



PROJECT

The Four Plinths Sculpture Project is an undertaking of The Wellington Sculpture Trust.

The four plinths are the massive bollards situated on the waterfront between Te Papa and Circa Theatre. It is on this site the Trust has made a departure from permanent to temporary public art, and where it showcases New Zealand sculptural practice with the biennial temporary sculpture installation: The Four Plinths Sculpture Project.

The Project forms part of the New Zealand International Arts Festival's visual arts programme.

The aim of the project is to foster art, artists and audience interactions, and to provide an opportunity for established and emerging artists to work in the area of large-scale public sculpture.

Temporary sculpture is a great opportunity to enable artists to realise a public sculpture, with all the challenges of scale, robustness and rigour that come with working in a tough environment and in a highly visible space.



Photographs by Amy Schultz Photography



WORK

Wellington artist Joanna Langford was invited to submit a proposal for the 2006 Four Plinths Project, and her work continued to haunt the Trust and panel of artistic advisors over the intervening years. In 2010 The Trust approached Joanna to ask if she would realise her work for the 2012 project.

Out of the Dusk comprises four large glass cases that sit atop the plinths and collectively make a diorama-like landscape.

Joanna uses her materials rather like handwriting; they have a formal and legible quality in themselves as well as telling a larger story.

In *Out of the Dusk* mint green silage plastic cloaks a skeletal wire frame.

Joanna's work is a landscape spent, one used by intensive farming and relentless cropping. It is a landscape where gravity weighs heavily, with gridded wire laddering bisecting the cubes of space occupied by this island world.

In its monumental site surrounded by the high walls of Te Papa, and the grey plinths themselves, *Out of the Dusk*, presents something delicate, exhausted and fundamentally anti-monumental.



THE WELLINGTON SCULPTURE TRUST

The Wellington Sculpture Trust was established in 1982 to help enrich Wellington through sculpture and public art. The Trust commissions quality, contemporary public sculptures to support the creative arts in New Zealand and to give artists the opportunity to make large scale public works.

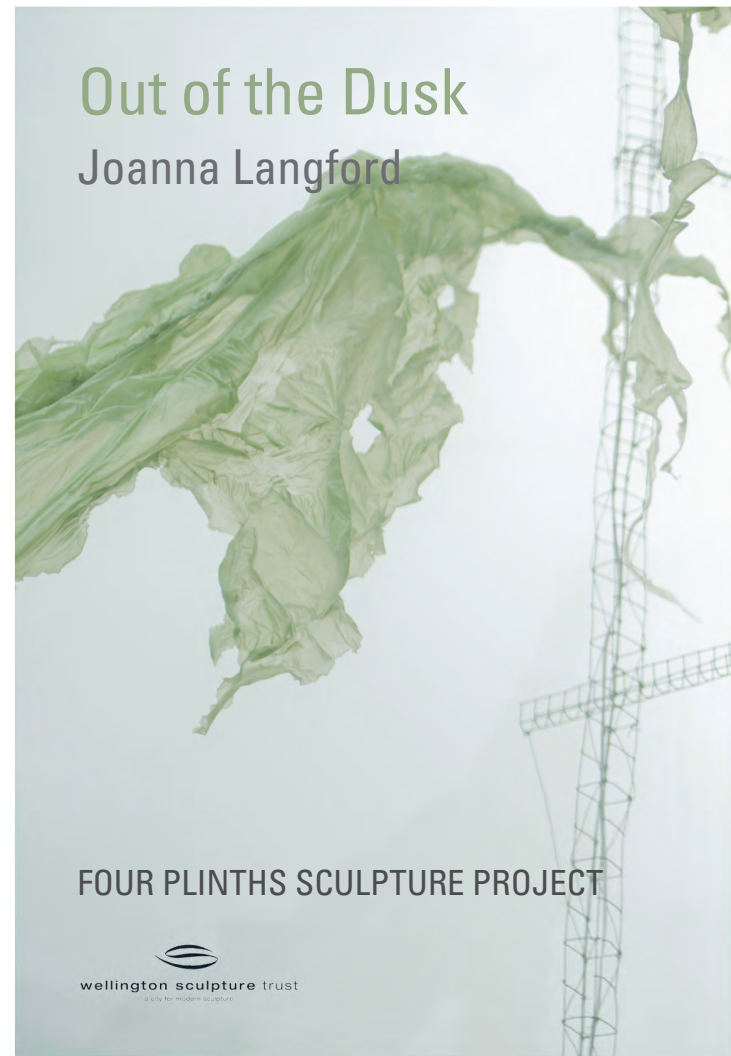
The 24 sculptures the Trust has placed around the City and the Botanic Gardens over the past 29 years have become an anthology of many of the most distinguished contemporary sculptors in New Zealand, and together showcase contemporary sculptural practice.

The Trust is a voluntary organisation, with very few resources, but a growing expertise in the commissioning of public art. It works in partnership with the Wellington City Council and other parties, and raises funds from trusts, Wellington businesses, and individuals through donations and sponsorship arrangements.

