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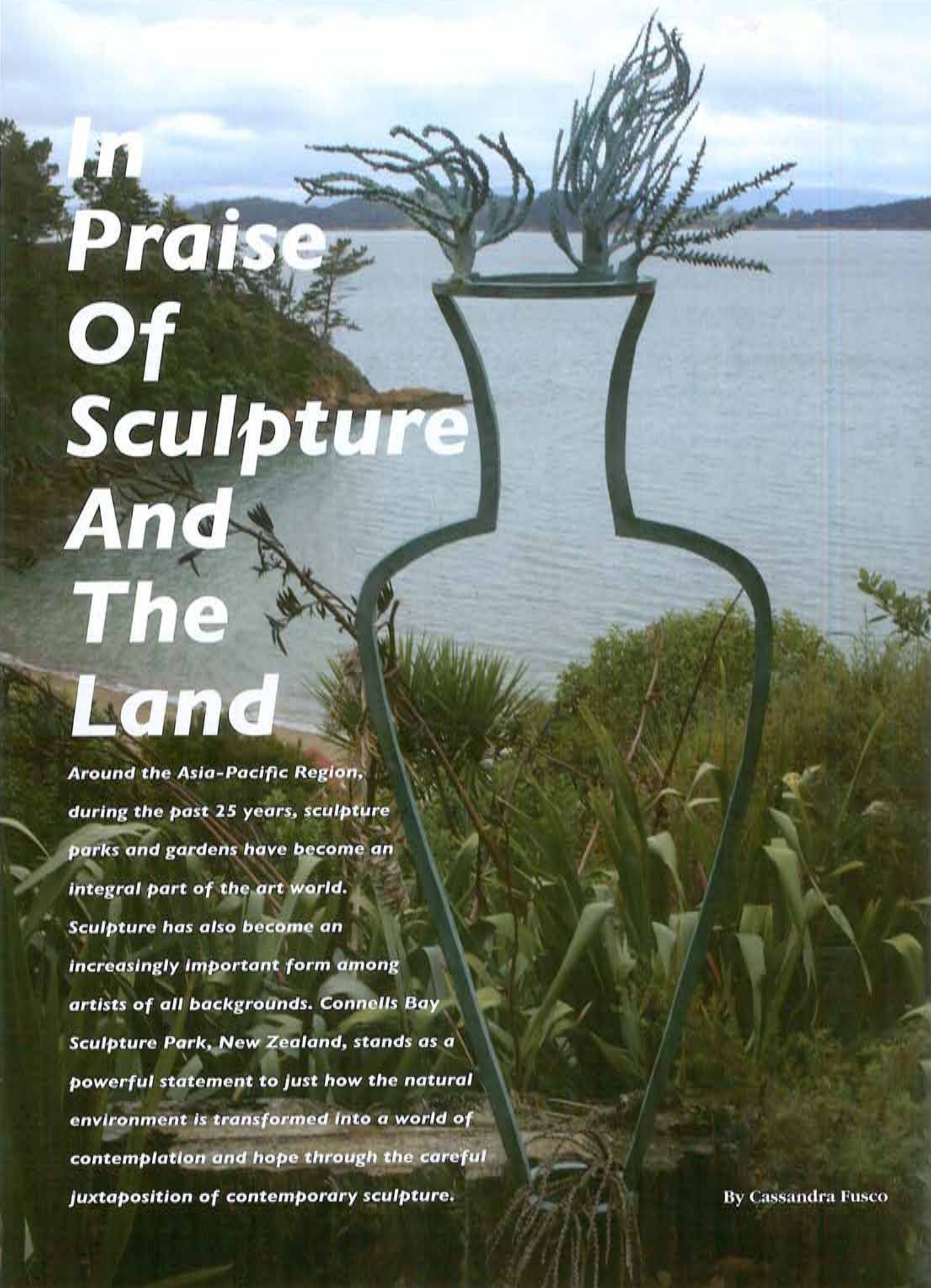


# LIN LIANGTSAI



**Porntaweesak Rimsakul** \* **New Zealand's Connells Bay Sculpture Park** \* **Arzan Khambatta** \* **Dhananjay Singh** \* **Reviews**





