

# ONE DAY SCULPTURE

A NEW ZEALAND-WIDE SERIES OF TEMPORARY PUBLIC ARTWORKS

## MARCUS MOORE 'TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT'

I wish to preface this paper to address a comment that was made from the floor in an earlier paper, one received quite well. This comment spoke of the 'proliferation of image' as a means to disseminate ideas widely; and a positive outcome from this One Day Sculpture programme. However, I wish to draw caution of the perceived advantages of the proliferation of image in lieu of the nuanced moment and the intimacies to be had with an art in situ. By engaging people in public space art is met fleetingly or participated in over duration. Its symptom however does not end with an encounter, but can cumulate through the telling of others: friends, family, colleagues and so the terms of engagement with temporary public art in situ persists in some measure after it's gone. And then there is the document.

These poles -- situ and one of its aftermath: an image -- is one cut and thrust of our terms of engagement with temporary public art-forms that this programme was conjured-up for us to encourage discourse on. What becomes of One Day Sculpture ultimately concerns a record. I position myself as historian looking back at a one day sculpture one day in the past in this country, undertaken within a critical international period that sees the New Zealand scene contemporaneous in involvement through post-object to situationally based and site responsive temporary public projects. This period is valid for the symposia of ideas on time, place and space; and dare I say the quandary of legacy.

[SCREEN – ODS LOGO]



The problem with one-day sculptures is they can be missed.

How might we use documentation as a record after the fact (or indeed to amass a wider audience)?

In what ways does the historian position themselves in relation to a site-specific temporary project when never contemporaneous as critic or writer in situ?

These are not new questions, but I use them specifically to address a 1975 temporary public project in this country that has, for all intensive purposes, moved on and become 'lost' – or as Tony Green writes of an art-form: quote: “whose existence is now tenuous if not unreclaimable.”<sup>1</sup>

---

**[SCREEN – MENDELSBERG INTERIOR VIEW]**



Mendelsberg, Martin. *Air Corridor* (1975). Interior View installation process. Cathedral Square, Christchurch, New Zealand. Image courtesy the artist, copyright © 1975/2009 Martin Mendelsberg.

Here's the situation. In 1975 Martin Mendelsberg sets-up a 200-foot long semi-transparent structure that appeared overnight in the South Walkway adjacent to the Christchurch Cathedral for the Christchurch Arts Festival. The project resists the conventions that a sculpture is fixed in one place to reside throughout the duration of an arts programme. Every-day throughout the 2-week Festival, by Mendelsberg's devise, the industrial fan used to inflate the structure is turned off. The anchor points untied and released. The structure left to deflate. The material folded up upon itself and then stored in the Cathedral's vestibule until the following day when the operation is resituated. His public work, more than temporary, was transitory: appear, be stored, re-appear.

---

**[SCREEN, blank screen]**

Before I develop understandings of Mendelsberg's project: I position my reasons for looking to the past in relation to this current One Day Sculpture programme; I offer a

few observations on this programme's terms of engagement and uses of the Internet; I briefly consider the writer in situ of the 1970s 'post-object' scene in relation to Wystan Curnow's writing in situ in Auckland; then return to consider Mendelsberg's project using extant photographs of the project to gauge its situational cues.

---

A caveat for One Day Sculpture 2008 to 2009 is that 'legacy' is yet to be 'found out' for this programme of temporary and ephemeral works –.

I cast an eye to the past for a legacy in this country of temporary situational based public projects. This shouldn't be overlooked for two reasons.

(1) One, because the 1970s was one principal catalyst for Claire Doherty and the Litmus curatorial initiative in 2006 – who understood the return to the precedent in 1970s practices. The 1970s sees an historical shift in the traditions of art making, sutured to the blurring of art and life within a milieu of radical social and political reform. That is to say, that this decade most comprehensively demonstrates the shift from perceptions of what art IS to what art can DO.

