

ARTS ON MONDAY

The mark of Fisher

Bernadette Rae visits Pakuranga to find the Fisher Gallery is expanding on its reputation for groundbreaking work. New extensions allow more exhibition space, especially to show emerging artists.

The Fisher Gallery perches precariously on the edge of Pakuranga's suburban hinterlands, just where the highway spews its dense traffic forth. Across the road are a large store and a hamburger restaurant.

But the Fisher Gallery itself is far from suburban.

Since its inception in 1984, it has developed a fine reputation for groundbreaking — and even boundary pushing — work. A huge number of contemporary New Zealand artists have been involved, perhaps received their first break, at the Fisher. It stands, inspired and inspiring, alongside the country's other fine regional galleries: the Govett-Brewster in New Plymouth, the Sarjeant in Wanganui, the Suter Gallery in Nelson and Lower Hutt's Dowse.

Now its contribution to the arts community, in Pakuranga, Manukau and nationwide, is about to receive a giant fillip.

On May 19 extensions and additions and amalgamation with the Pakuranga Community and Cultural Centre will be celebrated with an official ceremony. The complex will then be known as te tuhi — the mark.

The amalgamation with the Pakuranga Community and Cultural Centre brings the history of the arts in the area back in a full circle. The Pakuranga Arts Society, formed in 1970, was instrumental in the founding of the Pakuranga Community and Cultural Centre, in partnership with the Manukau City Council.

A few years down the track the society felt the need for a more pure arts facility and set to with more fundraising, to build the Fisher Gallery, again with support from the city council.

JASMAX Architects designed the original Fisher Gallery complex, which in 1984

was one of the few purpose-built art galleries in New Zealand. Now one of the founding firm's architects, Ivan Mercep, who has since designed both the Waikato art gallery and Te Papa, has physically linked the original Fisher Gallery building with the neighbouring Arts and Cultural Centre, to create the physical space of te tuhi — the mark.

The driving force behind the new amalgamation has again been the Pakuranga society.

This time the reasoning was that not only had the Fisher Gallery outgrown its space but that it and the Community and Cultural Centre, just metres away, were duplicating a lot of expenses for things like administration services and security and cleaning contracts. The Community and Cultural Centre provides childcare, holiday programmes, after-school and adult art classes and rents space for other community classes.

Again the council was supportive of the proposed amalgamation, to the tune of \$400,000.

The approval was rubber-stamped last September and building began on the \$1 million extension project in November, with the PAS and ASB Trusts, the New Zealand Lottery Board (facilities) and the Sir John Logan Campbell Residuary Estate Trust providing the balance of funds.

The new building expands the number of gallery spaces from two to five, including an enclosed but outdoor sculpture court and will enable the gallery to increase its role in supporting a wide range of artists, which it categorises as "burgeoning, emerging and established."

The glass-fronted lobby will house a new Centre Gallery, where the emphasis will be,

says director Candy Elsmore, on "accessibility and a quick turnaround time, so there will always be something interesting and new, to catch the casual visitors' eye."

The gallery sits close to the doors into the centre's auditorium, with its new "noise lobby" — which prevents sounds travelling through from one area to another. A cafe will also invite casual visitors into the Centre Gallery — and beyond.

The first exhibition up in this space is the *Red Earth Project*, which opens tomorrow with a collection of masks, drums, costumes, photographs, music and video, collected and created by Joshna La Trobe Burton and student colleagues on a study trip to West Bengal.

Local Ngai Tai Iwi artist Emily Karaka, will then exhibit her works, relating to her iwi's claims before the Waitangi Tribunal, in this Centre Gallery.

In another area of the glass and light-filled lobby, a Ngai Tai Iwi sculpture, celebrating the story behind the naming of the new complex, will soon be installed. It is expected to be hewn in a large slab of pohutukawa.

The name te tuhi, refers to the legend of Manawatare, a Maori voyager and explorer who is said to have arrived in the Hauraki Gulf on the back of a taniwha. Landing on the beach at Owairoa, or Howick, he made his tuhi, or mark, on a pohutukawa tree using red ochre, as a sign to those following, that he had been there.

To this day a large pohutukawa tree at Cockle Bay is called Te Tuhi a Manawatare with the Ngai Tai people, when it produces its summer crop of flowers.

Inside the gallery complex proper, now fitted with air conditioning for a controlled environment, and handsome wooden floors,

the main exhibition space is named the Iris Fisher Gallery. Iris Fisher was a significant benefactor of the initial arts project in Pakuranga and this gallery, says Elsmore, will house the exhibitions of established artists who would not be daunted at filling such an extensive space.

Two decades of paintings by Nigel Brown open here tomorrow.

Terry Stringer will show 10 works, which use the concept of a hidden image, in the sculpture court, from May 4.