# In Praise Of Sculpture And The Land

*Around the Asia-Pacific Region, during the past 25 years, sculpture parks and gardens have become an integral part of the art world. Sculpture has also become an increasingly important form among artists of all backgrounds. Connells Bay Sculpture Park, New Zealand, stands as a powerful statement to just how the natural environment is transformed into a world of contemplation and hope through the careful juxtaposition of contemporary sculpture.*

By Cassandra Fusco



In New Zealand, Connells Bay Sculpture Park, Waiheke Island, is a unique celebration of cultural diversity as much as it is a reforested and treasured island area. The *Lonely Planet Guide* describes Connells Bay Sculpture Park as "one of the best properties we have ever seen." Only one other park warrants comparison in New Zealand, Waitakaruru Arboretum and Sculpture Park, Tauwhare, north of Cambridge. Waiheke Island (Ebbing Waters)<sup>1</sup> is the perfect setting for Connells Bay Sculpture Park: 24 hectares peppered with work by leading Pacific sculptors, commissioned by the owners, Jo and John Gow, and open to the public.

"Our aim," say the Gows, "is to bring nature and art together by installing site-specific sculpture in a native tree environment. The works in the park, in various degrees, address historic and contemporary concerns and, together with our reforestation and land conservation efforts, work towards bringing nature and art together."<sup>2</sup> Towards this objective the Gows have reforested much of Connells Bay and placed within it collected and commissioned sculptures,

large and intimate, by artists such as Jeff Addison, Graham Bennett, Chris Booth, Phil Dadson, Neil Dawson, Paul Dibble, Kon Dimopoulos, Darryl Frost, Fatu Feu'u, Christine Hellyar, Virginia King, Peter Lange, Barry Lett, Michael MacMillan, Dave McCracken Cathryn Munro, Peter Nicholls, Phil Price, Bob Stewart, Rob Suisted, Jeff Thomson, and Richard Thompson.

"The visual arts have always served as a medium for self-expression and consideration," says Jo Gow. "Even as our children were growing up here, we knew we wanted to restore this area's native flora and fauna and place within it works that would offer further rich engagement. The Park, retrieved from its 19th century farmland status, is steadily returning to its natural state with works specifically sited to engage visitors. There is, we believe, a balance struck between the reforestation, and the thoughts and intentions encompassed within each sculpture placed within this special environment. The enjoyment is enlarged and completed every time we share this space with others."

High on one of the first rises is

Phil Price's *The Dancer* (2002). On top of a curved limb four butter-bright discs 'M&Ms' or 'Smarties,' move in perpetual, balanced slow motion. To the right, nestled on some old sheep paths, is Jeff Thomson's *Three Cows Looking Out to Sea* (1989–2001). They are paused, attentive but relaxed as though chewing the cud under a spreading pohutukawa tree. They have, as it were, replaced their 19th century predecessors. And looking up beyond their corrugated haunches the eye finds the fiery vertical rods of Konstantin Dimopoulos's *Kete* (2004). Gently moved by the wind, this 'treasure basket,' is as lithe and luminous as the summer-scarlet bird-beak flowers of the flax. Standing near or wondering around this work gives a sense of plenitude, of community and growth so that like Price's *Dancer*, the work makes the body lighter, eager to move further into this Park. The position of these two works, in particular, indicates something of the ethos behind this Park. It is a place of welcome and restoration, change and growth.

Just outside the Park's gallery (which exhibits works for sale by the commissioned sculptors) are two ceramic



**Above left:** Phil Price, *The Dancer*, 2002, carbon fiber and fiberglass, 500 x 100 cm. **Above right:** Konstantin Dimopoulos, *Kete (Treasure Basket)*, 2004, polyurethane resene, 7 x 3.3 x 2.6 m. **Previous page:** Christine Hellyar, *Nikau Urn*, 2001, bronze, 200 x 72 x 43 cm. All photographs by Gil Hanly and courtesy of Connells Bay Sculpture Park, Waiheke Island, New Zealand.



koru, mounted on macrocarpa by Darryl Frost, and titled simply *Koru* (2001), a seamless blend of clay and wood.

