

Jenny Orchard

Living in the clouds, Beaver Gallery, 11 February – 1 March

Review by Kathryn Wells

Jenny Orchard's exhibition has its roots firmly in both the Surrealist tradition of the 1930s and also that of decorative ceramics and collage. Orchard's surrealist ceramic creatures and collages rely heavily on the culture of the monstrous Minotaur, a monster with the body of a man, and the head and tail of a bull, imprisoned in a maze. Along with the reoccurring eye of the Cyclops (human eating monsters), symbols of ancient spirals and the Australian landscape, Orchard confronts us with choices for the modern world. In the surrealist tradition, her works reflect upon the reverie of dreams; she inscribes in her work: 'art is a dream' as well as art being 'another person's monstrosity'.

Specifically, the *Minotaure* was a surrealist publication, 1933-1939, with discussions on art, archeology, ethnology, architecture and history. Its covers were illustrated by different surrealist artists and their interpretation of the Minotaur. There were contributions by Breton, Picasso, Éluard, Miró, Chagall, Bataille, Magritte, Lacan, Matisse, Queneau, Duchamp, Man Ray, de Chirico, and Dalí amongst others.

Through her seven versions of the monstrous Minotaur, Orchard presents



Jenny Orchard, *The Chalice*, 2015, earthenware with glazes and enamels



Jenny Orchard, *Mick Bling*, 2015, earthenware with glazes and enamels

us with powerful visual commentary on colonisation, suburbia, media, architecture, wealth, health and the Minotaur itself, as part of the labyrinthine prison of modern life. These are deliberately contrasted with vessels and sculptures inscribed with joyous symbols of life and art, the humble offerings in *The Challis*, *Two Tears Vase*, *The Cloud* and *Lost in the Cloud*. Land, water and sky are key elements used by Orchard in the transformation symbols and transfigurative vessels, lurking amongst and behind the Minotaur-like works.

At the same time, Orchard is rewriting the mythologies, from her own dreams and creating art in her own terms from a surrealist viewpoint as a 'half effaced recollection of higher states from which we have fallen'. In her 'Colonised multi-creature', the Minotaur is turned on its head, as Theseus had to do to kill the monster. Orchard's colonised creature has a blue-spotted human face with cat-e-coils of gold, the arms or legs of a forest creature, the tentacles of an octopus (like the maze created by Poseidon), hands of gold, and a phallus with stunning black lashes demarking the cyclops eye, not terrifying so much as, all seeing.

The decorative tradition of clay is beguiling in Orchard's hands as it expresses her interest in the interconnectedness of life, culture and form but challenges us to bear witness to the monstrosities in this world. 'Hidden suburbanite' is a three-legged feral cat with glassy eyes, two large tits, a tail with a cyclops eye, gold lashes and pink eye-liner, perforated tentacles and malign growths emerging from its body, crying eyes and red sexy lips, presented in shiny succulent white underglazes over earthenware.

'Reconstruction' is a triffid-like creature with a cigar, poison ivy tentacles, its talons on its chicken/bird/dinosaur feet covered in blood-red nail varnish and on its body, the word 'water' smudged and ruined – leaving only 'sugar'. The scribbles of 'bodifists' an audible reference to biodiversity, the *boda vista al mar* of Barcelona, the Buddha's vision, are slowly disappearing. What has happened since the fall from Eden?

Wealth in the form of 'Mick Bling', has a human face with black tentacles for a crown (oh what a maze has Poseidon set), glazed enamels as diamonds flashing on enlarged ears, a pearl-encrusted choker necklace, the neck – a fish with a human mouth, tyrannical eyes, a phallus for a nose, a mouth for genitals and crab-like hands, standing on three legs. The decorative effect is fascinating, intriguing, dazzling and audacious.



Jenny Orchard, *Colonised Multicreature*, 2015, earthenware with glazes and enamels



Jenny Orchard, Hidden Suburbanite, 2015, earthenware with glazes and enamels

'The Architect from the hidden suburbs' fares no better with three red-bricked legs. The ugliness of suburbia is epitomised in the house for a hat on his head, stranded, alone. The body is a head with square eyes of televisions, the square small mouth like that of a fish gobbing, and deformed arms. This is confronting about what we accept as normal.

The 'Me Dia' or media has a black hood like the Klu Klux Klan hood, with a skull head aloft in one hand and vegetation tentacles forming the other hand, both arms dripping with blood, a fully erect phallus nose, and a small closed genital area, its legs covered in blood. This is part of the maze and prison of modern life; seeing all the monstrosities as well as suffering from this knowledge, with control of the media hidden and the voices of the people silenced.

The Minotaur itself has a cabbage crown between horns and spiky tendril flowers, green carbuncles, phallus nose, fish mouth and human lips, and individual pearly white teeth, deceptively elegant in its glazing and perfectly balanced in its construction. Orchard's exquisite detailing in its construction is arresting in both its boldness and also her detailed scrutiny of the veins of the leaves.

Orchard suggests that the redemption from this fall from grace is in accepting art itself, represented by the fusion of land (creatures), water (fish) and sky (clouds and dreams). In the 'Art has

Fallen from Eden' Vase, Orchard offers us a marriage of a fish with a human/ tiger, merging with the clouds and sky. The 'Two tears vase' has gold tears, emerging from the black-glazed hole of the universe, sitting in the rich blue cobalt of life (water) with happy smiling lips and spirals. The cloud-like 'Chalice' offers glittering eyes with joy and crazy love, dotted with gold. The interior of the vessel drips with dark cobalt glaze.

An inscription reads, 'Art is as essential as dreams'. Orchard is suggesting that, only by bearing witness to art movements as well as the seven sins of the modern world, and understanding how they have corrupted the world in monstrous forms, can we begin to have salvation through art and realising the visions of our dreams.

Life can be short for living creatures and the natural world but art is long. From ancient times, the spiral of life and its inextricable natural forms, the natural world and the movement of the universe have been maintained, expressed through the rhythms of dance, art and dreams. The modern day monstrous sins depicted in her decorative sculptures can only be contained if we try and live by different rules, to realise that we cannot live without neither art nor dreams.

Orchard's skill in using the ceramic decorative tradition with its exquisite details and demanding construction requirements to present ancient spirals of life has successfully subverted our thinking about art and life. Orchard has contrived and achieved an arresting exhibition that references ceramic decorative art with the tradition of ancient sculptures of the Minotaur and the modern surrealist movement, clearly proclaiming the importance of art and dreams in addressing the monstrosities of the modern world. Well worth the visit.

Diary dates

February

Richilde Flavell, CPS EASS Winner
Studio Road, Exhibition
Strathnairn Arts Centre, Canberra
 28 January - 21 February 2016

Carla Wolfs, Artist Talk
Watson Arts Centre
 Fri 19 February 2016, 6 pm
 Gold Coin Donation Entry

Canberra Potters' Society stall
Canberra Show
 Fri 26-Sun 28 February 2016

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March 2016

Greg Daly, 'Pivotal'
Sabbia Gallery, Sydney
 4 March - 2 April 2016

CPS Raku Course, Chris Harford
Watson Arts Centre
 Sundays 13 and 20 March

Carla Wolfs, Exhibition
(Artist-in-Residence, from the Netherlands)
 Ceramics made during Carla's artist-in-resident program at CPS
 Opening Thu 17 March

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Classes for children and adults across all levels of ceramic practice. Workshops, Summer Schools and Kids' Holiday classes are available too.

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Artist-in-Residence program including studio and residence facilities to national and international visiting artists.

Gallery hosting a ceramic focused exhibition program.

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