

Background:

The Mt Albert community art project was just one of the many initiatives to come out of a two-year long Auckland City Council communities programme (facilitated by Roz Johnstone). Throughout 2006 and 2007, Roz's goal was to develop strong links and networks within the Mt Albert community, focussing on the idea of connectedness, a sense of pride and of belonging. Other activities within the programme included the establishment of the Mt Albert 'Get Together' meetings, the development of the Mt Albert community newsletter, the community perspectives meetings (a series of informal lunchtime sessions encouraging inter-cultural exchange), and activities involving local schools and pupils.

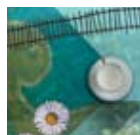
The idea of creating a new permanent, public artwork for Mt Albert was also one of the programme's initiatives and was intended to visually record the sense of community and participation found and nurtured within this suburb.

Towards the end of 2007, a team was put together to guide the art project towards completion. This team included *Special Projects Manager* Cherry Tawhai, *Community Arts Co-ordinator* Clare Carmondy, *Art-station Manager* John Eaden, *Community Services Advisor* Graeme Dykes, and *Manager of the Mt Albert YMCA and Community Centre*, Jill Gibson (with assistance from Nuaa Mamea and Raj Bedi). An Auckland based artist was then recruited to facilitate the creation of the artwork itself. Mt Albert resident artist, Zoë Nash was successful in her application for this role.

Zoë has been working in the fields of art and design for the past 15 years, currently dividing her time between her fine art practice, tertiary teaching and freelance graphic design. Her work continually takes inspiration from her surroundings and the circumstances of her life, thus it seemed relevant that if ever Zoë was to create a community-based art project, it would be for and about Mt Albert.

Community Involvement:

Community members with Mt Albert connections were actively encouraged to participate in the creation of the artwork, and a series of public meetings, events, tours and workshops took place during the first few months of 2008, helping to generate valuable source material for the project. Questionnaires were distributed as an initial starting point and the finished artwork takes its inspiration from and directly responds to ongoing community feedback. Many elements found within the final artwork have been supplied by local people, either in the form of their own artworks and photographs, or through the re-telling of their own personal stories and the sharing of their memories.



Contribution:

Heart-felt appreciation goes to the following Mt Albert connected residents for their involvement in this project:

Mt Albert Art Club:

In particular Colleen Chamberlain (drawings of tuis), Shirley Franich (watercolour painting of cherry tree grove up Mt Albert, panel one), Young Lee (inset watercolour of Alberton, panel two), Helen Miller (knitting of peggy squares, photographs of home interiors/wallpapers, embroideries), and Frances Paine (watercolour painting of Alberton, panel two-faded in background, back of Mt Albert shops panel seven, baby shawl panels three and seven).

Community Centre Children's Art Class, Thursdays Term One 2008: Wendy Baek, Michael Barlow, Chloe Childs, Jessie Cooper, Julie Kyung, Genevieve Ross and art teacher Kusam Fausett. The art class created the background prints of collected plantlife, the paintings of leaves, images of Rocket Park, Metro Soccer Club, the city scene, and koru symbol.

Photographers:

Carol Green, Isobel Innes, Wendy John (Co-ordinator, Oakley Creek Volunteer Group), Louise and Anastasia O'Shea, Ron and David Mackie, Caroline Powley.

And:

Christopher Dempsey and Pauline Anderson (Eden/Albert Community Board), Rendell MacIntosh (Manager of Alberton and Mt Albert Historical Society President), Robin Whitworth (Mt Albert Library), Shaun Perry (Gladstone Primary School), Catherine Goodwin (Ray White Realty), Jo Farnan (Mt Albert Citizens Advice Bureau), Rita Kopp, Hare Paniora (Unitec), Barbara and Russell Hyde (Mt Albert Gym Club), Raewyn Whalley (artist-painting of original family residence at 1034 New North Rd, panel seven), Fandu Patel (Mt Albert fabric shop), Deva Cameron, Mary Newbold, Sheilah Chalken, Wilma van Heiswijk, Kerry Carter, Stephanie Mackie, and the many, many other people who have inadvertently contributed via their personal stories and conversations. Thank you.



Auckland City Council and YMCA working together

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Interpretation:

Using the idea of 'connection' as a theme, the contemporary artwork takes the form of a large scale, digital collage, stretching across the wall in a series of long, thin panels that complement the existing building structures. Each of the seven panels is 2metres by 45cm with a small space in between. The panels are purposely built to replicate the windows around the other side of the building. Windows become important when you consider that the artwork reflects what people feel about Mt Albert. The high-gloss surface of each acrylic panel means that in certain lights, people will literally see their own reflections within the artwork too, allowing them to become a part of it.

The idea of 'connection' has long remained paramount to the project. Zoë believes that people connect through the things that they see, the things that they do, and the things that they choose to get involved in. Thus the artwork references the Mt Albert environment (both the natural and the man-made), local history, culture, social events and activities.