(2) Secondly, because of the curious mission statement for this programme:

**[SCREEN – CURATORIAL STATEMENT]**

*“Conceived as the first project of its kind to be staged in New Zealand, what also marks ONE DAY SCULPTURE apart is the combination of [...] different artistic responses to the commissioning brief [...by June 2009...] a unique portrait of contemporary sculptural practice [will have emerged] establishing an internationally significant legacy.”<sup>2</sup>*

**[SCREEN, blank screen...]**

The attributes of works in this programme don't strike me as those that would wish to promote a hermetic appraisal of the way influences come and go in history, whether one or another can claim that dubious title of being the 'first project of its kind' especially when directly tied to use of the term 'legacy'. In art historical terms legacy is stitched through historical contexts.<sup>3</sup>

Least to say, the spin aroused by this statement of aims might lead to overlook an extremely important Chapter in New Zealand art where situational temporary public projects occurred, and, where, in a different milieu, political and social reforms were



vehemently a very real consequence of and for the motivations of artists in this country, especially in the centre of Auckland.

In 1998 Christina Barton succinctly defines ‘post-object’ as, and I quote, ‘a catch-all label for work deriving from the expanded field of experimental sculpture that emerged in New Zealand in the late 1960s, in performance, installation and intermedia. The “post” of post-object denotes a desire to go beyond “the object”, which had become freighted with oppressive values and meanings, to refocus on actual bodies, processes, ephemeral situations, specific sites [...]’.<sup>4</sup> End quote....

**[SCREEN: BARBER’S KISS HERE]**



Bruce Barber, from *Kiss* (1974) still from slide-tape sequence. Image courtesy of the artist, copyright © 1974/2009 Bruce Barber.

Post-object practice was not so much destined to occur in public, but a number of various examples did and can be traced.

It is in Barton’s 1987 thesis, still the most comprehensive collected evidence of ‘post-object’ history in New Zealand, titled *Some Experiments in Art and Life: ‘post-object’*

1969 – 1979 that I first encountered this image of Mendelsberg's project **[SCREEN image]** – but this image, like any image, can impart only part of the story.

---

**[SCREEN – ODS LOGO]**

A principal aim of this One Day Sculpture programme is to situate work outside the entrenchment of gallery and museum conventions. This is an exercise of a public dimension, but we cannot forget to question the institution's ability to address works of a temporary nature for the fate of documents and records in this programme: for me, this has seen the amassing of an audience that did not engage directly with works in situ but one is formed through uses and terms of engagement of the Internet.

**[SCREEN – GOOGLE INTERNET PAGE]**

As this programme unfolds the uses of the Internet as a site for global network has arisen combined with the allied reach of communications: email, text messaging, digital copy and up-loadable essay in PDFs.

Such terms of engagement are predicated on what Craig J Saper ... **[Screen – Book Cover]** ... terms the intensification of the Internet as a medium of communication and networking in global arts practices that raises the concern: can this forum make for intimate moments (that unmediated)? The Internet as network for One Day Sculpture has been a site for publishing commissioned writing and providing 'untold' hyperlinks and still-images of works in situ -- this response offers bridge between projects and an engagement with works after the fact, to help sustain a year-long project of individual temporary projects throughout New Zealand into a cohesive programme for the record. It negotiates the terms of engagement for projects that people simply can't get to. But it does raise other issue.

IS the Internet, prosperously or otherwise, now *the* most-made-use-of vehicle for global arts networking allied to the immediacy of its electronic reach and disembodied communications? This use of technology may appear more a branding and communication exercise not an employment COMPLICIT with the temporary nature of public projects to enhance audience understandings in situ. While pointless to resist technologies, and unwise not to use them to good effect -- a fact remains that due to this technology the audience for One Day Sculpture is significantly increased,

**[SCREEN – Paoli Pivi Cartoon ODS]** but understandings of the projects in situ are not necessarily enhanced with each artist’s various aims.

