

Bendigo Weekly Bendigo Women

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ADVERTISING FEATURE

Christmas at Fairhall

is brought to life through the skilled crafts groups and artisans of Bendigo

FAIRHALL is a grand Georgian style house in east Melbourne, home to the late William Robert Johnston's private antique collection. Since 1991, there began a tradition of decorating Fairhall for Christmas.

This year over 60 highly skilled women in Bendigo are involved in the Christmas show. Embroiderers, porcelain painters, quilters, members of the CWA, textile artists, spinners and weavers, as well as a milliner, a sand artist and a sculptor have made interpretations of the collection through their works of art.

The show's title 'Five Golden Rings and Other Glorious Things' is inspired by the Christmas carol – 'Twelve days of Christmas' and relates to Bendigo's gold rush past. It is a collaborative process between the Bendigo artisans and the museum.

"Taking the inspiration from the Christmas decorations from objects in the collection is really a concept initiated by the former director and curator of the gallery, Nina Stanton," explains Robyn Ives, (former) acting director and curator.

"Each of the groups chose a room and selected the objects they wanted to reinterpret. Some of the artisans have chosen to weave a story relating to Mr Johnston's life around their work to give them a focus".

William Robert Johnston's collection began, when, as an eight-year-old boy, he received a gift from



■ MINTON CUP C. 1811: inspired the saucer by the Central Vic Porcelain Artist's Guild. ■ SCULPTURAL CHRISTMAS TREE: Bendigo Spinners, Weavers and Handcraft Group Inc

his grandmother – a small Minton coffee cup, made in 1811, which is still in the collection. The Central Victorian Porcelain Artists Guild adopted this cup as inspiration for the making of a matching saucer.

"The lady who executed the saucer was chosen because she is wonderful at copying fine detail," said Robyn.



FEATURE BY
ANN-MARIE ROBERTS



■ THE YELLOW ROOM: Christmas angels, Bendigo Textile Artists
Photos Olivia Gill

'Five Golden Rings and Other Glorious Things' runs from 3rd November 2008 - 27th February 2009
Bookings can be made by telephone: 03 9416 2515 or go to www.johnstoncollection.org/house_museum_tours

It is in the blue room that the Bendigo artists decided that Mr Johnston would be having breakfast, so they have created art pieces to befit that theme.

"All the china on the table, including the napkin rings have been handpainted and painstakingly gilded. The inspiration for the design is the Baxter plate; the

flowers and colour scheme on that plate have been translated onto the hand painted china."

There are other items within the table setting that have been meticulously recreated by the Bendigo group and represent the type of detailed work you will see throughout the show. Nothing in the home can be an actual food

source so the two boiled eggs, cut in half and ready for Mr Johnston to eat, have been boiled, cleaned out, lacquered, filled with plaster and painted. His glass of orange juice is melted candle wax, the toast is made from painted salt dough, the silk strawberries are individually beaded, slumped glass becomes marmalade and sugar cubes are

simply beauty



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Kelly McCarthy
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"Follow Your Bliss"



Larrie Winzar
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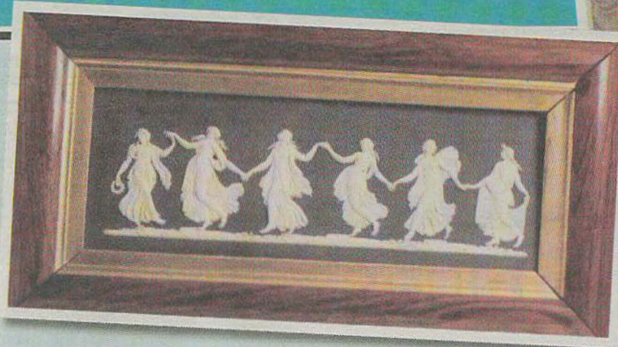
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ADVERTISING FEATURE

Bendigo Women



■ **DANCING HOURS:** Panel 'Dancing Hours', one of a pair, 19th century, Wedgwood, after a design by John Flaxman, Jasperware with mahogany frame, The Johnston Collection



■ **PAINTING:** Portrait of Elizabeth Pelham, 1685 by Mary Beale, oil on canvas, The Johnston Collection
Photos: Mark Chew Pty Ltd



■ **INSPIRED:** Suzie O'Shea's ceramic sculptures

...it has encouraged a great deal of interaction between the groups.

re-imagined with the help of tiny threaded beads.

