

Cormick gets up close and very personal



Burning Plains, a kimono by Kathryn Hamer, forms part of the exhibition opening at Durban's Artisan gallery at noon on Sunday. Above right and right are triptychs by Dina Cormick, on show at Durban's African Art Centre in Florida Road.



IN CELEBRATION of August being Women's Month, the African Art Centre in Durban is showing icon triptychs by Dina Cormick, a noted figure in South African art.

Born in Nkana, Zambia, and schooled in Harare, Zimbabwe, Cormick studied art at Rhodes University in Grahamstown and at the Durban University of Technology.

Since 1978 she has worked as freelance artist from her studio in Durban.

Her many commissioned artworks include wood sculptures, mosaic and ceramic panels, book illustrations and posters.

In her latest work, Cormick, who, in 1992, graduated cum laude as a "mistress" of Feminist Theological Ethics, creates images of women that capture moments of intense awareness of personal and intimate awakenings.

Miniature artworks engage in a very personal, intimate interaction because viewers have to come closer to really see the work.

In Cormick's own words: "My triptych icons are unashamedly didactic. The viewer is invited to open the doors and to interact personally with each story."

Cormick says that she uses the concept of icon deliberately as "a re-birthing". Traditionally the Byzantine icon depicts a sacred image in a formalised style that is used ceremoniously.

The triptych is a set of three thematically connected images hinged vertically so as to allow the side panels to fold over the central panel. Cormick calls her images the Wise Women Icons, explorations of re-envisioning and finding the sacred in every woman.

Presented in an ancient women's art format, the portable altar shrine, these miniature triptychs were created by women for women, for private use in their homes, and notably, women could use their triptychs without interference or control by the patriarchal authorities.

These are joyous images of women, some men, and animals dancing and floating in open spaces.

The triptychs, although small in size, have been very well executed and are painted on wood, as is traditional. This exhibition is supplemented by Ilala palm baskets by the Masuku Sisters from

Hlabisa, northern Zululand. From the bottom end of Florida Road, Morningside, we travel to the top, near Mitchell Park, where you will find Artisan contemporary gallery featuring fine art and craft.

It's always a pleasure to visit. Opening at noon this Sunday, and set to run until the end of September, is an exhibition titled *Kimonos Unlimited*.

It is a dramatically colourful and exquisitely executed interpretive show of the traditional Japanese garment.

On exhibition are selected works by the 50-member Fibreworks artists in South Africa, who work in fibre and textile mediums. Their aim is to promote fibre/textile as a serious art form and to provide a platform for their members to exhibit, to generate interaction, new challenges and critical input.

The group was formed in 1997 and since then has had many national and international exhibitions.

Fibreworks has produced a number of travelling exhibitions of small works, including *Major Minors I* and *Major Minors II* which have been accompanied by colour catalogues.

These exhibitions have travelled extensively and have been viewed with

great acclaim in America, Europe, New Zealand and Australia. *Major Minors III* was exhibited in the US in 2010.

Several of the group's members are internationally renowned artists.

The exhibition challenges the definition of the centuries-old kimono. Kimono styles have changed significantly from one period of Japan's history to another and today there are many different types worn by men, women and children.

Some works on this exhibition present a Japanese aesthetic sense, displaying a tendency towards simplicity and restraint. Others have related the theme to their African experience.

Diverse techniques and media illustrate a wide range of expression from the group of artists and include both three-dimensional and two-dimensional forms. Women's kimonos are the most elaborate and varied in style, fabric and colour.

"Several of our members are internationally renowned teachers and fibre/textile artists," says Artisan curator Sue Greenberg.

"Fibreworks encourages its members to investigate both the technical and conceptual aspects of any subject matter by inviting artists to explore and expand art forms in almost unlimited ways," she adds.