

# THE SUTER ART GALLERY

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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**29 April 2009**

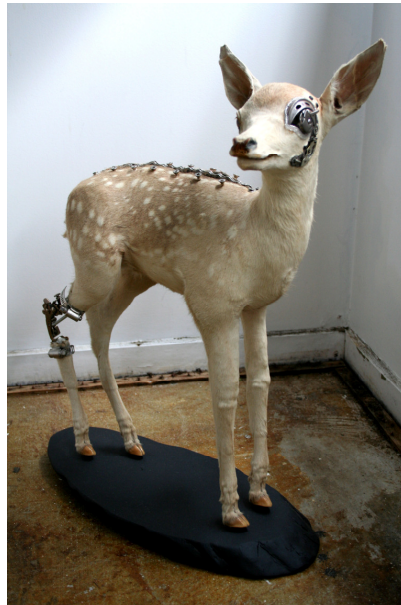
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**START**

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## **Creature Discomforts: Decorating with Death**

Exhibition Dates: 2 May – 21 June 2009



*Creature Discomforts: Decorating with Death* is an exhibition that compares the current use of taxidermy in contemporary art with past fashions for

taxidermy in the decorative arts. It opens at The Suter Art Gallery, Nelson, on Saturday 2 May 2009.

Taxidermy is currently an international phenomenon that is reflected in recent New Zealand art practice. This trend includes art work that links with the practice of preserving animals for educational, entertainment or decorative purposes. However this new taxidermy related art is quite different from past fashions for taxidermy in that it takes a critical look at this tradition. In this respect, contemporary artists are reflecting, and stimulating, a larger debate within society about the ongoing relevance and purpose of taxidermy.

With ethical and environmental questions in mind, *Creature Discomforts* offsets contemporary art works with historic artefacts to compare the changing attitudes towards using animals as a form of decoration. It features art works in a range of media alongside historic artefacts from public and private collections. Some of the intriguing, but to modern eyes, gruesome historic items include an armadillo sewing basket, an albatross foot purse, an elephant foot stool and peacock body turban.

Curator, Anna-Marie White says: “one of the reasons that taxidermy fell out of fashion in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was due to the belief that television and photography could teach us about the natural world in a more humane manner than taxidermy. One of my interests in developing this exhibition was to make a direct comparison between the image and ‘thing’ to challenge this assumption and our general antipathy in an image saturated world”.

Director, Julie Catchpole says: “it has been fascinating during installation to watch the reaction of vegetarian staff members and later, casual onlookers and education classes. The vegetarians are not really coping with the splayed polar bear rug and they haven’t even seen the worst of it yet! The children however, ask the most wonderful questions. They want to know where the polar bear came from and who ‘murdered’ it – the really hard questions that cut straight to the core themes of the exhibition”.

The following event is associated with this exhibition:

**Floortalk** Wednesday 6 May 12.10 pm

Curator Anna-Marie White discusses the 'ins' and 'outs' of the exhibition

Exhibition supported by Savage and Savage Chartered Accountants

**Images:** (left): **Albatross foot purse (pre-1900s)**. Collection of Te Manawa, Palmerston North; (right): Lisa Black, *Fixed Fawn*. Recycled taxidermy, mixed media. Courtesy of the artist, Auckland

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**ENDS**

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