

# Drag queens of the whole Pacific

by Aroha Awarau

A beauty pageant featuring extravagant gowns is set to be staged in Auckland this month.

But don't expect to see women in the competition. All the contestants are men.

*Queen of the Whole Pacific*, a fundraising event for the AIDS foundation, has attracted men from all persuasions to enter, says pageant organiser Jonathan Smith.

"We've got people who just want to put on a frock, have fun and contribute to a good cause," he says.

Around 30 "girls" will represent countries from the Pacific Rim and will compete in categories such as national costume and talent.

The pageant is to be held at the Sky City Theatre on September 18.

It is based on a similar event held in Los Angeles in the 1990s.

The film *Queen of the Whole Wide World*, which screened in Auckland last year, documented the crazy backstage antics of the US contestants.

Smith promises that the Kiwi version will be just as wild.

"This pageant is designed to go terribly wrong," says Smith. "But I'm certain it will be a whole lot of fun."

Edward Jenner, 57, aka Miss Japan, has entered the contest to try something new.

The only time he has worn make-up is when he performed in local theatre.

Jenner says performing in front of an audience while wearing high-heels will be daunting.

But Jenner has a secret weapon to help calm his nerves.

"After a couple of brandies and once I get started, I'll be fine," Jenner says.

Steve Attwood, spokesperson for the AIDS Foundation, says last year 188 people were diagnosed with HIV.

This is the highest recorded number in New Zealand history.

Attwood says events like *Queen of the Whole Pacific* will help boost the profile of the AIDS Foundation.

Though some may view this event as a spoof of pageants like *Miss Universe*, Smith says a handful of contestants are taking the competition seriously.

Tickets are \$45 from Ticketek.



ON SHOW: Miss Chile, Campbell Stodart, of Ponsonby.

# Message of world peace to be delivered by whirled peas

by Peter James

The message of world peace can be delivered through the painting of a humble green vegetable.

Artist Julie Ross's exhibition *Visualising Peas* at Auckland's Spiral Gallery uses peas to give voice to Ross's view of peace.

Peas turn up in every piece of Ross's work.

The idea of peas representing peace came to Ross in the form of a car bumper sticker with the message "visualise whirled peas".

Ross is a self-professed bumper sticker fan and says the word-play became an inspiration

for her art.

"If everybody could visualise peace, could it really happen?" she asks.

Painting peas has given Ross an outlet for her emotions and opinions, she says.

"I listen to things on the news and the radio and I get upset."

Listening to the BBC reports on the recent Sudanese conflict gave Ross the inspiration for her painting *Sudan Peas Girl*.

The piece is a reaction to her hearing about young Sudanese girls being beaten and raped while trying to retrieve drinking water.

The peas that surround the Sudanese girl in the painting are

part of "a prayer to bring peace to the region and specifically to bring peace to these young girls," says Ross.

"It just represents my frustration towards what is going on over there," she says.

"It's my attempt to be empathetic to them."

Ross has been sharing her message of peace with New Zealand children.

As part of her exhibition at the Spiral Gallery she invited a group of children to create a piece of art to show their ideas of peace.

The group of about 20 children designed their own peas and hung them from a large copper coil in the middle of the gallery.

The piece of art became whirled peas.

Ross says it was a good creative outlet for children and an easy concept for them to grasp.

"They love that correlation between peas and peace — they understand that."

Ross says the experience was "pretty full on" and the result was "amazing".

