

The cultural language of fibres

Now showing at Blue Knob Hall & Gallery



Opening Night

by Stephen Wright

I first became aware of textiles as a women's tradition when I saw an exhibition of quilting running in tandem with Judy Chicago's 'The Dinner Party' at the Adelaide Festival Centre many years ago. Not only did I begin to see the feminist credentials of that kind of work, but it also generated a respect I ignorantly hadn't thought would be there.

The current exhibition of textiles at the Blue Knob Gallery sits well within the groove worn by thousands of generations of creative working women, and demonstrates a breath-taking variety of technique and conceptualisation that is both refreshing – and for me at least – very illuminating.

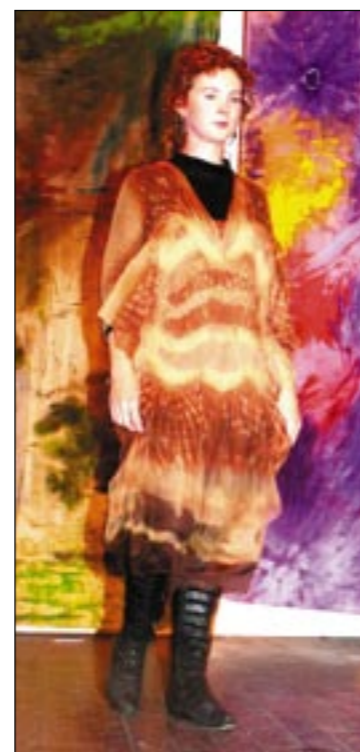
I missed the opening night of the exhibition on 12th June, where a packed house of 70 people – heroically catered for in the Gallery café by cook Heather and dish-pig, Kylie – saw part of the exhibition become mobile in what must have been a very intriguing and lively fashion show (photos at right).

I'd like to offer the viewpoint that the Blue Knob textiles exhibition shows us a complex grammar and an expressive vocabulary of technique that illustrates something quite singular about the way that dialogue and the execution of

art is commonly constructed. Firstly, it looks to me as though a significant amount of the work at Blue Knob was created by women working in groups. By that I mean women working on their individual projects in guild, as it were, with other women. A note by one of the exhibition artists, Polly Stirling, says it beautifully, when she refers to her work as "my daily bread."

Secondly, this way of working has to presuppose a common and exceedingly sophisticated common grammar, and this grammar has great impact in the current exhibition where it appears to me that every work speaks with every other work. This tremendous unity in diversity is something that can't be artificially curated, and seems to be extremely rare in the competitive universe of art production and display. The idea of artists working in guilds or co-operative associations isn't new, but it's not very common either. One can think of the Bauhaus school, the Bloomsbury group centred on Charleston House, and in Australia, maybe Montsalvat and the Box Hill artist's camp. But generally western art is the tradition of the individual, indeed the creation of the individual, a tradition of solitary genius and solitary identity.

To a large extent this has been a male-dominated tradition too, and



the creation of the kind of work seen at Blue Knob has not only historically been anonymous and co-operative (the Bayeux Tapestry for example) but also ephemeral and somewhat looked down upon. Baskets, quilts and garments don't have the longevity of marble and neither have they been historically as exalted.

The Blue Knob textiles exhibition has a lot to say and says it beautifully and with great articulation. If that wasn't enough, most of the works for sale are very humbly priced too. Perhaps it's in the tradition of textile creation to think humbly, but the pricing – no \$2,000 blockbusters here – means that there's no reason why a lot of what is on show can't be bought and used in ordinary local households.

It would be unfair – and wrong – to single out some works over others. But purely and only to illustrate the diversity on display in this wonderful exhibition, and not to allocate preference or value, I'd like to point to Polly Stirling's tea-cosies, Sue Duncan's tapestries, Enid Taylor's exposition of the kantha technique, Barbara Mills' shawls, Rose Palmer's installation, Fiona Shadwell's hangings, and Melissa Hume's cushions. But there is much, much more. Have a look yourself – the exhibition runs for a couple of months – and take your time when doing it. Look closely and you'll be very richly rewarded.

And after you've done that, check out Blue Knob Gallery's very fine little café too. There's a lot happening out there at the moment, with studio workshops currently under construction. Let's hope they can be used to facilitate much more of the kind of co-operative artistic thinking behind the current, excellent exhibition.

The Fashionable Top End of Town

by Christina Chester

It's exciting to see the Top End of Nimbin turning into a fashion centre, with no less than two new fashion shops set to open, and another planned, in a cluster at the top of Cullen Street.

The first cab off the rank will be *The Gorgeous Joint*, a couture partnership between Rita Bergs and Judy Who, opening on the 12th July in the transformed FunFruits shop (see story at right).

Judy Who has also just been granted development consent for her retail premises a few doors down, which is a rezoning victory in itself, but she has to build it first, so that opening will be some way off yet.

I will be opening my shop CC-Design on 31st July, from 6pm in the Old Bank building, everybody very welcome.

I will be offering custom-made garments, wedding dresses, alterations and repairs, hire service for special occasions, and unique individually-crafted hand-painted clothing from my C-C Design range.

Forthcoming workshops

• **Barbara Mills** felting workshop on 25th July from 9.30am – 4pm at Blacksheep Farm. Bookings are essential, contact Barbara on 6689-1763

• **Marlene Roehrich** will also offer a workshop offering a range of skills to designers and needle workers, through the Open Learning Centre, for eight weeks on Thursdays, from 5th August to 28th September. More information in Marlene's article (at right).

I am very excited and inspired by all these positive developments and it seems that the timing is right for development of the local fashion industry.

