



FISHER GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

PACIFIC THREADS : An exhibition celebrating traditional
and contemporary Cook Island tivaevae
Saturday 4 March - Sunday 2 April 1989

This exhibition celebrates the development of the Cook Island tivaevae. It opens at the Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga from Saturday 4 March 1989 and has been generously assisted by the Auckland Institute and Museum and the Council for Maori and South Pacific Arts (MASPAC).

The making of patchwork and appliqued quilts is a common feature throughout the Pacific including the Hawaiian, Tahitian, the Cook and Marquesas Islands and New Zealand. This exhibition explores and celebrates the traditions and innovations of the quilts known as 'tivaevae' of the Cook Islands.

The origins of the tivaevae are also considered. Their introduction was due partially to various forms of sewing brought to the islands by the European and American missionaries. A number of traditional colonial quilts and bedcovers will be exhibited that have been kindly lent by the Auckland Institute and Museum.

The skills introduced to the islands were quickly adapted and developed as the designs, motifs and colours came to relate more directly to the local flora and fauna and the legends of the people. Within the Cook Islands the tivaevae became objects of great ceremonial importance and social value. They were made and used for special occasions such as births, deaths and weddings. They are also highly prestigious gifts.

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Administered by the Pakuranga Arts Society Incorporated

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Within each Island there are individual traditions and designs and the tivaevae vary enormously in appearance and in the methods of making. The women also make smaller scale embroidered pillowcases and intricate cushion covers as well as woven hats, fans and crocheted vases.

In the Cook Islands the traditions of tivaevae making are still strong. Young girls are taught and still practice the skills under the supervision of their mothers or elder women of their group. Many of the women are often reluctant to part with the knowledge of the tivaevae. 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.

The working of a quilt is a collaborative effort. One woman will create and cut out the design but a group can be given the task of piecing and appliquing the whole together. Often the period to make a tivaevae will be over a year as the design and the detail become more complex.

Matarena George, who has contributed a large number of the tivaevae being exhibited, was born in the Cook Islands and learnt her artform there. For many years she has lived in New Zealand and has continued making and experimenting with her own designs.

She now shares her knowledge with groups of young girls who, having been born in New Zealand, are being introduced to the new skills. The ways of making tivaevae in New Zealand are changing and developing as the artform finds interpretations and techniques that relate to new experiences of the country.

Events during the exhibition will feature a demonstration of tivaevae making by a group of sewers on Tuesday 14 March at the Fisher Gallery from 10am-4pm. Everyone is invited to visit the Gallery during the day, meet the sewers and share information. The exhibition closes on Sunday 2 April 1989.

For further information contact Louis Johnston, Curator
available weekdays 10am-4pm