Wellington Sculpture Trust Trustees:

Neil Plimmer (Chair), Vivien Atkinson, Richard Burrell, Jon Craig, Helen Cull, Sue Elliott, Catherine Franks, Helen Kedgley, Richard Nelson

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Out of the Dusk Joanna Langford

FOUR PLINTHS SCULPTURE PROJECT



Out of the Dusk

By Abby Cunnane

On paper, it looks like a small urgent diagram.

Such a diagram might provide extraordinary but useful instructions: how to get lost in a familiar city, how to leave early without an apology, how to restore a morning or conversation begun badly. It's also an architectural plan, for a diminutive act of commissioned building. The drawing is one of a series submitted by Joanna Langford for the Wellington Sculpture Trust's original Four Plinths commission in 2006.

Most commissioned public sculpture begins life on paper, as photo-shopped images and engineer's schematics which bear the weight of technical scrutiny. Similarly, most built architecture germinates gradually, from sketch to site plan, CAD drawing to glossy elevation, long before it attains three dimensions. Many such works are never realised, having hit some bump in the road during the process of selection, practical fine-tuning, funding or time. Arguably some of the most compelling works of public sculpture have never been and never will be made material, some of the building's we most love to imagine would be impossible or worse were they built.

The original proposal was to create glass cubes atop each plinth, inside of which the artist would construct, with plastic bags, bamboo skewers and wire, a tiny un-peopled landscape and awkward infrastructure, diorama-like. The work was a natural extension of projects she was working on at that time, pillow-white forms which exploited the iridescence and buoyancy of recycled plastic bags,¹ translated to an outdoors environment of hard edges, scouring winds and massive scale.

Yet the plans submitted by Langford six years ago are not instruction sheets, precise blueprints or a template for what would eventuate. The artist draws with full expectation that the form will become clear in the making. Her drawings represent a map of what is possible, what appears necessary to the space as it exists on paper—the Four Plinths' site, with its heavy shouldered stone façade, and gridded surfacing prompted her choice of aerial, laddered cloudscape—but they are also flags waving for provisionality, anti-engineering, impossibility.

Faith and risk are key elements of Langford's practice. Blair French writes [of her yet to be realised project for Christchurch's Biennial of Art in Public Space, SCAPE 2011]. 'As always, Langford discloses her commitment to arriving at form through a process of tracing and trusting the specific malleable or associative qualities of the material she uses...² Working with found resources, often discarded (empty milk bottles, computer keyboards, plastic bags), used in industry and agriculture (silage wrap, LEDs, astro-turf), or cheap and non-lasting (biscuits, bamboo skewers, glue), she sets out to establish the terms of a language available and appropriate to each.

Langford's concerns are architectural in that she acknowledges the full expressive and impractical potential of built form, yet there is a sense that this is something 'arrived at', to borrow French's phrase, through testing

impelled by underlying curiosity and conviction. She has described her process as 'the integration of foreign elements into a native system.'³ Langford has always used her materials rather like handwriting; they have a formal and legible quality in and of themselves, as well as pointing to larger narratives. She sustains enormous faith in her materials, and her ability to manipulate them, methodically building haphazard structures like votive monuments to a deity of risk and possibility.

And there is always the risk that it will simply not work: that the insubstantial structures she creates will not withstand the demands of their environment, or audience curiosity. Langford refers to the long preparatory periods spent in the studio as 'rehearsals' or 'drafts', where the capabilities of forms and materials are put on trial. This is architecture that is essentially pragmatic, as well as being mutable, temporary. Six years is a long time, during which Langford's practice has been far from static. Nor has the world been still: floods, fires, monumental earthquakes have occurred; new countries have been born; cities have rioted, governments changed, and financial crisis swung like a wrecking ball. It has been an unsettled time, less easy than we'd hoped, and we are all older now.

Mint green plastic silage wrap cloaks a skeletal chicken wire frame. Its tired-shouldered hunch and buckle is that of a landscape spent, seaweedy ends hang from beneath the frame. If it is an island then it may be a sunken one, or one on which gravity weighs heavily. Gridded wire laddering bisects the cube of space occupied by this island form, without necessarily offering access to or from its bony contours. For the first time in my experience of Langford's work, I realise this is a place I may not want to go. It is desolate, bolder and stranger, and older, than the artist's work has seemed before. It does not attempt to transform materials or site so much as to make their most basic qualities explicit.

The silage wrap, used, is a shroud, a rag: it recalls land used up by intensive farming and relentless cropping. From the early drawings, the visual link between the work and the Taranaki Wharf remains, the thread-thin wire structure which scaffolds the work drawing deft comparison with the pylons and rigging there. The plinths' site, with its sheer slate surfaces, shaft of hard wind, and salinated soil, has a magnificence drawn in unforgiving lines. Conscious of the space they occupy, these works are not trying to be monumental, rather they present something beautiful and exhausted, anti-monumental, possible. Their monumentality, what will last, lies in the guiding principles of the construction, risk and faith.

Abby Cunnane

1. See 'The Quietening' (2007, Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch), and Beyond Nowhere ('Out of Erewhon', 2006, Christchurch Art Gallery).
2. Blair French, 'Joanna Langford: The High Country', Art & Australia, 49:2, 2011.
3. Natalie Poland, Beyond Nowhere exhibition catalogue (Porirua: Pataka Museum of Arts and Cultures, 2011), p.14.

