



# Conference 2022 | Stitch-a-Plenty

Hosted by Tauranga Embroiderers' Guild Inc

## The long legacy behind Tauranga's logo

The logo chosen for the ANZEG Biennial Conference, to be held in Tauranga in 2022, is a painting titled 'Series Connection 88 – Trans Harbour 1', painted by the late Tauranga artist, Arthur Dagley (1919-1998) to commemorate the opening of the Harbour Bridge joining Tauranga and Mt Maunganui on March 13, 1988.

Perhaps best described as the grandfather of western art in Tauranga, Dagley's painting is indicative of the 80s and is a sound example of his repertoire. The port and shipping were constant subjects for Dagley; he watched the port grow over the decades. As the port evolved so too did Dagley's approach to it with some interpretations being close to abstraction.

Originally, Dagley worked as a signwriter. In 1968 he took the bold step and became a full-time artist. He had his own studio/gallery space on Devonport Road – right in the centre of town – and later at his home in Brookfield. For inspiration, Dagley attended summer schools over the years, taught by eminent artists, including Dame Louise Henderson and Colin McCahon.

Dagley was a prolific artist and was very encouraging of emerging artists. He hosted school groups to his studio to view his paintings and sculpture, and talked about New Zealand art in the days before a public art gallery opened in late 2007 – a vision he didn't get to see in his lifetime. In short, Dagley championed art in Tauranga and therefore it was fitting that the first major exhibition shown at the Tauranga Art Gallery, just after its opening was Mission Impossible: the Art of Arthur Dagley.

'Series Connection 88 – Trans Harbour 1' depicts and represents the joining of two communities. The sweep of the newly built harbour bridge is a stylised curve; each of the posts supporting the bridge carry the embossed names of those involved in its construction. Dagley used a combination of acrylic paint and (ironically) marine filler to build up the surface. Mauao/Mt Maunganui is slightly cut off to focus our attention on the bridge and what it represented. In this work the curve is more than a form, it is a strong compositional device, and a shape that he would manipulate and revisit in other works.

The painting has several sculptural components. For instance, the embryo shape in the right hand corner is

built up and textured. The embryo shape is significant and can be considered as a beginning point – a new period in the history of the Bay of Plenty. It also represents a very significant and strategically specific location, that of the land at the tip of the Te Papa peninsula; this location was the home to the Redoubt dating from the New Zealand Land Wars, the Mission Cemetery, and The Elms Mission Station. The mission house has a commanding view beyond its manicured front lawn and across to the Harbour's entrance.

Dagley considered closely the composition of 'Series Connection 88 – Trans Harbour 1'; with a limited palette he reduced and simplified complex shapes. The only exception, to provide a contrast, is the shimmering reflections and mirage of the buildings and yachts at anchor at Pilot Bay, in the background. The strength of the forms stays with the viewer because of its powerful simplicity.

Dagley also wants us to visually consider the human presence on the land, that of the concrete bridge structure that changed the social, economic, and geography of the region by literally bringing several communities together.

Many visitors to Tauranga or Mt Maunganui will enter via the Harbour Bridge. When Dagley painted the new human made structure, it represented change and progress.

It seems fitting that Dagley and his 'Series Connection 88 – Trans Harbour 1' is the logo for the upcoming conference as it embodies the nuances of the sharing of ideas through art and conversation, and exhibiting as a group.

Dagley acknowledged that being an artist in the provinces could be isolating and that the sharing of ideas through meeting like-minded people, both in Tauranga and beyond, was essential to being creative. Using Dagley's work as a logo for a national conference ensures his legacy lives on, as do his ideas around sharing and collaborating together.

**Penelope Jackson**, Tauranga author/art historian  
*Republished here in full from Threads magazine, issue 81, October 2020.*