

# Mixed messages highlight show

## Craft

By MYRA McINTYRE

Elizabeth Charles: *The Orchard*. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street Deakin. 10am-5pm daily, till November 3.

**T**HE ORCHARD, the most recent work of contemporary ceramicist Elizabeth Charles, is a collection of vessels and sculptural pieces which harbour the echo of nature while exhibiting a dependence on classic form.

Her expressive style, whether as a gift or a consequence of "happenstance", remains a visually enticing combination of experimentation and retained respect for traditional methods of practice.

"More than anything else, I am influenced by what tool is at hand.

"I work with whatever I've got, even if this means dragging a slip-drenched brush along the floor of the studio, picking up the debris and applying it to the surface of the piece."

The surface qualities of low

relief, incised patterning and subdued colour are heightened by the introduction of foreign objects, either real or fashioned.

The 22 pieces in the exhibition range from a quirky and playful sculpture of her dog, "Coconut", to a collection of large urns in stages of metamorphosis into the realm of the living.

The characteristics of fauna and flora, of shells, vines, leaves, flowers, nuts, swans and open-mouthed fledglings inhabit rather than decorate the forms.

All appear to be swathed in weathered skin, some carrying markings of ancient rituals.

Several figurative sculptures hang on the wall, a series of "Himself" and "Herself" alluding to the several levels of relationship and interaction of male and female: the womb nurturing man and the symbols of sovereignty are two themes.

The exhibition is most intriguing and delightful, and clearly reflects the energy and immediacy of Charles's creative process.



Vessel III, slips dryglaze on ceramic by Elizabeth Charles.