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Review / Franzi's ceramics burst with confidence after river visit

craft / "Cathy Franzi: A visit to the river", Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin until March 4. Reviewed by MEREDITH HINCHLIFFE.



'Twining Guinea Flower', by Cathy Franzi. Wheel thrown & altered Limoges porcelain, engobe, underglaze, glaze, sgraffito.

CERAMICIST and scientist, Dr Cathy Franzi is holding her first solo show at Beaver Galleries. It follows a residency at Bundanon, formerly the Boyd family property, which lies on the Shoalhaven River – the river that gives its name to the exhibition's title.



'Black She-oak (male & female)', by Cathy Franzi. Set of two, wheel thrown & altered Limoges porcelain, engobe, underglaze, glaze, sgraffito

Franzi's passion for making and deep love of being in nature is conveyed on her ceramic vessels that explore ways of representing Australian flora.

Each work is a response to the landscape of the area. The residency, where she saw her first rainforest, Red Cedar, found Rock Figs and Rock Lilies hiding in the escarpment and experienced the ever changing views from Pulpit Rock, clearly had a major impact on Franzi and her work.

The strongest evidence of this is a series of five tall cylindrical forms in terra cotta, brushed with engobe decoration. The forms are simple, and the surface decoration on these works is calligraphic, almost casual in its informality and is in stark juxtaposition with the meticulous surfaces of the remainder of the works on show. The viewer sees glimpses of trees, a path or a creek and rocks, almost as though they're walking through the bush with the artist who is creating it.

Other works in the show are in Limoges porcelain with detailed carvings of leaves, flowers and fruits of plants. The forms are wheel thrown and altered, so that some flare at the base and others rise to become tall, narrow cylinders.

In addition there are a number of narrow, delicate cylinders in sets of three, with Hyacinth Orchid black ink inlay in on altered Limoges porcelain and Wallaby Grass porcelain inlay on altered stoneware. They are fine and delicate and contrast with the tall, heavily carved surface of other cylinders.

Two particularly outstanding carved cylinders are "Saw Banksia I" and "Saw Banksia II". These are precisely carved, the serrated leaves lie over the flower spikes and they wind their way up and down the form.

Another pair of cylindrical forms, "Black She-oak (male & female)" also shows a more informal, whimsical side of this artist. Touches of red highlight the blossoms, with fluffy inflorescences and strong red tips.

While Franzi's work is strong and thoughtful and exacting, I sense she is taking a slightly new approach, which is freer and not quite so constrained. The forms are more organic, and the decoration is a little looser.

This shows a new confidence and expansion in her work which seems to get stronger and stronger.