

## by Darcy Nicholas

**T**HE *Karanga Karanga* exhibitions were by communities of Maori women working throughout the country. They were exhibitions in which they represented themselves, their culture and concerns. In Auckland we saw the work of individuals moulded into a group. Artists like Helen Lloyd, Maureen Lander and Kura Rewiri Thorsen have developed a sophisticated technique having trained at the Elam School of Fine Arts. Seeing their work on the Maori art scene was exciting.

The creative Toi Maihi exhibited a wide range of works that included a powerful series of woven kelp pieces. Hiraina Polson and Paparangi Reid produced some beautiful red-ochre pottery. The kakahu and kete by Puti Rare stood out for excellence of technique and colour. The excitement for me was to see the work of Freda Kawharu publicly exhibited. She was one of the early Maori artists to graduate with a diploma in fine arts. The Auckland exhibition produced new Maori artists and encouraged younger and older artists back into the scene.

I was disappointed not to see some of the beautiful fabric creations of Amy Brown or the creative stylish clothing of Hinewirangi Kohu.

The approach in the Wellington exhibition was different. For a year women worked collectively on pieces. The result was a series of workshop pieces. "Ukaipo" (mother) was an intimate story in hue (gourds), feathers and harakeke by Erenora Puketapu-Hetet and her daughter Verenoa. Each well-sculptured piece was placed on a woven mat symbolising the binding of people from past, present and future generations.

"Whakapapa — brother" by Emily Karaka is a small but powerful painting that stood out because of its sheer skill and economy of line and colour. It also laid to rest the ghost of Phillip Clairmont that seemed to be in her other works. The fact that it was on an old piece of wood instead of art-school style hessian gave it additional impact.

The poems of Keri Kaa display the warmth of wit and humour that typifies her personality at its best. All New Zealanders could benefit from reading her poetry and that of her sister Arapera Blank.

"Taranga" was a large installation created by Janet Potiki, Patricia Grace, Robyn Kahukiwa and Kohai Grace. It made use of natural materials and could well be the catalyst for a whole series.

The Wellington exhibition was a sense of occasion rather than a visual spectacular. Its collective nature had a family warmth that provided a support network for less-experienced artists. I would like to have seen single works by Susie Rori, Erenora Puketapu-Hetet, Robyn Kahukiwa and Kataraina Hetet-Winiata. However, it was not that type of exhibition.

The weavers in the show wanted to accompany the mauri of their work and



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**"Taranga" by Janet Potiki, Patricia Grace, Robyn Kahukiwa and Kohai Grace: made use of natural materials and could be the catalyst for a whole series.**

weave beside it. Weaving is a living art form and the process is an ongoing part of the total art. However, they were overruled by senior members and placed away from the main exhibition.

The *Karanga* exhibitions are an important cutting edge for contemporary women's art. What I saw in the Auckland and Wellington exhibitions showed me that this movement needs vigorous support because of its importance in women's art internationally.

The pathway of the karanga leads us to the threshold of our ancestors. This one has just started out and the journey will be an exciting and rich one. ■