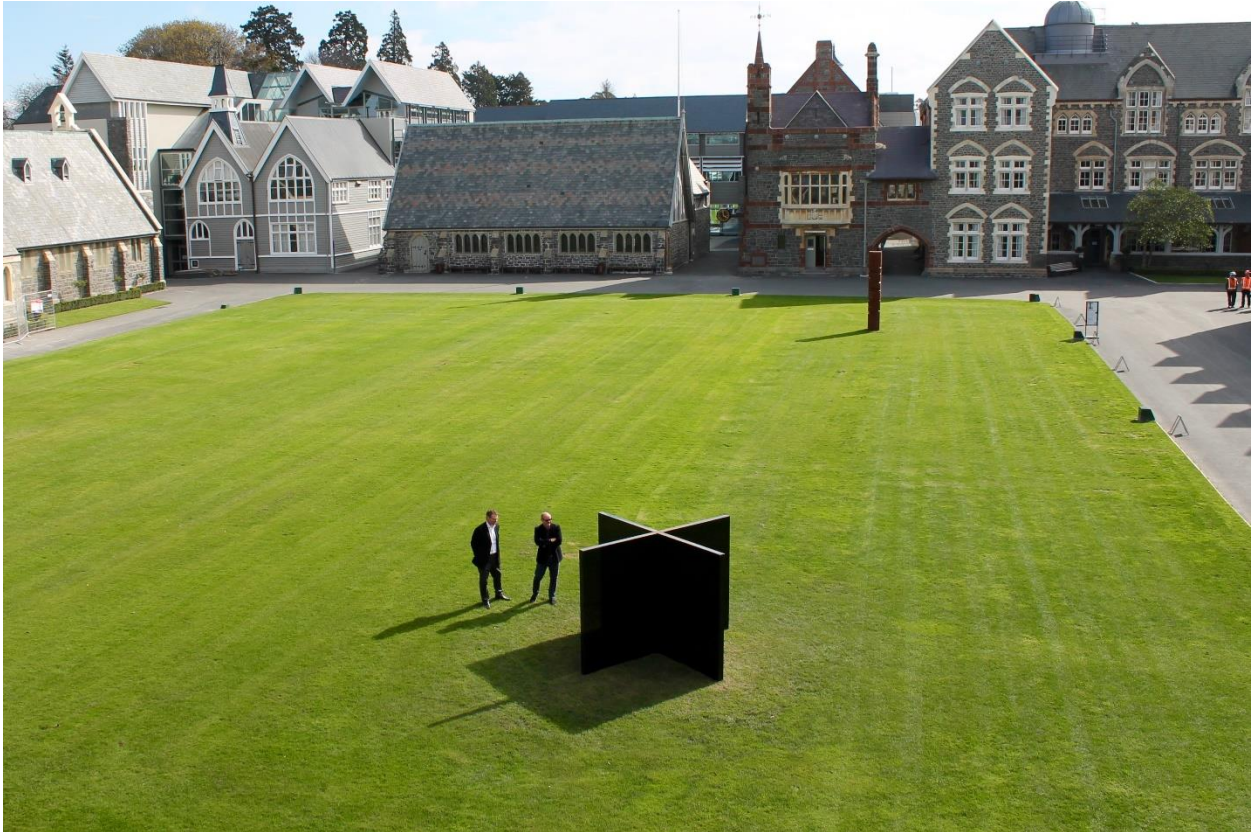


Falling in love with a Kiss

Dr Warren Feeney

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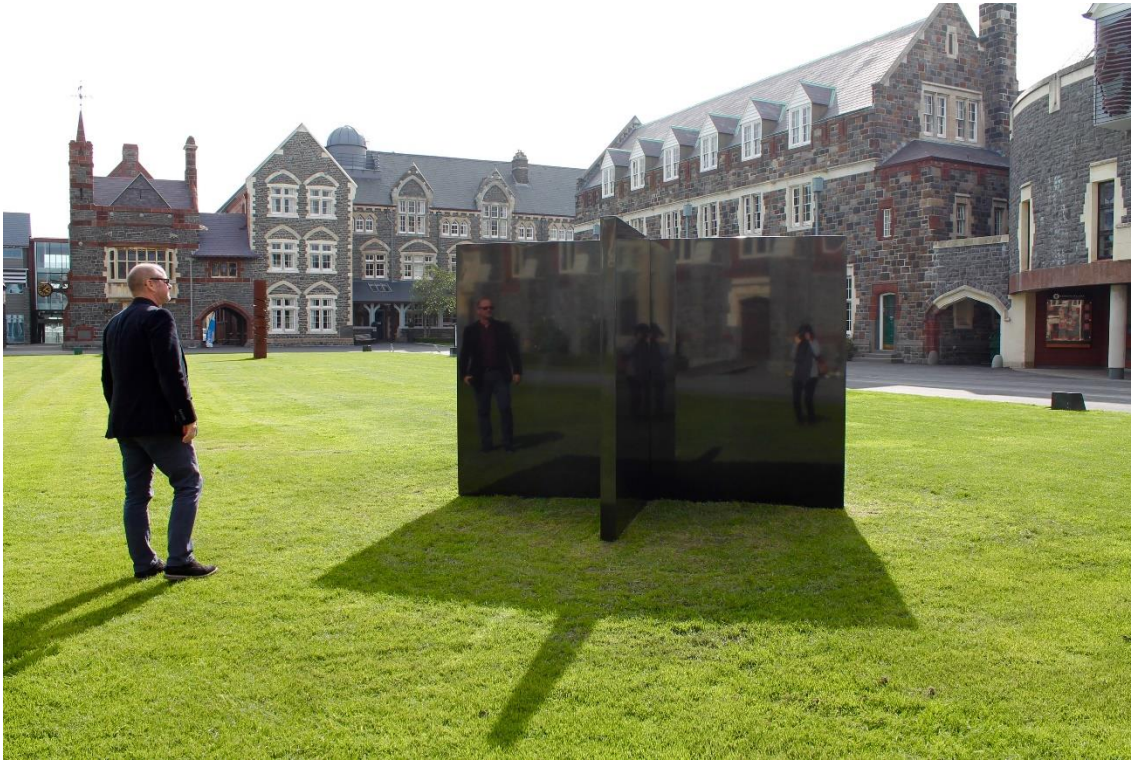
Gill Gatfield's sculpture *The Kiss*, at Christ's College, Christchurch NZ.

Gill Gatfield's sculpture, *The Kiss*, is a four tonne black granite "X." Two years in the making in New Zealand, India and Denmark, *The Kiss* literally and metaphorically marked its spot in Christchurch in October 2016 in Christ's College's quadrangle as part of SCAPE's annual public art's programme.

The Kiss was also recently announced as the winner in the Landscape Category of the prestigious international public art CODAwards. Established in the United States by an amalgam of eminent designers, architects and artists, its selection panel in 2017 included editor-in-chief of *Interior Design* magazine, Cindy Allan, and CEO of Phaidon publishers, Keith Fox. The panel described *The Kiss* as 'strong, simple, yet meaningful, poetic and political.'

Installed on a beach in Aarhus, Denmark in June 2015 for the biennial Sculpture by the Sea over a period of four weeks, Gatfield's sculpture was visited by more than 500,000 people.

The curator of SCAPE's 2016 programme, Massey University's Heather Galbraith says she was thrilled to hear of Gatfield's recognition for the initial presentation of *The Kiss* in Denmark. 'This work has been recognised for its conceptual and formal strength and subtlety. Having seen this work so warmly welcomed in Ōtautahi for SCAPE 2016, it is very special to see it being so highly regarded on the international stage.'



Gill Gatfield's sculpture *The Kiss*, at Christ's College Christchurch NZ.

Success for Gatfield's work resides, not just in the international esteem it has received, but equally in the captivating public responses it has elicited. Those who circle it, or are bounded by its polished black granite form, see their presence reflected back upon themselves. *The Kiss* encourages a physical response. Couples have been seen to embrace and kiss, others run their fingers over its surfaces, tracing their journey around it, and for children it has been a game of hide and seek. At Christ's College it was difficult not to feel embraced by the work, yet, in seeing one's reflection, also become conscious of where you were standing at that moment in place and time.

As a geometric minimalist form that traverses ancient and modern cultures, values and knowledge systems *The Kiss* is a deeply philosophical, yet affable, experience as a work of art.



Gill Gatfield's sculpture *The Kiss* at Sculpture by the Sea, Aarhus, Denmark.

Gatfield has been refining public responses to her work for more than a decade, and maintains that "geometric abstraction is ancient as well as global, hence its wide audience reach. In my work, it aligns with universal symbolic content as well as aesthetics".

