

X4

20 JUL 1979

Chongs Press Cutting Bureau  
Box 68143, Auckland, N.Z.

# Many Shows Put Art Pilgrims On Their Mettle

There is such a bustle of exhibition in Auckland that there are times when the reviewer can become quite overwhelmed.

There are a half dozen shows which are by no means negligible, but it would take a most earnest art pilgrim to get around them all.

The most accessible is a display of silks and graphics by Susan Poff at the John Leech Gallery. The silks are dyed by batik methods and the style is palely Art Nouveau. The silks are made up into lampshades, cushions and kites as well as dress-lengths.

The graphics are often inspired by an excellent idea but typically, as in "Blue Hat" the idea is not carried through with the delicacy it deserves. For compensation

there are some good, direct drawings like "Her Boots."

### Vulgar Dolls

Much more blatant and also very funny is the display of kewpie dolls embellished by Christabel Wylie and on show at the busy Outreach Gallery in Ponsonby Rd.

The dolls are dressed in feathers and sequins and are triumphantly and delightfully vulgar like some "Essence of Dolly Parton."

At the Society of Arts on the other side of town is an extensive exhibition of paintings by Mary Armstrong. She subdues all her subjects to a flat, patterned, poster-like style.

### New Gallery

Here again there are some good basic ideas such as in "Wind" where great play is made with the vivid spinners of yachts but the full potential of the subject is not seized on because of the awkward naivete of the style.

In Parnell, at the top, on the right going up, is Gallerie La Mezzanine, a new and lively little gallery that has already had a number of interesting shows.

At the moment there is a display by Bodel Rikys divided into birds and still lifes. The birds are pushed too far towards human characteristics but the still lifes combine effective use of line with limited use of subdued colour. Particularly appealing are "Pear One" and "Robe."

Any pilgrim who has made the journey so far might call in to the Maidment Little Theatre on the way back to town to see a varied exhibition by Dora Campbell.

-T. J. McNamara

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## Birkenhead artist holds exhibition

Birkenhead resident, Mary Armstrong, will hold an exhibition of contemporary oil and acrylic paintings at the Auckland Society of Arts, Eden Cres, Sunday, July 15 to 20.

Armstrong was born in

Barbados.

She has exhibited in the Barbados Museum's annual exhibition of contemporary art since 1964.

Two of her paintings were selected to hang in the Barbados Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal, Canada.

Also in that year she exhibited at the IXth Biennial Exhibition of San Paulo, Brazil and again in 1971.

In 1968 one of her paintings was exhibited at the Mexico Olympic

Games.

In 1969 she was awarded first prize in the International Labour Exhibition.

During 1972 some of her work was represented in group shows in New York and in Caracas, Venezuela.

The artist has exhibited for many years in Barbados as well as holding her own shows there in 1969, 71, 72, 73 and 74.

Armstrong has been living in Birkenhead since 1974.

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Beach Haven artist Mary Armstrong adding the finishing touches to one of her exhibition pieces — a scene from a Barbados hotel.

## A visual composer

By Lara MacKinnon  
Brilliant and bold — pink, green, red and gold billowing spinnakers on a flat green sea.

Not your typical Shore seascape but these are the scenes Beach Haven artist Mary Armstrong likes to paint.

Mary is a contemporary painter with a individual style.

Her compositions are bold and simple.

She uses strong, bright colours.

Her paint is laid smoothly and her hard-edged figures have a strange stance-like glow.

She uses perspective as children do.

Distant objects are depicted above nearer ones. Pattern becomes more important than three-dimensional space.

Her colour is flat.

She does not create space or volume through the use of light and shadow.

But her paintings do not lack perspective.

They acquire it through the placement and size of the objects.

Critics have called her a primitive, quasi-primitive, a sophisticated primitive.

she laughs.

"I don't think I really am," she says.

Mary describes her work

as compositions — "a composer of paintings," she says.

"When I am painting I paint from things that I have seen and I paint them the way I want to paint them."

She is hesitant about classifying her style.

"I'm not a realist or a surrealist — my work is probably closer to the abstract painter."

And while the critics argue about the meaning and significance and categories, Mary and her

brushes do what has to be done.

"The work of an artist is its own justification," she says.

Mary Armstrong was born in Barbados.

Six years ago, she and her husband emigrated to New Zealand.

Although a member of the Auckland Society of Arts, Mary has had little exposure to the New Zealand art scene.

During the past six years, most of her work has found its way back to the private homes and galleries in Barbados, where her popularity is well established.

But now Aucklanders will get a chance to view some of her art.

Mary is holding her first New Zealand exhibition this week at the Auckland Society of Arts Gallery in Eden Terrace.

Mary's skill with a palette and brush is undeniable.

With an unusual combination of line and colour, the familiar scenes she paints are transformed into something magical.

"My paintings are not photographic," she stresses.

"I compose a picture as I want it."

The figures that people her canvases achieve no identity.

They are stereotypes — a woman in the street, a boy on a bike.

She is not concerned with the personality of her subjects.

