

RIGHT Lucy is fond of simple, subtle plants such as sweet violets, recreating them in the style of botanical specimens.
FAR RIGHT A snail takes shape in Lucy's hands.



LEFT Plaster moulds line the shelves of the studio, hiding intricate forms within.
FAR LEFT Lucy begins many of her pieces as beautifully drawn sketches.

Breaking the mould

The ceramics of Lucy Smith celebrate the hidden and overlooked with lifelike depictions of animals and plants. Sorrel Everton meets the artist in her East London studio. Photographs Rachel Warne

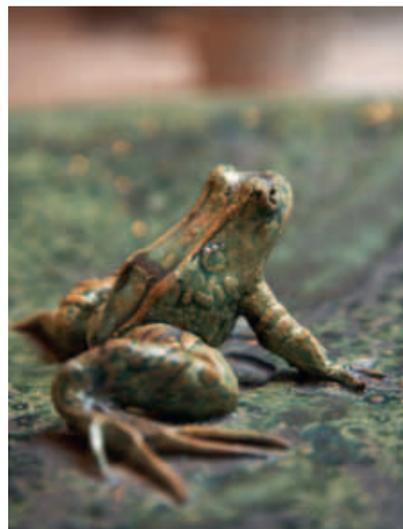


maker garden art

Lucy Smith describes herself as a natural collector, recording what she sees



Lucy fires her works at high temperatures, which gives the glaze muted, realistic colours.



Mouldings such as this plaque with daffodil need to dry for several months before they can be fired in the kiln.

As a child, Lucy Smith would spend family visits to gardens looking for secret places and little niches, longing to discover small creatures silently poised. Now a successful ceramicist, that early curiosity finds expression in the garden ornaments she creates. Frogs sit on the edge of pools ready to dive into the waters, lizards bask motionless atop stones, water trickles gentle from a spout. “I like the secretiveness of animals, the sense of imminent movement and fluidity in their bodies,” explains Lucy as she sits in her studio in East London.

Lucy began her artistic career as a stone carver. It was a chance commission from her father, a landscape architect, that helped her refocus her work towards clay moulding. “Dad’s garden had been chosen to feature on Geoffrey Hamilton’s series *Paradise Gardens*, and he asked me to create a small water feature, hidden away, low down.” The request suited Lucy’s sensibility and reminded her of those formative days in the garden. “I don’t have any formal horticultural training but as a family the conversations were always there. It’s what our lives were based around.”

Enhancing the garden

There are similarities though between Lucy’s craft of ceramics, and creating a garden. She considers garden-making an art form in its own right, while her work is informed by artists such as Grayson Perry and his belief that a useful object can also be one of great beauty.

“I want my art to enhance the experience of the garden. My pieces aren’t meant to jump out and dominate,” Lucy explains. “They should be tucked away – adding a glistening, a burbling, a hint of something out of the corner of the eye.”

Plants are a favourite subject too, and Lucy frequently uses them as inspiration for her wall plaques – irises, narcissi, anemones and plants that are often overlooked, such as cow parsley and plantain. “They have such gorgeous structure,” she enthuses, adding that she naturally has a collector’s eye and enjoys noting everything that she sees. The fine detailing of her plants does indeed make for beautiful botanical art.

Patience makes perfect

Clay is an ideal material, allowing her to work on subtle details. “You can work with the tiniest of slithers and the slightest movement of the finger will have an effect,” she explains. The process requires patience, too. It takes months for a piece to dry once it is taken from the mould; it’s then fired, glazed and fired again.

At this time of year the Chelsea Flower Show is the main focus of her attentions. Lucy has exhibited there for ten years and her now-retired father is always there to help her set up her stand. From the spotlight of Chelsea, her pieces then find new homes tucked into garden corners and leafy niches, from where they weave their secretive magic. □

• For details call Lucy Smith on 020 8558 4734, or go to her website at www.lucysmith.org.uk

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Lucy works clay into plaster moulds to produce her design in relief, such as this water feature with a flag iris