Graduating from Auckland University with a Master of Fine Arts (Hons) in 2004, she gained public attention in 2011, winning a national art competition with *Silhouette*, a site-specific black granite and white glacial stone sculpture at the gateway to Smales Farm Bus Station in Takapuna, Auckland. On a scale that frames the human figure, *Silhouette* invites its inquisitive visitors to walk through and around it, taking in the changing environment of this busy community space, day or night.



Gill Gatfield's sculpture *Silhouette* at Smales Farm Station, Auckland NZ.

In 2011, Gatfield also participated in *Sculpture in the Gardens* at the Auckland Botanic Gardens, installing *Native Tongue*, a three metre carved segment of ancient kauri (45,000 years old), excavated from a Northland swamp. Its prehistoric weathered surfaces and the prominence and candour of its geometric "I," proved near impossible for visitors to resist. *Native Tongue* is now located in the head offices of Spark in downtown Auckland, visible from all eight levels of the building, it 'communicates' with visitors and staff wherever they may be.

If hauling ancient kauri from a Northland swamp was not challenging enough, Gatfield's commitment to securing the right materials to realise her work assumed an international scale for *The Kiss*. The black granite she required meant finding a rare natural material beyond dimensions normally used for commercial purposes.

She maintains that "not finding the right stone was not an option". Locating a quarry in Southern India, after two blocks were found to be unsuitable, a third block was quarried and accepted.



Gill Gatfield's sculpture Native Tongue.

And the challenges of creating an artwork in three countries, in three languages? "I worked with translators in New Zealand, Denmark and India. I used drawings, photos and the international language of numbers and made sure key people physically handled models of *The Kiss*. Double-checking how my ideas were being interpreted was critical. Cutting a huge block of granite is a reducing process. It's not possible to add stone back.'

"This is not an exact science. Stone has its own mind and quick decision-making was needed, often across different time zones. People closely involved understood that the project might result in something special."

Gatfield says the idea for *The Kiss* came from seeing Palaeolithic cave paintings in Southern France in 2013. They fuelled a desire to "represent both the cave and the drawing in a single abstract gesture".

Responses to *The Kiss* reveal numerous points of view: *The Kiss* represents universal DNA, the genetic code shared by all women and men. It is also a single sound, a letter, a mathematical sign for plus and multiply, a symbol, a cross, circle and square. The X also announces; "You are here: This is it."

Gatfield comments that *The Kiss* completed its global journey in 2016 when it was transported to New Zealand and presented at Christ's College for SCAPE Public Art. There was, in fact, something about the material of this sculpture that seemed utterly relevant to the city.

'My abstractions also carry imperfection - caused by a quirk of hand or a quality revealed within the materials or in the process of making. In *The Kiss*, under certain lights, a faint dark line tracks across all four arms of the sculpture. Created millions of years ago when the granite was being

formed below the earth's surface these markings trace earth movements. Hardened with deposits of minerals these lines are areas of strength, not weakness.'

'Only revealed when the giant block was first cut, my team in India panicked, thinking I would be heartbroken but I was thrilled. These marks record movements in tectonic plates - the perfect 'imperfection' for *The Kiss*. This serendipity seemed even more apt when presenting *The Kiss* in Christchurch.'

Director of SCAPE Public Art, Deborah McCormick says that 'when the opportunity arose to show *The Kiss* in Christchurch for SCAPE Season 2016, I was very taken by the sculpture's conceptual approach, audience appeal and technical sophistication. All of these qualities were confirmed for me upon installation at Christ's College on the grass quad. It's been a great pleasure to work with Gill and share the magic of *The Kiss*.'

Gatfield observes that 'the response in each place to *The Kiss* was different because the context was different. The distinct sites and timing impacted on the responses. In Denmark, the audience came from across Europe. *The Kiss* was considered in light of a different art history and cultural context. In Denmark, *The Kiss* was surrounded by nature, during the Danish suffrage centenary. In Christchurch as part of SCAPE, it was symbolic of progress – a change of rules, opening up the hallowed turf at a heritage school, and of renewal in a city rebuilding itself.'

***The Kiss* has now been acquired by a private collector. SCAPE Public Art Season 2017 Time in Space (territories and flow), is curated by Heather Galbraith, and runs from 7 October to 18 November in central Christchurch.**

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