

Empathy adds to ambience

Belinda Fox and Neville French: Give and Take: A Collaboration

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin.
Hours: Tuesday-Friday 10am-5pm,
Saturday-Sunday 9am-5pm.
On until April 10.

Reviewer: Kerry-Anne Cousins

This interesting and unusual exhibition includes the work of two artists Belinda Fox and Neville French.

Fox is represented by several paintings but she has also worked with French on a series of ceramics that are also on display.

The result is a very successful collaboration by two artists who are in empathy with each other's aesthetic beliefs.

This is demonstrated not only in the pots where artist and ceramist work together directly but also where the individual ceramics and paintings of each artist complement each other and contribute to the overall ambience of the exhibition.

Fox is a well-established painter and printmaker. Since graduating from the Victorian College of the Arts in 1996 and Melbourne University in 1999, she has travelled extensively, mainly in Asia.

This experience has given her work certain Asian sensibilities.

In particular she seems drawn to using recurring images, such as the lotus flower and its leaves, the bodhi tree (the sacred fig tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment) and a sacred mountain in Tibet called Mount Kailas, as symbolic ideas in a personal iconography of contemplation and reflection on nature.

In this series of works the magnolia flower, the patterns of water and marine life have also become leitmotifs, appearing as decorative images in the paintings



Belinda Fox's watercolour *Several shades*, and ceramics from the *Give and Take* series, a collaboration with Neville French.

and ceramics. In 2005 Fox attended a residency at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute where she discovered new techniques of printmaking. An example of how the artist brings together successfully several techniques such as intaglio, chine colle and collage is demonstrated in two works – *Full of Adventures. No. 2* and *Your journey may be long No. 3* – where the varied textures add to its rich layering. Fox also uses wax in an encaustic technique that is dripped over the surface of her paintings so that the effect appears accidental. Watercolour washes are used in the same way. The artist

intervenes by working back into the surface in tiny ink strokes to create or isolate a shape or passage of paint and create a rhythmic pattern.

In some instances tiny strokes like running stitches create networks like webbing or lace – a motif that appears in many of the artist's works.

Fox is interested in orchestrating these rich layers of images so that one is drawn into a world of overlaying pattern and infinite space. The resulting works have a mood of misty beauty and fragility.

In 2010 Fox had a residency at

the Skopelos Foundation on the Greek island of Skopelos. Here she worked with Basil Hall and other artists and experienced a time of discovery both in printmaking, drawing and ceramics. The latter interest in ceramics was given impetus in part by a well known local Greek potter who was also working on Skopelos. Fox's stated wish "to do printmaking in a three-dimensional form" caused her to team up with Neville French, a ceramist and teacher at the Arts Academy, University of Ballarat.

French writes that his ceramics owe their forms and colours to his

study of the landscapes of Victoria – the colours of its changing seasons, its "domed" skies and grasslands. In this exhibition he has also found inspiration in dry eastern shores of the Willandra Lakes region in NSW; a system of ancient lakes formed over the past two million years. His soft, organic forms with their defined rims mirror their wind sculptured shoreline.

French's porcelain vessels are wheel-thrown, then manipulated so that their shapes are slightly ovoid and indented. Their beauty lies in the delicate and beautiful soft blue, green and yellow glazes that seem almost to hover over the forms.

They reflect the same meditative quality of Fox's paintings. Fox has applied her painting techniques to decorating French's pots. Sympathetic to French's forms, her designs are quotations from the imagery she uses in her paintings. Particularly of note are the two vessels from the series called *Give and Take*, No.20 and No.21, where Fox has drawn on the linear patterns taken from her graphic work.

To see these ceramics with the paintings is to experience the sense of the wholeness of the creative process. This is a concept understood by the Japanese who traditionally have given the same importance to all branches of the arts. In the Japanese tea ceremony for example, the ceramic vessels used for the tea may be matched to a painted scroll in the teahouse so that the individual meaning of each piece adds to the appreciation of a larger, more embracing, concept. Both Fox and French understand this relationship. It amplifies their work and brings to it a new and deeper meaning as this rewarding exhibition so amply demonstrates.