

NIALL KRAMER visits the city's galleries

Argus Wed 6 Dec. 1989.

Overtly political exhibition is well worth a visit

"IF it furthers the struggle, it must be good art" used to be the (usually unspoken) view of many in progressive and community cultural organisations.

So the matter of whether art should reflect or influence society was not at issue. The latter view was taken for granted.

The Community Art Project (CAP) exhibition in Woodstock, cryptically titled *Let It Be Done Before Dawn*, again teases out this issue. But here both sides are represented.

Much of the art is overtly political. T-shirts, posters and banners aim to conscientise. They do it through unambiguous images and

slogans such as "Smash the Labour Bill" and "People's power".

In the attempt to empower people and make art acceptable and relevant, these posters and T-shirts do the job much more directly than the more traditional form of fine art.

But these fine art forms are here, too. There are technically and conceptually excellent graphics as well as thoroughly worked through paintings and murals. The mark of strong teaching and committed learning shines through.

The general impression is one of artists furiously engaged in reflecting aspects of experience. And it is not just pictures of stoning Casspirs and police.

Most of the images are more subtle and, interestingly, the influence of Western European ways of putting pictures together is very strong. Gone are self-consciously "naive African" compositions.

There are still the tired old cliché images of Che Guevara, Nelson Mandela and by now desperately reworked and exhausted Hector Peterson.

Mural

One presumes these are only here as a result of trying to make out they are relevant to political experience and life. Surely they should be pensioned off to rest now.

There are two things that really stand out in this show. One is the mural *Dont Be A Ja Baas. Don't Vote*, which reflects aspects of prison, townships and workers' life. The other is Billy Mandini's expressionist charcoal drawings which evoke the essence of intense psychological experience.

This exhibition, which is on until December 10, is well worth visiting and it provides something of an alternative art experience to the prevailing middle class work seen in most city galleries.