**H**uman and spirit presences are explored in several works: Paul Dibble's *Huta Feather* (2000) and *Between Two Islands* (2002), Chris Booth's *Silent People* (1999), Michael MacMillan's *Moonlit Lady* (2001), Phil Price's *Angel* (2004), and Fatu Feu'u's *Guardian of the Planting* (1999). Whereas Price's *Angel* appears to discreetly open and fold its wings like a solitary butterfly, perched, perhaps, on the trunk of a young Lancewood in a shallow valley, Feu'u's *Guardian of the Planting*, located on a higher shoulder, overlooks much of the entire bay.

Feu'u, a New Zealand-based Samoan artist, came to Connells Bay to explore possible locations for his proposed genealogy work *Ngati Feu'u Waka*, and was completely taken with the magnificent *in situ* macrocarpa stumps overlooking the valley. Feu'u's *Guardian of the Planting* is monolithic, multiple and carries the carver's knowledge of Pacific histories and hopes—Fa'a Samoa, the Samoan way.

Similar levels of resonance flow through Bob Stewart's more minimalist yet organic greenstone, *The Dark One* (2002).

Greenstone, treasured by so many cultures, is especially valued by Maori and called pounamu (precious of treasured). Within the natural abstract contours of *The Dark One*, some may find 'the crack in time' said to exist between the old and new years; others may experience the work as a sensual orifice. In turn, a dramatic contrast is struck by the intriguing linear 'watchdog' of Barry Lett's *Kamo* and Paul Dibble's tall bronze *Huta Feather* (2000).

Dibble's *Huta Feather* is not only a highly political work, a celebration of this bird, but also a lament for a beautiful, extinct native bird. The plumage was prized by Maori and Europeans alike and ultimately lead to its extinction. Conservation also informs Chris Booth's stone geoglyph, *Slip*, and *Silent People*, Peter Lange's *Kete* (2002) and the 'trumpet' chorus of Phil Dadson's *Tenantennae* (2005).

Rising from a hexagonal wooden deck, built on a steep hillside above the bay, *Tenantennae* is, as its name suggests, a series of ten, sound-resonating tubes, each five meters long in anodized aluminum. Each

'trumpet' has an open "listening/resonating" cone at its outer end with a delicate musical instrument consisting of sansa-type elements and gentle gongs. When the wind activates the sculpture, the sounds can be heard gently wafting across the bay.

Equally evocative is Cathryn Munro's *Rise* (2001). It may, at first glance, appear to be a series of retaining walls. Several areas of the surrounding hills bear slip scars and are constantly undergoing stabilizing reforestation efforts. But Munro's subtly landscaped work, like Virginia King's *Oi Oi Bridge* (2003) and Peter Nicholls's *Tomo* (2005), relates closely to the water that feeds this particular valley. The work's geometry, among other things, suggests ancient temples. But here, *in situ*, it hunkers down into the earth, pouring any notions of weight or stress into that body and counterpointing this with aqueous ripples. These, like all water, promise life.

This same sense of promise and possibilities are also tapped into, further up stream across the 'silver' length of Virginia King's *Oi Oi Bridge* and farther again, along the sinuous, sensuous scarlet 'ribbon' of Peter Nicholls's *Tomo* (underground waterway or shute.)



Bob Stewart, *The Dark One*, 2002, greenstone and andesite, 117 x 60 x 47 cm.



Fatu Feu'u, *Guardian of the Planting*, 1999, macrocarpa slump, 600 x 190 x 210 cm.



Both of these, like Munro's work, evoke the rhythms of nature and its concert of harmonies. King's *Bridge* is a soft Monet garden crescent flanked by alloy oi oi reeds. It crosses the rivulet that feeds Munro's aqueous buttresses. And, like Munro's *Rise*, it has its own music. Its oi oi verticals shimmer in slow rhythms, moved perhaps by a breeze coming down the valley or the weight of a patrolling kereru pigeon.

