

Merge with the poppies

Tall Poppies, by Judy Mackintosh Wilson, at the Fisher Gallery, Reeves Rd, Pakuranga, until July 24.

THIS show is a total experience; that is, one enters the room and becomes part of the work, instead of the more usual experience of entering a gallery and looking at individual pieces.

The walls are black, the room is rectangular. Echoing the rectangle, a bed of pale sand is spread on the grey carpet. Closely arranged on the sand are many small boulders, each (except four) wrapped or bound. On each end wall, and covering the same width as the sand, is a group of three identical photographs. Above, track lighting, also echoing the rectangle, highlights the boulders.

The installation pulls the viewer in, to a soft, dark, silent place. There's an intensity in the group of boulders, their stillness and verticality, together with their bindings, making them seem as if they are straining towards something.

For many years, Wilson was an innovative textile/fibre artist. She has brought her skills and preoccupations into a wider "artcraft" area, endeavouring to convey through mixed media and metaphor her concerns and ideas.

The materials and images she has employed are site-specific: boulders and photographs from Canterbury's Ashley and Waimakariri river gorges, and elm bark from her own garden.

However, her stated concerns are somewhat more universal, having to do with "restriction, freedom, and change" and the

One mould is used for several faces, which have painted eyes and lips, and a shiny white glazed finish, like masks.

Realism of skin tone or details is not aimed at; surfaces are often pitted or bumpy and features are rendered sketchily.

Nevertheless, they are made with great skill, by someone at ease with and

While an artist's statement can be useful in the dialogue between the viewer and the work, it can sometimes be tiresome, getting in the way, detracting from real involvement with the work by imposing questionable justifications upon it.

In this case, we are presented with a scenario, a story, as if these were characters in a child's book; it's a bizarre mixture of the light-hearted and the earnest.

Arnold likes making dolls. Is it really necessary to load them with simplistic feminist baggage, or half-learned stuff about the ancient myths of dead cultures?

It may well be true that we're a bit short on spirituality, but we're hardly going to find it in the trite, sentimental evocations of old and foreign belief systems, so popular among some women in crafts.

Enjoyment of the processes and products of craft idioms should need no justification or rationale beyond that simple fact. Dolls — Arnold's included — can be magical, mysterious, spooky, delightful, comforting, without the trappings of irrelevant myth. A dollmaker of her stature and talent should have the confidence to demonstrate this.

— Sue Curnow

Around the Galleries

perceived New Zealand peculiarity of cutting down those who achieve well (the Tall Poppies), as well as with the opposing forces of control and destruction.

These intentions are honourable but perhaps rather weighty, for what is, in the end, an elegant and seductive, well-conceived and crafted, arrangement of interesting objects in a managed space, quite self-sufficient and compelling for its own sake.

The Goddesses Within, dolls by Leonie Arnold, at Compendium, 5 Lorne St, until July 30.

Leonie Arnold's dolls function as alter egos, embodying or being imbued with a fantasy. They are not "lifelike," as are reproduction dolls, nor is this intended.

in control of every demanding aspect of her craft.

In this eye-catching exhibition, six dolls 1m high sit in a circle around a star-shaped arrangement of broken shells. The theme of the show is based upon the indulgent (and dubious) premise that women should have everything they want and that they have every right to it.

The "six aspects of a woman's psyche" are represented by interpretations of six Greek goddesses.

Each doll is dressed (in flowing silk garments) according to Arnold's perception of the significance of its identity. How strange, then, to see Aphrodite as a sweet virginal creature with blond curls, dressed in white, festooned with flowers. Clearly, interpretation is subjective.