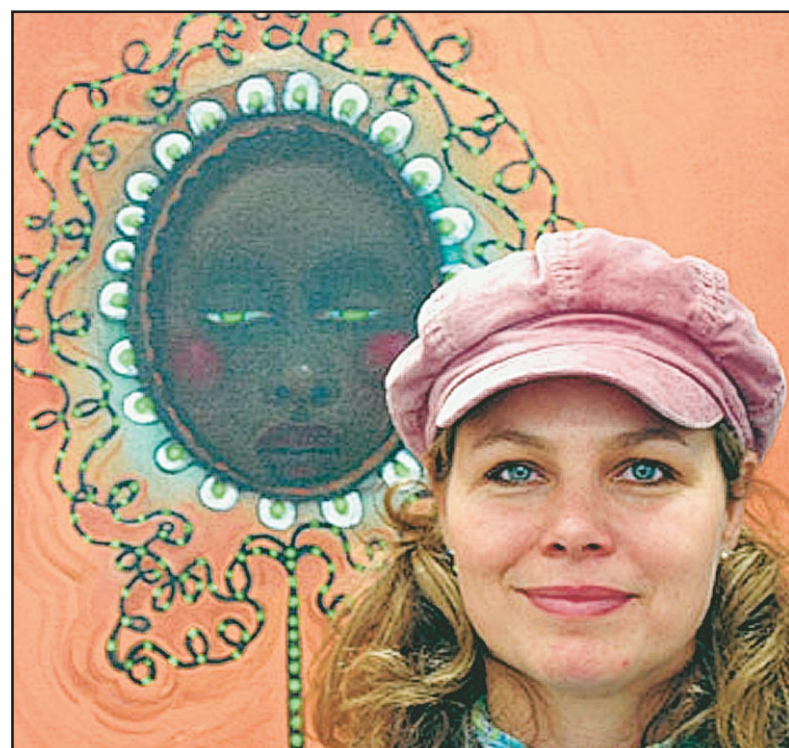
Ross grew up in Florida and studied at the School of Fine Arts in New York City, where she graduated with a Bachelor in Fine Arts.

She then travelled the world working as a crew member in the private jet and yachting industries.

On her travels, she met her fiancé Paul in New Zealand.

Now living here, Ross says she will continue to send out a message of peace.

"I think I'll always continue to put peas in my work."



WHIRLED PEAS: Julie Ross and her painting *Sudan Peas Girl*.

# Art, technology and its potential failures

by Sharon Marris

The latest exhibition at the Gus Fisher Gallery has added resonance in today's context, according to gallery director Robin Stoney.

*Friendly Fire: the exhibition*, which focuses on the paradoxical nature of technology and its potential failures, is showing at the Gus Fisher Gallery at Auckland University until September 18.

"As technological development has increased in warfare, we've created an expectation of fewer civilian casualties and more targeting of military targets," says Stoney.

"The more that technology has enabled that, the more incidents there have been of friendly fire: shooting something like the hospital or your own allies."

Curator Leonhard Emmerling from Berlin came to the idea after the September 11 attacks.

But he did not specifically aim to produce a commentary on those events.

"There are resonances there but it wasn't the specific trigger."

"He wanted people to think about what reason and thought were being used for by humans: what sorts of things we were justifying in the name of reason."

"If we are justifying rather inhumane and barbaric acts in the same way we justify reasonable acts then we have a problem."

*Friendly Fire: the exhibition* has had a good response from the public thus far.

"A lot of people find they like the absurdist take on the subject matter."

"A lot of the works are humorous but also horrifyingly compelling."

The works were collated for the first *Friendly Fire* exhibition in Germany but the first work that catches the eye is the *Crash Test for Favourite Things* from Switzerland.

Participants bring their favourite object, don a grey coat and goggles and then smash it to pieces.

"It presents a moral dilemma," says Stoney.

"If it's my favourite thing, why would I want to destroy it? If I want to destroy it, is it really my favourite thing?"

So are people reluctant to do this?

Not at all. "There's something cathartic about it," says gallery co-ordinator, Kim Ellis.

"One guy had a G-Shock watch, and he had 30 of his student colleagues with him and he took off his watch and smashed it to pieces. I hope he felt okay about that," she says.

"The worst one was pavlova and I don't eat a lot of dairy products. It was a bit distasteful so the girls had to go away and get some cleaning products."

"We've also smashed cell phones, cameras and a coffee plunger."

After the experience, you can have your object bagged with a piece of paper signed by the artist: your own work of art.

Stoney's young son even had his mobile phone smashed.

"It was quite a big gesture," she says.

She eyes my cassette recorder. "That would make a good crash test..."