

Jenny's 'fantastical' figures draw attention to the environment

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"Totem from everywhere", earthenware with glazes, enamels, fabric and mixed media

*Craft / "Conversation with weeds" by Jenny Orchard, at Beaver Galleries until August 30. Reviewed by **MEREDITH HINCHLIFFE**.*

JENNY Orchard has been creating fantastical figures since the early 1980s.

She uses white clay to form slip cast pieces – often using polypipe – coloured in bright, luscious glazes combined with a range of other materials, such as feathers and fabric.

The major work in this exhibition is No. 3 "Totem from everywhere", a tall three-legged figure, 190cm tall. I think of it as a bird, maybe because of the long skinny legs, feathered skirt and clawed feet.



"Remembering Bush Ghost", earthenware with glazes and enamels

Each work has a unique personality, and No. 2 "Remembering Bush Ghost" is one of the perkiest in this show. From the front, she – definitely a female – has a painted face, with earrings, a necklace and various appendages which could be brooches. Her toes are painted, and her eyes are heavily outlined. Turn her around, however, and she has a reptilian tail.

No. 13, "Hemlock Lizard", is more threatening and, to me, a masculine creature. He has a pointed snout, with bared teeth. Four-legged, three are legs similar, with the fourth more menacing and a different colour. The claws on each are turned upwards.



"Hemlock Lizard", earthenware with glazes and enamels

Orchard's work is extraordinarily skilled and involves a great deal of detailed hand-building. She draws inspiration from her early life in Zimbabwe and from her rich imagination. Her work has been called

whimsical, humorous, bizarre, and she herself refers to it as "mash-up" but these descriptions tend to undermine its importance.

In this exhibition, Orchard is showing works on paper. She has always been a zealous drawer and I can see in these works where her creatures are derived.

I feel that Orchard is gently drawing the audience's attention to the destruction of the environment. Words and phrases on No. 1, "Hope is Power", such as "rescue", "global consequences" and even the title itself remind me of the damage being done to the planet. There is no gloom and I do not believe she is predicting a future, but is reminding the audience of the need to keep a sense of humour and humility.