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arts & entertainment

Life's rich tapestry

Tapestry has burst free of its fusty old seams, writes
ALISON BARCLAY

KATE Derum has a loom with a view, and the outlook is spectacular.

From one upstairs window are skyscrapers; from the other, peaceful verdant parklands.

But what dominates Derum's home studio is the chunky builder's scaffold she bought at "some male-oriented place" in Cheltenham.

She scrambles all over it, pressing into place delicate little stitches in the richest wools.

Footy ovals, street signs, mysterious fires and Derum's dog, Koutis, and his mates take shape on huge warps that can take up to four months to cover.

From the the colonial cottages and cabbage roses of needlepoint kits, tapestry has burst free of its fusty old seams.

"Even now when people think of experimenting with tapestry they think more in terms of the materials than the content," says Derum, who picked up her first bodkin only 13 years ago after a long career as a printmaker.

"But I think there are heaps of possibilities for interesting content in tapestries."

And she can prove it — twice. Monash University, where Derum

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is a lecturer in the Faculty of Art and Design, is staging an astonishing look back at work created in its Tapestry Studio, which has its 10th birthday this year.

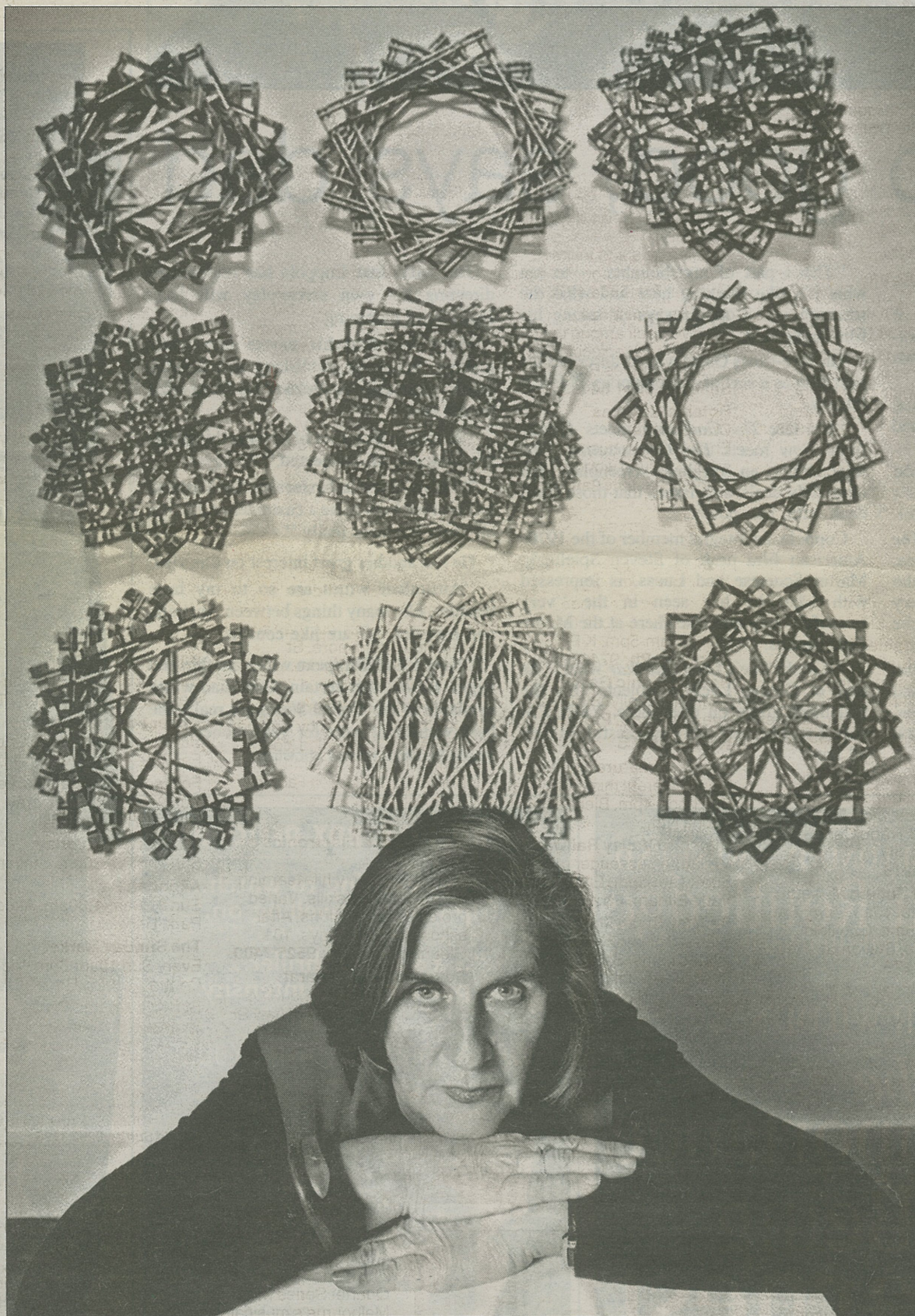
Greeting visitors at the door of *Decade* are two tapestry sculptures by Emma Sulzer that have all the fine, upstanding features of a best-seller from Club X.

