

Exploring fears and desires

Nelson artist Nic Moon has turned an unattractive plastic material into a thing of beauty.

Alice Cowdrey reports.

Walk up the stairwell to Nelson's Arthouse Architecture and you arrive in a mythical and ancient forest - with tall trees, birds and little creatures emerging from the green wilderness.

Nelson artist Nic Moon has spent the last four weeks creating the intriguing world out of the most unlikely material - plastic grass. Surrounded by tools, books and cutouts from the green plastic matting, Moon is finishing off the last of her installation, *The Dream*, which features cut-out figures of insects, figures, birds, animals and tall trees.

She has enjoyed using the "abject and repulsive" material which she managed to buy second-hand on Trade Me.

"It's quite intriguing that we live in places where ancient forests once grew and now we are at the point where some of us live with plastic lawns.

"I use the forest and the stairwell to explore aspects of the intimate and the immense, the inner and the outer, dream and reality."

Moon is the second artist to have an installation put in the space as part of the Arthouse Installation Project which started in November 2010.

The project, which links art and architecture, is available for two artists annually, with prize money of \$4000 each. The prize money has been provided by Nelson art philanthropist Sally Hunt, patron of the project, and by Nelson Arthouse Architecture.

Moon's latest work is inspired by the surrealist jungle paintings of French artist Henri Rousseau, especially his famous 1910 work *The Dream*.

"Like Rousseau, I have become a city dweller, drawing inspiration



Intriguing world: Nic Moon with *The Dream* installation at Arthouse Architecture.

Photo: MARION VAN DIJK

from my local environment, books, magazines and now the internet. And, like Rousseau, I choose to explore the fears and desires of my era."

Moon has created most of the cutouts while based at Arthouse Architecture. She traced patterns on to the turf with coloured pencils before cutting out the various shapes with a surgical scalpel.

She trims up any detail with tiny nail scissors and then sticks

the pieces to the wall with thousands of map pins. The domestic landscaping material, which is made from petroleum, provokes a wide range of responses like the nostalgia of Granny's conservatory and caravan awning floors.

It's also quite repulsive, bringing to light issues such as peak oil, climate change and deforestation. "It's the ultimate insult to the planet."

Moon says fake grass was first

developed by the multinational corporation Monsanto as a form of artificial turf for sports games.

"Monsanto now controls much of the world's food supply through its patent on seed, genetic engineering and its petrochemical-dependent food-growing methods.

"Plastic grass is now made in China as a maintenance-free lawn for apartments and urban dwellings in developed nations, where there are no terrifying ancient

forests to contend with, no pesky growth or wildlife to keep in check and no primitive savages lurking in the undergrowth."

Moon says the forest has always been an integral part of humanity's planetary balance and survival, lurking in our subconscious.

"We evolved from primate ancestors who inhabited forests and jungles.

"For me, the creative process is

one in which I explore the edge of my tolerance for fear and uncertainty.

"I find myself in oscillating states of knowing and not knowing, feeling lost and then found again. At times, I wish there was a map to guide me. At others, I am relieved that there is none."

Nic Moon's installation *The Dream* is on show until October at Arthouse Architecture, 3 Haven Rd, Nelson.

SPOT LIGHT



New member exhibition

New members of the Suter Art Society will have their 15 minutes of fame in an exhibition at the McKee Gallery in the Suter. Fifteen Artists, 15 Minutes opened last week in the gallery and continues until June 18.



Boy, by Miriam Hansen.



Luscious, by Helena Morris.



Blue Light, by Anne Parkes.



Bluebird, by Barbara Frankel.



Mutawinji, by Craig Duffy.



Pat's in Paradise, by Patricia Richardson.

Stunning artworks from outside the mainstream



A favourite: Community Art Works student Robbie McManaway with his painting of two eagles.

Alice Cowdrey
alicec@nelsonmail.co.nz

The quality workmanship behind a range of bold and imaginative masks can be inspected at a new exhibition.

Dreams of Unity, which opened yesterday at Reflections Art Gallery, brings together vivid mixed media paintings and imaginative masks, all created by Community Art Works (CAW) artists.

Many of the masks will be familiar to Nelsonians, having been worn over the years at Nelson's annual masked and Christmas parades - including a lion, walrus, camel, cat, caterpillar and a unicorn. The mastermind behind the paper mache creations is Karl Wulff, a senior tutor at CAW who picked up skills for making masks about 14 years ago from Kim Merry. Merry was a fixture on the Nelson arts circuit and started the Masked Parade.

CAW operates out of a council-owned building in Paru Paru Rd. It is funded by the Nelson City Council, the Canterbury Community Trust and artists' fees.

It caters for people who cannot access art programmes via the mainstream. This includes disabled people, disconnected youth and people with experience of mental ill-health. More than 100 disabled people participate in the

programme each week. People ordered by the courts to do community service help out with the programme, and there are always people dropping by to lend a hand or to chat to the artists.

CAW co-ordinator Paye Wulff says the exhibition is important for the artists.

"This showcase is a highlight for the artists who put so much passion and time into their paintings and other creations. Proceeds from sales go to the artists, with a small portion going back into material costs in the effort toward keeping CAW a sustainable and valued centre for the artists to keep working from."

She says CAW has started making moulds for many of the masks and is planning to set up a website so the organisation can sell more of them to individuals and theatre companies.

"We hope the masks take off to give CAW an income that will make it more sustainable."

The disabled artists love the sessions and produced some beautiful works.

"It's about them being out in the community and it's the only community integrated space where disabled people sit alongside other people from the community."

Among the artists whose work will be hung at the exhibition is Robbie McManaway, whose painting of two eagles is set on a bright blue background. The feathered



Full of character: Some of the masks on show at Reflections Gallery.

animals are the only thing the keen artist ever paints.

"He just loves them," says Wulff.

Reflections co-ordinator Sharon Patterson says the exhibition gives an opportunity to appreciate up close the quality and workmanship of the masks. Although they are made for performance, they are fine artworks in themselves.

"These masks are amazing fanciful characters ripe with tons of personality - some are storybook inspired, others fantastical. Each sees many hours of creative skill and labour."

She says the paintings share

similar qualities - a no-nonsense directness and sense of vibrancy.

"I particularly enjoy Mary McEwen's paintings. Her happy creatures bounce off the canvas."

Arts Council Nelson manager Lloyd Harwood says it's a delightful show which is guaranteed to appeal to people of all ages.

"Entry to the exhibition is free, so definitely take the children for an inspirational arts experience."

Dreams of Unity opened yesterday and runs until July 11 at Reflections Art Gallery, which is based at the World of WearableArt & Classic Cars Museum. Entry is free.

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