Sited, almost secretly, in a stand of kanuka on the hills above King's bridge, Nicholls's organic *Tomo* wends its way around and about and through the slender tree girths. In Maori, 'tomo' refers to "a shute-like hole made by water especially in volcanic or limestone terrain." In a gentle silky weave, *Tomo* traverses the site across the longer axis in two sweeping loops, one at 48 meters and the other at 43 meters, a total of 91 meters at heights ranging from ground level to three meters. This gently varying elevation alludes to the motion of water veins but, like a wind-borne ribbon, its painted timber and powder-coated stainless and galvanized steel lengths gather in trees and visitors alike, enfolding them in a hillside narrative. *Tomo* talks of the natural forces that feed the area and records the names of five owners of the property.<sup>5</sup>

Some distance along the same hillside, out in the open, stands Graham Bennett's *Reason to Return* (2005). The title and tilt might well suggest that this work is a sequel to *Reasons for Voyaging* (2003), Bennett's welcoming 'avenue' of flagged verticals situated outside the new City Art Gallery in Christchurch and, understandably, there are similarities in terms of concept and composition. Like the



Phil Dadson *Tenantennae*, 2005, sound resonating tubes in anodized aluminum, 10 x 5 m.



Jeff Thomson, *Three Cows Looking Out to Sea*, 1989-2001, three pieces each approx. 130 x 210 cm.



Darryl Frost, *Koru*, 2001, ceramic and macrocarpa, 157 x 52 x 52 cm.

seven-membered Gallery work, *Reason to Return* is about voyaging. Three mast-like verticals carry three mobile spheroids that move gently—reminding us that this is a place worth returning to.

The viridian verticals, especially when experienced from a distance, may well reference the masts of small vessels, or perhaps even the uprights of the small pier in Connells Bay. Against the evening sky they conjure the eddies rippling out from dipping oars, or the lap rings that circle ceaselessly around the tide-worm limbs of the small pier far below in the bay.

Connells Bay is unaffected by tidal washes so that its shell and pebbled sands remain smooth and soft underfoot. Peter Lange's Gulliver-size rust-red, 'flax' *Kete* (2002) is, literally, half full of these siftings. It is, in fact, a weave of individually handcrafted ceramic bricks that Lange has partly filled with various shells. This gesture, and the dimensions of the composition, turns the work into a





Paul Dibble, **Huia Feather**, 2000, bronze, 330 x 89 cm.



Barry Lett, **Kamo**, 2004, scoria and steel, 260 x 96 x 240 cm.



Michael MacMillan, **Moonlit Lady**, 2001, molded, sculpted concrete, 120 x 90 x 170 cm.



rich suppliant celebration—a reminder of past and present occupants and the plenitude that still exists in this bay and its hillsides.

**H**igh on one hillside, these past and present occupants are alluded to in the vertically stacked 'little boxes' of Neil Dawson's *Other People's Houses* (2002). While many think of Dawson as a sky-drawer of globes, water droplets or swirling cones of native flora, he is equally well-known for producing works of vicinage and strongly architectural in nature commenting upon environmental issues. *Other People's Houses* is no exception. Viewed from the valley floor it is as dynamic, as Phil Price's *The Dancer* and *Angel*—but it is in fact static. The illusion of movement springs from the tipsy-toppling 'box' upon 'box' arrangement, freeze-framed momentarily on the hillside. For some, *Other People's Houses* (basically steel fretwork boxes) might recall the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph for 'house'—a checkerboard, the squares of which represent rooms. But whether the sculptor is conjuring with antiquity or the language of Leggo land, here as elsewhere in his work, Dawson is definitely asking questions about accommodation—in the broadest sense of that word.

Perhaps something of the dimensions of the bay or its hills informs Richard Thompson's *Gow Mountain* (2002). Or perhaps the two overlapping steel semi-spheres simply redraw the appeal of the circle halved, the 'half moon' of Dekkers, Delaunay, and Klee. Pythagoras and Plato held the circle to be the most beautiful of all the forms—endless and flawless. For the romantic, Thompson's two half circles may conjure an embrace. Equally, and bearing in mind that they are sited in what was once a highly volcanic area, they may well allude to natural forms susceptible to change. In this sense, *Gow Mountain* evokes both change and interrelations.

Change and constants are almost synonymous with the work of Chris Booth. The sculptor has an obvious yet hushed reverence for the land—wherever he walks. Booth's *Slip* (2004), like some ancient cautionary geoglyph, hangs upon its hillside, a kete bag full of rocks—of our own making. Throughout its organic and abstract unified whole it speaks, like the Arava Desert works by the Australian sculptor Andrew Rogers, of the enduring forces of nature and change. The painstaking construction and rugged pulchritude of *Slip* gives the impression that these steel nets are just about to slide down the hillside with their heavy burden.

