

Art of bush craft skills

Local artist Kirstie Rea felt a little worried about her current exhibition, which opened at Craft ACT on Thursday night.

The Pialligo-based glass artist was worried how her work was going to be received.

"There's no object - I'm not using glass," she said, looking at lines of wool thread recreating the space beneath a bush hut veranda in her studio space.

The *Gudgenby traces* exhibition, which she shares with textile artist Paull McKee, is the end result of her residency at the Gudgenby Ready-Cut cottage in Namadgi National Park. This was a joint Parks and Craft ACT project which ran from February to May last year. Rea and McKee each spent five weeks living in the old 20s-built, pre-fab cottage which was restored by the Kosciuszko Huts Association in 2005.

Rea's three wool-thread works - describing structures of or near the hut, and a vista of the Brindabellas - show the influence of North American artist Fred Sandback, who also used thread as a sculptural material. Rea's woollen lines suggest the volume of the building or the mountains in the distance, but also captures the sense of vacancy and lost histories - both settler and Aboriginal - that the valley contains.

Rea is clearly outside her comfort zone and it is apparent the landscape virtually made her let go of what she did best.

"I felt I had to answer to the complexities of this place, the dingoes and the kangaroos. I was very conscious of being watched for hours by all these creatures, as I sat watching them."

Gudgenby traces

At Craft ACT until June 12.

Reviewer: **Zsuzsi Soboslay**

that their histories can be felt and experienced. Whereas even a year ago, he was talking about "loss" and "absence", he now sees the blankets as marks of resilience, continuity, generosity. "Someone has saved these scraps; someone else has cared enough to salvage them and hand them on to me." Continuing the tradition of the early 20th century swagman's "make-do" culture, he now sees the history of the waggas (self-sewn blankets, so named after the flour sacks from Wagga Wagga mill used as backing as a culture of abundance - "We have what we need.")

This carries a lovely echo of what I hear in conversation with head park ranger Bernard Morris: "I myself am never alone in the bush, I am never lost, I am safe. There is always company."

The Gudgenby cottage, well set up with three bedrooms, kitchens and combustion fire, is not an artist's studio. For the artists, it was virtually a walk-in, walk-out situation, demanding minimal technical interface.

Both artists engaged with an influx of visitors on open days, which allowed members of the general public to come in, chat to, and see an artist at work. For the rest of the time, the experience was one of immersion - a project with a sense of slow build.

In the time since the residencies, the project won the NSW/ACT Landcare award, for both bringing in a new audience to the