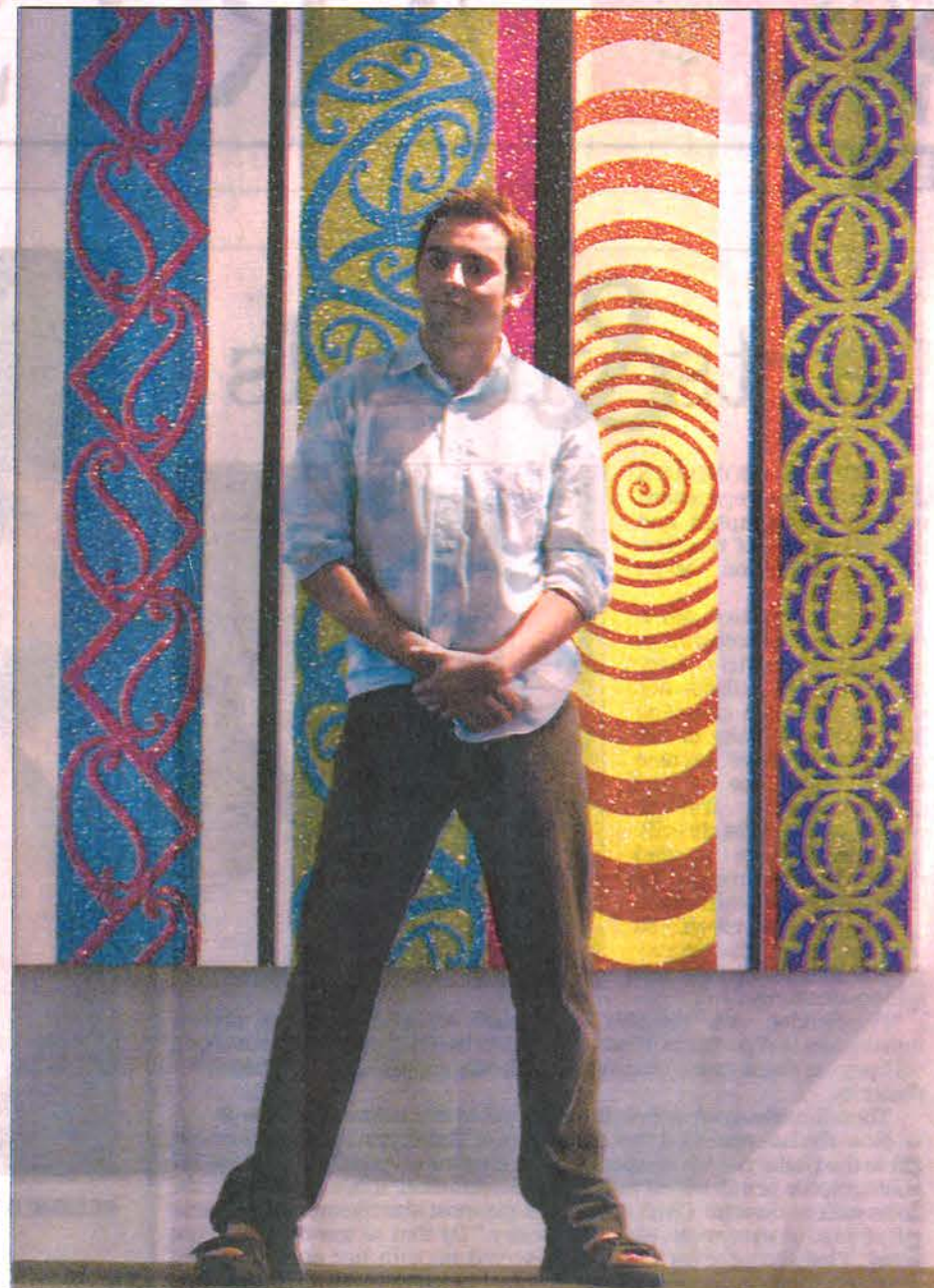
Two smaller exhibition areas are designated as the Members Gallery, which will house exhibitions by selected members of the PAS and what is informally referred to as Studio One.

That name will eventually change, as there is a room by that name already, in the Community and Cultural Centre wing.

Another important space, a large open wall just inside the doors to the gallery wing, has been set aside for a "Cameo Project," the brainchild of gallery curator Rhoda Fowler. Here one work and a simple catalogue for a "burgeoning" artist will be featured. Space in a reputable gallery and a catalogue are important milestones for young artists and often prove elusive.

Reuben Paterson, an Auckland artist who grew up in Manukau, takes the first honours on the Cameo wall, with his gorgeous work in glitter, titled *the wharenui that dad built*, from tomorrow.

In the old space, says Elsmore, there were times when the gallery was out of action for several days while exhibitions were changed. Now, with quicker turnaround in some of the spaces, and with longer standing runs in the sculpture and Iris Fisher Gallery spaces, there will always be significant things to see.



CAMEO APPEARANCE: Reuben Paterson with his glitter painting.