

Arrivals on the forecourt: Peter Trevelyan's new work for the Four Plinths

730 daylight skies will pass overhead during the period Peter Trevelyan's sculpture occupies the Four Plinths in Te Papa forecourt. 730 nights, 730 dawns, 1460 tides will change guard in the harbour. Scudding debris, wind-tortured kites and red faced pedestrians will appear, and orbit, and depart. All this will be reflected in the multifaceted mirrored surfaces of the four massive forms. And at the end of two years they will leave as unaccountably as they arrived, like fictions, like diamonds conjured by fantasy, like extraterrestrial observers.

Trevelyan's work, *Mimetic Brotherhood* (2010), replaces Regan Gentry's *Green Islands* (2007), No. 8 wire-constructed native foliage (re-sited in Wellington's Botanic Gardens in January 2010), on the Four Plinths. In contrast to the precariously perched trees, Trevelyan's forms will cover the plinths themselves, voluptuously engulfing them like something having fallen from a great height. In this sense they appear less like sculptures, mounted in a conventional public memorial or art galley context, and more like an alien arrival on the waterfront site, sharing human space but not human scale.

Wellington artist Peter Trevelyan received the commission from the Wellington Sculpture Trust in early 2009. Engaged at the time in constructing fragile model-scale geometric forms from pencil leads, 'building drawings', he may have seemed an unlikely candidate for the task. The substantial heft of the plinths themselves, let alone the ferocity of the site's conditions, poses a challenge to all but the most robust of materials and forms. Yet those earlier works lend not only their triangular structure to this most recent project. There is something fundamentally provisional about the polyhedral solids; it is as if they might be sketches only, drafts or outlines. The sculptor's interest in Plato's ideal forms is evident, and his works operate as hypotheses as much as completed formal statements.

The temporary condition is at the core of the Wellington Sculpture Trust's Four Plinths Project commission. Made to endure two years, yet not to stay on the site subsequently, the character of this work is essentially transient. It could be seen to represent a series of changing fictions, moving and changing across its own surfaces, and across the minds and eyes of those encountering it. Given the impermanent nature of this work, we may be justified in momentarily entertaining some of those fictions evoked by these out of the ordinary objects.

The four part work is made up of 1200 equilateral triangles of mirrored acrylic, which are mechanically jointed and articulated, and fixed on a skin of flexible rubber. This forms a sheath which is fitted over the solid concrete plinth, and is secured to a steel base surrounding the foot of the plinth. Responsive to the wind, the work's agile skin is in constant motion, so that the reflections caught in the triangulated surfaces on the exterior continually shift and alter.

The triangular lattice arrangement of the surfaces suggests the structure of the crystal, another prismatic mineral. A grouping of atoms with regular internal structure, and symmetrically arranged plane faces, the crystal epitomises naturally evident mathematical precision. The perfect geometry of its whole exterior is underpinned by the intricate geometry of its molecular makeup. The triangles which cover the surface of the *Mimetic Brotherhood* forms imply this ordered precision, yet their mirror nature introduces a more wayward element, as the reflections cannot be controlled.

Each solid is over twice the height of a person, and approximately 2.4 metres in diameter; together they take up the space of a large truck, a small spaceship. Yet despite their bulk the odd thing about these giant forms is that they are entirely self-effacing, only able to reproduce and continue the environment they occupy. They are rather like huge instruments of surveillance, poorly disguised or

comically misplaced in an urban setting. Their material solidity is undermined by a completely reflexive relationship to what exists around them, and it is hard to discern whether one should feel menaced, amused, or simply made curious by their presence.

Consider Trevelyan's sculpture as a group of extraterrestrial arrivals, as agents sent from the outer reaches of space and fiction, or fallen though a gap in time. Formally 'mimetic', they imitate or replicate their surroundings; perhaps this site is being recorded, translated, and transmitted to another place. And what would they have learned in the two years of their occupation? Would they have documented the many-various languages of visitors entering Te Papa, the various critical languages of those emerging? Would they know the drone of rush hour traffic along Cable St, the rival complaint of gulls circling the harbour, the tugboats' bossy timbre? Would they have catalogued the steps of night-time vandals, morning joggers, evening theatre-goers in their heels?

The staging of this mystery is part of Trevelyan's project, both in this work and in his ongoing explorations. Beyond the perhaps indulgently theatrical scenario tendered here, it is the staging of possibility which this work achieves. Like crystal quartz from deep in the earth, like something from science fiction, they seduce with otherworldly strangeness. Their occupation of the grey forecourt throws the city into temporary relief; we see ourselves reflected, diminutive and askew, and for the time being become part of the work's fiction.

Abby Cunnane

1. Trevelyan's work *As yet untitled* 2009 (made from 20,000 0.5 millimetre pencil leads) was part of 'The Future is Yet Unwritten' at the Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University, 2009. This is a good example of the artist's drawing investigations. See <http://www.adamartgallery.org.nz/thefuture/trevelyan/> for further detail.

About the Project:

The Four Plinths Sculpture Project is an undertaking of the Wellington Sculpture Trust which was established to enrich Wellington through public art.

The Trust has the support of the Wellington City Council, and a strong track record of commissioning high quality permanent public sculptures that have enthusiastic support from the residents and visitors to Wellington. The Trust has developed a national reputation for excellence and innovation.

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 practise 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.

For more information please visit: www.wellingtonsculpture.co.nz

To contact the Wellington Sculpture Trust please email: wellingtonsculpture@xtra.co.nz or phone: 04 4996644

About the Artist:

Wellington artists, Peter Trevelyan, was one of six sculptors invited to submit a proposal for the 2010 Four Plinths Project, and was selected by the Trust and a panel of artistic advisors.

Mimetic Brotherhood comprises four bulbous, but flexible forms which envelop the plinths made from hinged and mirrored equilateral triangles.

Peter said of his work: “They are an ever-changing translation of their environment as the shimmering surfaces reflect the surroundings of the harbour and central Wellington. This is a huge opportunity for me to create a large public artwork on the Wellington waterfront.”

Other recent exhibitions include:

September 2008, “*the incompleteness theorem*”

The Physics Room Christchurch

February 2009, “*new work*”

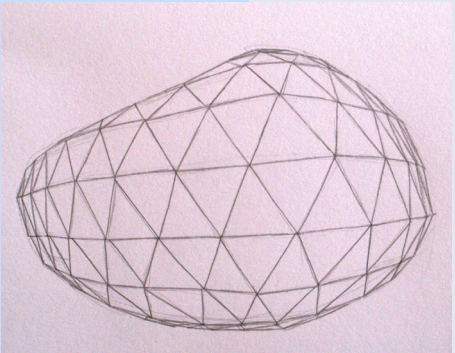
Tina Marsupial project Christchurch

August 2009, “*The Future is Unwritten*”

Adam Art Gallery, Wellington

January 2010, “*First Test*”

Suite Gallery, Wellington



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Mimetic Brotherhood

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