

VISUAL ARTS

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Pragmatic flights of fantasy

Animal-human hybrid characters offer a form of escape for sculptor Flavell and audience

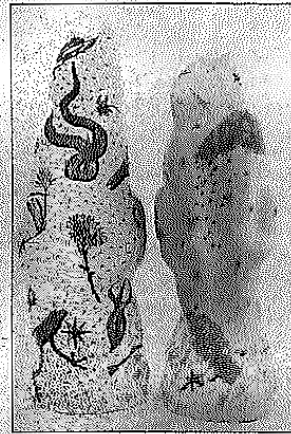
It could be argued that flights of fantasy represent a pragmatic realism in today's world. Such has been the explosion of the genre of fantasy in film, gaming and literature that escaping into another or alternative universe seems to have become a required part of our everyday psychology of coping.

Coping with what, I'm not sure, but certainly the stresses of banality versus the intoxication of fantasy have become an ongoing internal psychological battle today.

Enter Susan Flavell and her accumulation of works under the auspices of the Mark Howlett Foundation. MHF #14, at Gallery Central, is a picturesque assortment of drawings and ceramic sculptures which continue the journey of Flavell's work into the



Brave: Some works from Susan Flavell's exhibition.



therianthrope world of human and animal morphology. The morphing in MHF #14 is more of a liminal one with the act of transmigration occurring through both an ambiguous use of forms and a material transformation.

This is achieved primarily through the ceramic sculptures which, as you enter, are immediately enticing.

Laid out as they are, the ceramic figurines seem a natural extension of Flavell's cardboard constructions but there is a braveness in this change of

direction and it's paid off in spades.

Built predominantly through two main figures, one an elegant animal figure, the other a head with a human face on one side and an animal's on the back, these works engage a vast amount of emotive and responsive readings.

This is enhanced by Flavell smoothing the features and adding individual pattern and motifs to each piece. This creates a sense of artistic ownership of each work while allowing us to push our own memories and self-analytical readings on to them. It's finely balanced and well worked stuff.

In the end MHF #14 becomes, as it should, a celebration of the freedom of a year's commission.

Flavell works with press moulded stoneware, plumped stoneware, slipcast stoneware, raku and various

glazing, perhaps tapping into the recent reinvigoration of ceramics in European contemporary art, particularly as a large construction format, or maybe not.

It doesn't matter, what Flavell has achieved is a quality body of sculptural work equally ensconced in the origin of the ceramic figurine and the modern flight of fantasy.

In the format of this exhibition the lithographs and watercolours get a little lost in the background but throughout Flavell's work there is a constant desire to go deeper into our collective psyche, demanding attention be paid to our more shamanic roots.

Susan Flavell MHF Commission #14 is at Gallery Central, Aberdeen Street, Northbridge, until May 29.