

Artist scales down – the size of her works, not her output

IT HAS taken Cherry Hood six years to overcome her fear of the landscape at her farm near Goulburn.

"It's really been a difficult thing," she said. "We have this big black range of hills near us and they're quite spooky and we're surrounded by these white trees that are quite eerie."

Years of drought had taken a toll, but Hood said rains had brought life to the district's parched farms: "It's very green and lush. The dams are all overflowing. The rivers are flowing. It's a big change."

It also encouraged her to go to market to buy a stud ram and two ewes to add to her small flock.

The dramatic changes around Hood's farm are paralleled in her latest show, *Miniature Paintings – Farm Life*, which opened last week at Tim Olsen Gallery in Woollahra. Hood's grandson Jesse Hood and Ellis Gumbert, both portrayed in the show, were at the opening night. So, too, were



Artist's model ... Jesse Hood with his grandmother Cherry Hood and his portrait. Photo: Helen Nezdropa

Pru Goward, the NSW opposition spokeswoman for community services and women, and the bookseller Nicholas Pounder.

Gone are the monumental heads of pre-pubescent boys, replaced by envelope-sized

watercolour portraits as well as paintings of farmland dotted with sheep, tumbledown cottages and winding dirt lanes, with price tags of \$2500 to \$3500.

Hood said bucolic landscapes have traditionally been frowned upon: "To show this kind of landscape and sheep and animals is quite political and something dismissed as kitsch and sentimental."

Hood, an Archibald Prize winner for a portrait of the pianist Simon Tedeschi, still portrays pale-faced boys, but she has chanced her arm with a couple of girls and the faintest of grins. "There are little smiles, Mona Lisa smiles," admitted Hood, who exhibited at this year's Hong Kong Art Fair. "But certainly no grinning."

Hood decided to scale down her art after visiting the Art Gallery of South Australia to see miniatures painted by her great-great grandfather, John Hood. She admits it was a challenge: "I nearly went cross-eyed."