



### *Icon-oclastic: new truths at the edge of chaos and form*

Gill Gatfield, *Zealandia*, 2018, New Zealand stone, Italian granite, stainless steel, h 2.3m, w 1m, d 1m

From time immemorial utopia has sat on the horizon, in sight but out of reach, a mirage. Defined infinitely, the concept of a place and time where all are free to be and live equally is what drives us, regardless of the process. Ironically it's perhaps in the obscurity of utopia, its anti-definition, that we may come closer to it.

Aotearoa New Zealand artist Gill Gatfield's sculptural gesture to the future, *Zealandia*, confronts this discussion. Through the figure 'X' (a chromosome, a kiss, a Roman numeral) it frames our pivotal moment in time by referencing the past, while simultaneously operating as both zeitgeist and emblem for a world to aspire to, should the collective people will it. *Zealandia's* conception was prophetic in its anticipation of worldwide race equality riots and the ensuing dismantlement of colonial and confederate monuments, set amongst a pandemic of ubiquitous proportions that questions the very fabric of what it means to live in a global community. In many ways, *Zealandia* is the anti-monument.

First sited in Venice for the 2018 Architecture Biennale exhibition 'Time Space Existence',<sup>1</sup> this inaugural display posed a challenge to ideas of the Renaissance such as Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, embraced in the same Italian city over five centuries prior. *Zealandia* heralds a challenge to the 'perfect proportions' fit by Vitruvian, whose dimensions informed a wealth of spatial design – from architecture to industrial products – tailored to the ideal man and to the exclusion of swathes of citizenry ever since. *Zealandia's* very existence works to unravel a dominant rhetoric that has inherently influenced all we know, from value systems to the built environment. In doing so, a new lingua franca begins.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Time Space Existence', Giardini Marinaressa, San Marco Canale. Curated by Global Art Affairs Foundation & European Cultural Centre, May - December 2018.

*Without front or back, or single point of perspective, Zealandia's abstract figure  
imagines a world without oppression where diversity is  
the perfect set of proportions.*

- Gill Gatfield, 7 July 2018

In early 2019 *Zealandia* returned to Aotearoa where a site intuit was found in the heritage grounds of Government House, Auckland. Here the work feels at home, where all elements are equally key in the tableau vivant: *Zealandia*, the maunga, the forest, the lawn and the House.

Contrary to the inertia of many a public sculpture, the work is a powerful presence emanating the mana of the mountain and of the Governor-General, calling quietly from the garden of a civic house and constitutional pillar of democracy; a potential influencer of decisions in futures untold. *Zealandia* keeps watch – over occupancy, flagpole and ceremony – and in that way keeps an eye on the truth, gradually building a record that will embed and layer its mineral fabric over time.



Abstract and figurative at once, *Zealandia's* symmetry is disrupted by feral striations observed close and at side-view, where the figure becomes an 'I'. Hewn from a single block of precious stone from Te Waipounamu's telluric depths, *Zealandia* gracefully promotes a philosophy of endurance; a wisdom borne from witnessing the earth's tectonic shape-shifting for over 100 million years, before being human was remotely possible.



The title *Zealandia* carries a double reference: to the recently discovered 8<sup>th</sup> continent in the South Pacific Ocean; and to the idealized classical female symbol created by British settlers soon after arrival in Aotearoa, commonly found personified as a nubile statue in towns across the country, representative of all that was fair and promising in the new land. Zealandia, the symbol, was ostensibly the daughter of an aging Britannia, where slavery and labour exploitation pushed people to new shores.

Today Gatfield commands a new interpretation of 'Zealandia' in ideas, language and form through a perfect alchemy of material, concept and site, shedding the tropes of femininity to become A-sexual and A-gender. She states that by 'aligning the X-figure with the history of human evolution – from Ape to standing Human – *Zealandia* elevates on a pedestal the DNA that unites people, not the histories and systems that divide them.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 'Zealandia –Icon-oclastic', Gill Gatfield, 7 July 2018.

Until as recently as the 1970s much of western anthropological thought split the genders and attributed 'nature' and 'wild' to females, and 'culture' and 'civilization' (tame, order) to males.<sup>3</sup> It was argued universally that culture was superior to nature and therefore nature was to be dominated. Today we know that is not true. Nestled perfectly at the fringes of a manicured lawn and remnant lush forest at Government House, *Zealandia* sits at the edge of chaos and form: it's here that we find a liberating potential, with Gatfield's sculpture at the helm.



## Ineke Dane

Ineke Dane is an award-winning curator from lutruwita Tasmania based in Meanjin Brisbane, Australia. She has a background in contemporary art theory, climate change law and Indigenous justice; each of these disciplines informing a thought-provoking and conceptually rigorous practice.

As Senior Curator with UAP, Ineke develops site-specific public art for urban spaces and maintains, in parallel, an independent curatorial practice, recently presenting *Conversations on Shadow Architecture* in Brisbane (Metro Arts 2021) and Sydney (Dominik Mersch Gallery Curator Award 2022), supported by Australia Council and Arts Queensland.

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<sup>3</sup> Nature, culture and gender, MacCormack, C. and Strathern, M. (Eds) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980.