

Arts



Architectural model maker creates off track

There's a big dose of whimsy in the work of Auckland artist Serene Thain, as **Peter Gibbs** reports.

It looks like the kind of bewildering maze some mischievous pixies may have erected while the grown-ups sleep.

It's exactly this sense of fun that Serene Thain wants to inject into her work, which is now on show at Arthouse Architecture on Haven Rd, Nelson, close to the Bridge St corner.

The Auckland artist is the first recipient of the recently created Arthouse Installation project award, worth \$4000. Her installation will remain on show until April next year.

Nelson artist Nic Moon will take up the project in the second half of next year.

Thain starts her work by acquiring a mass of small, colour-

"Every space is a challenge - you create it as you go."

Serene Thain, artist

ful everyday items - ping-pong balls, plastic cups, dominoes, pencils, slinkies, cotton reels - all sorts of things you might pick up cheap.

Then she starts to piece them together using hundreds of small wooden strips made from matches, satay sticks and wooden forks.

She says she travelled from Auckland with several banana boxes of materials with which to make her installation.

Although it's a stationary sculpture, you can almost imagine that when you turn your back, the balls will start rolling, the dominoes will fall - maybe even little cars will appear and start whizzing around the precarious tracks.

Thain hopes everyone will come up with their own fantasy.

She says that each time she

makes a similar installation, it changes to fit the location. "Every space is a challenge - you create it as you go."

Her Nelson work is different from others, being split into two pieces by the staircase at Arthouse. Once she starts building, she says it's hard to stop.

"I could go on forever - I stop when I run out of material."

Her imagination isn't prompted by her own children. She says they're teenagers now and think she's crazy.

Born in Singapore in 1960, Thain trained as an architectural draughtsperson before moving to Auckland, where she worked as draughtsperson and architectural model maker. She completed a degree in visual arts in 2002-04.

She says her installations stem from her work making models of actual buildings - what would happen if she didn't have to follow a plan.

■ *Not a Super City*, by Serene Thain, will be on show at Arthouse Architecture until April.

Artist at play: Serene Thain of Auckland setting up her installation *Not a Super City* at Arthouse Architecture. The work will stay in place for six months.

Photo: MARION VAN DIJK