



Art in a new form

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Aboriginal artists are making inspired carpets, Lisa Blundell reports.

CARPETS and rugs come in all shapes, sizes and colours and there isn't a room that can't get a lift from a floor covering.

They range from the humblest little toe-warmers to grand and glorious works of art and cultural heirlooms.

Melbourne rug and carpet maker Tsar is showcasing indigenous art in woven form at an exhibition called **TSART**. The company commissioned well-known Aboriginal artists and transformed the artwork into floor rugs. Tsar owner David Sharpley says the idea came to him when the Melbourne Museum asked the company to donate a rug based on an Aboriginal design for its indigenous art section.

Many artists were asked to submit paintings, and Vicki Couzens won the honour of having her piece represented as a rug at the gallery's entrance.

Mr Sharpley felt the other artists also needed a fair go.

"The other paintings that had been submitted were all beautiful and I really enjoyed the process so I decided to turn all the entrants' paintings into rugs for the exhibition," he says. The feedback was very positive and many of the rugs sold that evening.

Ms Couzens, a Kirrae Wurrung clan artist for more than 10 years, says the exhibition is an opportunity for herself and her culture to be recognised and to have the distinctive style of Victorian indigenous artists acknowledged.

"Our style incorporates a lot of line work, as opposed to the dot paintings of central Australia and the X-ray bark work from Arnhem Land," she says.

Other artists include Gayle Maddigan, an established artist from the Wimmera district who has had work represented in some significant national collections; Lee Darroch, a Yorta Yorta artist working for the East Gippsland Aboriginal Arts Corporation; Treahna Hamm, an award-winning Yorta Yorta artist; and Kirrae Wurrung artist Jarrah Bundle.

Ms Couzens is interested in the healing benefits of arts practice and often volunteers at community groups, helping others to unleash their creativity.

"It's very healing if people can tap into the creativity within themselves," she says. "When you teach people to paint when they say they can't, they reckon they get a really good feeling."

Mr Sharpley says the artists worked closely with the Tsar design team.

"They came to our head office with their paintings on canvas and on art paper and helped us choose the appropriate wool tufts and colours to use to replicate their pieces," he says.

The designs were then translated into technical drawings and produced at the factory on a scale of two metres by three metres.

Each of the five artists was commissioned to create one piece, and only five reproductions of each rug are available.

The price is \$8500, and 60 per cent of the profit goes directly to the artists.

"**TSART** will be an annual event, in future, featuring the work of other leading local artists," Mr Sharpley says.

"Because of my strong interest in Aboriginal art, I particularly wanted the first exhibition to feature indigenous designs."

Exhibitions

Tsar Design. 3 Wellington Street, St Kilda. Phone: 9525 0488. Until Friday.

1349 High Street, Malvern. Phone: 9822 4644. Until May 31.