There is a woven puppet tent and a table for eight made entirely from knitting. In *Take A Letter, Miss N* Ann Newdigate makes a tapestry from Pitman's shorthand, which she suspects of being a secret language among women.

Mandy Gunn's *City Circle 2000* comprises spindly snowflake shapes woven from neatly segmented Met tickets.

There is a cabbage rose, but it's exploded across two walls in a glowing mosaic of woolly tiles.

Derum, who is the Tapestry Studio's co-ordinator and the show's curator, is represented by two of her



Just the ticket: Decade curator Kate Derum with a Mandy Gunn work *City Circle*. Picture: PAUL TREZISE

Prayer Rugs for the Antipodes, inspired by rugs made by Middle Eastern nomads and pilgrims.

And across town, in Collins St's Gallery 101, are her four big new tapestries collectively called *Day Return*.

"People come in and say: 'Wow, I didn't know you could do that with tapestry,'" she says.

"In the tapestries at 101 I have a lot of things from technology and the mechanical world — an oil rig and telegraph poles.

"I'm just interested in reflecting

the world I'm in, and those things are in it. And we are all pretty interested and concerned about the huge increase and change in technology and the man-made world.

"It's in the same way a nomadic weaver in the Middle East looks at the world around her and weaves what is there. That is in one simple sense what I'm doing."

When the Tapestry Studio opened in 1990 Derum was quick through the doors to do a graduate diploma in this nimble-fingered art. She has since earned a Master's degree.

Monash stitchers can follow the thread all the way to a PhD.

Many graduates now work for the Victorian Tapestry Workshop, which helped set up the studio and has made Melbourne a world hub for fine-art weavings.

"Students do drawing, art history, electives in a whole lot of other things, so tapestry has been given the kind of seriousness that the full art training offers," Derum says.

Decade, Faculty Gallery, Art and Design Building, Monash Caulfield campus until September 2. *Day Return*, Gallery 101, Collins St, City until August 31.

We can
all hum
this tune

REVIEW

COMEDY

2 Pianos 4 Hands

Directors: Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt

Where and when: The Comedy Theatre; four-week season

Reviewer: Xenia Hanusiak

THE piano seems to be the instrument with which we're all familiar, whether through lessons as children or simply hearing it in the background in a cocktail bar.

Some may recall terrifying teachers, enforced practice sessions and tears. For others, piano lessons may have been a joy.

2 Pianos 4 Hands contains elements to which everyone can relate.

Written by two pianists, the show is a biography — from the first lesson to competitions, auditions, concert recitals and the piano bar.

Writers Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt have distilled their personal accounts into a series of mini-skits which lift the lid of the piano and uncover its hilarious side.

The show is an unpretentious, fluffy romp that will delight — just two men, Edward Simpson and Jonathan Gavin, and their pianos.

They make a splendid team who, in true madcap tradition, play a host of characters during the 90-minute show, from reluctant student to overbearing parent, enthusiastic teacher of the year, ogre and aspiring soloist.

All this, plus playing excerpts from *The Mephisto Waltz*, Bach's D minor Concerto and, of course, the evergreen *Heart and Soul*.

If you're expecting a concert recital or psychoanalysis of performance, this show is not for you.

This is plain fun. The trick of this show is the writers have found the right level of shared experience without pandering to cliché.

It's a must-see for every piano teacher and student — not a prerequisite, but the mirror image is frighteningly real.