



📷 Fine dining: Marlene Ogden crafted Boris the big head out of felt for the Georgian festive feast. Picture: Andy Rogers.

COUNTRY LIVING

Gippsland crafters shine in Johnston Collection's annual show

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COOKING a traditional Christmas dinner is difficult enough when it's done with food.

But try concocting a festive feast using only craft techniques, and the degree of difficulty increases considerably.

This was the challenge that faced the members of the Baw Baw Arts Alliance after they agreed to take part in the Joyful and Triumphant Collection exhibition at Melbourne's Johnston Collection.

The exhibition is an annual event that showcases crafts from different regions of rural Victoria. This year, it's Gippsland's turn.

The Baw Baw Arts Alliance members are just some of the 170 craftspeople — including spinners, yarners, patchworkers, embroiderers, lacemakers, quilters, cake decorators, glassworkers and beaders — taking part in this year's exhibition, who have taken 18 months to create complex craft pieces.

Alliance member Marlene Ogden worked with the fibre and textile group to create a Christmas feast for Joyful and Triumphant.

"The group got together and brainstormed what you'd find in a Christmas dinner in the Georgian era — because that's one of the periods the Johnston Collection represents," Marlene says.

The 59-year-old, from Yarragon, created a life-size boar's head using felting techniques, as a centrepiece for the Christmas feast.

Marlene says she made an initial pattern before stuffing the head and covering it with needle felted fibres.

"We had a roast pork one night at home and I kept some of the crackling so I could get the idea of the colours for the felt right," Marlene says.

"One day we joked the pig needed a name so we call him Boris."

Boris — complete with felted eyes and woolly eyelashes — now sits at the exhibition on a bed of crocheted parsley and next to a wheelbarrow of knitted fruit and vegetables, alongside a Christmas tree sculpted in metal by Jindivick artist Laurie Collins.

“All the other craft work from the other craft groups is beautiful, fine work, but our work is very different to that.”

In what appears to be a battle of the Christmas dinners in Gippsland, the Gum Leaf Quilters from Churchill have made a festive turkey for their installation, which appears in the Johnston Collection’s kitchen, alongside origami flower balls, quilts, mosaics and scroll sawing projects (a type of woodwork).

The group’s teacher, Jean Baudendistel, made a wall hanging but says it was when the Gum Leaf Quilters worked with adults with physical or mental disabilities to make crafts for the exhibition that some of the best pieces emerged.

“Our members worked with the disability support services for some months and made items such as gingerbread men, paper flowers and pompoms,” Jean says.

“It got them motivated and proved they could accomplish something.”