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Ghoulish delights in exhibition

By SALLY KIDSON - Nelson
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MARION VAN DIJK/The Nelson Mail

GHOULISH: Exhibition curator Anna-Marie White says taxidermy was currently "an international phenomenon" in contemporary art.

From intense fascination to outright repulsion, the art of taxidermy usually evokes a range of emotions, and a new exhibition at Nelson's Suter Art Gallery exploring past and current trends of the sometimes ghoulish art is likely to do the same.

Called *Creature Discomforts: Decorating with Death*, the exhibition opened today as part of the gallery's annual winter showcase.

Curator Anna-Marie White said taxidermy was currently "an international phenomenon" in contemporary art and the exhibition, which had been put together by the Suter, explored society's changing attitudes towards the art.

Taxidermy had changed from being a fashion statement in Victorian times to a symbol of environmental concern. During the 1950s, museums had even destroyed taxidermied collections. She had read that one got rid of 5000 stuffed humming birds as they were no longer considered socially acceptable.

Ms White said although the exhibition had only just opened to the public, one of its biggest exhibits, a polar bear, was already proving a hit with school children visiting the Suter who had seen it through the door.

Ms White said children were fascinated and had asked a number of questions including whether the bear had been shot, who had murdered it, where had it been murdered and did it have a bullet hole in it.

"There's already an urban myth at St Joseph's that there's a polar bear down here."

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/nelson-mail/2380084/Ghoulish-delights-in-exhibition/>

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Other exhibits included a stool made from an elephant foot, an armadillo sewing bag, a turban made from a peacock, a white crocodile bag and a purse made from an albatross foot.

Ms White said she had been working on the exhibition since last October and had sourced the exhibits from both public and private collections around the country.

She said even the vegetarians who worked at the Suter had got something out of the exhibition.

"They can see it's not all gory. These things are quite beautiful and really intriguing."

Creature Discomforts is at the Suter until June 21.