

# nicola cerini whimsical textiles

LAURA JOCIC EXPLORES A BOLD NEW RANGE OF FABRIC DESIGN

The playful use of everyday objects is the focus for Nicola Cerini's textile designs shown at Craft Victoria. Presented as a ten day Product Launch, Cerini's first range of furnishing fabrics were hung as curtains which could be drawn across the space, inviting the viewer to engage with the fabrics much as they would in a domestic interior. In conjunction with the hung pieces, dining and deck chairs, ottomans and cushions covered in the fabrics were also displayed as part of the range. This method of exhibiting the textiles served the dual purpose of the exhibition; to present the designs as both the work of a craftsperson and as a commercial venture.

Product launches at the Craft Victoria Gallery were introduced in 1993 to enable craftspeople to showcase new products and to present new business activities. A launch runs for a shorter period than an exhibition. Using the gallery space as a showroom has enabled Cerini to gain wider exposure for her work and present a range that can be exhibited to its most advantageous.

Cerini's current work is the result of her considered move to address new market possibilities. The product launch was the culmination of a two year business plan Cerini developed through the Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) funded New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) to present her first range of printed textiles under the label Nicola Cerini Australia. The range consists of four designs in two colourways each, printed on cotton and hemp, a material Cerini favours for its environmental and aesthetic qualities.

The designs have been inspired by the familiar and everyday objects that inhabit Cerini's studio and are aptly titled *Fruit Bowl*, *Pear*, *Gingham Pear* and *Handbag*. They move across the surface of the textured hemp as if in orbit, the undersized pear suspended on the rim of the fruit bowl and checked handbags jostling on a gridded background. Colours with the names of 'mushy pea green', 'caramel' and 'brick red' further evoke the domestic interior. The designs are linked through the subtle use of the pear and gingham motifs and

have been consciously created to recall a 1950s sense of design, both through the choice of imagery and fabrics.

Cerini's current textiles are a departure from her previous work which involved the handpainting, printing, cutting and reassembling of small pieces of fabrics to form a 'sampler of images'. These experimental pieces explore the variation of textures through the juxtaposition of fabrics such as silk and hemp. The transition from a labour intensive method of working to one where Cerini decided to hand over the work to a commercial printer, has allowed her to concentrate on the design aspect and also to produce larger quantities to meet orders. This major shift in the direction of her work grew out of a series of carefully planned professional development experiences overseas in the mid 1990s.

In 1993 Cerini spent nine months working at the Banff Centre for the Arts (in Canada) as assistant to the coordinator of the arts studio. The Centre runs three residencies a year for forty invited artists who work around a theme and across a number of media. Cerini was involved in printing the drawings created by a group of Inuit women who were exploring the theme of 'community' and found the cross-fertilisation of ideas at these residencies a dynamic experience.

While working at the Banff Centre for the Arts Cerini became aware of The Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia, an innovative design studio which invites artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Dale Chihuly and Roy Lichtenstein to experiment in the area of textiles. Cerini was able to incorporate a three month apprenticeship as part of her business plan and it was here that she sharpened her production and technical skills while working alongside master printers who were meticulous in preparing and printing the works of visiting artists. It could take as long as three days to set up for one print run. During this time Cerini produced a three-colour screen printed design titled *Journal Block*, recently acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria.

The pathway to Cerini's current work thus moves from the experiences of the North American community studios to the inspiration derived from the private interior of her Melbourne studio. The designs possess both a sense of whimsy and nostalgia and exhibit a strong individuality.

#### endnotes

Nicola Cerini's product launch was at Craft Victoria, Melbourne, 23 April-3 May 1997.

Established in 1995, Nicola Cerini Australia specialises in the design and production of original printed fabric for interiors including product applications.

Laura Jovic works as a Research Assistant at the Textile Resource Collection, RMIT and is writing a MA thesis at Melbourne University on museums and the impact of computer technologies.



top: Nicola Cerini, *Fruit Bowl* (brick red), 1997. 60 x 80cm.

below: Nicola Cerini, *Pear* (blue), 1997. 60 x 80cm.

opposite page: Nicola Cerini, *Handbag Deck Chair*, 1997.