The purpose they serve is to stress their surroundings, to convey the idea not of themselves but of what they are doing — their role.

Mary uses backgrounds as a stage to set the moods of her compositions.

Her buildings are rich with personality.

With colour, her flat skies and dead seas take on a depth of emotion.

Mary Armstrong is an artist of the future — a modern-day Bruegel.

# The Auckland Star

(AUCKLAND)

Auckland Province

Circulation approx. 150,000

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Chongs Press Cutting Bureau  
Box 68143, Auckland, N.Z.



An Exhibition of Paintings by Mary Armstrong,  
at the Auckland Society of Arts Gallery, Eden  
Terrace.

Mary Armstrong's exhibition of figurative paintings possess a simplified type of uncomplicated realism that comes near to being folksy.

Carefully composed, with images clearly delineated through the use of thin black lines, the artist's use of colour is frequent but restrained.

Although not detailed in the conventional sense, many of the paintings are full of carefully drawn objects, some of which, like the ferris wheel in "Down-Down-Down" (2) or the yacht masts in "Boats and More Boats" (9) produce very complex patterns.

In many of the paintings the artist's obvious interest in people comes to the fore.

There are occasions when this aspect takes on too folksy an impression with a sweetness that is a trifle overdone, as in "Bookbags" (1).

Included in the exhibition are several child portraits to which her style is appropriate when handled with the control of good observation.

It is the rather childlike approach that comes through in these portraits rather than any depth in the portrayal of personality.

You Are Invited To Attend The Opening of an Exhibition of Paintings

By  
MARY ARMSTRONG

AT 4 p.m. ON SUNDAY 20th SEPTEMBER  
AT MOLLER'S GALLERY,  
313 QUEEN ST., AUCKLAND

EXHIBITION CONTINUES UNTIL FRIDAY 2nd  
OCTOBER 1981

GALLERY HOURS:- MONDAY TO THURSDAY 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
FRIDAY 10 a.m. to 8.30 p.m.

Mary Armstrong:-

Was born in Barbados. She has exhibited in the Barbados Museum's Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art since 1964. Two of her paintings were selected in the Barbados Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal, Canada, also in that year she exhibited at the IXth, Biennial Exhibition of Sao Paulo, Brazil and again in 1971. In 1968 one of her paintings was exhibited at the Mexico Olympic Games, and in 1969 a first prize was awarded for one of her paintings at an I.L.O. Exhibition in Barbados.

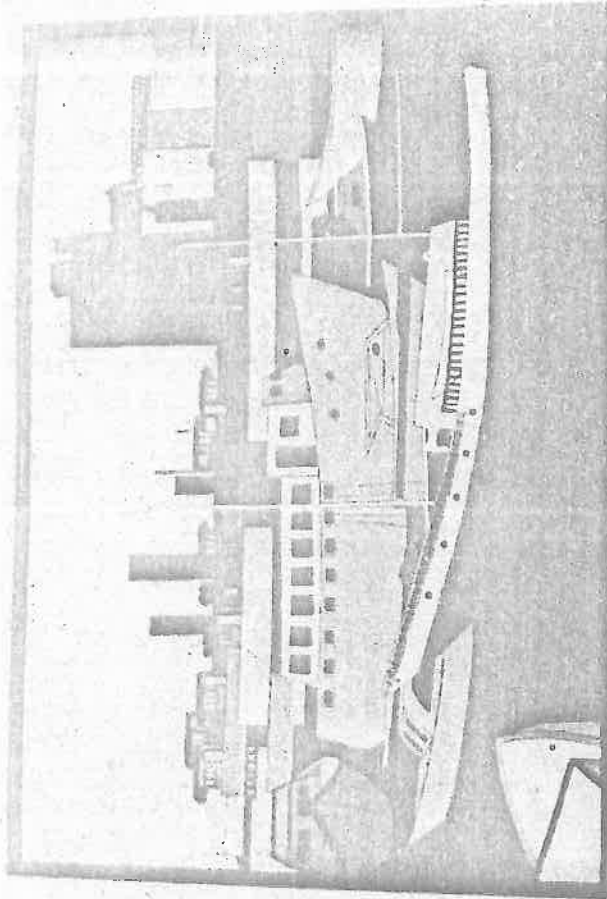
During 1972 she was represented in group shows in New York, U.S.A., and in Caracas, Venezuela. The Organization of American States (O.A.S.) in 1976 invited her to take part in an exhibition touring Museums and Universities in Central America. The artist has exhibited for many years in Barbados as well as holding solo exhibitions in 1969, 71, 72, 73, 74 and also in 1980 when she returned there on a holiday.

Mary Armstrong has been living in Auckland since November 1974. In 1979 she held her first solo show in New Zealand at the Auckland Society of Arts.

## Barbados to Auckland

Artist Mary Armstrong was born in Barbados. She has exhibited in the Barbados Museum's Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art since 1964. Two of her paintings were selected for the Barbados Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montreal. In that year she also exhibited at the 9th biennial exhibition of Sao Paulo, Brazil. The Sao Paulo biennial is one of the world's most prestigious art competitions, and for Mary to be chosen was a great honour. Her inclusion in this event and the Montreal Expo means her work has been seen by thousands of people.

