



HOW' ABOUT?

with Louise Howland

Out & About with Louise at the Royal Melbourne Show

I had been concerned about a friend due to her deepening depression, then I met her at a country show. "I am so excited! My shredded marmalade won second place and so did my embroidery. It is ridiculous how thrilled I feel!"

There were a number of factors that led to my friend's improved health – I'm not claiming the show was an antidepressant – but the fact is being involved can give additional purpose and a sense of validation.

Walking the pavilions I felt a surging enthusiasm for all sorts of sections. Our silky hens would surely look as pretty as the pampered poultry – were they only shampooed? (Does anyone actually know how to bath a chook?) And what about that peach chutney? So promising until I foolishly tampered at the boundaries of the recipe, but the taste spectrum – initial delight quickly followed by a highly unusual metallic flavour – would surely give the judges a change from so much perfection.



The crafts enveloped me in a warm, contented snugness, the feeling that only involvement with traditional skills can bring. The time-honoured embroidery, cross stitch and quilting, the beautiful Aran knitwear and perfect pulled-thread work; these textile classics kept custody of the challenging, the avant-garde.

Each year the sections are reviewed to ensure that they stay relevant.

Judy Barnes, Arts, Crafts & Cookery Coordinator of the Royal Melbourne Show advised: "Any sections that are not patronised, ie two years with two exhibitors, are discontinued. Sections can also be reinstated. For example, Bark Art is to be reintroduced to the Royal Melbourne Show, as is Felting. A new section for 2009 will be Recycled Garments."

The youngest exhibitors were four and five years of age, chubby fingers proudly pointing out heftily decorated arrowroot biscuits and bulky hand-stitched tablemats.

Slightly older children produced some wonderfully competent works. I overheard mutterings of 'surely a child couldn't have done that.' (Quite the opposite to certain art exhibitions where one overhears 'a child could have done better than that.') It is heartening to realise that



Madison West

fortunate children are being given the guidance, time, space and materials to help them develop techniques and imagination.

According to Judy Barnes, "craft entries decreased considerably in the past 10 years, but are now beginning to increase again, with around 1,000 juniors entering each year. Winning entries from country shows go on to the regional finals and these winners then come to the city for the state finals."

Beading, jewellery, quilting, embroidery, cross stitch ... I felt inspired to encourage my daughter to enter some of her efforts in the show, and to enter a section or two myself – even if it's only the peach chutney, I wonder whether it will improve with age ...

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