**[BLANK screen]**

---

Create a mental picture of this exact ‘24 hour’ public project in 1970s Auckland, that Wystan Curnow notes in 1977 essay. The artist Gray Nichol elected to lie “trapped underneath a two-tonne block for 24- hours.”<sup>5</sup> Curnow does not reveal how the block was lifted to relieve Nichol of every one of those pressing hours in the twenty-four -- but this is a concrete reminder to appreciate the weighty difficulties of legacy of ‘post-object’ in this country : Nichol’s one-day and death-defying -act demonstrates how ‘post-object’ work resisted conventional avenues for museum collection and publication.

---

And Curnow is not a figure to gloss – over. It is because of his writer / critic in situ that others have understood insight into this period through his published accounts at the time or lucky to strike unpublished notes by Curnow in archives in New Zealand and Australia – Writing and sources by Curnow in this period have a ubiquitous quality.

One example:

**[SCREEN – still from Mt Eden performance]**

In situ at Bruce Barber’s May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1973 ‘Mt Eden Crater Performance’ – a performance from dawn to dusk on the shortest day of the year -- Curnow wrote, and writing ain’t a bad way to make a record.

For brevity of this paper I’ll quote from where Curnow’s account ends in situ with his pressing statement:

“it’s a long way down to the bottom of the crater and very steep ... my position’s precarious ...”<sup>6</sup>

I’m taking small liberty – because of time constraints on me here – but ‘the precarious position’ is one of physical risk on a mountain side, but also of being that writer-critic of the work performed in situ then conduit to wider audiences of the performance occurrence and its merit and validity.

Curnow reflects on his writing in 1998 in *Action Replay* to demonstrate and I quote : “performance documentation and criticism converge.” Such record, and Curnow’s reconsideration of his writing in situ over twenty years later, makes for interesting historical example in this country for ‘site-writing’.

---

Two further quick observations on assiduous records: writing and otherwise:

(1) One : Blair French, who is a delegate here, has past written on both Curnow and Jim Allen’s presences at Elam: Allen, particularly, because as Head of Sculpture he set-up a reference library at Elam in 1968 and orchestrated intensive staff-student critique sessions that in the late 1960s can, as Blair French asserts, be seen as the origins for critical art writing emerging in this country.<sup>7</sup>

**[...SCREEN Apple ]**

And, (2) Two, It’s apt that Apple comes from ‘out of historical sight’ and opens tonight at the Adam -- his official One Day Sculpture project is tomorrow at the Salamanca lawns, Botanic Gardens -- Apple came to New Zealand in 1974 shortly after completing these New York works, bringing to New Zealand this capacity for the given situation. Assiduous with the way he conducts his works in situ and the processes and methods of their documentation, Apple is insistent he is that something always lingers: the dirt on windows is not cleaned, it is transferred on to something else – matter becomes matter of another substance.<sup>8</sup>

---

**[SCREEN: image of Mendelsberg’s structure + Cathedral]**



Mendelsberg, Martin. *Air Corridor* (1975). Exterior View, Christchurch Cathedral in background). 1975. Cathedral Square, Christchurch, New Zealand. Image courtesy the artist, copyright © 1975/2009 Martin Mendelsberg.

Martin Mendelsberg arrived to our shores from the United States in 1970 (where he worked with Jean Claude and Christo and names as belonging in his then circle of friends). Other international figures arrived in Auckland in the 1970s who have become, moderately, more widely known in New Zealand art history, and namely: Adrian Hall, Kieran Lyons and Steve Furlonger. Mendelsberg appears on the margins of research on ‘post-object’ because he lived and worked in Christchurch – a centre that has received very little attention for its receptions to post-object.

This is one extant image by which to bring together the project’s proximity to the architecture of further consequence: a Cathedral. Here is invoked the very long standing tradition of an artist, an artwork and the Church.

