



Alive with art

A popular Auckland sculpture event showcases the synergy between art and gardens.

WORDS GRETCHEN CARROLL PHOTOS CHESTER NICHOLLS



1. Emma Camden's *Shadow House* directs your eye to the landscape it frames. **2.** Auckland Botanic Gardens Manager Jack Hobbs says the artworks change how visitors view the gardens. **3.** Lead Curator Dr Linda Tyler says curators look at how a sculpture complements plantings. **4.** *Patchwork of Possibilities*, constructed out of repurposed 44-gallon drums, is a collaboration from sisters Amy Lynch and Katie Baptiste, known as Metal Metcalfe.

OPPOSITE Greg Tuthill explores Fibonacci geometry in the plant world in his work *Nonagon Acorn*.

Established in 2007, Sculpture in the Gardens returns this summer after a three-year hiatus. The free event at Auckland Botanic Gardens features 15 outside works and an indoor exhibition with hundreds of smaller artworks for visitors to enjoy and purchase.

Auckland Botanic Gardens Manager Jack Hobbs says they find visitor numbers increase during Sculpture in the Gardens, because the presence of these beautiful artworks changes the lens through which visitors view the whole environment.

Sculpture in the Gardens' artists are from around Aotearoa, and the artworks are created especially for the exhibition. The themes coming through this year are conservation, the fragility of nature and climate change.

PLANTS VERSUS ART

Jack says artwork and the garden should complement each other. "I think gardening is one of the great art forms, one that works all the senses – fragrance, obviously the aesthetic, also sound, movement, everything is in a garden."

Lead Curator Dr Linda Tyler says she and the other two curators look at the way a sculpture can enhance and complement plantings. This includes textures, as well as colour playing a big part. "You often see something working well against predominantly green or blue backgrounds because the colour stands out, and we've got some startling colours this year."

The three curators – Linda, Terry Urbahn and Catherine Hamilton – spend a day together with a huge map of the gardens.

"As we are narrowing it down to our final choices, we're thinking about making a walk something that has an element of surprise

and draws people through the spaces. We're thinking about a sequence – what will go well in particular places – and try as much as possible to use areas that are easily accessible, giving the visitors an experience of the different types of garden and planting.

"There's nothing quite like being in the space and experiencing the different light and sounds. It creates a lasting, memorable experience for people that will give them a good two hours of entertainment," she says.







4



5

1. Chester Nicholls' work *Pod* suggests husks nurturing seeds, the gems of potential. 2. In *Two With One Shot*, Greg Piper considers the impact of colonisation in Aotearoa, in particular on the extinction of the huia. 3. Josh and Amelia Olley remind us of our responsibility and potential to give, and to graciously receive, in *Hand Down*. 4. Oriah Rapley's work, *Spirits Flight*, is inspired by the pōhutukawa tree at Te Rerenga Wairua Cape Reinga, where spirits are said to leave this land. 5. James Wright's *Long Fin Eels, Tuna – Kuwharuwharu* is an installation of sculptures, symbolising the importance of running creeks in our ecosystems.

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LOCATION MATTERS

Jack says the curators do a superb job. “An artwork can look wonderful in one setting, but in another might be actually not quite right. The artists, together with the curators, locate the artworks in the most appropriate place.”

It's a matter of scale, says Linda, you don't want things to be dwarfed. “There're people working on a micro scale, and their works are really appealing to children. You want to give space where people can interact with the art. There are so many opportunities in the Auckland Botanic Gardens, because there are all sorts of different spaces and plants.”

Some of the sculptors come up with an idea about placement when they're working on the design and are asked to nominate where they'd like the artwork to go. As part of this process, they visit the gardens and think about what would suit their work.

“That's the ideal synergy, where you can see that they're trying to do something, not competing with what's there, but to actually complement and enhance it,” says Linda.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Once the artists have been selected, they all come to the botanic gardens and meet with engineers to go through the practicalities and location. They go away and make their artwork, and then it's installed. Some take days to install, while others take a couple of hours.

Linda says because people love to touch and interact with the sculptures, you have to ensure that people won't hurt themselves. The engineers contribute their time free of charge and ensure the artworks will be robust. Because people will try to climb on them, they've got to be safe and meet consenting criteria.



1. In *Moo*, Jamie Pickernell explores the wondrousness and politics of cows. **2.** Chris Moore is hoping his contribution, *Bubblegum*, inspired by bubblegum coral, will bring awareness to what is happening to our underwater forests. **3.** Andrea Gardner and Brit Bunkley's *Cenotaph for a Snail* draws attention to the loss of habitat of a native land snail.



2

There's a community of people from different fields who make it happen, says Jack, including curators, artists, the Friends of the Auckland Botanic Gardens, volunteers, patrons, sponsors, Auckland Council and the Auckland Botanic Gardens staff, who all love it.

"To a large extent that's why it's such a success, because so many people are passionate about it, and a lot of them come back year after year. We've got artists who may not be exhibiting every time, but who participate in different roles."

Jack says it's by far their number-one event, and is expecting more than 350,000 people, who come from further afield than usual. The exhibition is spread over three months to allow for these visitor numbers. All the artworks are for sale, with proceeds contributing to the event's funding. Auckland Botanic Gardens always purchases at least one artwork from the exhibition to go on permanent display, and this is funded by sales.

SCULPTURE IN THE HOME GARDEN

Jack has some tips for the home gardener choosing art for their garden.

"Gardens shouldn't be seen as just a setting for art, because the artwork and garden together are the artwork. I have a few artworks in my own garden, but one which resonates with my visitors and me is a huge, old anvil. It sits in one of my gardens and looks beautiful in that spot. It's finding the right artwork for the right place, and don't put too much in – I've been to a number of gardens, which have been spoiled by too much art, and your eyes don't know where to look.

"As gardeners, what we're creating are places of beauty, and it's a challenging form, because you're dealing with both the inanimate and living. So from a craft point of view, it's challenging, but when it is executed well, it is a fabulous form of art, and greatly enhanced by the presence of sculptures.

"What I find really interesting," he says, "and it's the same when I take people on garden tours, is that some people will love an artwork and others hate it. And I love that about Sculpture in the Gardens, because if the definition of art is something that moves you, this exhibition really does."

Sculpture in the Gardens is a free event at Auckland Botanic Gardens and runs until 2 March 2025. For more information, visit sculptureinthegardens.nz



3



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