

Water, water, it's beautiful

A collection, by all of us, goes against expectations

■ William Yeoman



of water. Sometimes we forget to treasure it and that's part of the power of the Museum of Water: to remind us."

Then, Sharrocks continues, there's the visual impact. "Some people say, 'You're going to a museum of what?' It's so easy to underestimate. Then you come face-to-face with it. You look at the enormous variety and beauty of these bottles on the shelf. We had 500 bottles on display at Somerset house in the UK, all lit up in different colours. It was staggeringly beautiful and funny and colourful. Almost like a still life by Morandi."

As a PIAF artist-in-residence, Sharrocks will collect water and stories from around WA, with Cottesloe Beach being the first of many locations to host the Museum of Water's WA edition of publicly donated water by people of all ages and from all walks of life.

Sharrocks invites all of us to pick a sample of water that holds some significance for us, put it in a bottle and tell her the story behind it. The mobile exhibition and collection centre will also host a series of public

admit it: when I heard about Amy Sharrocks' Museum of Water I was sceptical. After all, what could be interesting about a bunch of bottles and other containers filled with a fluid that, yes, is vital to life on this planet but basically colourless and dull?

Then I looked at the British artist's website. I had to speak to this amazing woman. Within five minutes she overturned all my preconceptions and I was in no doubt the WA edition of Museum of Water, surely destined to be one of the highlights of this year's Perth International Arts Festival, will be a lyrical, imaginative and moving collection of stories by, and for, all of us.

"It's amazing, isn't it," Sharrocks says on the phone from Britain. "Most people begin by saying it's just water from the tap, as if it's something mundane. Which it is. It can also be this other extremely lyrical and extraordinary thing. Both precious and undervalued at the same time. That's the magic



Artist Amy Sharrocks and friend at Museum of Water in Cumbria in Britain.

Picture: Jill Jennings

activities including a Swimmers' Manifesto, which Sharrocks likens to a speakers' corner where beachgoers can share their philosophies, experiences and reasons why they jump in the water.

The collection will be assembled over two years at locations across Perth and the Great Southern during this year's Festival before being donated to the WA Museum.

PIAF artistic director Wendy Martin says Museum of Water is a prism through which we can look at who we are in WA — our past, our present and our future. It's a way of exploring our environment and our connections to each other.

"This project is a marvellous platform to explore our relationship with our most

precious resource," Martin says. "It's a radical reimagining of what a museum can be in which everyone is a curator and everyone is a contributor."

Museum of Water was nominated as 2016 European Museum of Year and has been applauded for attracting new audiences and satisfying its visitors with unique atmosphere, imaginative interpretation and presentation, a creative approach to education and social responsibility.

"I came to Wendy Martin with this work, telling her what a huge impact it had in Europe," Sharrocks says. "I'm just so proud of it. But it would be nothing without the people bringing their water and their stories to us."

She says people can bring whatever they want, in any containers. "The conversations can be quite intimate. They can last from 15 minutes to an hour. Nobody is turned away. Some people run up mountains and down again so they can bring us water from the spring at the top. One woman swam to an island in Croatia and she stuffed a bottle down the top of her swimming costume so she could bring me water from the midway point to swim. I just think that's amazing."

Then there are the children's offerings. "There were some five-year-old boys playing in a fountain in London," she says. "They asked me if they could give me their wet socks. I said they could. They were just so excited, to think their wet socks were going to be a part of a museum display."

She recalls a six-year-old girl's offering. "It was her snowman, melted and put in a pesto jar. You could see the rosy beads that were the man's eyes and bits of garden detritus that had been a part of him. It's a kind of leap in time that brings back not only the winter but the nature of our days."

Sharrocks acknowledges WA is very different from Europe. "I feel like I'm in an extraordinary position," she says. "I spent three years travelling across the UK and then a year and a half in the Netherlands, where half the country is continually pumping water. So to go from that to a State as dry as WA is to be confronted by another place defined by water, in this case a lack of it."