

No limit to imagination

SOME people see it as junk, others consider, and pronounce it "found sculpture," and those who think they know even better call it "objets trouves."

New Plymouth sculptor Don Driver is usually immune to judgments about his work, except when he feels threatened. This happened once in Wellington where he mounted an exhibition consisting of 500 boxes.

"A women's group said

I was obscene because they thought the boxes were a symbol for female genitalia."

Driver felt so vulnerable that he kept away from the show's opening.

Driver arrived at the Fisher Gallery in Pakuranga this week with a truckload of bits and pieces, including 40 tyres, for an exhibition-installation which will run until May 26.

The tyres joined 30 green plastic drums to form the installation part of the show. The tyres are heaped up on the floor of the main room and lit with yellow and red neon tubes. The drums dangle from the ceiling and stand in corners. Around the walls hang large collages using slender bicycle tyres, carpenters' aprons, leather gauntlets, a small rusty saw, and sacks - the old hessian and the shiny synthetic.

The expanse of Driver's imagination is as limitless as the materials and tools he uses.

His reputation in New Plymouth for unusual ob-



• Don Driver

jects is legion.

Two large studios are chock-a-block with everything from old tyres to discarded plastic.

But the signposts in Driver's work which indicate the way his mind works are not hard to read, and the pilgrim is rewarded by marks of his appreciation on the way. Look at the tyres. If you know that he cycles to his work as assistant at the Gowett-Brewster gallery

you might decide they are symbols of the madness of modern life, people moving round in circles.

On the other hand, the wheel is the ancient Hindu symbol of regeneration and permanence. For years Driver has collected Indian sculptures, seeking out little gems in Southeby's catalogues.

Lying on the floor, the tyres' relationship to the enfolding, protective symbolism of the circle is more explicit.

With this understanding in mind, other elements in Driver's enigmatic world begin to take on a symbolic as well as an aesthetic function.

Lighting is important for the subtle, secondary effects which Driver hopes people will notice. Look carefully at the shadow behind the scythe's handle. In another work, observe the reflection of the coiled spring in what looks like a sheet of copper but is, in fact, shiny paper.

Driver isn't always so serious. He likes to poke fun at institutions. There

is a wall piece which uses a bit of the New Zealand flag and a teatowel in the form of a torn \$5 note.

Atop a barrel sits a jaunty trio of soft toys riding in a child's pushchair. The laughing dog, and the fat cat are really the king and queen, Driver confides.

At 61, Driver is something of an icon himself in the art world. The National Gallery in Wellington has bought 18 of his pieces; the Gowett-Brewster has bought 10.

His career began in an inauspicious way. For 15 years he worked as a dental mechanic, making teeth and plastic eyes then, surreptitiously, he made other objects which were first noticed by painter Peter McIntyre, who took them to the Academy in Wellington.

When the Gowett-Brewster opened in New Plymouth, Driver became its first display registrar and his work as a sculptor flourished.

—Pat Baskett