



CHRISTINE HELLYAR | *Clutch, brood and echo, 1990*

Christine Hellyar's sculptures have been described as 'ghosts of natural phenomena'.²¹⁴ As traces or impressions of natural objects, they are indeed ghosts of a kind. Hellyar works with a range of materials including rubber latex, textiles, plaster and metals to create these renditions of nature, which she uses in conjunction with found objects both natural and man-made. *Clutch, brood and echo* contains a variety of items — plant materials, clay vessels and plates are hand modelled and imprinted with texture, the kumara are moulded in clay and the logs in plaster, and then cast. These finely textured objects, some of which are coated in copper, suggest natural processes of growth, reproduction, gestation and nurturing. Their earthy, oxidised colours hint at decay and the completion of the life cycle.

For Hellyar, casting is a cultural act of reproduction that echoes what occurs in the natural world. In *Clutch, brood and echo* the cast objects are classified according to her own taxonomy and arranged in a variety of glass-fronted china cabinets and shop display cases. Through these methods of production and display,

Hellyar brings the forms into contemplation as art objects, expressing a belief in the importance of the environment and suggesting the need for it to be considered as valuable as high culture. The combination of domestic and commercial cabinets further underscores her interest in notions of value, raising questions about what is precious to whom, and why.

Hellyar's work is generated by, and infused with, her love of the natural world and her interest in people's relationship with it. As biological entities, she asserts, humans are part of nature, yet we are voracious consumers of it. Hellyar also brings a feminist perspective to her exploration of gender roles and biological cycles. In work that has consistently addressed cultural connections to the natural landscape, she focuses particularly on ancient and traditional gender roles such as those of the hunter gatherer. In *Clutch, brood and echo* the artist herself takes the traditionally female domestic role of gathering, commenting, 'All art for me is gathering and ordering. All thought processes are.'²¹⁵ [CHI]