

Queen of Kitsch shines at Te Papa

by Owen Hembray

Love her or hate her, the 1980s "Queen of Kitsch" is back in the limelight with a major new art exhibition at Te Papa in Wellington.

Manukau Institute of Technology lecturer Judy Darragh became famous in the 1980s for controversial art work made from objects such as toys, plastic flowers, and even joke shop vomit.

Pieces such as *The Birth of Barbie* in 1989, a shrine-like creation, with a Barbie doll surrounded by plastic flowers, embryos, candelabra, penis models and Christmas lights, continue to polarise opinion.

Darragh says her art is cheeky and cheap, using every-day items people normally throw away.

"Mainly because I didn't have much money I was always looking for second hand things. I'd go and collect things and sometimes they would find their way into my artwork."

She says by putting so-called cheap materials into galleries she subverted more traditionally accepted forms of art and undermined the

"preciousness" of some galleries.

After her abdication from the kitsch monarchy in 1995 she stepped back from the limelight and began operating outside the traditional dealer-gallery system with artist groups such as Teststrip and Cuckoo.

However, she is back in the spotlight at Te Papa with the largest-ever exhibition of her work featuring more than 70 pieces, including 12 new works.

As a young artist Darragh says she would do anything to get her face into the media but nowadays prefers to let her work speak for itself.

A lecturer at Manukau Institute of Technology for the last nine years, she says teaching keeps her feet on the ground and gives her the chance to share her skills and experiences.

"I've always had an interest in teaching. It deflects from that whole self-interest thing."

"I get all my best ideas from them [her students], and I think it's important to give something back."

The exhibition entitled *So... You Made It?* took two years to prepare in partnership with Te Papa art curator Natasha Conland. It is one of the few

occasions the museum has held a substantial exhibition of a contemporary artist.

Two phases can be identified in the artist's work — her kitsch period with its three-dimensional assemblages, and the more recent two-dimensional work featuring video, photography and collage.

Conland says the exhibition aims to break mainstream display methods by examining how an artist's body of work develops over time rather than focusing on just the perceived high points.

"I wanted to take a step back and look at an artist that has a long history, but is also contemporary. I wanted us to re-think the idea of focusing on artists in the present tense," Conland says.

She says an important role of this retrospective display is to give visitors the chance to "tease out the patterns of these changes".

A new book release, timed to coincide with the exhibition and bearing the same title, is the first major publication of the artist's work.

Darragh says: "The book is fantastic. To have a body of work catalogued



THE BIRTH OF BARBIE (1989): Judy Darragh creates art using objects that people would normally throw away calling it "cheeky and cheap".

and explained is a real privilege for an artist."

A typewriter at the exhibition is used by visitors to write comments on brightly coloured paper, which is then stuck to a gallery wall.

This reflects Darragh's philosophy of making art accessible to people, something she says she achieves by using common objects and humour.

"It's tongue-in-cheek. There's a sense of play about it."

The world may have changed a great deal in the last 20 years but Darragh's work still creates the same public controversy.

Whether good or bad, she says she loves the reactions, but is yet to read the public reviews posted on the wall at Te Papa.

"Every time I go in I haven't got my glasses on me," she says laughing. Success in stimulating reaction from visitors, whether good or bad, looks likely to encourage more such exhibitions at New Zealand's national museum.

"We've got a mandate to keep doing shows like this," Conland says.

The free exhibition at Te Papa in Wellington runs until August 29.



SOMMERSET: Rocking the stage (from left) Milon Williams, Ryan Thomas, and Stefan Thompson.

On the road with Sommerset

Auckland band Sommerset have toured Australia seven times, Europe twice and even played Singapore. In June they returned to Australia to support Perth band, Gyroscope on their album release tour. Te Waha Nui reporter, **Marcus Stickler**, Sommerset's booking manager, profiles life on the road.

Glamour in rock'n'roll is an unknown thing. There might be free beer, and sometimes there are girls, but the reality of touring is sleeping on broken squeaky bunks in a two-by-three-metre room with four other sweaty guys.

Long hauls are a constant. Sommerset's flight from Auckland to Sydney had been delayed three hours. We needed to make it up to New South Wales central coast for a show at a resort in Toukley at six.

