

MY SPACE

Dale Copeland

Taranaki artist Dale Copeland's studio is a jam-packed jumble of junk. It's so messy, women around the world show photos of it to their husbands and say, "See, I'm not the worst - look at that!" Copeland is somewhat of a jumble herself. A nuclear physicist at 21 (a career she decided wasn't for her), she'll sit her fourth dan black belt in taekwondo next year at the age of 67.

Her work has been shown in 12 countries, but the exhibitions she's most proud of are those that included other Taranaki artists, especially a three-week stint at New York's Lincoln Centre. And while her Punihō studio might look chaotic, picking through the pieces and assembling them is part of her creative process.

"I may need something just this size, just this colour, just this meaning," says Copeland. "They have their own essence, their own history. By themselves, that's all they are. But put them with something else and they interplay, they tell stories, and that excites me."

As does the internet. That's not only where she sells most of her work but where opportunities "flutter by and all you can do is grab their tail feathers and hang on like hell and make it happen".

The problem, she admits, is finding an empty space among the stuffed crocodiles, broken clocks, various doll parts, human and bird skeletons, porcelain knick-knacks, small wooden boxes and who knows what.

"Sometimes the only surface I have to work on is the top of this tiny little vice. But I know what I've got here - it may be at the bottom of a pile, but I know which pile. Besides, time spent clearing up is time not making."

CHRIS SAMARA

