

Bombs away

Exhibition offers chance for all to understand

by Jaimee Astle

A PROVOCATIVE art exhibition that uncovers the smokescreens of the pro-nuclear nations and challenges viewers to consider New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance opened at The Physics Room in Christchurch last week, some 15 years after our nuclear-free status was declared.

Titled *Bombs Away*, the exhibition by five New Zealand artists combines contemporary art with pro-nuclear film footage.

Visual artists Tony de Lautour Richard Reddaway and Fiona Jack, dancer Megan Adams and writer Jo Randerson, explore the pro-nuclear argument from the perspective of the five original nuclear nations: the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom through painting, sculptural installations, photographs and video, says curator Sophie Jerram.

"Using official government atomic testing films as a starting point, the artists take on the role of nuclear propagandist in order that we might learn more about New Zealand's position as a nuclear-free country," says Jerram.

Jerram obtained the films from the Centre for Land Use Information in Los Angeles to provide insight into the mindset of the nuclear nations.

She says younger generations do not perceive the nuclear threat with the same fear as past generations, and would be pushed to explain the reasoning behind the anti-nuclear stance. "I grew up accepting New Zealand's anti-nuclear ideology, without understanding its basis. *Bombs Away* is an attempt to revisit the anti-nuclear reasoning."

The perception of the danger of nuclear war has shifted since the 1980s, she says. "The nuclear threat is perceived to have been diverted since the Cold War, when it has in fact increased, as an increasing number of countries have developed or have access to, nuclear arms, as we are seeing in the India-Pakistan conflict."

Bombs Away is funded by the Peace and Disarmament Trust, set up with the funds provided by the French government after the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior*, and is supported by the Centre for Land Use Interpretation, the Stealth Foundation and the Christchurch Peace Foundation.

Foundation members Veronica Meduna, Kate Dewes and Commander Robert Green will hold a public forum to discuss New Zealand's nuclear ideology at The Physics Room on Thursday.

Dewes, South Island regional Peace Foundation co-ordinator for 20 years, says the exhibition is an exciting vehicle for education. "It will help people to understand why we have such a strong allergy to nuclear weapons, especially those not born at the time of disarmament."

She says some Christchurch veterans will have suffered the health and generational effects of nuclear weapons, and this is a digestible way to revive the issue.

Partner and former nuclear weapon operator turned peace campaigner Robert Green, says the enduring bedrock of anti-nuclear opinion is in need of fresh focus, particularly with the current conflict in India and Pakistan. Those with nuclear-power status are suppressing the dangers of nuclear weapons, he says.

The exhibition coincides with the visit of the mayor of Nagasaki last month and the Hiroshima A-bomb exhibition at the Canterbury Museum, which marked the 20th anniversary of Christchurch's becoming New Zealand's first nuclear-free city," Green says.

Moves to officially declare Christchurch a "peace city" are now under consideration.

The public forum will take place at 7.30pm June 20, while the Bombs Away exhibition runs at The Physics Room, at 209 Tuam Street until July 6. Opening hours are Tuesday to Friday 10am-5pm, Saturday 10am-3pm.



FLUROO MELTDOWN: Artist Richard Reddaway with his wax creations titled "no one believes they (themselves) are evil", as part of the *Bombs Away* exhibition at The Physics Room.
Photo: Mette Kristiansen