

Quilts prove real winners

Commonwealth Quilt Exhibition and Recent Auckland Craft — at the Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga, until February 25.

A WONDERFUL tradition was initiated during the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh in 1986 — a quilt made by women was created to present to the host city of the next games.

With this precedent set it was incumbent upon the Auckland 1990 Festival Committee to respond and make a quilt that would be sent to Victoria, Canada.

The two quilts are pivotal to the exhibition at the Fisher Gallery. They show two different approaches to collaborative projects in similar media, each presenting a large composite image.

Commonwealth Friendship Quilt, from Scotland, is in the form of a triptych and has a low-key folksy quality. Squares representing different countries in the Commonwealth have been created by a number of artists, the whole assembled as three formal rhythmic quilts.

Applique, stitchery by hand machine, piecing and quilting are all in evidence.

Commonwealth Quilt, designed and made in Auckland, is the vision of artist Carole Shephard it

was commissioned to reflect Auckland and New Zealand's place in the Pacific.

The result is a tribute not only to the inspirational design, meticulous attention to detail and cultural sensitivity of Shephard, but also to the women who worked with her.

Toi Maihi and Luseane Koloi took responsibility for the Maori and Pacific Island components; they retain strong individual identities, the former as the tangata whenua, embracing the work. Migration from European and Asian countries is also represented symbolically.

The central part of the work is, appropriately, a general statement about land, sea, sky and conservation of our natural heritage.

The realism of the carefully chosen elements (not a sheep or kiwi in sight!) is balanced by the abstraction of the background and the rich borders.

The work is exquisite in detail — for example, the minute red french knots on the muted green fern leaf, and a scattering of tiny shells stitched to the intersection of quilting lines.

The juxtaposition of

materials and techniques is equally well handled.

The accompanying works on show indicate not just the calibre of the artists involved in the project but also their diversity.

Harnessing this talent, and focusing it, takes skill beyond mere artistic ability. Documentation of Judy Chicago's massive collaborative projects suggests that the collaborative journey is not to be undertaken lightly: all the more reason to acclaim the results achieved.

The tradition of meticulous crafting is to be found in all the works, which have been chosen to represent the groups involved in making the quilt.

The artists reresented are Pearl Ormsby, Toi Maihi, Pat Britton, Margaret Maguire, Luseane Koloi, Tai'i Carpenter and Carole Shephard.

The exhibits include a feather cloak, hanging kelp sculpture, two patchwork and applique quilts, two works in tapa, a tivae-vae (quilt) and an assemblage of found and constructed objects and hand-made paper.

— Helen Schamroth

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