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Art

'I am an inspiration to myself...' Leather changes art dimension

BY CHRISTINE KHAN

THE leather art jumps out at you.

A three-dimensional effect that makes you want to get to know the artist.

To find out who she is and where she received her training.

Marita Brodie is happy to chat and is quite down to earth about her exhibits at last week's National Art Exhibition at the Suva Civic Centre.

She draws her inspiration from photographs she takes, from magazines, gardens and "upstairs" she says, tapping her forehead.

"I'm an inspiration to myself."

South African-born Marita, who spent seven years in New Zealand before coming to Fiji, says when people think of leather, they think of blue, brown and black.

They don't think of it as having colour. When they see her work, they say: "Wow! I didn't think you could do this with leather."

For someone who "can't draw a stickman" Marita is in a class of her own. She has been to view art exhibitions overseas and has not found anyone who does leather art.

"I took art history in school. I failed it miserably. That was the ball and end-all of art for me."

Nor does she want to attend art classes. "Art classes will change my style. This is me," she says, pointing to her creations. With a little help from her microwave oven which helps shape her pieces, bits of leather become fences with the timber grain enhanced by a touch of pastel paint.

One collage, of a bucket, leaves and rake

make you want to reach out and touch the fine detail. There's even a tiny chain hanging from a gate — made from leather. A rolled-up piece of leather brings a sawn-off trunk to life.

Her collages come with instructions on how to look after the artwork to prevent mould and grime.

She is a frequent visitor to the abattoir, buying "split" pieces, which is



Pastel clouds, evergreen trees

between the hair and flesh, the middle piece of the hide, which feels like suede.

Her visit to the tannery a few years back wasn't even inspired by the urge to do leather art. Her husband, who owns an engineering business, asked her to buy leather to make aprons. Welding sparks were ruining his workers' overalls and leather aprons were the answer.

Well, never mind the aprons. Here was something Marita could sink her scissors into, working on her art until her husband came home, often to find no sign of dinner, even at 8pm. Her son and daughter are her art cri-

tics, she says.

Her first attempt was to make a few roses, but it took so much time it was unsaleable.

Her next attempt, a landscape of Namosi, sold for \$90 four days after she framed it. Some of her work fetches up to \$800.

She uses goat leather, cow leather, even snake leather.

"A local woman heard I was doing leather art and she gave me three snakeskins which she had no use for," she said.

Even toad skins can be used, she explained.

"In South Africa, ostrich leather is extremely expensive, a handbag can cost \$3000."

She said she's heard of an ostrich farm in Fiji but has not contacted it.

She sells her collages from Matengi's Art in Knolly Street and her home. She also does work on commission.

Marita says with so much talk about value-added products, her leather art is an ideal way of promoting Fiji, the leather is 100 per cent from Fiji and so is the framing, done by Smaritto Arte Gilding Company at Laucala Beach Estate.

Asked if she would teach locals her self-taught art, she said: "I'm still learning what leather can do and what leather can allow me to do."

"If you make a mistake in leather, you can't fix it, but you do learn from it."

Marita Brodie's opinions are as refreshing as her art.



Marita Brodie holds up a "chain" made of leather, with bucket and rake giving a three-dimensional effect. Picture: ATU RASEA

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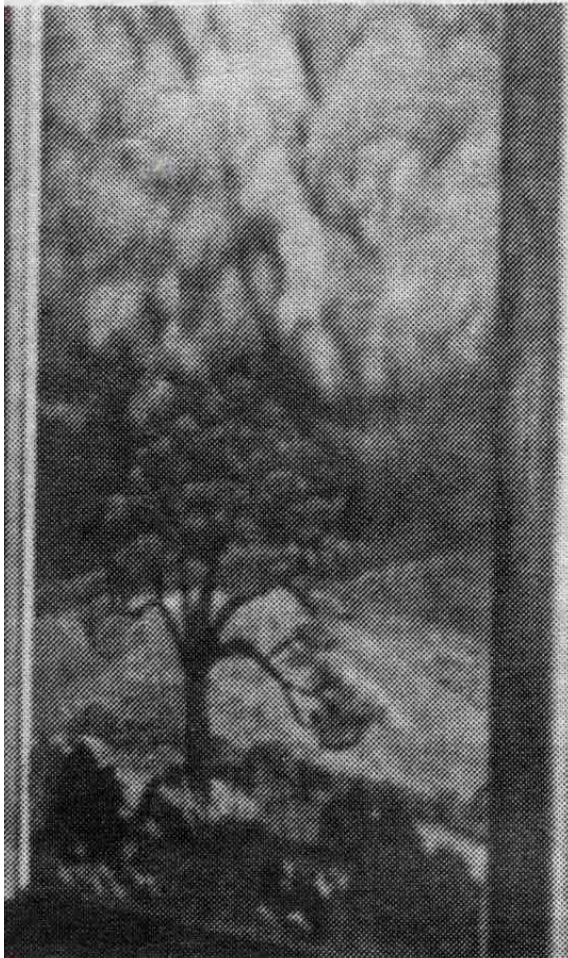
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A fence made of leather, with grass growing behind it