



Cultural curmudgeon

BY HAMISH KEITH

Keep on truckin'

Taking art to the country's schoolchildren.

There are times when even a curmudgeon wants to toss his hat in the air and shout "Whoopie!" The brief visit of Fiona Campbell's *Real Art Roadshow* to Auckland's Viaduct harbour early this month was one of them. What a generous and far-sighted initiative this is. Two vast trucks – one silver and one black – open out into 64sq m galleries, each showing about 65 works of New Zealand art. They drive around the country's schools with the laudable plan of letting children see real art at first hand. Since September 2006, the trucks have visited 89 schools and by this April will have been to another 35 high schools and colleges.

If that were not marvellous enough, this is an entirely personal gesture – financed by Campbell's Real Art Trust with not a bureaucrat or committee in sight. Not that the cultural bureaucracy turned her down, but she knew the frustrating heartbreak that would go with the asking. Condemned untested, of course, but who could doubt the reams of futile papers and the cultural meddling that would have gone on if such a daring and beautifully simple request had crossed the desks of the panjandrum of the Education and Culture and Heritage Ministries and Creative New Zealand.

And perish the thought that Te Papa or any other major art gallery could have thought so far outside their own narrow squares. Think of the huffing and puffing that would have settled on their conservation and registration departments. What an alarming notion that you could take the risk of putting real art in beautifully designed and air-conditioned trucks and take it to kids! But this is what Campbell and her two fellow curators, Rob McLeod and Gerald Barnett, have done with fine works of art bought for the purpose.

Best of all, it is a very catholic and eclectic collection, pushing no curatorial barrow or hammering any particular theme. These are mainly just lovely things beautifully made by creative hands and eyes and surely that is the very first thing we would want our children to



The Real Art Roadshow on the move.

know about art. This is very much a rich extension of what Muka Gallery has been doing with its youth prints for the past 20 years, and the *Real Art Roadshow* certainly deserves to be around for at least as long – refreshing its collection as it goes.

The roadshow was inspired by the hundreds of school visits that New Zealand Symphony Orchestra percussionist Gary Brain made 20 years ago. Campbell was moved by one he made to her school. There is a lesson in that encounter we should ponder. Sadly, an accident obliged Brain to cut short his career of making wonderful noise, and he is now a conductor based in Paris causing wonderful noises to be made by whole orchestras. He could rightly see this initiative in another art as a great monument to his enthusiasm, and so should we. ■