

# Works of serene beauty show off skills

## Craft review

Kerry-Anne Cousins

**SANDRA Black: *Reflective Space*. Beaver Galleries. Until June 16.**

Porcelain is a versatile material for the ceramic artist. Although it can look ethereal, fragile and translucent, its surface can be pierced, carved and cut.

Sandra Black, a ceramic artist who works in Fremantle in Western Australia, exploits this characteristic of porcelain with great finesse.

As she notes, life is fragile but tenacious and this is expressed in her use of the very strong material of porcelain and in the extreme piercing and carving of her vessels.

When speaking about her art practice Black adds that she is interested in the space and surface within the form and that the walls of her vessels are there to enclose that critical space.

Many of her works demonstrate that it is within her forms that the beauty of the ceramic decoration is revealed.

These decorative patterns, finely balancing both negative and positive space can be read from both the inside and outside of the vessel.

And in this piercing of the porcelain walls of her vessels to form patterns like delicate fretwork, the distinction between inward and outward surfaces dissolve.

The motifs of leaves that seem to float across the interior of the bowls are taken from Australian banksia and hardenbergia (native wisteria).

In the large black open bowl *Hardenbergia II*, the delicate tracery of the leaves of this climbing plant turn and twist inside its open form making delicate shapes that contrast with the myriad small fretwork piercings.

In the *Etched Vessel* series, the whole surface of the small vessels are an interplay of dark and light patterns. The overall design allows equal play between open and negative shapes.

In the soft cream cylindrical vessel *Banksia Leaves, Vessel III*, the piercings



Sandra Black, *Windswept III*, in *Reflective Space* at Beaver Galleries. Picture: Supplied

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of pattern and leaves are swept in a band around its form.

In the *Windswept* series, the surface of the simple slip cast cylindrical forms are

decorated with images taken from nature - landscapes, pine trees, leafless branches, small birds and magpies.

*Windswept III* is the most majestic of these works. Its soft linear decoration of pine needles is seen against a grey swell of soft clouds - its delicacy suggestive of images on Japanese screens.

In other works in the series, black shapes are "painted" on the vessel's surface allowing only small glimpses of landscapes and birds, a suggestion perhaps of the industrialisation of the environment.

In the *Green & Gold bowl* series, delicate vessels are decorated with a subtle turquoise and white mottled glaze. In the bottom

of each bowl, there is a small round gold design like an Oriental calligraphic seal.

Three other bowls reflect the influence of the residencies the artist has had in China. *The Banksia Leaf Bowl* is a classic form of a dish balancing delicately on a turned foot.

It is made from Jingdezhen porcelain and fired with a yellow jade coloured glaze.

Into its surface the artist has modelled a delicate banksia leaf bringing together the influence of both east and west.

Sandra Black has given us an exhibition of work of serene beauty that demonstrates her ceramic skills as well as her deep mindfulness of ceramic traditions informed by her residencies in Asia.