

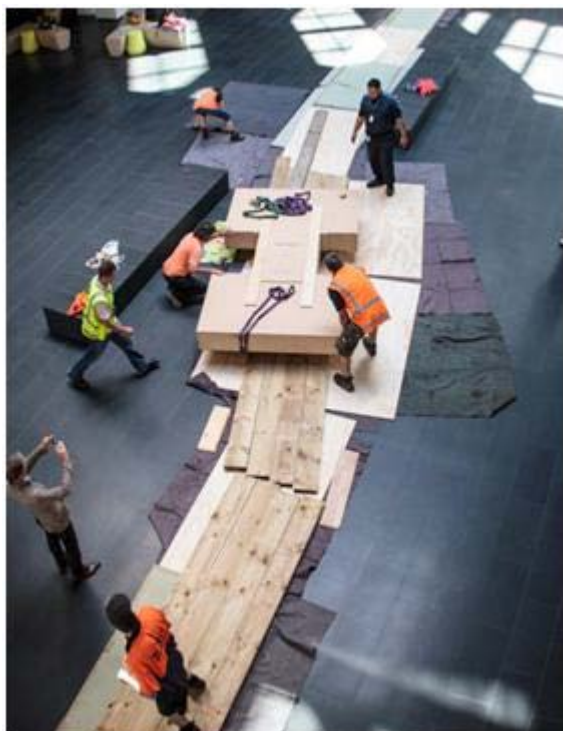
## Telecom embraces its Native Tongue

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Over the weekend, we received a one tonne sculpture made from a single ancient piece of kauri, entitled *Native Tongue*.

Created by Whangaparaoa based artist Gill Gatfield, *Native Tongue* is now proudly displayed in Telecom Place, bringing some much-needed life to the previously barren landscape of the main atrium.

Pulse was onsite at Telecom Place yesterday to watch the installation. A crew from Rich Rigging arrived at 8am to begin preparations and at 9.30am the priceless artwork was offloaded by crane closely supervised by Gill Gatfield herself and a crew from Telecom property. Due to *Native Tongue*'s weight, and concerns about the tiling and flooring in the atrium of Telecom Place, sections of elaborate walkway of blankets and wooden planks had to be laid down first. Once these were in place, the crated sculpture was then wheeled across, section by section, along with a mobile crane rig - a process which took around 3 hours to complete. Once in place, the sculpture was lifted into place and un-crated.



During this mammoth 5 hour effort, Pulse took the opportunity to speak with the creator of *Native Tongue*, Gill Gatfield about her life, her work and how she feels about letting us take care of one of her most prized pieces.

**I'm looking at *Native Tongue* and wondering – how on earth did you make this?**

I dreamt of making *Native Tongue* many years ago. It took a long time to find the log suitable for the sculpture - it had to be an alpha specimen – large, straight, strong and clean grained. And, it had to be ancient heart wood. Such a log is extremely rare.

The work itself was complex, involving very old technology and very new state-of-the-art technology. Using an ancient book-matching technique, the single slab has been 'folded' end to end forming a seamless continuity of surface and grain and it's sealed with a high grade penetrating timber oil, specially designed for NZ climate conditions. It also has an engineer designed installation system. Overall it took more than a year to complete.

### What's its meaning?

*Native Tongue* is pure heart – it's made from heartwood. It speaks of our land and has been connected to Aotearoa for more than 45,000 years - this timber was embedded in the land well before people came to New Zealand. In such a young country, *Native Tongue* reveals the ancient origins of our past and our deep connections to the wider world. Somehow *Native Tongue* is timeless; it makes the transition, like a witness from the past to the present, sending a message to the future.

The I-form conveys layers of meaning: a first person pronoun, a number: One, a symbol of divinity and a phonetic 'eye'. It's open for interpretation by different cultures and creeds.

### How old is the piece of kauri used to make *Native Tongue*?

It's carved from one giant ancient kauri recovered from a prehistoric forest in the far north. It was buried in peat approximately 50,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age; the fallen log was sealed in a chemically balanced environment which preserved the timber in perfect condition.

Neither petrified nor turned to coal, the single tree I used to make *Native Tongue* is estimated to be 2,000 years old while growing above ground and radiocarbon dated by Waikato University scientists at over 45,000 years below ground. So, in total it's closer to 50,000 years old.

### How did it come about that Telecom got to have this?

**More about Gill Gatfield**



Born in Kawerau, Bay of Plenty.  
Lived in Auckland, Wellington, London, and Pennsylvania, USA  
Married with three children  
Based in Whangaparaoa, works out of a large factory studio  
Holds a Bachelor of Laws and Masters of Fine Arts from The University of Auckland  
Studied for 2 years at Elam  
Has worked as a barrister, a senior advisor on law reform and founded a legal consultancy.  
Wrote the book *Without Prejudice: Women in the Law* in 1996  
Began exhibiting abstract text and landscape paintings in 1999  
Won the 2011 Public Sculpture Competition for *Silhouette*, which stands at Smales Farm Station, Takapuna beside the Northern Motorway.

