

# Can-do approach

By SARAH HUDSON

**F**IONA Hall has been getting down and dirty. The installation artist has been working on a garden of native flora for coming exhibitions.

"I've been trying to track down the most amazing plants that have the most exotic names," she says from her Adelaide home.

Native flora also featured in her controversial sardine can designs in the 1997 *ContemporA5* exhibition which she won.

And native flora features again on six sardine cans which are part of her contribution to an exhibition titled *The New Republic* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

The cans show six plant species, including she-oak, coolibah and kangaroo paw.

The *New Republic* exhibition — which has appeared in the UK and Canada —



**Fiona Hall**

the French-speaking want independence; in South Africa the post-apartheid state is finding its feet; and in Australia Aborigines want self-determination.

Also representing Australia are Richard Bell and Gordon Bennett, who present an alternative perspective of white settlement; and Elizabeth Gersakis, who reflects on the migrant experience.

Apart from the sardine cans, Hall is

combines the work of artists from Canada, South Africa and Australia and refers to colonial authority.

All three countries have a similar legacy: in Canada

exhibiting a series of heads knitted together with videotape.

The title, *Bounty Hunting*, refers to the infamous mutiny on the *Bounty* and the annexation of cultures.

"My work does not have a strong political edge to it," says Hall, "but if you feel strongly about something, then you want to have the opportunity to make a comment about it."

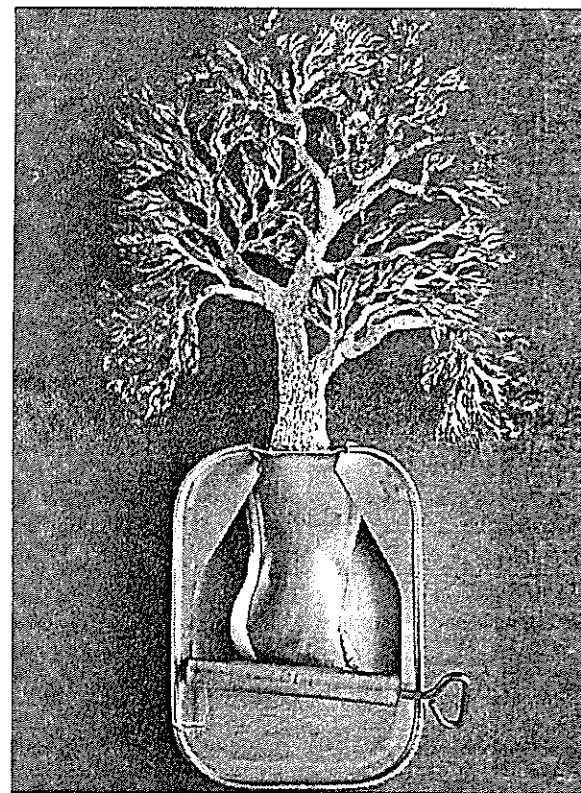
"That's one of the advantages of being an artist — you have a voice."

But Hall says her message is often overlooked. "I'm often chastised for doing work that is too beautiful."

"But you can produce work on a high aesthetic level that has aspects of cynicism."

"Sometimes people don't see my comments, but you can't hold their hands."

*The New Republic*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, South Yarra, May 5-June 4. Phone: 9654 6422.



**Get the message:** native flora in a sardine can.