

WOMEN

Rachel will dress walls in silk

SUE MILLARD

SILK: it's vibrant, luminous and it looks good in the sharp, harsh light of the Reef.

Rachel Gitai is speaking about painting on silk, her special craft.

"It's bright and soft, and the fibres shine."

An Israeli who lives with her husband and young sons in Johannesburg, her creations are original and unique.

The method of painting on silk is taken from ancient Eastern techniques.

All the silk cloth she uses is imported from Israel. It has to be treated in a soft water bath in hot and cold water in order to stabilise the warp and

weft of the fibres.

When the material is still wet, the edges are tied to a flexible frame. The tension in the cloth can then be modified in the desired direction.

For example, in one of Rachel's recent large-scale works, she was asked to interpret the feel of deep sea streams. In order to achieve that effect, the material had to be stretched with unequal force to give the direction of the streams.

The painting is done with concentrated silk paints and fine brushes, the kind that are used for watercolours.

The better the brush refinement, the better

the brush control.

The work is done in wet weather, or in the early hours: humidity helps in achieving the right colours.

"A stable hand and great patience is required to execute the work and achieve satisfactory results."

When the painting is finished the material will rest as much as two days in dry conditions. Then the cloth is put through a process of steaming to stabilise the painting.

When the painted material is ready, "the real creativity starts": various pieces of cloth or paper are incorporated on to the work.

Finally, the integrated shapes create the desired artwork.

It was while studying and teaching at the University of Haifa that Rachel realised the psychological effects of colour.

Her work has elicited a satisfying response from architects and interior decorators.

To enhance an interior, Rachel will create a picture which will pick up the colours already used in the room, for example, in the upholstery.

"Interior design is a way of 'combining' whatever you know about the outside world inside your house". (I am sure she means "incorporating". The expressions she uses are slightly foreign.)

The light of Haifa, she says, is more like that of Cape Town. It's only 500 m above sea-level and close to the sea; "there is a softening in the air".

When Rachel and her family arrived in South Africa for the first time in 1984, she was shocked when she hung her wa-

horrible."

So she looked at galleries, and studied the culture of this new place.

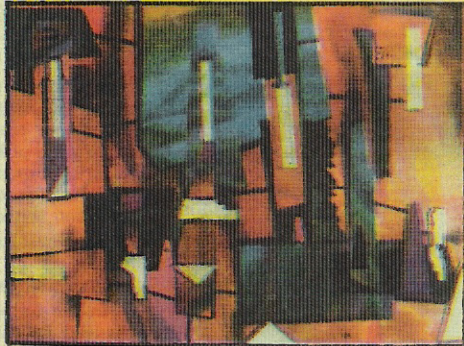
At first she did silk

import charge on galleries, is filling a gap in that she is an artist from overseas who happens to be in the country.

Besides taking her BA in creative art and literature at Haifa University, and an MA in education at the same university, Rachel has taught in both these fields. She also holds a Phd.

She has exhibited her artworks and set up and managed a photography laboratory for the Israeli Defence Force, which gave her "a lovely amount of money" for the project, she says, with no intention of being quaint.

Pretorians who wish to find out more about Rachel's paintings can phone Reli Zur on 465498.



Pictures: AVIGAIL UZI

Painted pair: this painting has a partner.

tercolours in her town-house. "The space was different and they looked

painting only for herself, for wallhangings.

With the 60 percent



Silk merchant: Rachel Gitai uses an ancient Eastern method to paint on silk.