

Gill Gatfield

A composition of two sculptures – one miniature, one virtual and monumental – are bookends at two historic Venetian locations. They are personal and universal structures engaging consciousness and states of being. The miniature *Harmony* beside the Rialto Bridge on the Grand Canal and the monument *Native Tongue XR* at Marinaressa Gardens 'speak' to the viewer through their symbolic I-forms. They evoke other-worlds from within the rare stones, gold and ancient wood from the Islands of Aotearoa New Zealand. Across the waters of Venice, the sculptures echo one another like mirrors. Their refrain plays across the ebb and flow of tides, otherworldly Island-forms (I) connecting with the floating city and the biosphere.

In the historic mercantile hub of Rialto, the precious miniature sculpture *Harmony* fits in the palm of a child's hand. Framed in a square of black velvet, it propagates key moments in art history – piercing a minimalist black square with the I-figure, and outlining the whole in an Italian Renaissance gold frame with a laurel leaf motif of classical origins. The laurel tree was prized in Ancient Greece as a symbol of peace. Sized to encompass the viewer's head, the framed *Harmony* bestows the gilded laurel corona on its audience, the crown worn to signify victory and peace.

Spiritual and anthropomorphic, the totemic I-figures are joined at shoulders/heads and hips/legs. Aligned as gender-free pronouns, they make affirmative sounds: 'aye' in English and 'ae' in Māori, the languages of New Zealand's treaty partners. *Har-*

mony records the passage of time in carved stones and minerals that register geological evolution and are potent with meaning. Each element – pure river-gold, Kahurangi pounamu, and Tāka-ka marble – holds a wairua (spiritual essence) and ancestral connections to whenua (origins/land). Luminous in the setting sun, *Harmony* positions humanity at one with the Earth. Each I/One is unique and independent, with equal standing, articulating the founding principles of human rights. United, these pillars forge a harmony of collective strength.

Beneath the leaning maritime pines in Marinaressa Levante garden, *Native Tongue XR* rises up and looks across the Venetian lagoon, a historic place of transit and a safe harbour from the trials of war. Empowered by the metaverse, the I-form is a free spirit, transcending borders, materiality and boundaries in a rapidly redefining world. Its totemic figure is the digital twin of an ancient kauri monument *Native Tongue*, carved by the artist from the heartwood of a primordial tree, an indigenous taonga (treasure) from a forest buried in Aotearoa at the end of the last Ice Age. Shaped as the first person pronoun and number One/First, *Native Tongue XR* is an alter-ego or 'Other I'. An imposing presence 3m high, created by the viewer through a mobile phone or tablet, the digital monument is experienced in real time and three-dimensional space. Rays of light enliven the golden grain of the ancient wood and an I-shadow imprints the ephemeral figure on land. Both atavistic and high-tech, *Native Tongue XR* propels the past into the present tense.

