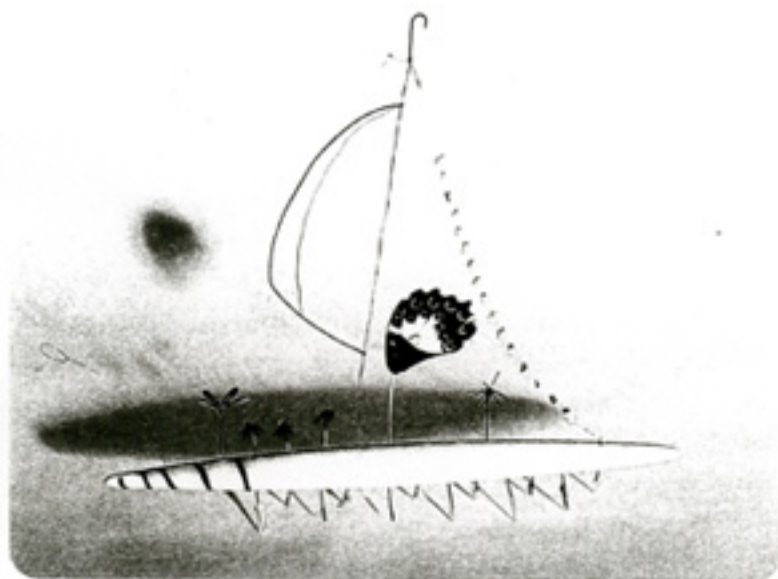
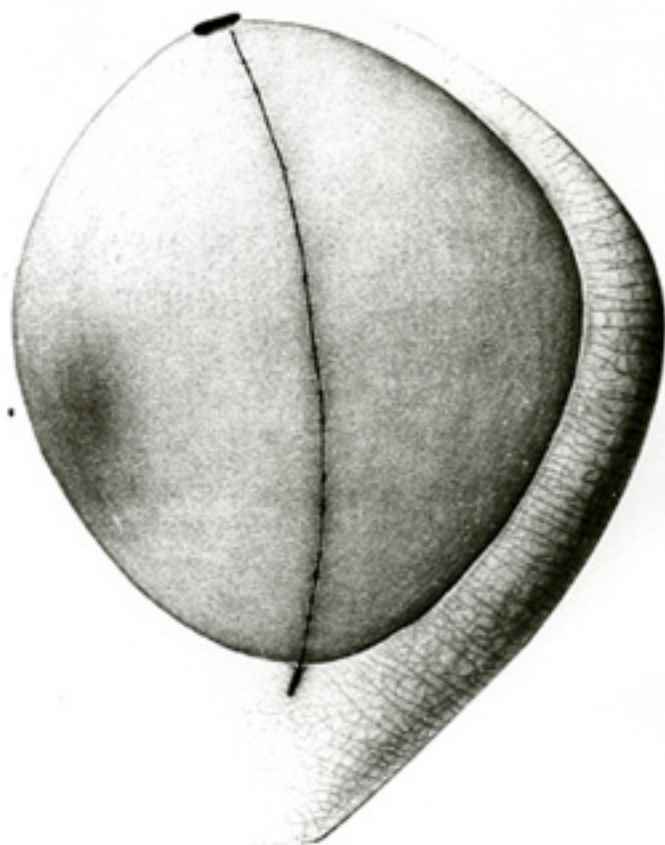


Shona Wilson

A Profile



Shona Wilson, *Dream ship*. Ceramic and mixed media. 25cm (h) x 3cm (w) x 30cm (d).
Photo: Simon Davidson, courtesy the artist.



Shona Wilson, *Vessel form I*. Ceramic; slip, clear glaze, copper wire. 45cm (h) x 35cm (w) x 12cm (d). Private collection. Photo: Simon Davidson, courtesy the artist.



Shona Wilson, *Altar stick series*. Ceramic, raku and earthenware frings. 45cm (d) x 3cm diameter. Private collection. Photo: Simon Davidson, courtesy the artist.



