelled the large-scale work *The Provider* on herself, resulting in a bald female figure holding a honeyeater in one hand and a nest with two birds in the other.

"What I make is always quite instinctive and in this case, it represents me, my protective nature

and what has now become my life," she said.

With a mother who was a professional potter, Shelsher has worked with clay since the age of 10 and has rarely deviated from the medium.

"I have always worked figuratively, creating the works by hand so each becomes unique," Shelsher said.

"What I make is quite instinctive, very intimate and the process is now second nature to me so I wouldn't want to work any other way."

And despite using seemingly hard materials, life's fragility is emphasised down to the individual handprints sometimes visible in the works.

Garden of Curiosities is at Form Contemporary Craft and Design, Murray Street, Perth, until July 21.

Louise Bettison



Artist Amanda Shelsher.

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