

Tragedy failed to still her creative spirit

New angle for Berrell's art

HER metal sculptures gleam with a lovely, remote beauty, but there is nothing remote about the petite blonde who creates them.

She is down-to-earth and practical and describes herself as "jolly determined." She needs to be, for metal sculpture is among the most physically demanding medias.

Berrell Jensen, who is fast becoming one of South Africa's best-known metal sculptors, is no amazon. She weighs a mere 54kg and with her fair hair falling about her shoulders, she admits the going is pretty tough sometimes. "I ask myself why do I do it...?"

Torch and saw

With the aid of an oxy-acetylene torch, metal guillotine or hacksaw, she creates her magnificent copper reliefs and metal sculptures which decorate both homes and public buildings.

After an absence of four years from the Johannesburg exhibition scene, she is now showing 23 of her latest sculptures at the Gallery 101, in the Hyde Park Corner shopping centre. They will remain on view until next Wednesday, March 8.

Much has happened in the years between. Four years ago, Berrell, her husband and their two children left Johannesburg for Crete. They intended to stay away for about six months.

Tragedy

"I was to work on commissions and later hold an exhibition in England. My husband, a trained psychologist, was becoming increasingly interested in art. He planned to study, and pursue various cultural interests."

But tragedy struck only a few weeks after their arrival in Crete. Mr Jensen was killed in a car accident, and Berrell landed in hospital.

The years that followed



BERRELL JENSEN — on her metal at Gallery 101.

brought hardship and loneliness for Berrell, who soon moved from Crete to Greece. Then her life took another turn. She met a young Greek lawyer, Mr Nicholas Trichas, and they were married about a year ago.

Now they are busy setting up home in Craighall Park, which means that Berrell has turned her hand to bricklaying, plastering, and generally keeping an eye on building renovations, while preparing for her exhibition.

This exhibition shows a marked change from her earlier intricate work executed mostly in thinner

metals, to the heavier geometrical pieces which she now favours.

"I feel a need to work in something more substantial, more sculptural," she explained, and elaborated on some of her difficulties.

Greek influence

"I buy big sheets of brass. Although they are brand new they are full of scratches. It takes an awful lot of elbow grease to remove the scratches. Cutting is a problem too. I have to use a hacksaw, and the blades keep breaking."

She believes her stay in Greece has influenced her work to some extent, and she has given Greek names to one or two of the pieces on her exhibition.

Berrell feels that much of her success in South Africa is due to the backing and encouragement of women.

"Women have instigated a large number of the private commissions I have done," she said. "Most of my clients are women, although my work also appeals to men."

"I think the women in South Africa know far more about the cultural scene than the men."