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Creativity defines her life

By PAUL BROOKS

The living space in Yoka van Dyk's Wanganui home is minimal. Her work space, watched over by an Antoon van Dyck self portrait, is where her heart is, and it takes up a good portion of her house.

Dutch-born Yoka is a writer, poet, multi-media artist, photographer, calligrapher, engraver, print maker and book binder. Beneath Antoon's gaze, washed in the cool afternoon light, is an etching press, a bookbinding press, a letter or proofing press — all hand-operated — and volumes of completed work.

Her "inking up table" is in constant use, a testament to years of work and ever-developing skills.

A bookshelf is filled with a range of her bookbinding examples in different styles and sizes, many well outside this reporter's well-defined square.

I learned words like metatint, saw a framed example and then the copper plate from which the image — a feather — sprang.

Yoka explained the process that took the work from lines in metal to an intricate picture on the wall. In taking me through the procedure, I was aware of the disciplines, artistic and artisan, which combined to create this exquisite work. She talked me through the way the metal is worked with scrapers and burnishers to create the stamp for different tones.

"You're literally working from the dark back to the light," she says.

"I love language. That's part of why I love making books and working with text and images. They complement each other beautifully."

It's a tactile place, her work area. Finely etched lines amid



TACTILE: Yoka van Dyk's work combines her multiple talents and skills.

PICTURE: PAUL BROOKS

deeper, wider grooves and metal roughened to produce tonal variations, then touch gives way to sight and the work is there to see. Many of her prints are tiny, but she likes working at that scale.

"It makes you get closer and zoom into things. You have to pay attention to see it and take in the experience.

"It's for me to give attention to things that are easily overlooked, or just singling out one small image and then giving it a particular title, and with a title you can give poetic content to the image."

Yoka pointed to a small print

of two kowhai flowers which she has called *A few blossoms worth of warmth*. The image, therefore, with a title, is symbolic of spring, the warming of the seasons and the promise of colours to come.

"It's not just about what you see," she says.

Yoka, has the ability to use all her skills to create a unique finished work, a product combining all aspects of her creativity and craftsmanship.

She loves Japanese aesthetics — "the elegance of simplicity" — and writes haiku verse, much of which she has printed in her handmade books.

And yet, the simplicity is

offset by the clutter of her work space.

"I like things around me that I've made, that say that's me, that's part of me. I love living in my space like that."

She showed me a book of her haiku and, to my surprise, what looked like a conventional book opened out in concertina fashion.

"It's an early Japanese book," she says.

"It's the second stage after the scroll."

She has made many books that show the evolution of bookbinding, as well as some interesting in their complexity. "Origami concertina" is a

It's my passion . . . it's just what I do. I wouldn't be me if I couldn't do this.

particular book structure that springs to mind. There's a book made of silk, in which the "pages" are sewn together like peggy squares.

Much of her work combining verse and art gives a three-dimensional feel to the experience.

Not one to follow "accepted" usages and styles, Yoka gets creative with conventional forms, finding new ways to present text and images, shifting artistic boundaries constantly. All of which requires complex decisions before even preparing to begin the work.

"You never get bored with it," she says, "There's always more to learn, more to explore."

She showed me where she had combined New Zealand landscapes and Dutch cityscapes with verse in Carolingian-inspired calligraphy to create an edition of 50 books for friends in Holland. The effect is stunning.

"It's my passion . . . it's just what I do. I wouldn't be me if I couldn't do this," she says.

One book she showed me folds out into a three-dimensional "exhibition space", displaying marbled-paper kimono in many colours, each bearing an original descriptive name. Of course, she does her own marbling.

Yoka's artistic output is prodigious and much of her work illustrates a busy sense of humour.

Born and raised in Holland, she came out to New Zealand in 1987, and, apart from an 18-month return to her homeland in 1994, has been here ever since.

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