

# Copper wire creations evoke shapes of nature

## ART REVIEW

### TREE LINE: SCULPTURE

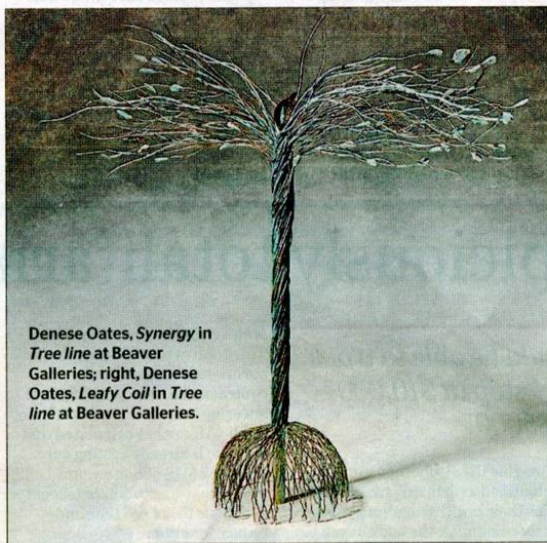
By Denese Oates. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until May 20.

REVIEWED BY Sasha Grishin

Denese Oates is a very consistent and focused artist who has been working for many years with copper wire, which she weaves to evoke organic forms in nature.

In her last exhibition at the Beaver Galleries, about four years ago, her copper growths sprouted out of books – a sort of literary flowering. In this exhibition (her 10th solo show at this gallery), she has reverted to the forms that she exhibited in 2012. These range from small sprigs of growth and bits of spindly vine to tree-like shapes of quite monumental proportions.

A conceptual conceit that runs throughout her work is the contrast between the strength and firmness of the metal and the delicacy and vulnerability of plants and organic growths. By allowing the copper to oxidise and to form its wonderful green patina, there is also a visual play between the



Denese Oates, *Synergy* in *Tree line* at Beaver Galleries; right, Denese Oates, *Leafy Coil* in *Tree line* at Beaver Galleries.

green of the metal and the green of the foliage. Oates throughout her work enjoys this tongue-in-cheek game between artistic intent, its realisation and the various verbal puns that can become involved in

the process.

Many of her sculptures involve this intuitive, personal, funny, but also slightly confessional note. I think that my very first encounter with an Oates sculpture, about 20



years ago in *Sculpture by the Sea* at Bondi, was a large metal "self-portrait" holding a fish, where the figure seemed to morph into the fish and the whole piece was about fear and dread of the ocean – something that seemed to both attract and repulse the artist.

This note of "otherness" and personal metamorphosis has remained embedded within her work and in her attitude to nature. None of her natural forms is a literal quotation from nature, or an attempted imitation, but an invention or artifice – a winged tree, a twisty tree, a flutter tree or a leafy curl. Oates appears to want to tap into the moods and spirits of nature and create out of metal lyrical evocations of the metaphysical in nature.

The larger pieces in the exhibition are the more successful ones, while the smaller wall piece vignettes have a more ephemeral presence. *Synergy*, one of the key exhibits, is made out of woven copper wire and stands about one-and-a-half metres tall. It is a tree-like form, where the spindly roots are echoed by the crown above. It is ordered but asymmetrical, finely crafted but allowing for chance and the accidental properties of the material.

*Leafy coil* is the other largish piece that stands out in the exhibition. It combines Oates' two favourite materials, copper and corten steel. The latter, more accurately known through its generic trademark COR-TEN, is a mixture of steel alloys that develops a rich, stable rust-like patina. Oates employs the corten steel as a sort of naturally weathered plinth from which rises the mysterious, finely fabricated copper mesh from which in turn spring a number of leaves.

It becomes like an enigmatic "natural" object found somewhere in the corner of the garden keeping its secrets and exerting a powerful presence, as if a talisman suspended between worlds.