

Arts

Amateur artist's victory sparkles

By Daniel Satherley

An amateur photographer has turned last-minute inspiration into award-winning success, and her work is currently gracing a billboard in the heart of the city.

May Lee Weernink's sparkler-drawn photo of the Auckland skyline won the Auckland Festival of Photography's competition to take a picture that represented the spirit of the city.

"I'm really bloody stoked," said Weernink, 24. "I nearly had a heart attack when they told me I was in the top 10."

The public had two weeks to



WINNING PHOTO: May Lee Weernink used a sparkler to portray the Auckland skyline.

vote for their favourite of the top 10, which were on display at Sky City in May.

The billboard will be up on Fanshawe St for most of June.

Her entry nearly didn't happen. She'd been thinking of working with sparklers and long exposures since last year, but with only a few days left to enter, she

hit upon the city skyline idea.

"I've always liked cityscapes, bright lights and landmark buildings," said Weernink.

Seeing there were already "a million" ordinary photos of the Sky Tower and the city skyline, she remembered the idea she had back in November.

"I put my camera on a tripod,

put on dark clothes, lit the sparkler and drew it freehand," said Weernink.

It wasn't that simple of course, taking two boxes of sparklers to get the winning shot.

Using a digital camera lowered the cost dramatically.

"I'd never have been able to do it with film," she said.

Go Txttunes for music

By Todd Symons

Three Kiwi boys have been working on a new way to take Kiwi music to the world.

Music-downloading website Txttunes started selling music online in New Zealand last September, and in June it will launch in the USA.

Txttunes was founded last year by Steriogram guitarist Brad Carter, New Zealand Schools Tour's Matt Ealand and the team's technical guru, Rohan Adarkar.

The site allows people to use credit on their cell phones to buy music online, which can then be put on Ipods and other mp3 players.

Txttunes chief executive Matt Coleman says using cell phone credit means music can easily be distributed to a much wider online audience.

"It means everyone – even kids who aren't old enough to have

credit cards – can now buy music online."

Simon Ocroft, guitarist from Auckland indie band The Midnight Youth, says Txttunes has been a useful distribution channel for the group.

"It's actually really good. There's no other chance for up-and-coming bands to sell singles.

"You don't have to pay for production costs of CDs. You give Txttunes their share but the band can make more money this way," says Ocroft.

Coleman says the launch into the USA will provide a great platform to promote New Zealand music.

"Americans send more than 15 billion text messages every month, so there is a very, very big opportunity in the States.

"Over \$1 billion of digital music was sold in the USA last year and the market is growing at a very fast rate," says Coleman.

Ocroft says The Midnight Youth see the launch of Txttunes

into the American market as a great opportunity.

"You don't have to sell hundreds of singles to be in the Txttunes top artists list.

"So if Americans see that and have the perception we are a huge band in New Zealand, hopefully they will get excited about us.

"It will be a great way for us to broaden our fan base," says Ocroft.

However, he is concerned American bands may take over the site.

But Coleman says the company is committed to promoting New Zealand music any way they can.

"We want to be one of the leading internet publishing destinations in certain marketplaces around the world, but at the same time, want to promote New Zealand artists and encourage people around the world to choose New Zealand music."

The site was re-launched in

May with an online community flavour.

"The site will have similarities to MySpace and bebo, but the difference is we are purely about music," says Coleman.

The new site will allow users to create their own profiles and allow bands to send bulk text messages to their fans to promote gigs.

"We are one of the first companies to go out with a site like this.

"We are basically an advertising portal for bands," says Coleman.

All bands on the site are independent bands – not signed with major labels.

Ocroft says this is a huge advantage for up-and-comers.

"Everyone is unsigned on there. So it's not like your competing against Incubus or anyone like that.

"The internet is going to be the most important way of promoting your band. It's going to be the way of the future."

Noticing art in the CBD

By Eleanor McKay

Auckland City Council's annual series of public art installations, entitled the Living Room, will need to gain more public support if it's to continue, says AUT spatial design lecturer Fleur Palmer.

This year's Living Room series ran over April and May. It included "Makeover" by Lauren Lysaght, which set out to redesign disability parking space signs, giving them a new colourful look, and "Runner" by Gaye Jurisich, which used electrical tape to create complex patterns on the ground, trying to get city residents and workers to think about everyday materials in a new way.

However Palmer, who was also involved in Living Room projects in 2004 and 2005, says the series will need to gain more public recognition if it's to become a regular part of the



MAKEOVER: Revamping the CBD

city's events programme.

"I think the Living Room series needs to develop like the Lantern festival or Pasifika festival, where people have an expectation for the event to occur – to get a level of public acceptance."

This may prove to be difficult as many of the installations in the series are performance-based and the council does not want to advertise them significantly.

Jenny Gordon, arts and funding advisor for the council, says the series is designed so people "happen upon them, it's not really a highly publicised, marketed thing".

She says the council does not know how many people viewed the series and has never aimed to get a certain amount of people viewing the works. Although specific targets are not important to the council, it hoped the series, which had a budget of \$100,000, would allow as many people as possible to "create a connection and relationship with the city".

Gordon says "the whole Living Room idea promotes the concept of the CBD as the living room of the city".

For the first two years, the council trialled the event over summer, but shifted the series last year to autumn, a time where fewer events are happening in the city to give the installations maximum exposure.

To increase public support, the council relies on the artists themselves to become advocates for the series. Rather than dictate what the installations should look like, the council wants "artists coming up with the ideas so there is more community buy-in".

Palmer says "the Lantern festival is so visual, so much there, you can't miss it. The Living Room series is more subtle."

Mammoth stage to boost Kiwi film industry

By Joanna Davies

A \$7 million soundstage of mammoth proportions will open in August to boost the Auckland and New Zealand film industry.

The soundstage, currently under construction in Henderson Valley, is being built to cater for feature film productions, rivalling in size the studio built in Wellington by Peter Jackson to film King Kong.

Henderson Valley Studios site manager John Worley says the soundstage has 2000sq metres of clear floor space, and 14.5m of clear space to the ceiling grid.

It is big enough to construct a two-storey house inside it.

The facility will also include two storeys of office space and dressing rooms.

Work on the soundstage began nine months ago after the studio complex was used to film the new thriller, *Thirty Days of Night*, starring Josh Hartnett.

New Zealand has become an attractive place for film makers to use for location shooting because of its scenery, and better studio facilities will encourage more overseas productions to film here, Worley says.

"We have a few unconfirmed bookings, which are pencilled in to use the space when construction is completed," he says.

Henderson Valley Studios has already been a base for overseas productions and feature films, including *Narnia: The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*.

"We've just come to the end of a very busy season where we were fully booked for 18 months," says Worley.

"Seventy per cent of all TV and film producing in New Zealand is done within the Auckland region, and this soundstage is a step in the right direction to get overseas studios to film here," says Worley.

"Wellington already has the facilities with Peter Jackson's soundstage, but that's been built specifically for his own work. With this soundstage, anyone can use it."

The soundstage will compare to the facilities used by the film industry overseas, he says.

As well as the soundstage, Henderson Valley Studios has four smaller studios of about 1000sq metres each, with busy schedules.

Other Waitakere studios have been busy as well. Studio West has been fully booked by the American production of *Power Rangers* for the past five years, while South Pacific Pictures has been the base for 95 per cent of the production of *Shortland Street*.

The value of film and television production throughout Waitakere is nearing \$100 million every year, says Mayor Bob Harvey on the Waitakere City Council website.

"Some of the really big international dollar earners were not coming because we didn't have a state-of-the-art sound stage. And that's what the new studio is all about," says Harvey.