

Thursday Arts



● Tiare Maori tivaevae manu, at the Fisher Gallery. The tiare flower forms the centre of this tivaevae, which was designed, cut and arranged by a 14-year-old. The piece was handworked by a group of 13 and 14-year-olds as an introduction to tivaevae making.

Colours will knock your socks off

Pacific Threads: An exhibition celebrating traditional and contemporary Cook Islands tivaevae, at the Fisher Gallery, Heeves Rd, Pakuranga, until April 2.

In the 150 years since the skills of piecework, applique, and quilting were introduced to the women of eastern Polynesia, a wide diversity of regional styles has developed.

In Hawaii, complex two-piece applique, and a unique undulating style of quilting, have become a widely admired source of regional pride and identity.

In the other Island groups, a patterned top only is made, using applique or piecework methods. These are tivaevae.

In the Cook Islands, both methods are equally popular; embroidery, as embellishment and delineation of shapes, is a unique feature of their applique work.

Tivaevae play a vital role in the domestic and ceremonial life of all eastern Polynesia, replacing fine bark cloth in gift presentations to honoured guests, in rites of passage and other significant contexts. They are usually made by groups, sometimes by one woman; frequently, one woman who has recognised skill will design and cut the pieces, and others stitch the tivaevae.

The new tivaevae in this exhibition were made by the women and girls of the Kuki Airani Angaanga Tupuna Trust, Auckland, in the 1980s. Their tuktur, Mrs Matarena George, a collector of old and new tivaevae, is herself a highly skilled and respected artist.

The visual impact of this work is hard to describe. The place jumps with colour: magnificently flamboyant embroidered and appliqued flowers, rich mosaic patterns, in colours to knock your socks off.

Mrs George's own Pansy embodies the artistic principles of tivaevae making: technical skill, in the design and the meticulous embroidery; symmetry, in the arrangement of the simple flower and leaf motifs and placement of colours; contrast, in the deep rich blues and verdant green upon a crimson ground; framing, in the well-judged distance between the design's edge and that of the whole *Chrysanthemum*, which has salmon-pink flowers, embroidered in varied shades, on a mauve ground, is also a fine work.

The vibrant qualities and two-dimensional, "flat" appearance of the piecework depends upon strong colour contrast; tonal gradation is not important.

Several saturated hues are combined with white and primary colours to produce dramatic mosaics, made of octagons, hexagons or squares. Turtles and starfish appear in some of these.

An adaptation of the American *Log Cabin* block is seen in a particular impressive arrangement here, in relatively subdued shades.

Old pieced and appliqued quilts and coverlets from Europe, American and Polynesia, lent by the Auckland War Memorial Museum, provide a historical perspective for this important exhibition. Credit is due to the organisers, who recognised the artistic and cultural value of these amazing objects.

We are uniquely privileged, both to have the opportunity to see them and to have such a rich, vital textile tradition on our own doorstep.

Bronze Vessels and Stone Tablets, by Paul Mason, at the Compendium Gallery, Devonport, until March 18.

THINK of the word bronze, and you think of a colour — soft, shining brown; a texture — a rough, cast surface; and weight — a heavy, immovable permanence. Stone, too, has these connotations: weight, permanence, texture — rough or smooth.

Imagine, then, a vessel, a graceful fluted form curving outwards at the rim, the smooth surface a sumptuous deep blue-green flecked with aqua, the rim a bright polished band, the whole rising from a circular base of deep red-brown.

Another, half-egg-shaped, dark blue, with a surface like sandpaper; inside the hollow, a patterning of verdant green, turquoise, brown-gold. Others still — smooth, perfect forms, mysterious, rich colour, a pleasure to behold.

Imagine, too, a small concave square, delicately inscribed and divided — as if inlaid — into coloured parts, with a surface as smooth as silk.

These are Paul Mason's bronze vessels. Their elegant form at first belies their substance and solidity, yet on further acquaintance these properties seem to be in perfect harmony.

The surface colouring and apparent polishing is achieved by a chemical process known as patinising, a process over which this artist has great control. The vessels are sand-cast; the red-brown base on the fluted forms is of red granite.

His stone tablets have the appearance of magical tokens, or of artefacts. A black serpentine disc has a raised inlaid centre of red-banded Jasper; a black-grey pakaheo disc, with a natural fissure in its side, has a straight line incised across, and a mound of polished red granite inlaid at the centre of one face, of black granite on the other.

Other tablets, of polished stone, granite, jade, have similar properties of stone-within-stone, magical markings, mysterious origins. These are all deeply satisfying objects to contemplate: the work of a patient and masterful craftsman.

— Sue Curnow



● Hibiscus tivaevae manu.