

Consider the challenge that a site like the Waitakaruru Arboretum offers to both artist and arborist. Forty-two acres of land traversing a Waikato hillside, the site of an abandoned Winstone greywacke quarry – evidenced by the rock underfoot and (only just) underground throughout the park. For over sixteen years park owners John and Dorothy Wakeling have undertaken an impressive and dedicated project of planning, landscaping and planting. John is an arborist by profession, and his passion both for the site and for the programme of cultivation undertaken here is clearly evident. It is a rich and interesting site – extraordinary for its history as a quarry and for the sheer beauty and diversity of the growth that can be experienced in the park today.

For an artist or curator the site is a rare opportunity, but not without a few obstacles. Here there is no room for artists to be complacent about what they are competing with spatially and aesthetically. Light, wind, colour, scale and durability must each be negotiated. Surely the most critical question that must be asked by artists or curators contemplating making work for such environments is *what is worth adding?* What will benefit from this environment and what can the environment benefit from? These questions form the motivation for E:SCAPE. To treat the site with the respect it demands, but also to place work within it that is able to stand its ground. To do justice to the context and to give both the work and the park space to breathe.

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E:SCAPE includes significantly less artists than previous exhibitions. Individual works are allowed space to be discovered, and also to surprise us. Each artist establishes a point of connection with the environment, and how this plays out varies enormously from work to work. John Ioane's *Pearliculture* sits weightlessly in the quarry pond, achieving what few works, if any, have been able to do before it in this site – it actually makes the quarry feel smaller. A perfect match for James McCarthy's (.....?), where piano wires stretch from one side of the quarry to the other – a literal and graceful conversion of site into musical instrument that again serves to remind us of both the characteristics of the site and the scale with which we are dealing.

From a distance the tall thin scale of Karin Strachan's wind battered *Safehouse* feels unsteady – as if the work is slowly being set adrift. However, on approach the scale overtakes us and the viewer quickly becomes stranded – this is a safe house with no entry point. Gaye Jurisich is well known for her outdoor installations using recycled plastic and farming materials. *Plot* connects every tree in a small plantation of pines with three strands of bright orange twine. The work shifts effortlessly and playfully throughout the site, stopping to account for the dead pine rotting in the ground and at another point jumps the fence into the neighbouring farmland.

Works of a smaller scale in the park make no less impact, Jim Cooper's bed of ceramic tulips *My Precious Little Things* draws us in and demands we take a closer look, the work is a splendid visual treat and arguably better than the real thing. Smaller scale works also feature around the lower two ponds and include works by both artists and designers. Here notions of function and utility are questioned. Duncan Sargent's *Land Buoys* sit stranded on the water's edge void of any proposed function. Industrial designer Dan Emery has teamed up with Fraser Engineering in Wellington to produce his nest of intricately cut steel tables. These works require total precision

in their fabrication, but Emery introduces disorder and chance to the work as they are left to weather and rust throughout the course of show.

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There is a work you won't see at the park and its time at the arboretum will far exceed that of E;SCAPE. Up high on the right hand side of the quarry in an area not yet open to the public, John Wakeling has planted a circle of (name of trees?), fifty in total, each planted at one metre intervals spanning a fifteen metre diameter. This is John's *100 Year Project* – his living work of art. Planted under a year ago the uninformed eye might not even notice the metre high seedlings, but imagined in 10 years, 25 years, 100 years time, the circle takes on an formidable physicality. Depending on how John tends them now and whose hands they end up in, at some point in the future the edges of these trees will touch and form a solid wall of wood.

This project would and should increase the heart rate of any serious sculptor. It displays all the key elements that we strive for as artists. It is daring and ambitious, it engages us with the site visually and conceptually, and most importantly it makes accessible the passion and motivation of an individual. It is my hope that the works in E;SCAPE do justice to the site and share in some of John and Dorothy's contagious enthusiasm for its possibilities.