

Cook Islands skill displayed

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An exhibition of traditional and modern Cook Islands tivaevae opens at Pakuranga's Fisher Gallery this Saturday.

Tivaevae means work made by patches or sewn together, usually quilts or covers.

The making of patchwork or applique quilts is common throughout the Pacific Islands.

Exhibition curator Louis Johnston says the exhibition explores and celebrates the traditions and original ideas used in the quilts.

A number of traditional colonial quilts and bedcovers have been loaned to the gallery for the exhibition.

The quilt-making concept was introduced to the Cook Islands by early missionaries.

Island women soon adapted the skill and developed new methods and designs.

They also used a vivid range of colours which related to the local flora and

fauna and the legends of the Islanders.

Within the Cook Islands the tivaevae became objects of great ceremonial importance and social value, says Mr Johnston.

"They were made and used for special occasions such as births, deaths and weddings and they are also highly prestigious gifts."

Each island has its own traditions and designs and the tivaevae vary in their appearance and the way they are made.

Young girls are still taught the skill of tivaevae by their mothers or older women.

Many of the women are reluctant to part with the knowledge of tivaevae, says Mr Johnston.

"Within the islands the histories and ways of making are highly guarded until the tivaevae are exhibited as the women are very competitive over the creation of new patterns."



Pansy Tivaevae by Matarena George. Mrs George is a major contributor to the work featured in the Fisher Gallery's next exhibition.