Shona Wilson, *Vessel Form IV*. Ceramic; slip, clear glaze, engobe, copper wire. 75cm (h) x 25cm (w) x 20cm (d). Private collection. Photo: Simon Davidson, courtesy the artist.

ADAM RISH TAKES A CLOSE LOOK AT WILSON'S RECENT BODY OF MIXED MEDIA WORK AND CERAMIC VESSELS

SHONA WILSON'S RECENT WORK, shown in November 1997 at Federation Zen (her now defunct Clovelly, Sydney, outlet) draws on diverse sources and materials. Her main body of work examines and recycles the detritus of nature—broken twigs, torn off wings, chrysalises, bones, shells, seed pods—reconstructed (using hot glue, wax and shellac) into new forms, imaginings, projections. Mounted in Solander boxes these become a museum of unnatural histories. 'Click go the shears' and organic forms transmogrify—a 'squid woman' is constructed from butterfly wings combined with the scales, bones and eggs of fish. Under the 'Wilsonscope' diatoms morphose from Casurina needles, dragonfly wings and seeds.

Her ceramics include sumptuous coil pots drawn from organic forms. These vessels play on the contrasting textures of glazed and unglazed surfaces. A brilliant pink glazed, gynaeco-morphic ¹ eye dish has a dull central unglazed macula ². A pot plate is a shiny white stone with muted lichenous patches. Ceramic structures (spirit homes) resemble the adobe dwellings of Mali and evoke the mysteries of a cargo cult. Her 'wishing stones' are the coloured eggs of imaginary birds. The 'altar sticks' resemble the larvae of giant undiscovered insects. Her paintings of primordial, marine life forms are in muted sulphurous yellows, muddy pinks and bluey purples—an evocation of the swampy source of life itself.

This work has not arisen *de novo* ³ having antecedents and affinities with Calder, Klee, Joseph Cornell's boxes, John Davis's twig sculpture, the constructions of Andy Goldsworthy etc. The sensibility of the work, however, is uniquely her own and a visual logic has been rigorously explored to create a significant, mature body of work. The ceramics have the fragility of Morandi (via Gwyn Hanssen Pigott) but also a recycling of style inspired (via Japan) by the colours and shapes of the sixties ceramics and glassware she formerly collected and sold. Her style, however, is not straight retro but mutated. It is as if these inert geometric forms had awoken and grown from some internal living code like those organic patterns generated by the Mandelbrot set (of Chaos theory) from simple mathematical formulae.

Wilson's work is ecologically significant. In a kind of perverse Darwinism, ichthyology ⁴ becomes a branch of entomology. Instead of the artificially ordered, branching system of Linnaean classification we have a spider's web. The work demonstrates the interdependence of the natural world; how forms evolve and relate to each other; how nature avoids waste by recycling; how we can recycle nature. Her work challenges our sense of scale and wakens us to the microscopic world. Her delicately balanced pieces show how even the detritus of nature is stunningly beautiful. There is nothing cloying about this world, her objects have beak and claw and are forged out of death, however, the work is fecund and optimistic in the possibility of rebirth. 'Familiarity breeds contempt' may be a platitude, but an important quality of art is to make us see the world anew. Wilson's work, with consummate craftsperson-ship, amply fulfils this criteria. Her coming exhibition at Michael Nagy Gallery, Sydney, in December 1998 should not be missed.

endnotes

1. Gynaeco-morphic: is a form of a woman.
2. Macula: is a dark spot or permanent stain.
3. De novo: is to start again or afresh.
4. Ichthyology: is the branch of zoology that studies fishes.

Dr Adam Rish is a Sydney based General Practitioner, artist, textile designer and occasional art reviewer. He spent 4 months in Jakarta on an Asialink residency in 1997, the results of which will be shown at Michael Nagy Gallery, in Sydney, November 1998.