

Creativity stimulated by supportive group

KARANGA, KARANGA, an exhibition of contemporary creations by Maori women, at the Fisher Gallery, Reeves Rd, Pakuranga, until June 4.

AROUND THE GALLERIES

With Amy Brown

THIS is just one part of a three-venue exhibition of the contemporary work of 70 Maori women.

If the other two, at the Gisborne Museum and Arts Centre, and the Wellington City Art Gallery, are anything like the Fisher Gallery show, then *Karanga, Karanga*, is a call for celebration and a milestone in the cultural and creative activities of Maori women.

It's not that the exhibition is so marvellous or the work is so brilliant. Like most group shows it is a little uneven, the work going from absolutely stunning to very ordinary.

What it exemplifies is what can happen when women gather together and support each other's endeavours. The resultant taonga, treasures, art works, craft — call them what you will — have arisen out of the creative endeavours of individuals, stimulated by group support.

To the charge, that the exhibition is not only sexist, but also racist, because these women

happen to be Maori, I can only say, "piffle."

If there is one thing that the exhibition shows, it's that there are major differences in thought, ways of seeing, art forms, style and so on. Maori people are different from Pakeha people. This should be no surprise. Perhaps the supremely beautiful tukutuku panel in the foyer, *Te Korimako*, by Hinemoa Harrison, shows this best.

I know of no other culture that weaves in this particular way. You can find koru and kowhaiwhai forms in American Indian and pre-Columbean pottery and weaving, but tukutuku exists in a world of its own.

This particular panel is not without humour. Based on the symbol of the korimako for the orator and audience, the subtle difference in shading and pattern on the right side of the panel suggests that what is heard by the audience is often different to what is said by the orator. We always hear what we want to hear.

The other beautiful tukutuku panel, *Punga O Te Ao* is the work of Freda V. Kawharu. Also in the

foyer is the deceptively simple eight-stranded rope weaving of New Zealand native fibres completed by the women just before the opening. Look carefully at this offering. It has a lot to say, not only about the entwining of lives and feelings, but almost a ritual karakia or prayer of thankfulness, accompanied as it was by a waiata composed by Katerina Te Hei Koko Mataira.

The feather cloak or kakahu, and kete whakairo by Puti Hineau-pounamu Rare are extraordinarily beautiful and again accentuate the differences between the cultures that abide in New Zealand.

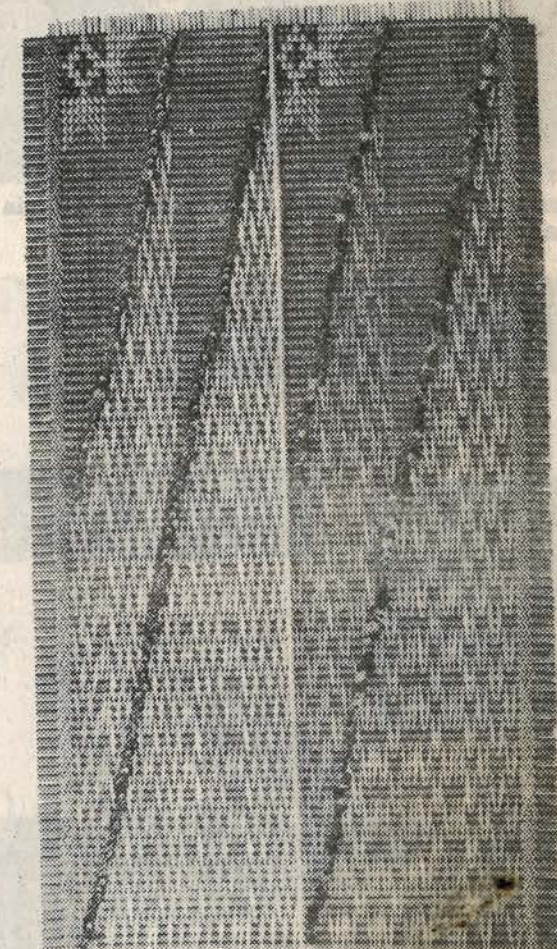
This kind of work may be learnt by non-Maori, but in the learning, the very nature of the weaving changes and becomes cross-cultural and invested with new meaning. I am not against cross-culturalism.

Oonagh Marino is another fibre-weaving artist. Her display of taaniko from belts, earrings, wallet and cigarette cases is a good example of an old craft being updated for contemporary use.

Merania Paora's three rock-drawing paintings are a modern depiction, rendered most faithfully, of the most ancient rock art in New Zealand, much of it in caves now swallowed by water. They're very good.

Toi Te Rito Maihi is a talented artist who can work in many mediums. From her simple shell jewellery, with its plaited and knotted muka fibres, to her rimurapa or kelp-knotted sculptures, she shows an affinity with the materials of nature. Her two kites, based on a manuscript of traditional designs, are quite beautiful and her painting, *Harakete III*, based on the interleaving of flax and in delicate shades of pink and green is a fine example of her artistry.

I think the work of Maureen Lander most appealed to me. Her installation of flax fibre, flax seed, scoria and plastic



● TUKUTUKU PANEL, *Te Korimako*, by Hinemoa Harrison.

strips is highly contemporary. The luxuriousness of the flax seed and the starkness of the scoria is quite startling.

One of her other wonderful contributions is *Nga Kete o Te Wananga* — the Three Baskets of Knowledge.

There are many other exhibits, all interesting to see, some challenging, especially the burnished pottery of Hiraina Polson and Paparangi Reid.

There are indications in this exhibition of the rich and fertile stories of Maori philosophy and creation, a philosophy not often spoken of or written about. There is much to learn here about Maori, much to be proud of.

I visualise an enrichment for both Maori and Pakeha in viewing this exhibition. The Fisher Gallery must be commended for being a host to *Karanga, Karanga*.

WHA