

# Sorry **NO** PHOTOGRAPHS

The work is big and public but the creator is a very private person. **PENELOPE CARROLL** talks to installation artist **Jacqueline Fraser** about her latest exhibition — and things like bringing in the washing.

**I**T'S hard to imagine how an exhibiting artist can remain incognito — or why he or she should want to.

But installation artist Jacqueline Fraser is adamant. She will not be photographed. It's the images she creates which are important, not her ...

Her latest, *Pakuranga Rahihi, The Martyrdom of Pigeon Mountain*, is installed in Pakuranga's Fisher Gallery until Sunday, April 21.

Her neighbours, says Fraser, don't know what she does and she wants to keep it that way. Her telephone is unlisted, too.

"Most of the time in my life, I don't mention what I do.

"Installations" ... People can't cope. They still think real art is paintings, and that's fair enough."

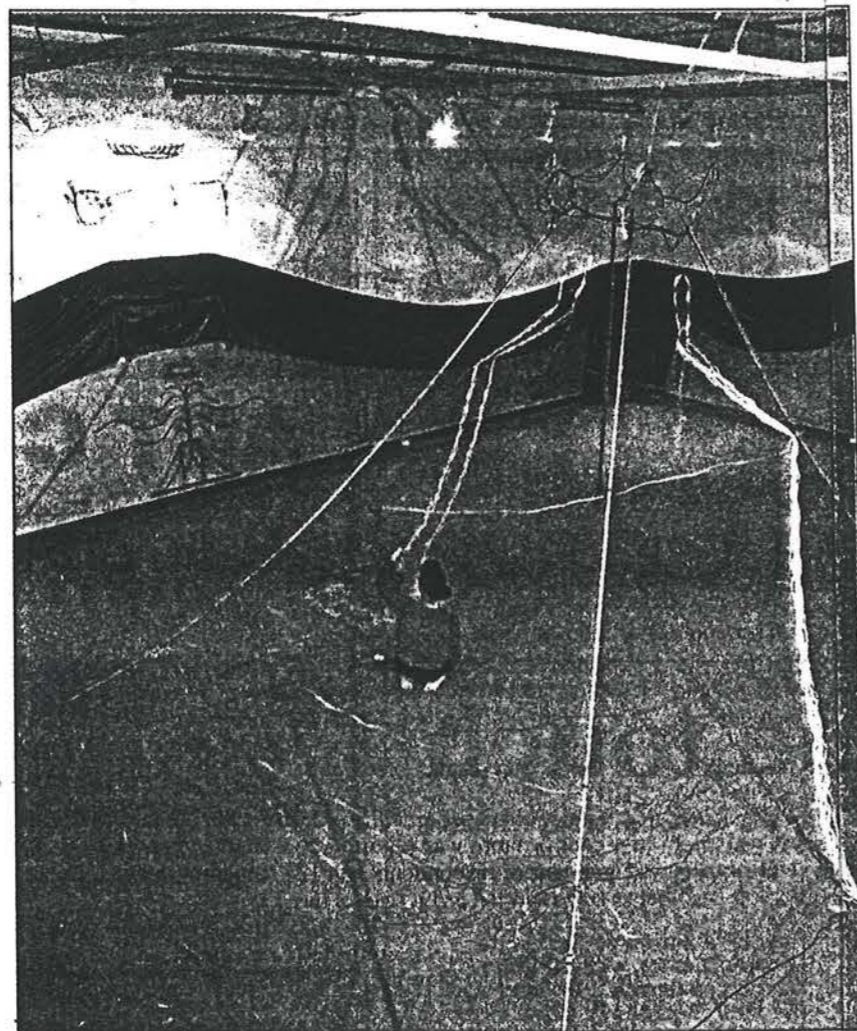
So she doesn't talk about art. And leads a double life. There is her work as an artist, which takes her all over the world. Then the rest of her life. "Being a mother, bringing in the washing, getting the dinner on, going to school meetings."

Fraser is now exhibiting more overseas and less here.

Before her present installation she was in Adelaide. Next month she is off to Copenhagen.

She's always been a very private person, says Fraser; she liked the anonymity of life as a solo mother bringing up two children (now 13 and 15) in Grey Lynn and dreaming up her multi-media installations.

Then four years ago Fraser won the



*Pakuranga Rahihi, The Martyrdom of Pigeon Mountain* being installed in the Fisher Gallery.