Mission one was to pick up the tour van in North Bondi. We found a taxi van, met our vehicle, loaded up the gear and set out to Toukley.

We navigated Sydney using the thin lines that mark the city's arterial roads on the New South Wales

Queensland interstate map.

Spending four days in Sydney, monotony set in. The cycle of a 1pm wake up with a curry breakfast at the same Newtown North Indian diner every day, then loading up and driving to the show, blurred time.

Crowds filled the venues. The first show, in Toukley, was at a backpackers' resort. A touch of New Zealand hung on the wall — a signed Pacifier shirt from a show they'd played there a few months earlier.

A Sydney city show at the Annandale Hotel filled the venue to its 500 punter capacity. A day off was killed by doing washing, checking email and drinking in a park.

After the first NSW round, we had a 12-hour drive from Sydney to Brisbane, passing through Australia's country music capital, Tamworth, where the local meter maid slapped a fine on the van for parking in a loading zone. The ticket got thrown back at her.

We needed a serious unwind after the drive. A quiet jug after some kebabs turned into 4am carnage and missing memories the next day.

The Brisbane show was at a huge warehouse venue called the Zoo, for its weekly punk night.

The crowd slowly seeped in. Most of them were there to see Sommerset's tour mates Gyroscope, but the response was still good. A few hearts were won.

A short drive the next day brought us to the paradise of Byron Bay, NSW. After some food everyone split up — some to an internet café, some to the beach, and one went to sleep.

A cross section of the town — some of them stumbling drunk — turned out to see the local band play and stuck around for Sommerset and Gyroscope.

It was a nine hour drive from Byron Bay back to Sydney, and once we got there, t-shirts, keys to accommodation, and a band member's girlfriend needed to be picked up.

Pounding Carlton Cold every night started to make minds soft and stomachs feel like they were full of battery acid. Lack of sleep and long drives frayed tempers.

The next day another flight.

Film traces rocky road of skateboard superstar "Gator"

by Dean Campbell

American documentary maker Helen Stickler says she's no skate groupie. But her first feature-length film, which screened as part of this year's Auckland International Film Festival, tracks the life of international skateboarding legend Mark "Gator" Rogowski.

Stickler, who lives in New York, visited New Zealand to promote the documentary she directed, *Stoked: The Rise and Fall of Gator*.

The documentary follows the life of Mark "Gator" Rogowski, a 1980s skateboarding legend currently serving 31 years to life for the rape and murder of his ex-girlfriend's friend.

"I got interested in his story because years after he had gone off to jail, people in the skateboarding industry didn't know what had happened and how he had got to this point where he'd committed this terrible crime," says Stickler.

"It was a lot bigger than just one guy's journey — it was a story of the 80s era of vertical skateboarding and it was a pop culture story as well"

Rogowski shot to international fame in the mid 1980s after turning professional when he was 14. By age 17 he was, through a mixture of prize money and endorsements, earning \$100,000 a year.

In 1991 he confessed to the rape and murder of a 21-year-old woman.

Now a born-again Christian, Rogowski is in San Diego County Jail

where he is eligible for parole in 2010 at the earliest.

Stickler found Rogowski had many pressures that caused him to break down, including an identity crisis, mental illness, and fame.

"But with the movie I wanted to avoid pointing the finger at just one thing because I think in any kind of case like this there's no easy answer," she says.

The film looks at a full 10 years of Rogowski's life, and Stickler spent many years researching and finding footage of him.

"I started to look into it and realised it was a very 80s story, and it was a lot bigger than just one guy's journey — it was a story of the 80s era of vertical skateboarding and it was a pop culture story as well — I just got drawn into it."

Stoked is Stickler's first feature-length film. Her previous credits include two award-winning short films, and an education at the Rhode Island School of Design.

She has always had friends who were skateboarders. "I grew up in a small town and was really into art and punk rock music, and in a small town everyone who's not mainstream kind of bands together."

The film is now successfully touring the world festival circuit, but Stickler says when she first set out to make the documentary she attracted a lot of scepticism.

"People were really afraid that it would make skateboarding look bad, or they just didn't know what good could come of it."

Stickler says the film has received a positive response from both the skating community and film critics.

"When you get an opportunity to look at a story like that over 10 years and then condense it into one 82-minute viewing experience, it's really quite extraordinary," she says.