



# 17 Gill Gatfield

## Native Tongue

*ancient kauri (agathis australis)*  
3000mm x 1700mm x 200mm

POA

Rising from the ground, *Native Tongue* articulates a monumental number/letter/word: '1 or One', in a single slab cut from the heartwood of a giant ancient kauri.

Radiocarbon-dated at over 45,000 years old, this very rare and unique timber, recovered from a prehistoric buried forest in Northland New Zealand, pre-dates the Ice Age, Neanderthal man, the hunt for mammoths, cave painting in Europe, and human migration to Aotearoa.

Possibly 2,000 years old when it fell, the mature tree remained chemically sealed in a peat swamp. In perfect condition more than 45 centuries later, the 'heart shakes' (formed at the centre of a fast

growing juvenile reaching for the canopy and bowing in the coastal winds) are conserved in *Native Tongue*.

Pre-dating the invention of language, the timber used in making the I-form sculpture places the earth at the centre of the concept and serves as a visual metaphor for the Mother Tongue or originating language from which all things evolve. The abstract figure remains open for interpretation by different cultures and creeds. The primordial, exhumed tree takes on a new life in *Native Tongue*, to tell many stories and begin again to silver with age.

*Gill Gatfield graduated with Masters in Fine Arts (Hons) from Auckland University in 2004. Her sculptures, in glass, stone and timber, render complex ideas in minimalist form.*

*In 2011, Gatfield won a major public art competition for a permanent sculpture at Smales Farm Station, Auckland. Her work is exhibited widely in art award exhibitions, and held in collections in New Zealand and offshore.*