In 1968 one of her paintings was exhibited at the



Mexico Olympic Games and in 1969 a first prize was awarded for one of her paintings at an I.L.O. Exhibition in Barbados.

During 1972 she was represented in group shows in the U S and Venezuela. The Organisation of American States invited her to take part in a 1976 exhibition touring museums and universities in Central America.

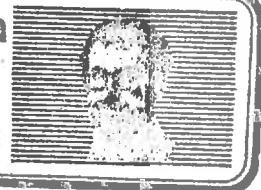
Mary Armstrong has been living in Auckland since November, 1974. In 1979 she held her first solo show in New Zealand at the Auckland Society of Arts. Her attention has recently turned

to Auckland's waterfront and an example of the results is pictured above. Other subjects in the paintings in her

exhibition (at Moller's Gallery, Queen St, September 20 till October 2) include motorcyclists and cyclists.

# Photographs Brighten Dull Week

T.J. McNamara  
on  
**ART**



Last week was a quiet time for Auckland art. Few exhibitions opened and those that did were mostly pleasant but unassuming.

The show by five print-makers at the Portfolio Gallery in Lorne St is typical. All the work is capably done and is often charming but it is all small and low-key.

**ELIZABETH STEINER'S** etching "Across the Headland" has pleasant colourings of green and brown allied to an effective use of the white of the paper. Her "Evening Reflection" finds a strong formal composition in the building on which the evening light is reflected.

In a print such as "Rangitoto" by **SHIRLEY MARK-**

**HAM** the formal pattern is imposed rather than found as she weaves her multiplicity of views together into a pattern. The combination of this technique with blind printing is quite inventive.

More colourful and equally inventive is "Triptych" by **GWYNEDD LOGAN** which shows a split stone shape balanced on a level plane with the three variations of the image having different but linked colour values. The artist's "Park Gate" is a tidy and controlled piece of patterning.

The same clean, neat qualities are shared by the work of **MARY DE LISLE**, particularly in her flower pieces like "Japonica."

The liveliest work in the show comes from **ELIZABETH TORRENS** but her flickering touch does not lift

her subjects out of the commonplace except in "Whananaki Stormclouds."

\* \* \*

More varied and vigorous work is to be found in three photography exhibitions:

Two of the exhibitions are at the Society of Arts. In the inner gallery are photographs by **KERRY M. HILL**. They range from dull images taken in conventional ways to others that show a clever eye and excellent technique.

In the front gallery is another varied show full of interest. It is called "By Eight" and all eight artists pursue highly individual artistic aims.

**JOHN GILLESPIE** takes small, blurred, black and white photographs of landscape in the approved modern manner to catch the memory of travelling from Napier to Taupo.

**PETER HANKEN** colourfully captures the gaiety of friends at the Easter Show.

**JUDY LLOYD** has penetrating character studies in black and white that are little short of magnificent but very ordinary colour photographs of a clown.

The outstanding group is the one that breaks a lot of the canons of serious photography. The set of eight colour pictures by **VICKI GINN** are carefully set up and have depths of meaning below their visual surface. They are illustrations to a variety of evocative stories which the viewer must create for himself. One image is a robed figure in the dawn, another a girl deep in mud, another a painted man on a stump, howling.

Ginn's photographs are the high spot of the week's art but they are not all this exhibition has to offer.

The photographs of **MARK ADAMS** are concerned with Maori art and are thought-provoking. Some are effective images in themselves but mostly they need the information provided in the extensive captions to give their full meaning.

The question of how independent an image should be is raised again by the exhibition of black and white photographs by **ELIZABETH**

**LEYLAND** at Real Pictures Gallery in His Majesty's Arcade.

All are Auckland images, most taken in extreme conditions such as late evening that give high contrast. Time exposure streaks the sky and special lenses push features like bow-windows forward so that they almost embrace the viewer.

Yet often the effect is dependent on what we know of the city. Thus steps leading nowhere are just steps unless you know the history of Grafton Rd. Only a couple of the pictures are powerful entirely because of what is enclosed in the frame regardless of title.

\* \* \*

Painting gets a look in this week at a bland exhibition by **MARY ARMSTRONG** at Mollers Gallery. She also captures the city but it is the activity of people rather than buildings that fascinate her.

Some of the paintings take an overhead viewpoint and make patterns out of yachts with their spinnakers up or the crowd below, a ferris wheel but the best neatly capture an attitude like the girl riding on one pedal in "Freein" or in "Little Ricard." Many of the other paintings are good ideas not carried through with sufficient force or knowledge.

\* \* \*

Two new galleries are "66A Benson Road," which has conventional work by **GAE HEALD** and **WALTER HIGGINS**, and the White-cliff Gallery in Parnell which is a fine expansion of the former Galerie la Mezzanine.