Within this environment there is a rich mix of scale and content so that the aesthetics of the center, as Dibble's *Between*



Cathryn Munro, *Rise*, 2001, concrete and bronze, 98 x 470 x 594 cm.



Chris Booth, *Slip*, 2004, steel cable, basalt and rock, 50 x 750 x 750 cm.



Virginia King, *Oi Oi Bridge*, 2003, Aluminum, alloy, 260 x 700 cm, verticals ranging from 60 to 120 cm.



*Two Islands or Huta Feather*, or MacMillan's *Moonlit Lady* or can celebrate the humanist vision in strong figurative works, while equally striking are Chris Booth's more abstract *Silent People* (1999), with his reverence for natural stone (often 'pillar' compositions), and Price with his subtle sense of movement—the affirmation of life or Dadson, with his wind-listening trumpets. All are substantial in their very different celebrations and comments.

One of the most dynamic and minimalist works is the bronze 'drawing' by Christine Hellyar, *Nikau Urn* (2001). High on a densely planted ridge, this vessel frames land, sea, and sky in its perpetual shifts. Hellyar's Urn might be an ancient Greek amphora sitting on a hillside somewhere in the south of Italy, where some of the best-preserved vessels have been found, resplendent in their bands of palmettes, sea scrolls, meanders, laurel wreaths, or red or black figures.



Neil Dawson, *Other People's Houses*, 2002, painted steel, 795 x 85 x

In antiquity, various vase painters decorated their vessels with a profusion of marvelous themes from mythology as well as contemporary life—a rich mix of metaphor and the mundane in seamless lines, contours and compositions. But this is a nikau urn. There are no handles to facilitate easy pouring of its contents and out of its neck grow green-blue nikau fronds. Perhaps it is all the more evocative because it is only an outline and its 'content' is so rich and various—the

perpetual vicissitudes of the bay. Like King and Munro, Hellyar has responded deeply and intuitively to her chosen site. If King's bridge involves us in concerts of arrivals and departures, and if Munro's three stalwart walls brace the hillside, like Booth's *Slip*, against natural forces, then, without resorting to superlatives, Hellyar's work offers a window with an ever-changing view.

In antiquity potters developed a

remarkable harmony of spatial relations—three-dimensional figures on a flat surface. While Hellyar's work continues in this life vein, her work reflects much about her own time and place. By her shape, Hellyar tapes back into past presences on this and other islands so that her urn conjures up more than resources of wine or olives and symbolically persuades that her vessel and the communities it symbolizes persist. By its very nature, the bay fills the urn with a constantly changing flow of 'contents.'

In many respects Hellyar's work sums up both the goal and growing achievement of the Gows with their Park: the environment and the works coexist, complementing each other and expanded by the appreciation of anyone who pauses here.<sup>4</sup> This is a bay of peaceful, changing 'rooms.' Within these are sited sculptures free of the age-old obligation or function of commemoration (mostly about war and the inevitable loss of life). In their various media and scale, each of these works responds to the environment and gives us time and space to contemplate each sculptor's intention and effort. That said, these are sculptures replete with contemporary concerns but, arguably, their setting (and the ethos of such sculpture parks) gives us not only space to contemplate these, but also hope for the future. Δ

Notes:

1. I am indebted to Trish Beamsley, Senior Reference Librarian, Maori Reference Services, National Library of New Zealand.
2. This and all subsequent quotes are from a series of interviews between the writer and the Gows in 2005.
3. In effect, with these inscriptions, Nicholls has discreetly established a time/place continuum one in which the work clearly celebrates a spiritual sense of belonging. This layered sense of place is highly appropriate since this bay has not only a long history of service to the community through its location as a general store/telephone exchange/launch service and firewood provider, but also now as a re-forested sculpture park that offers itself, like a tomo, as a place and time of pause and replenishment.
4. Information about Connells Bay Sculpture Park can be accessed at [www.connellsbay.co.nz](http://www.connellsbay.co.nz) or [info@connellsbay.co.nz](mailto:info@connellsbay.co.nz)



Peter Nicholls, *Tomo*, 2005, 44 x 23 meters of pohutukawa, steam-bent, laminated, and tanalized; in two loops: one 48 meters, the other 43 meters, at heights ranging from ground level, to 3 meters.

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