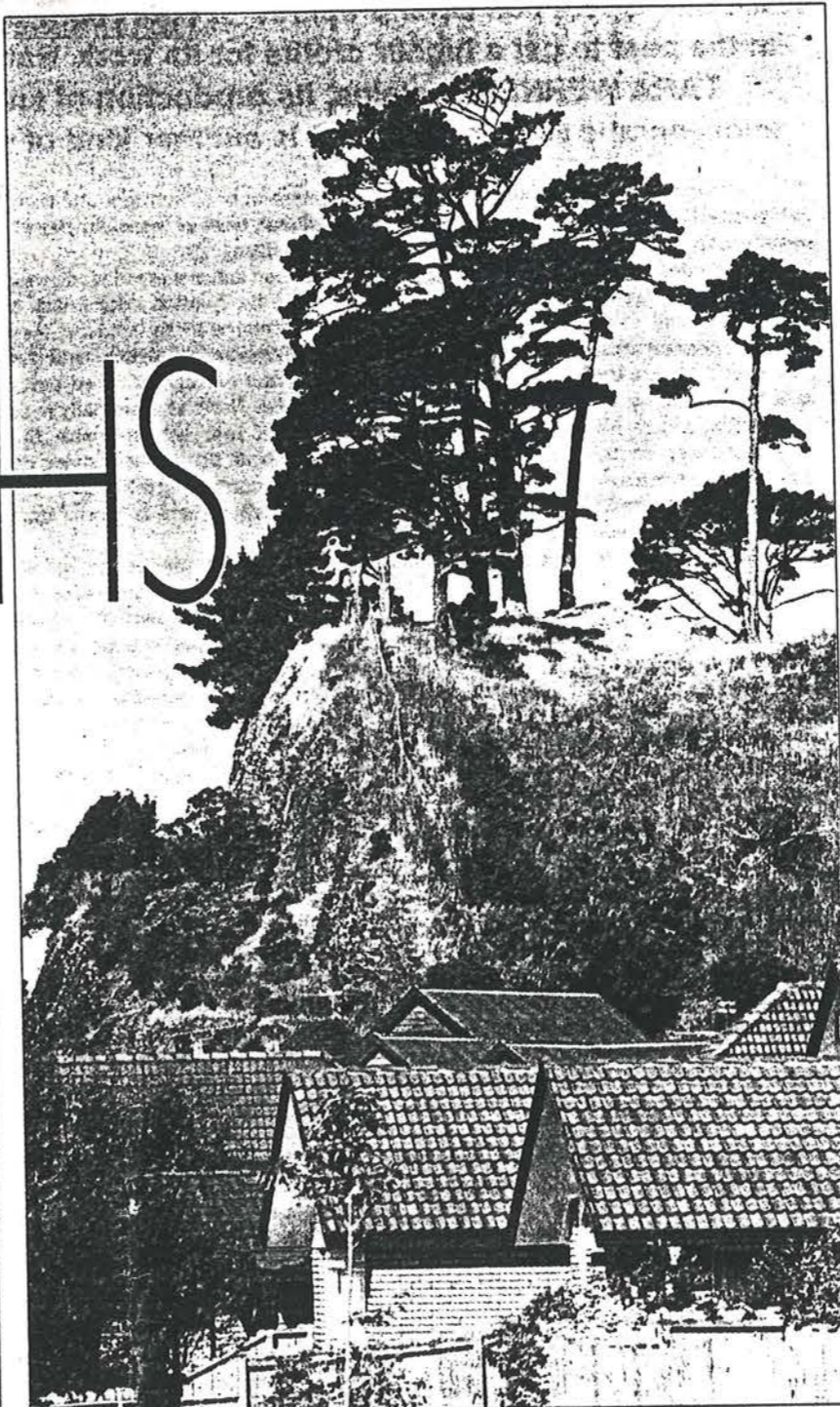
her fanciful *Tall Room For An Empress* and *Wide Room For An Empress* installations.

With her photograph plastered across the pages of several publications — including the *New Zealand Herald* — Fraser suddenly found herself being stopped on the street: "Oh, you're the girl in the photograph ..."

"People were even cruising past my

With the fellowship came an expenses-paid year living and working in the Chateau Casanove at Avize in France. When Fraser and her children returned to New Zealand they moved to another suburb — and got an unlisted number.