It is in the French sitting room that Bendigo artist Suzie O'Shea's dancing ceramic frocks mirror the Wedgwood "Dancing Hours" figures in mahogany frame on the wall. She has also wrapped her white and gold ceramic figures in layered folds, replicating the soft white undergarment and lustrous gold fabric worn by a regal looking woman in a magnificent 1683 portrait, painted by Mary Beale. "Each of Suzie's figures have names and they all have a piece of holly on them to represent Christmas," explains Robyn.

Just outside in the hallway is Bendigo Milliner, Anne Kavanagh's hat, which brings together both the Johnston Collection and the Bendigo Gold rush history in the form of a Koolie. She has taken inspiration from a small porcelain figurine of a Chinese man. Anne's predominantly black, gold and red Koolie hat incorporates the surrounding colour scheme of the hallway and the chair on which the hat sits. The rich ruby beaded lilies on the top of the hat are a beautiful embellishment.

Mr Johnston's kitchen provides the inspiration for the CWA artisans. A long time member of the CWA Dorothy Addlem says her group decided to recreate lunch for Mr Johnston. There are many wondrous items recreated here including a sumptuous luncheon. The hares – not rabbits – hanging ready to be prepared for the pot were inspired by the painting, 'Jugged Hare'.

"They were firstly knitted, filled with wool and pulled into shape. Then I started the embroidery; it took me nearly six months to get them the way I wanted them to – they are my own technique so they are something you won't find in books," explains Dorothy.

It is in the green drawing room that the Bendigo Embroiderers Guild bring Christmas to life in the form of a cocktail party.

"We decided that Mrs Johnston would be having an intimate Christmas Eve cocktail party and we've made items to befit what we thought would be a grand affair," said representative Maggie Antram.

It is here that visitors are tempted by a table laden with embroidered hors d'oeuvres and fine fare. A stylized Christmas tree wrapped in dupion silk is based on the form of a Georgian dumb waiter, whilst the hand embroidered, beaded and be-ribboned three dimensional decorations are inspired by different objects including a French commode and a Georgian breakfast bookcase. Jewel colours of luscious pink and turquoise predominate the work, matching Mr Johnston's, Staffordshire dessert service (c1820-6).

At the top of the stairs is Jeanette Bastian of the Bendigo Spinners, Weavers and Handcraft Group, she explains that her group's Christmas tree was inspired by Mr Johnston's Venetian Blackamoor console table and looking glass, which dates to about 1820.

"The theory

■ **GOLDFIELDS CONNECTION:** By Bendigo milliner Anne Kavanagh



is that the top of the console represents Christ ascending into heaven and the little Blackamoor figures at the bottom represent hell. To reflect this, the spinning begins with angora rabbit, which is hairy and light, then as we move down the Christmas tree we have used alpaca, mohair and silk, which is more textured as we head down towards hell. The entire tree is made from hand spun fibres."

The Bendigo Textile Artists chose the yellow drawing room for inspiration. Their stylized Christmas tree has drawn inspiration from various items including a marble obelisk, a glass tear drop hanging from a green chandelier and handmade Egyptian caryatids that echo those on a knife box.

An eight-year-old member of the group has contributed to Mr Johnston's Christmas by recreating the peanuts on the table from polymer clay, whilst the oldest – an 85-year-old made the fabric peaches and chocolates.

The Bendigo women involved in this incredible show expressed a satisfying sense of achievement; it has stretched not only their imaginations but their technical abilities and it has encouraged

a great deal of interaction between the groups.

"The wonderful thing about groups coming together to work on shows such as this, is the sense of community that evolves from it," said Robyn.

Unfortunately, due to the sheer breadth of the work involved, not all the groups work could be represented in this article, needless to say there are many beautiful creations left for you to discover.

The following is a list of the Bendigo crafts people and artists involved. They include the Bendigo Spinners, Weavers and Handcraft Group, Bendigo Textile Artists Inc, Central Victorian Porcelain Artists Guild, Bendigo Branch of the Country Women's Association of Victoria, Bendigo Branch of the Embroiderers Guild, Strathdale (Bendigo) Quilters, artist Suzie O'Shea and Milliner Anne Kavanagh.



■ **GIFTS FOR MR JOHNSTON:** Strathdale (Bendigo) Quilters Inc

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