

You yapping at me? I said, are you yapping at me?



Doggone: Oscar the dog wonders about a blue Aqua Mutt statue.



Top dog: then decides the critter is friendly. Pictures: NORM OORLOFF

Amusement bark

■ VISUAL ART

Harbant Gill

A PACK of painted mutts turned out to have more bite than one barking mongrel when the canines came face to face at artist Mai Long's colourful exhibition.

While the mongrel yapped, Mai Long's *Aqua Mutts* calmly commented on everything from global politics to personal preoccupations.

Sydney-based Mai Long, a self-confessed "mongrel" of a Vietnamese Buddhist father and an Australian Catholic mother, created her 30 dogs, and several Dag Girls, in her search for belonging.

"Mongrel has been used a lot to describe people who don't belong, but I wanted to legitimise that non-belonging," says the Hobart-born artist whose family lived for 14 years in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines.

"I'm taking the mickey out a bit of belonging or not belonging, I wanted to make it something fun and accessible.

"Yes, it's really serious to me but on the other hand it's ... just get on with life."

Mai Long's Mutts, made of chicken wire and newspaper and painted with acrylic, each tells a water-linked story.

One graced with the Buddhist symbol, the lotus, and Dame Edna Everage's iconic gladioli "takes something quite serious and lofty and puts it together with Australian humour".

■ AQUA MUTTS

Where: Atrium Gallery, Incinerator Arts Complex, 180 Holmes Rd, Moonee Ponds, until Sep 16. Free entry
Phone: 8325 1750

Another goes whaling, the shortest hangs out with the boat people and the tallest, which has Nemo on its tongue, swims in cyberspace while questioning its impact on global culture and copyright.

Bikini-clad Dag Girl, desperate to fit in, learns the classic Australian pastime — surfing — then spins out, dreams of Aqua Mutt and even rides him.

"Aqua Mutt is the part of me that tries to over-intellectualise things and Dag Girl is more the side of me that's allowed to have tantrums, is allowed to think naughty thoughts, is allowed to get drunk," says Mai Long.

"All these big ideas ... but in the end there is no one solution and that's the carnival chaos that I'm trying to reflect through all those colours.

"With all those big global issues going on, you've still got your own personal things, your mood swings, the inner world."

Mai Long, who completed a Masters in visual arts at Griffith University in Brisbane, says the exhibition allows her to share crucial issues while having fun.

"It's great to get responses and



Dogs' life: sculptor Mai Long with some of her creations.

be able to laugh about it with other people," she says. "It has also prompted deeper discussions, which is helping me also understand other people's stories."

Mai Long is really not sure what

Aqua Mutt and Dag Girl might get up to next.

"Dag Girl might get pregnant ... I'm thinking along the lines of Aqua Mutt, Dag Girl and the happy hybrids."