

Two young women artists talk to Shani Wikaira about their forthcoming exhibitions and the importance of portraying positive Māori imagery.

Plastic trinkets

Auckland photographer Angela Colbert (Ngararanui) has strong views on the Māori souvenir market. “There can be little respect for a culture represented by meeting house clocks, tiny Māori warriors embedded in plastic snow globes, and chubby Māori maidens decorated with witless smiles,” she says.



This “cheap and tawdry” aspect of New Zealand tourism is the focus of her new exhibition, *Kiwitown*, opening at Te Tuhi – The Mark in Pakuranga, Auckland in January.

The exhibition, she says, will show the enormous disparity between appropriate cultural representation in exhibitions such as *Te Māori* and the souvenir industry in New Zealand.

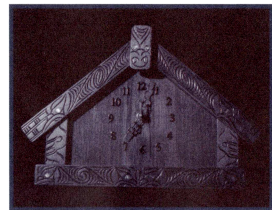
Kiwitown will include ten of Colbert’s photographs (pictured), depicting the mass-produced trinkets that flood tourist shops in New Zealand. “The images say it all, I think, and hopefully, viewers will be both amused and provoked by them.”

Colbert is passionate in her belief that Māori imagery should be not only positive but should also portray Māori as part of a strong, rich culture. Souvenirs seldom do this, she says.

“The souvenirs that I use in my photography are meant to show tourists something of New Zealand’s character but in fact, they can be incredibly demeaning to Māori,” Colbert says.

“My exhibition will show that these souvenirs are based on the myth of a compliant, contented Māori and that transforming our culture into plastic trinkets is offensive.”

Colbert completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts degree in 1993 and has been exhibiting her



work in various Auckland galleries over the past five years. Her most recent exhibition, *King of the G-String*, featured at Artstation in Ponsonby in July and was a commentary on the adult entertainment industry.

Kiwitown is her most ambitious project to date and she hopes to tour it later next year.

“This exhibition will be of particular interest to Māori – after all, they’re the ones represented by these plastic trinkets – but I hope it will also attract others.” □
Angela Colbert received a \$2800 grant from Te Waka Toi towards creating new work.