

# MERGING BLOCKS

## Sabine Marcelis

The Collin Post 4 Plinths Project 2024



wellington sculpture trust

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Known for her experimental approach to materiality and light, Sabine Marcelis is a Rotterdam-based designer whose work plays with perception and perspective. Using subtle transparencies, mirrored finishes and gradients, she explores the interplay of colour, shape and light in pieces that span scales and typologies. Though her works are often functional and frequently employ production techniques and materials more common to factories and construction, their forms consistently defy traditional perspectives on what constitutes design.

*Merging Blocks* (2024) marks a significant moment in Marcelis' practice, bringing an element of scale and permanency to her work not before seen. *Mergere*—the Latin root from which the word merge stems—means to dip, dip in, immerse, or plunge. Today, merge is a term that implies connection; the coalescence of one thing into another. Marcelis explores this idea through a site-specific work that does not simply attach itself to the four plinths that mark the boundary between the forecourt of Te Papa Tongarewa and the Wellington waterfront, but instead merges with the landscape and its surroundings.

Four mirrored glass volumes, each a slightly different shape, each with slightly different proportions, each with the same mirrored gradient—folding gently in colour from dark to light—have been installed across the four plinths. Their reflective forms, luminous and jewel-like, return the sun's light to their urban surroundings with changed colour. Rather than sitting atop the plinths, the volumes engage with them, elevating these bluestone pedestals from objects of urban utility to pieces of functional beauty.

In this way, *Merging Blocks* can be read as a comment on connection and unity; the materiality of its four forms, as a tangible expression. Together, the mirrored blocks and plinths create a harmonious whole, but one that is not singular and one which cannot be contained. During the day, saturated shadows spill beyond each plinth, while their



mirrored exteriors remain constantly in motion, reflecting the pattern and pace of the world that surrounds them. John Cage wrote that certain experiences are "invitations to events at which we are already present", and this is one such work. While nothing outside of the plinths have changed, suddenly the landscape around them appears anew.

The use of glass gives the large-scale forms a sense of lightness, while the gradient gives the impression that the volumes glow. With colours that mirror the skyline at dusk and dawn, the sculptures seem to capture nature's ephemeral beauty within permanent objects. The contrast between form and colour is captivating, while the mirrored element invites both interaction and introspection from passersby. Each volume has been designed to reflect a different aspect of the city: the faces of those passing, the tangle of clouds or the emptiness of a sky—they

show us both the mood of a city and the hijinks of its weather. *Merging Blocks* is a celebration of the environment through shared interaction, a comment on the rhythms of life which precipitate our understanding of time, space and being.

The materials are additionally activated by the shifting light of their location. Throughout the day, as the light changes, so too does the footprint of each block. On bright days, it stretches and increases, a glow that reaches across pavements, faces and buildings. When the sun moves beyond the horizon, the line that follows the point of connection between the plinth and the mirrored volume begins to glow. As with much of Marcelis' work, *Merging Blocks* alters our experience of space through colour, shape and light.

Like Wellington broadly, the site of the Four Plinths plays host to elemental drama: winds blow to gale force speeds of up to 100 km per hour, sea spray flies from the harbour, and during summer higher solar angles give biting intensity to the sun's rays. *Merging Blocks* has been designed to withstand such weather extremes, its durable form is the result of production techniques Marcelis has spent the last decade refining from her studio in the industrial harbour of Rotterdam. The laminated glass volumes are clad onto stainless steel structures that have been affixed to each of the plinths, making them both resilient to wind and entirely recyclable at end-of-life. The volumes are as large as manufacturers are currently able to produce, with their unique materiality never before seen on such a scale.

Having spent much of her childhood in New Zealand, that formative period in which connection and understanding of place is solidified in ways that we often do not understand until much later, this project marks something important for Marcelis—a return home with a materially-innovative work which celebrates the distinct magic of place.

### The Collin Post 4 Plinths Project

The Wellington Sculpture Trust, with the Collin Post 4 Plinths Project, has made a departure from permanent to temporary public art. In 2006 the Trust saw the possibility presented by the four bollards sitting between the forecourt of Te Papa and Wellington's waterfront. Here it showcases New Zealand sculptural practice with biennial sculpture installations. 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.

The Trust acknowledges with warm appreciation the Post family who provide the \$50,000 award, and the support from the Wellington City Council and the Public Art Fund, as well as Seresin Wines.

### The Artist: Sabine Marcelis

Sabine Marcelis is a Rotterdam-based artist and designer whose practice spans product, installation and spatial design. Characterised by pure forms that highlight material properties, her works are housed in the permanent collections of Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the National Gallery of Victoria, and have also been exhibited at the Mies van der Rohe Barcelona Pavilion, Vitra Design Museum, Design Miami, Les Musee des Arts Décoratifs and Kunsthall Rotterdam.

### The Work: *Merging Blocks*

*Merging Blocks* is a transformative work. Four mirrored glass volumes, each uniquely shaped and finished in a gradient of reflective colour, adjoin four plinths. Together, they transform the urban environment, inviting viewers to contemplate the interplay of form, colour and light. *Merging Blocks* celebrates a joining of art and its surroundings, and through its luminous forms, offers new perspectives on a familiar landscape.



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### The Wellington Sculpture Trust

The Wellington Sculpture Trust was established in 1983 to enrich Wellington through sculpture and public art. The Trust commissions contemporary public sculptures of the highest quality, supports the creative arts in New Zealand and gives artists the opportunity to make large scale public works. The objective is also to make this art form publicly accessible to as large an audience as possible, and increase knowledge of New Zealand contemporary artists working in this art form.

To this end the Trust has commissioned 29 permanent sculptures around the City and the Botanic Gardens over the past 40 years.

The Trust is an independent voluntary organisation, with an established expertise in commissioning public art. It works in partnership with the Wellington City Council and other parties and raises the funds for the commissioned works through the generous donations of individuals and Wellington businesses.

Wellington Sculpture Trust trustees:  
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