

# HOW' ABOUT?

with Louise Howland



*Embroidery & Cross Stitch* would like to extend a warm welcome to Louise Howland of Rajmahal, who will be putting her own spin on the wonderful world of needlecraft in a new regular column. In this issue, she asks what makes a fabulous exhibition and drops in on the Bendigo branch of the Embroiderers' Guild for the inside story on their big night.

Having devoured more than my share of visual feasts over the last 12 months, I've been thinking about the ingredients that go into creating a rewarding exhibition. Some displays are historic, educational, homely and others fun, but virtually all are inspiring. One that turned out to be all of the above was a biennial exhibition of the Bendigo Branch of the Embroiderer's Guild titled 'From a Thread, Sew it Grows.'

What makes a successful exhibition depends in part on how we measure that success. Is it a high visitor count, money at the door, critical acclaim, number of people inspired, best opening night or pieces sold?

According to Maggie Antram, President of the BEG; "Our guild has lots of reasons to exhibit. We want to show off our work of the past two years. That means showcasing work from classes, displaying work from special interest groups, as well as individual challenges that members have undertaken. We also want to raise the profile of embroidery generally." and show off work they did! A total of four hundred and forty nine pieces made up this exhibition. And amazingly, there was no selection committee. One hundred members made individual decisions about what and how many pieces they would enter. The attitude upheld was that

each member's work is valuable and of interest to be displayed.

There was no unnecessary snobbishness regarding what constitutes a worthy exhibit for an embroidery show. Beading? No problem. Felting? Even better! Quilting? But of course! All added to the richness and variety.

"This is a friendly group and we support each other incredibly. We want to encourage new members to join us and we love to share our skills," Maggie relates. Having sociable demonstrators and hostesses mingling with visitors throughout the three day show was a wonderful touch.

There's also a practical side to most exhibitions, and for the Bendigo branch this was an important fund raiser. Almost one thousand visitors paid an entry fee of \$5 to enjoy the show. A sumptuous boutique stocked with over 1000 handmade treasures was all that many of us needed to start the Christmas shopping. The timing of an exhibition can have a big effect on spending, so if it's Christmas shoppers you seek, then mid-November is perfect. Silent auctions take some planning but if you have willing helpers it's a great way to approach selling special pieces. An auction on opening night also worked as a great ice-breaker and vehicle to showcase and sell donated works.



Opening nights are, I think, supposed to be a shared celebration of achievement.

Rather like planning your wedding, it is important that no matter how much work goes on beforehand you save a little in reserves to actually enjoy the occasion.

We were warmly welcomed, the guest speaker was knowledgeable and kindly didn't feel the need to share all her knowledge. The moving induction of the first-ever life member to the Bendigo Branch was another very special moment.

There is nothing more pleasurable for a lover of all things textile than to be involved in an exhibition. As a guest commented to me, "even looking at someones stitching helps puts my life in perspective. It is an anchor to the hectic and humdrum nature that is so much a part of daily life."

Till next month,

*Louise*

## Share your tips!

Your ideas and feedback on these articles are very welcome, so do keep in touch. We'd also like to share the great tips you may have on any aspect of stitching and beading. A gift pack valued at \$50 which includes threads and a copy of *The Art of Conversation* will be sent to the best tip published each month. Email your handy hints to [louise@rajmahal.com.au](mailto:louise@rajmahal.com.au)