Collective forming

Designers and interested stakeholders in the Nimbin fashion industry attended a meeting with Community



Economic Development managers.

We established that we will unite as a Collective and submit for funding to help the industry become more professional and to help develop careers in fashion. There will be a meeting soon to officially create the Nimbin Fashion Collective.

Fashion Shows

The next Nimbin Fashion Show series is not far off, 13-14th November. There is a lot of interest by new designers, so if you would like to be part of the show, contact me soon, phone 6689-0205 or email christina@ccdesign.biz

In the meantime, keep sewing and creating. It would be great if we all have garments available for purchase after the shows.

Paris comes to Nimbin

Designer vintage (national and international labels) and new local designs in vogue fashion and accessories are now available in Nimbin.

Rita Bergs and Judy Who have teamed up to open a shop for the 'couture' buyer, at 2/46 Cullen Street (previously FunFruits), to be known as *The Gorgeous Joint*.

Rita Bergs, who ran the vintage fashion shop Hello Gorgeous in Hobart for eight years, and describes herself as having a passion for good design, said, "The shop is all about fabric and finish."

"Vintage designer clothes are all becoming highly collectable, especially with no flaws in them," she said. "I've been collecting them for over 40 years, since I was in London in the swinging sixties."

The individualised styles in the shop will be in keeping with the vision of Nimbin – a bit bizarre – utilising eco-sustainable fabrics such as hemp, silk, linen and wool in high quality, well-finished hand-made garments.

In-house personal stylist Rita will give personalised service to co-ordinate your new outfit,

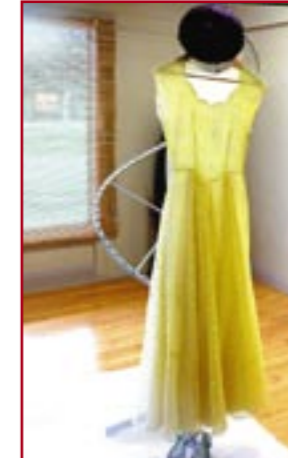
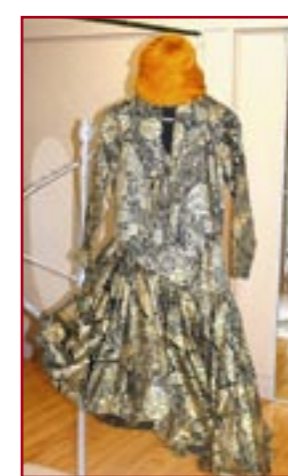
The Gorgeous Joint

while in-house designer Judy will make you a garment, if one on the rack is not suitable.

The Gorgeous Joint invites you to an official opening on Sunday 12th July from 1-4pm. "Champagne will be provided, but please BYO glass so we don't have to use plastic," said Rita.

"We look forward to seeing you there."

From Rita's extensive collection (at right, top to bottom): 1920's silk chiffon with hand-made lace by Paulo Pilat; late 1970's gold leaf painted cotton by Studebaker Hawke; 1925 Japanese hemp silk kimono



Floatation. One of photographer Thorsten Jones' evocative images from his series of Nimbin model Louise.

The gentle art of tattooing



Nimbin now has a resident tattooist, working three days a week at the newly extended Rainbow Piercing Studio.

Beki settled in Georgica a year ago with her partner Dan and her son Jahmin, now 16-months old, and is more than happy to meet the growing demand for high quality tattoos.

Beki was trained in the Gold Coast, serving her apprenticeship under the South American artist Marco Ventura, and worked for several years in the "Satisfaction Art" studio. "It was very busy, I was doing six days a week, so I got to do many different styles. "My preference is custom

work, consulting with the client to produce highly individual designs," she said.

Beki charges \$120 per hour x how many hours. Small tattoos take from 20 minutes to an hour to complete; large one can take 5-6 hours and are usually done in two sessions. Everything is single use and sterilised, of course. Healing time is 10 days to two weeks.

Beki takes appointments, phone 6689-0376 or 0145-822-851, plus walk-ins on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at the Rainbow Piercing Studio, 76 Cullen Street, behind the Snipping Heads hairdressing salon.

If you've ever thought of getting a tat, talk to Beki.

Workshop for Designers and Needleworkers

by Marlene Roehrich

While behind the scenes and on the net people have been busy preparing the shows for the Nimbin Fashion Shows in November, designers now have an opportunity to get the know-how to materialise their far-out nearly normal ideas.

I have been involved in the rag trade on all levels in my fairly long life, and I offer to share my skills with those who need help to increase their impact in their Fashion Shows section.

I am running a workshop through the Open Learning Centre (6689-1477) at the Nimbin Community Centre, for 8 weeks on a Thursday for 3 hours from 12



to 3pm, starting on 5th August through to 28th September, and will be listed in their new program.

Love for what I am doing is the most important ingredient in my work, 25 years of it in Nimbin,

designing, modelling, retailing, sweatshop producing, meditative in front of the fire knitting and crocheting, spinning and weaving. (Want to spin alpaca?)

I learnt everything properly (the German way) from scratch, and from all

the years of doing just about anything with fabric and yarns. I mostly enjoy felting and knitting with silk, hemp, cotton and wools, or changing op shop finds.

I do work almost exclusively with natural fibre and prefer the needle and the zig-zag treadle to industrial sewers and overlockers or knitting machines. (No RSI on a circular needle!)

The workshop welcomes of course those who always wanted to make just for themselves that skirty, that hat, that bag, that magic coat, or those socks, and darn them too.

If you are interested, please phone me at home after 6pm all days on 6689-7171 or write me a note with your phone number to marlenesphinx@gmail.com

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