



Shelly with one of a series on vessels: *My Grace is Sufficient for You*, (work in progress – a commission that must have lilac and turquoise in it), Shelly Johnson, 2004, acrylic and clay on canvas, 100 x 60cm.

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**God found
 me really,
 took care
 of me**

Interview: Shelly Johnson

Shelly Johnson is a painter as well as a photography-major in her fourth year at Polytechnic. She also works in collage and mixed media and is one of the invited artists in the *Beyond* exhibition: Peter Rae Gallery, 215 Stuart Street, Dunedin, 2 - 26 October 2004. She is part of a small weekly group at art school run to encourage and support each other in art and faith. Johnson is developing mainly paintings for *Beyond* that include text and screen printing onto fabric.

About this group she elaborates:

There is a core group of five and another seven who come when able. They are painters Briar Alison and Mike Cooke, David Teata, sculptors Amy Sheraton and Benjamin King, photographers Jo Osbourne, Rachel Walker, Kate Walkinshaw, Rosy Harray, 2nd Year, sculpture major I think, and Cedric Osten clothing design.

Fellowship of the Brush

My church is very supportive of the visual arts and what I am doing, I have a group there called the *Fellowship of the Brush* with about 20 interested people. I'm planning a series of artist talks, perhaps once every month or so, have started planning an 8-10 week block course, a sort of painting 101, from a Christian perspective, with a small art historical component, the Christian perspective coming in through group discussion on key scriptures which relate to visual media and associated issues. I plan to

have monthly exhibitions at the church.

Is there any intersection between art and faith for you?

A huge intersection. I've only been a Christian for four years. When I was first at art school (1997-99) I wasn't a Christian. I had my daughter and took three years off and became a Christian during that time. I've always been a searcher, looking for truth. My family wasn't Christian but I searched everywhere. God found me really, took care of me. Unbeknown to me, my brother had become a Christian and he and his wife were praying for me solidly every day. I'd come to the end of myself. That's when God revealed himself to me through the Bible and other influences around me.

How does all that impact on the art?

Just before I was a Christian I had begun using text as image in painting. More as an aesthetic formal thing. But now I'm exploring using Biblical texts within my work, like McCahon did. For me the text is rich in meaning and it's almost taking over from the visual. The text is looming larger, but it's visual too.

What are your aspirations for the future?

I'm rapt to be asked to be part of *Beyond*. It's a great opportunity to get to know other artists, build some works for the future. My plan is to be a full time artist making a living from my art.

John Stringer