

Quilt gift keeps tradition

More than 60 women had a hand in the Commonwealth Quilt — and Auckland artist Carole Shephard doesn't want a single one forgotten.

So she has designed a backing cloth for the quilt with 60-plus hand shapes, each one to be embroidered with a worker's name.

The 400cm x 236cm quilt, on display at the Fisher Gallery in Pakuranga, is bound for Canada, host of the next Games in 1994.

"It looked so good," says Shephard, "we decided to make a replica and keep it here in New Zealand — otherwise all that effort would have been lost."

The tradition of sending a quilt to a Commonwealth Games holder began in 1976 when the Commonwealth Arts Festival was held in conjunction with the Edmonton Games. It continued in Brisbane and Edinburgh. New Zealand got a quilt from Edinburgh and Canada, in turn, will make one for the 1998 host nation.

New Zealand's 1990 gift, though, is something special.

Shephard, well known as a painter, designed it and also did a lot of the sewing on the centre section with its paua shells, Great Barrier lizard, crimson flax flower and fern.

"I've been working on it for three years on and off," she says. "I used to have a dress shop and know about sewing, so once I saw the centre panel taking shape I began to feel very good about the overall design."

That design shows the ethnic and geographic groups which make up New Zealand, 34 "flying geese", as the triangular shape or symbol of immigration is known internationally.

"We decided this one should be a Pacific quilt and it should reflect the fact that Auckland is a Polynesian city," says Shephard.

Backed by the 1990 Trust and helped by ASB sponsorship, the "geese" are pieces of cloth from Danes, Indians, Chinese, Dutch, Poles and all the other nationalities that go to make up our modern population — a facet of New Zealand not, perhaps, appreciated overseas.

Vertical side panels reflect the Islander and Polynesian aspects of New Zealand's make-up heading into the '90s. Cook Island, Tongan, Samoan and Maori groups designed and made these. Toi Maihi collated the Maori contribution and Luseanne Kolo the Pacific element but the quilt was very much a group work.

Tapa cloth and weaving, shells and flower designs from the Islands make the vertical segments geographically fascinating.

Once the main design was completed the quilt was passed into the hands (or fingers) of the Auckland Embroiders Guild and the Auckland Patchwork and Quilters Guild.

That was six months ago and the result hangs, resplendent, on the Fisher Gallery wall — a long way from Shephard's Grey Lynn studio where the original design was spread out on the floor months and months back.

"One thing we didn't want, one thing we agreed on, was not to do the clichés of sheep and kiwis," says Shephard. "The quilt was made by Maori, Pacific and European women and that's the way we always thought of it."



JOAN GRAHAM of Herne Bay embroiders the hand shapes on the backing cloth.