



Images

Cover: *Flower Bowls* (detail) 2006, pierced porcelain

Right: *Heritage Bowls* (detail) 2007, porcelain, made from fired recycled doilies soaked in porcelain slip with a wheel thrown stem

- 1 *Remnants* (detail) 2007, porcelain, made by coiling thread soaked in coloured porcelain slip then firing
- 2 *Hybrids* (detail) 2007, porcelain, made from fired crocheted forms soaked in porcelain slip
- 3 *Time Passes Quickly* (detail) 2007, porcelain, slip cast pierced porcelain with wheel thrown stems
- 4 *Wildflower Street (Flower Bowls)* (detail) 2007, porcelain, slip cast pierced porcelain with wheel thrown stems
- 5 *Wildflower Buds* (detail) 2007, porcelain, slip cast pierced porcelain with coloured clay stamen and a wheel thrown stem
- 6 *Koala Park Estate* (detail) 2007, porcelain, slip cast pieced porcelain
- 7 *Erosion* (detail) 2007, porcelain, made from fired porcelain slip soaked fabric

Images courtesy of the artist

Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland

Cnr Middle and Bloomfield Streets,
Cleveland Q 4163

Monday to Friday 9am – 4pm

Sunday 9am – 2pm

Admission free

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Redland Art Gallery is an initiative of Redland Shire Council,
dedicated to the late Eddie Santagiuliana

WILDFLOWER
AN EXHIBITION BY JULIE SHEPHERD

Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland, Gallery 1
Sunday 19 August – Sunday 23 September 2007

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THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF ART, THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT HAS POSSESSED A LASTING POWER TO INSPIRE. JULIE SHEPHERD'S LOVE OF NATURE HAS LED HER TO DEDICATE ALMOST A DECADE TO DEVELOPING A VISUAL LANGUAGE IN FINE PORCELAIN WHICH COMMUNICATES HER ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS.



1

In *Wildflower*, Shepherd explores issues relevant to the Redlands area, where she has lived for the past 12 years. Long walks through nearby bushland helped to raise Shepherd's awareness of the relevance of global issues to her local environment. Most poignantly, as she witnessed the encroachment of development, she realised first-hand the fragility of delicate ecosystems and the importance of biodiversity. Her engagement with the natural environment has extended over many seasons, bringing with it an understanding of the passage of time and the transience of life. Recently, Shepherd has extended her work beyond a celebration of nature to explore the consequences of environmental mismanagement. These are all themes which are explored in this exhibition.

Shepherd has selected methods of working with clay which enable her work to speak simultaneously of the fragility and the inherent strength of nature. Water is added to porcelain clay to create a slip (liquid clay of a similar consistency to pouring cream). The slip is cast in plaster moulds, each hand-made by the artist from original sculptures. Shepherd uses the resultant form, as thin as egg shell, as a metaphor for the vulnerability of the environment. Each piece is then pierced hundreds of times to create a fine lace-like effect. Hours of sanding follow, in order to polish the porcelain to a soft silky finish.

A convergence of ceramic and textile techniques recurs throughout Shepherd's work. When Shepherd began piercing the clay forms with a dremel drill, she was struck by the similarity to sewing. The technique with the drill, the need to focus on concerns such as spacing to achieve an even stitch length, all implied a connection with textiles.



2

Since that first successful synthesis of the two crafts, Shepherd has experimented with other ways of combining textile techniques with her clay work. Many of these are utilised in the works presented in *Wildflower* (notably *Heritage Bowls 2007*, *Hybrids 2007*, *Erosion 2007* and

Remnants 2007). Each of these works is made by dipping textiles into porcelain clay slip to create a framework for the form.

In order to make the pieces in *Hybrids 2007*, Shepherd first crocheted the forms, and then dipped them in clay. For Shepherd, this work explores the way that man has sought to alter nature for his own purpose. As she points out: "It's not just the new genetic engineering, we've been making hybrids forever and adapting life to suit us". Shepherd has used the same basic form for the body of these pieces, but each has different additions or modifications. The resultant pieces straddle a divide between vessel and sculpture, evoking a bird-like creature gone slightly wrong.



3

In other work, while not using textiles in the actual construction of the pieces, Shepherd has used it as a source of inspiration. *Time Passes Quickly 2007*, a series of four pieces depicting the gradual opening of a flower, is a meditation on the cycle of life. The series was developed for an exhibition in conjunction with the Victorian Embroiderer's Guild. Artists were invited to

view the Guild's collection and then make a contemporary work. Shepherd selected a hand embroidered tea cloth as her inspiration from the thousands of pieces in the collection of historic lace and embroidery.



4

Wildflower Street (Flower Bowls) 2007 is a larger body of work which lends its name to the exhibition. Shepherd explains how she feels the word 'wildflower' addresses the way human perception impacts on our interaction with the environment. "It raises the question of what is considered a wildflower and what is a weed, and the long history in Australia of undervaluing our native flora and fauna".

The original inspiration for *Wildflower Street (Flower Bowls) 2007* came from a collaborative work Shepherd undertook in 2004. The artist was invited to work with playwright Donna Cameron on the staging of her play 'The Flowering', a modern interpretation of the myth of Persephone.

In a scene in 'The Flowering', the main characters meet in a gallery, where they are surrounded by an installation of porcelain flowers. This imagery was the stimulus for Shepherd to create a work based on the wildflowers she sees on her bushwalks in the local area. The pieces in *Wildflower Street (Flower Bowls) 2007* are bowl-shapes, with rims that gently morph into flower petals. The delicate pierced decorations depict a variety of floral forms and swirling spirals, a symbol of growth. In *Wildflower Buds 2007*, this theme of growth is developed further by the creamy cup-like petals, sheltering their colourful, unfolding stamens.



5

Shepherd offers a potent critique to encroaching development in *Koala Park Estate 2007*, named after a local housing development. The shapes of the woodchips left in the wake of land clearing were the inspiration for the individual pieces in this work. Significantly, Shepherd has allowed her finger marks to remain in the clay, rather than working to create her characteristic velvety smooth surface. This reminds us of the mark of the artist and can be read as a metaphor for the human footprint on the earth. The use of lighting to cast shadows enhances the sense of foreboding implied in the work.



6

In *Wildflower*, Shepherd not only showcases her technical virtuosity working with fine porcelain, but has extended her unique visual vocabulary. The resulting body of work demonstrates the ability to grapple with the complex environmental issues so close to Shepherd's heart. The reminder of our biological nature and our place in the delicate web of life is a timely one.

Text by Amanda Watson-Will, July 2007



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