Because this artwork is cause for celebration, many of the elements appear to be 'dancing' their way across the design. There is a sense of fun, jubilation and playfulness shown through such things as the crowns and the golden triangles (a local name for the more affluent parts of Mt Albert).

The crowns refer back to Mt Albert's name. Mt Albert was named in honour of Queen Victoria's husband, Albert, after their marriage in 1840. The suburb has strong links back to Britain and its monarchy through its early settler families (the Kerr Taylors, the Woodwards, Kemps, Shaws, Gribbles, Garlicks, Sadgroves and Allens). However, in pre-European times, Mt Albert, originally named Te Puke o Ruarangi, was more commonly known as Owairaka, the place of Wairaka. According to one version of local Maori history, it was Wairaka's matrimonial troubles that first brought her people to New Zealand. The words 'Na te po a Wairaka i raru ai' refer to Wairaka's ongoing domestic problems and literally translate as "twas by night that Wairaka took a false step". This false step led her to found a new community on the slopes of what we now know as Mt Albert. Unfortunately, due to many tribal wars and battles, by the early 19th century there were very few Maori left in this area.

In the centre panel sits an image of the mountain in its original state, long before the top part of its cone was removed. Quarrying for scoria by the railways played a huge part in changing the face of the mountain and to this day, railway lines cut their way across and through Mt Albert's leafy suburbs, the traversing of them a barely-noticed daily occurrence for residents. The railway tracks and white chalk line (representing a flatter, more contemporary version of the mountain) help to visually connect the panels.



Although there is much crossover and inter-weaving of ideas, stories and connections, the work is made up depicting the following general themes:

History:

References to Mt Albert's colonial past are made visible through such things as; original Victorian wallpaper patterns (from Alberton, Ferndale and the Miller residence), historic buildings (Alberton, Ferndale, the James/Stone house and Hebron College), gables, bungalows, pioneer and early farming references (the cows, the stone walls, machinery), the crown, Unitec (originally Carrington/Oakley Hospital), the DSIR building, old clothing, lace, embroideries and other items showing early domesticity.

Culture:

Mt Albert today is a multi-cultural community with many recent immigrants and new, New Zealanders. A sense of the many cultures now living here is indicated through the use of patterned fabrics and materials. Some of these directly reference Pacific-inspired patterns and tapa cloth, others recall Indian punjabi embroidery, Chinese and Japanese brocades, and middle Eastern decoration. Maori iconography is also visible within the work in the form of the koru symbol, flax and weaving motifs. We also see Chinese New Year lanterns, and the lucky colour red.

Environment:

Mt Albert is known and loved for its many parks and wide, green spaces which boast a vast array of flora and fauna. An aerial photograph of Mt Albert today sits halfway down the centre panel, showing just how green this suburb is. We also see ferns, flax, both native and imported trees (cabbage trees, palm trees, pine cones, gums, cherry trees, sycamores), dried grasses, autumn leaves, the waterfall on Oakley Creek, birds' nests, ducks, the puriri moth, tuis, kingfishers, cows on Mt Albert's slopes, daisies, water lillies, spider webs, a wasps' nest, and the mountain itself. Man-made structures are referenced through the trig at the top of the mountain, iconic Mt Albert bungalows, a child's depiction of the city view, Rocket Park, traffic lights, railway signs and crossings, architecture and industry.

Reference material:

Scott, Dick. (2006). *In Old Mt Albert*. Southern Cross Books



General Activity:

It was impossible to include every single activity found within Mt Albert's abundance. However, general sporting activity, success and achievement has been depicted through the image of medals on panel six. The archery targets are a prominent feature when walking on the mountain and so an image of this sits next to the trig in panel three. A child's drawing of the Metro Soccer Club (Phyllis Reserve) hides on panel two. The picture of the clown on a unicycle in panel six was supplied by the Mt Albert Gym Club and was taken in the early 1970s at the annual Farmers' Santa Parade. This image was chosen from many supplied because it ties in well with ideas of celebration and joy.

Many of the older women of the suburb fondly recall their fund-raising efforts to help build such things as the new War Memorial Hall on New North Road. Selling home-made jam and knitting peggy squares to make blankets were common activities for women of the post-war generation, thus you see images of these within the work. Recognition of Mt Albert's contributions to past wars have been acknowledged in the form of the memorial poppy (originally created by the children of Gladstone Primary School).

Other local schools are represented through swatches showing their school colours on panel four (Mt Albert Grammar School, Marist Primary School and Marist College, Gladstone Primary School, Owairaka Primary School, Mt Albert Primary School and Hebron College).

Religious belief is shown through the photographs of all local churches within the area and the beautiful, stained glass windows of St Lukes. Obviously the schools and churches also have strong historical and cultural links as well.

The red tree at the bottom of panel four connects the work back to its immediate environment, and depicts Caroline Rothwell's sculpture that sits in the green fields beyond the Community Centre/YMCA buildings.

