

Thursday Arts

Exploring paths of sculpture

By Penelope Carroll

EXPLORATION in clay of the eternal themes of birth, death and transformation has lead Helen Pollock down many paths.

The latest has been a long journey, and at times a very cold and muddy one, to create her huge installation the *Storehouse*, which is on show at the Fisher Gallery in Pakuranga.

The *Storehouse* which consists of a 2.6m high altar complete with life-sized goddess, an entering vessel, seven grinding-stones and seven receptacles — was created in Pollock's Takapuna studio and garage, spilling into the garden.

"I've been thinking about it for three or four

years. I had this image of big grinding-stones laid out before all there is. Of course you can't create that, so I've created this altar."

The sculpting and firing of *Storehouse* was like a long and continuous devotion, says Pollock, and one that wore a bit thin when it was cold, wet and muddy.

Known more for her holdable sculptures and masks, it is the first time she has ever worked on such a big scale.

"I like it," she says.

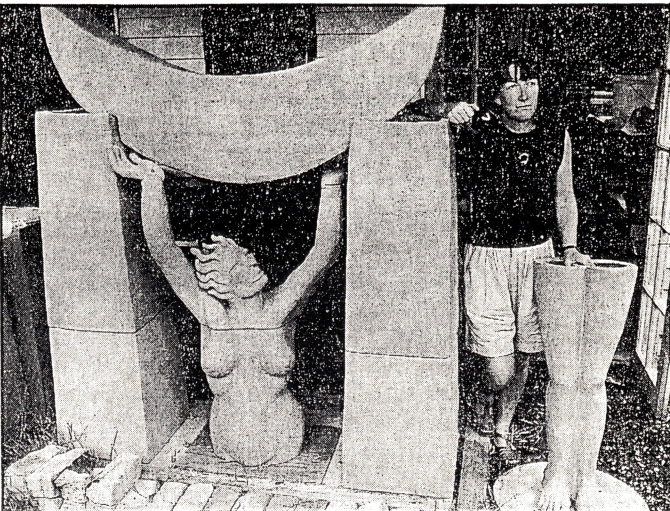
"You feel that you are actually in it."

Like all her work, *Storehouse* is a celebration of the feminine principle. Not the stereotype of the feminine as passive and yielding though; Pollock's feminine is fierce, and potent — an abundantly creative force.

Spirituality, says Pollock, has been overwhelmingly expressed in masculine images in Pakeha culture. "It is important for me to see feminine images — and powerful ones."

Like all her work, *Storehouse* is intensely personal and combines her passion for mythology with the mistletoes in her life.

"I realised early on that



PICTURE: DAVID WHITE

● Helen Pollock with her work *Storehouse*.

the things I was making to mark my own journey overlapped with things people had made over the centuries and this got me interested in mythology."

Storehouse, she says, represents both the storehouse that every society has for its wealth, sacred objects and mysteries, as well as the body as a temple and container for the soul.

"It refers to my body as a storehouse for my insights, potentiality and power."

The vessel for entering contains water for purification; the seven grinding-stones laid before the altar represents the transformative self.

The altar itself is a large terracotta archway sheltering a round-bellied goddess reaching towards a crescent moon and beyond, with the receptacles a symbol of both giving and receiving.

Pollock, who did some clay sculpture at art classes as a child, dreamed about becoming

a sculptor, but thought it wasn't feasible.

Instead she studied home science, with teaching, marriage and children following.

"Then when all the children were at school I decided I didn't want to go back teaching — I wanted to do something for me."

Winning a *Winstones* craft competition with a piece from her first firing spurred her efforts.

She has been potting professionally since 1985.