

The figures and figments

WILLIAM YEOMAN

"These are psychological portraits of people you've never met," says Perth sculptor Simon Gilby about the 10 life-sized steel, pewter, resin, bronze and stone figures in his new exhibition, *The Syndicate*.

Gilby's work combines the flamboyance of Mannerist sculpture with the literalness of communist statuary and the terrifying metamorphoses of Greek mythology. "They have plainly bizarre things happening to them, which you can read as clues to their character," he says.

"You might start seeing

relationships between them. Or you might not."

Messiah's heroic stance is deflated by a wire wheelchair imbedded in its body, evoking a Dadaist St Sebastian. The Finalist suffers a similar fate in being run through with a scaled-down skeleton of a whale. Corpus lies like a body in disarray, its limbs resembling the discarded armour of a long-dead knight. The doll-like Tarboy is drawn heavenwards by some unseen force.

Both the levitating body of Nuysia, branches sprouting where her head, shoulders and arms should be, and the floral filigree nakedness of Verona recall the fate of Daphne,

whom the gods transformed into a laurel tree to rescue her from the clutches of a libidinous Apollo.

"I'd like to think it's in that place between the threatening, the erotic and the vulnerable," Gilby says of Verona. "The impetus behind it was the idea of beautiful women being in a cage of their own bodies. They might actually want to be a boilermaker up north or something. But they keep getting asked to do modelling jobs."

The Syndicate, which soon will be taken around WA by Art on the Move, is the result of a unique form of syndicated sponsorship suggested by Eagle Bay winemaker Ron Wise and managed, in this instance, by art patron Lloyd Horn, whereby a group of benefactors commissions and pre-purchases several works of art to be paid for in instalments during the course of their construction.

This arrangement, which Gilby hopes will be a continuing one involving different sponsors and different artists, enables the artist to enjoy a rare degree of financial independence.

Another form of independence arises from the brief: there isn't one. "The only parameter I set myself is that the figures be life-sized and figurative," the Claremont School of Art graduate says.

The result is better art. "Being a really good artist is the state of being professionally lost," Gilby says.

"That's what I find hard in responding to a brief. As far as public art is concerned, our city would be much better served by someone saying, 'Look, we love your artwork — can you make something that you think is fantastic for that spot right over there? And here's the money'."

The Syndicate is at Central TAFE Art Gallery from Saturday till November 14.



Expressive: Simon Gilby with works from his exhibition, *The Syndicate*, which is to be taken around the State.

Picture: Ashley de Prazer

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