

Poetic observations of the natural world

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Shannon Garson: We are stardust. Beaver Galleries. Until April 9. beavergalleries.com.au.

I have a small porcelain bowl by Shannon Garson. It is "wrapped" with delicate all-over patterns that resemble the markings of bird feathers. It is a pleasure to turn it around in your hands noting the fluid design of the patterns transmuting, transforming and merging into one another as you find in nature. This concept of conciliating different imagery into one decorative concept is something that is also striking about Garson's work in this exhibition at Beaver Galleries.

Garson is an artist who works predominantly in ceramics although she has a background in drawing and painting that is evident in her skilfully applied mode

of ceramic decoration. Her vessels are thrown on the wheel in porcelain using traditional forms such as bowls, vases and teacups. The vases are "moon vases", being round and full bellied with a smaller foot than the rim so that they appear to be floating like the moon.

Moon vases, never out of favour, had their origins in 16th-century Korea but are also found in other Asian cultures such as China and Japan as well as being favoured by the early 20th-century English studio pottery movement.

There is one large bowl (24 centimetres in diameter), several small tea bowls and a series of teacups - *Teacup for Astrophysicists nos. i-vi*, and *Teacup and saucer for Astrophysicists nos. i-iv*.

Garson uses several methods of drawing her imagery on the ceramic surface. Many of the pots, such as the

Swallow series, are coated in the manner of terra sigillata (a form of liquid clay that can be fired to form a hard waterproof surface). In green (unfired) pots or terracotta clay pots it can be scratched into or inlaid with coloured engobes or slips to create marks and lines.

Garson also uses a Korean technique called mishima to inlay strips of coloured clay into incised lines to produce her distinct black linear motifs. Other pots such as the moon vases have an underglaze surface to provide a "canvas" for the decoration.

She uses imagery based on nature such as plants, leaves, moths and birds as well as abstract patterns that suggest air currents, movement and the cosmos.

Garson regards humans and the universe as being originally fashioned from the same original protons,



One of Shannon Garson's moon vases, *Elements of the Universe*. Picture: Supplied

electrons, helium and hydrogen that formed the universe and astrophysical equations and chemical symbols that adorn the works testify to her belief in the oneness of creation.

In her series *Swallow nos. i-iii* the bold uncompromising images of swallows sweep and fly across the surface of the vases, their red

breasts providing a flash of bright colour.

The moon vases provide a sympathetic form for her round-faced owls. In *Elements of the universe* a bold image of an owl peers unblinkingly at the universe through large eyes - its ruffled feathers being captured beautifully in myriad strokes of delicate line and colour.

In the *Teacup for Astrophysicists* series, orange and blue washes of colour flow across surfaces while leaves and abstract patterns are drawn in fluid black lines to create small microcosms of imagery.

In *Cup no. iv* and *Cup no. v* the interiors are glazed in dark blue with white markings suggesting the cosmos. In the series *Teacup and saucer for Astrophysicists* complex imagery taken from nature shares the space with scientific equations and chemical symbols.

These poetic and imaginative works need to be held to be fully appreciated as Garson's poetic imagery unfolds around each work like leaves from a journal, revealing a very intimate exploration of the artist's observations of the natural world and a personal philosophy of our relationship to the world around us.