It's hard enough on her kids having to cope with a "wierd mother," without the strains of any extra publicity, she says. So, no photographs.



Pigeon Mountain today ... "scarred and chiselled away."

HERALD PICTURE / GLENN JEFFREY

Ngai Tahu (she is a fluent Maori speaker) and Pakeha descent is happy to talk about herself and her work.

It was at Elam art school, where Fraser specialised in sculpture, that she created her first decorated room. "All the small bits and pieces I had made began to clutter up my room, so I joined them up one day ..."

Her art school training and later experiences with Maori artists and weavers remain primary influences on her work, says Fraser.

Twenty years later she is still "decorating rooms," but now starts with a very clear idea of what she wants to say and how she will express it.

Her materials, too, have changed. No longer scrounged from rubbish tins and building sites they are nevertheless still not those usually associated with "art."

Hundreds of metres of cloth, rick-rack braid, ribbons, raffia, plastic-coated wire and copper tubing have gone into her

latest installation.

Her recent works describe and mourn the destruction of so many of our natural landforms. From her Maori perspective Fraser also sees this destruction as a desecration of revered ancestors.

*Pakuranga Rahihi, The Martyrdom of Pigeon Mountain* is a tangi, mourning the butchering of one of Auckland's volcanic mountains.

**W**HEN the first occupiers of Pigeon Mountain (O Huiarangi) arrived between 1200 and 1500 they found a castle-and-moat volcanic hill clothed in forest. The Ngariki constructed their dwellings and storage pits on the flanks of the mountain, growing kumara in the fertile surrounding soil.

Eventually Pigeon Mountain became the site of the largest pa of the Ngai Tai people of Tainui lineage.

Until recently the mountain still had dividing walls dating from as early as

1700. These were razed in 1991. Today only half the mountain remains. The combination of quarrying for scoria and bulldozing has got rid of the rest.

Invited by the Fisher Gallery to create an installation symbolising the heritage of Pakuranga, Fraser has created *Pakuranga Rahihi, The Martyrdom of Pigeon Mountain*.

First came considerable research into Pakuranga's history. She was fascinated with the most ancient story of the area, which tells of the patupaiarehe (fairy) battle between Koiwi and Putere. When Putere found himself losing the fight he made the setting sun hold still, plucking out its solid rays and hurling them as spears to defeat Koiwi.

The full name of Pakuranga — Pakuranga Rahihi — commemorates this battle with the sun's rays.

Then Fraser, in Maori tradition, looked for the mountain — a key ancestor — to address.

"The first thing I noticed was that it was chopped in half, and I was really shocked. Poor little Pigeon Mountain, the site of that ancient battle! The whole face was scarred and chiselled away to let the torrent of group housing squash even closer to the centre of the mountain."

Looking for a European parallel for the anger she felt over an ancestor being thus desecrated and a mountain chopped in half, Fraser found it in a 15th century religious painting by the Italian painter Fra Angelico — *The Martyrdom of Saint Mark*.

A lot of Maori people have this feeling of being martyred, says Fraser.

*Pakuranga Rahihi, The Martyrdom of Pigeon Mountain* is Maori art, she says, but also draws on her love of European art. "I myself am from two different worlds and I like to put that in my work. I'd like someone who is French, or Yugoslav or Chinese to also be able to get something out of it, though the starting point is Maori."

**D**ARK lighting gives her installation a funeral feeling, as well as evoking the atmosphere inside the huge cathedrals with their religious relics which Fraser visited in Europe.

Rich, sombre-coloured satin curtains are draped around the gallery walls, framing the symbolic mountains, plants and wreaths of green leaves created from green wire, ribbon and rick-rack braiding.

A copper tubing Pigeon Mountain, whole once more, rises in the centre of the space. Flaxen-haired (raffia) patupaiarehe and other ancestors fashioned from wire and thin copper tubing form part of the mountain. More ancestors look down from the surrounding walls.

They are abstract, not real, ancestors, says Fraser. "I don't want the tangata whenua of this area saying, 'Oh, that is my great-uncle and she didn't ask us!' That would make me as rude as everybody else."

Her installation is a tangi for the mountain, for the whole region and what it has been, she says. "I hope some of the many waves of new migrants settling in the Pakuranga region will look more respectfully on this ancient symbol."

In fact it is relevant for the whole of New Zealand, says Fraser; she could go anywhere in the country and do the same show.