

Stamp of approval for letterbox art

The Letter Box Show — invited exhibitors at Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga, until October 20.

THE Interior Design Guild sponsors an exhibition annually at the Fisher Gallery that often produces some intriguing, if mixed, results.

The letterbox is the theme this year and participants include artists, architects and designers. As in the *Artiture* exhibition, this is an opportunity to explore and extend the definitions of art, craft and design, with input by those working professionally in all aspects of design.

The most interesting exhibits in this well presented show go beyond merely producing a pleasing functional box in which letters can be posted, although some exhibits of this genre are nonetheless worthy.

Rather, the notions of the letter, the box, the envelope and the function of the letterbox, are explored, separately and in combination.

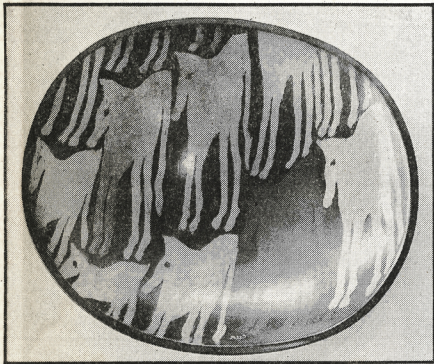
The very simplest, yet eloquent statement, is No 11, *A Stick Sharpened at Both Ends*, by Rick Pearson. His work examines the function rather than the object, by a forked stick, with letters jammed into the fork.

One of the more extreme and humorous interpolations of the subject is No 25, *Necessary Protection*, a mixed media work on paper by Charlotte Fisher who has started with word-play and created a frame of this. Letters become French letters represented graphically around a seed pod.

The most in-depth "study" of the subject is by Jeff Thompson, whose installation includes letters, illustrations and three mischievous interpretations of the theme.

His witty characteristic use of found corrugated iron in No 8, *Aeroplane Box*, is surpassed by No 9, *Roadside Farm Letter Box*, where tiny canvas stitched sheep on wire armatures project from a readymade galvanised iron letter box.

Donna Hoyle, with No 20, *A Letter Box*, and Todd Strathdee, have both developed the envelope into a box, thereby expressing the function of the box in no uncertain manner. Both interpreta-



● At Pots of Ponsonby, Siddig El'nigoumi's *Chalk Horse Dish*.

Around the Galleries

tions are well conceived and sensitively detailed, the former being wall-hung, the latter on a pedestal.

Malcolm Walker's quirky untitled work, No 2, is motorised, in the form of a dragon with jaws loudly clanging. Despite its crudeness there is an endearing quality to this work with its lightning-shaped tail.

Functional letterboxes as art objects abound, one of the liveliest being No 31, *Letter Box for Maria — Only Five Years Late*, by Peter Rogers. He adds a creative new function with a "condensing lens on the top that incinerates all junk mail at noon" to his classical patinated copper construction.

The work resembles an architectural model which in fact has been the form of many traditional letterboxes.

It is difficult to bypass Valeska Campion's extravagant kitsch mosaic construction in the foyer, or No 37, *In the House*, a wildly expressionist work by Calvin Collins.

No 30, *Monument to the Demise of the Rural New Zealand Post Box*, a work in pastel by Pete Bossley, and No 28, by Johanna Klein, depicting anonymous rows of post office boxes, present further aspects of the subject that demand consideration.

Gavin Chilcott ex-

amines the contents of the letterbox in No 17, *Where is Your Work*, and No 18, *Dear Gavin, We Have a Problem. Warm Regards*, bringing the message that fortunes made and lost have traditionally been conveyed through the letterbox.

Works like this latter group give substance and add richness to this vibrant exhibition.

Siddig El'nigoumi — at Pots of Ponsonby, until October 12.

ISSUES of culture are often highlighted when visiting artists exhibit their work, and this is very much the case with Siddig El'nigoumi's work.

El'nigoumi was born and educated in the Sudan and has lived in Britain for more than 20 years, and his terracotta ceramics are an amalgam of the two experiences.

The initial impact of the work is strongly African. One can almost feel the hot dustiness, and he uses strong elements of patterning and images of animals in a way one associates with African art.

Yet on examination, the influence of living in Britain is also apparent. Images of British culture, like a crossword puzzle in No 13, *Guardian Crossword Dish*, are integrated into his work as readily as are cave drawings.

The works have a still-

ness and presence, yet the surface decoration — in the form of coloured slips and sgraffito (scratched lines) — often has considerable movement.

The surface is burnished, a technique traditionally used to waterproof the vessels. Carbon smudges, both real and simulated by slip, on the surface of the terracotta clay add depth to the images.

The form of the small thrown bowls like No 18 and No 19 are a scaled-down version of the Sudanese gaddah, which is a large wooden bowl.

Larger less symmetrical works, like No 5, *Chalk Horse Dish*, are pressed slabs.

The surface decoration of this work, in the form of slip painting, is outstanding, with the distorted perspective of the horses of Salisbury Plain progressing diagonally across the surface of the plate.

In all his works El'nigoumi adds his personal mark of the scorpion and often adds a small bird.

In No 26, *Elephant Dish — Square*, with elephants marching across the plate, the bird sits on an elephant's back, waiting for the insects to be disturbed by the moving elephant before it swoops.

His delight in portraying the animal world is further illustrated by a mischievous fantasy blend of the *Zeppo*, No 28 and No 29, where zebra and hippo are merged into a new form. This whimsy is characteristic of much of El'nigoumi's work.

— Helen Schamroth