



Gill Gatfield, *Zealandia* 2018

## Stone-thinking from Zealandia: The art of Gill Gatfield

Andrea Lombardo

The artistic research of Gill Gatfield, presented in Venice at the 2018 Biennale in Giardini della Marinaressa, is influenced by the natural strength of her homeland in New Zealand, a faraway land in some ways mythical for Europeans. Its mountainous territory, rich in uncontaminated landscapes that are coloured in strong and varied ways during the year, hides a stone that is ancient in genesis but new for the use made of it by the artist. *Zealandia*, the X-shaped sculpture, created and transported from one continent to another, is the daughter of the sensibility of Gill Gatfield and the bowels of the Mountain.

Gatfield frequently works with particular and unusual materials, carefully chosen. In her research she experimented with the use of glass in the *Gazed I* series, creating contemplative works that exploit intersecting lines and geometric shapes. She worked with metals and the forces of attraction and repulsion that led to the creation of the series *Magnetic Fields* in direct association with those natural elements that connect the Earth

and the Moon. Her works are characterized by a dry aesthetic which feeds on everyday experience and holds a close relationship with nature. In the *Grass Work* cycle, consisting of canvases covered with real turf, the drive to take care of the lawn is palpable, a metaphor of life and of one's soul: the work of art must not remain a cold object hanging on the wall but must be accepted in our lives as a living being, which needs daily care.

This attention to nature also characterizes the great X present in Venice. The work, made with a rare rock from the New Zealand Mountains, is a slap to our distraction towards nature which we exploit in an uncontested and wild way. Very often, in fact, the nature that surrounds us is seen only as an object whose purpose is to end under our dominion and pleasure: under our organizational and mechanical power. Meanwhile, whilst the earth launches its appeal for help, we pass bored in front of ornamental or fruit trees, we rush to the side of freshly pollinated flowers, we move away from the swaying branches under the effect of the west breezes, or we climb on the hairpin bend headlands that dominate our cities, all that in a distracted way. Even the water of a river or the sound of a waterfall can become invisible and silent to our perception, to our minds, which are swept away in a thousand daily commitments. And yet, when we can stop, the sight of a green and luxuriant expanse of a forest, of a flowery meadow or of the valleys covered with snow restores our soul more than any other technology that should facilitate life.

Gatfield's sculpture is the break point we need to see with new eyes: it brings us to the panoramic view, where we can feel again the essence of Earth and of human life, in focus. With its X-shaped form, *Zealandia* defines space, recalling the balance of classical sculpture. At the same time it recalls the crucifixion, the punishment inflicted on the subversive. In the context of nature, subversion takes place daily as we forget the natural course of biological life on the planet, and try to harness, very often with poor results, the power of nature. Subversion is the course of those who with industrial and banking alchemy change the rhythms of human life. *Zealandia* is like a siren, giving a warning, both figure and metaphor, holding the ground. *Zealandia* is the hero who rises out of the tears and, at the same time, is the diaphragm to be respected, beyond which there are only rough waters.

The face of the rock, made smooth by polishing (like a river stone), and the squared cut of the contours project us towards a futuristic context. In contrast, the veins of the stone bring us into a labyrinth of light and shadow, which seem to reproduce the aerial view of an uncontaminated plateau, a strip of land to be discovered in all its novelty. With its architectural and minimalist imprint, the sculpture brings into dialogue the perfect proportions of the Vitruvius Man and the discovery of Zealandia as the eighth continent. *Zealandia* draws its strength from the natural conversation between the intrinsic compactness of the rock and the linear forms sought by the artist. The strength of the rock transmitted to this X is akin to the many that we have put in the ballot boxes and that have marked the fate of a city or a nation. This X is a Roman numeral, a common symbol in our lives, the sign of something done and accomplished, something that we have chosen first-hand.

*Zealandia's* X shape plays with light and creates a new X that no longer breaks the air, but stretches over the earth, as if to return to its origins, to the heart of the earth in which it was hidden. This X becomes the place to be, even for us, the observers. It indicates a direction for the treasure seekers who interrogate the map of life to understand the path to take.



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[www.gaafoundation.org](http://www.gaafoundation.org)

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Essay: 'Stone-thinking from Zealandia: The art of Gill Gatfield' September 2018  
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Abridged essay: '*Zealandia* – Re-writing Vitruvian Man'  
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