Following on from an exhibition at the Auckland Botanic Gardens, I wanted to make sure *Native Tongue* continued to get quality 'airtime'. As a new and significant work, it is fresh above ground, so to speak. The Telecom atrium is prestigious, impressive in scale, and vibrant with activity. Located here, *Native Tongue* will be exposed to a wide audience on a daily basis.

The context is perfect; *Native Tongue* like Telecom is all about the essence of people, language, connection, being there, communication.



**And seeing it here now, you realise how perfectly the atrium and *Native Tongue* are together**

Yes, the Telecom atrium is a great space! You can view it from different vantage points and different heights within the building, from open air walkways and stairways. The environmental goals behind the design and materials of Telecom building, and the use of natural light and timber features within the building, work well with the sculpture, and vice versa.

**What do you want visitors to Telecom Place to feel or think when they encounter *Native Tongue*?**

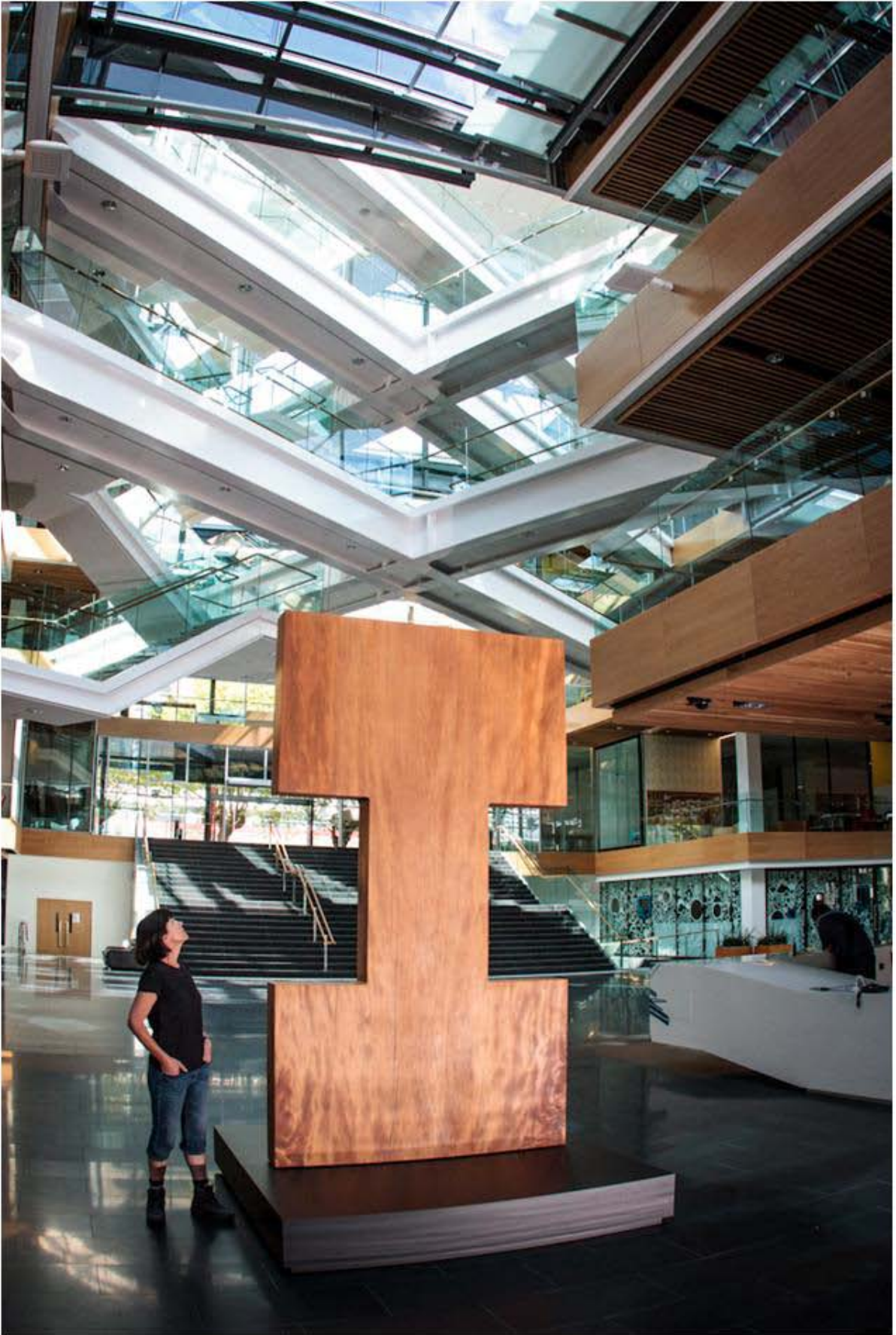
I hope visitors will share my sense of wonder when they encounter the sculpture's ancient material, the warmth and grain, and smooth lines. Viewers may respond to the connection with the land, the sculpture's scale and precision, the text, and the intrigue of possible conceptual meanings.

I hope these first impressions will trigger people's own thoughts, feelings and further conversations.

**Further reading:**

[-Gill Gatfield official website](#)

[-Career Conversion: Gill Gatfield by Gill South \(NZ Herald, 23 Jan, 2012\)](#)



Photography by James Hancox (except photo #3)