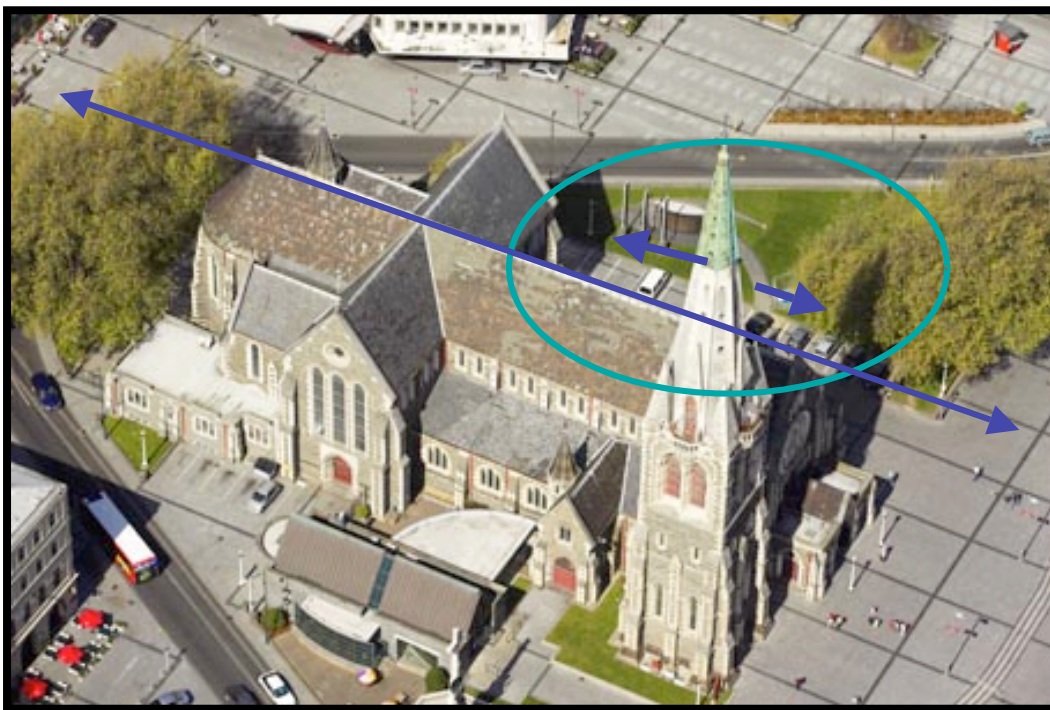
Akin to its transparency, this structure was social and dialectic: provoking – due to Mendelsberg’s strong faith – concerns of the place and encounter of art in people’s lives and the place and encounter of religion in people’s lives.



But there is a limit to our comprehension of the project with ‘even’ *this* particular photographic image. The project’s relationship with the Cathedral cannot be fully understood as we cannot perceive all spatial dimensions through this image: A static image taken from a fixed point of view. What requires investigation is the relationship of this project to the Cathedral, whereby the situational cues can be revealed and understood.

We need to become more spatially aware, particularly, of a West-East axis: .... [ **...SCREEN IMAGE ...** ] .... Consider this computer-generated plan view of the Square which establishes a tradition of Cathedral construction since the 12<sup>th</sup> Century – the Aisle of the Church, the approach to the altar, runs on the West – East axis as this diagram shows.

[**SCREEN next image**]



The area circled is the Southern Walkway, and the line indicates the approximate position of Mendelsberg’s air corridor, running parallel to the Cathedral’s aisle.

[**SCREEN image of + Cathedral + insert of Cathedral’s interior**]



Interior Christchurch  
Cathedral

Medelsberg's structure echoes an 'unseen' architecture of the Cathedral's interior passage, and of procession down it. The situational cue of Mendelsberg's structure transposes a passage in to public space while being a physical passage itself, becoming 'beyond the object manifest'. The transparent material underscores a motivation: to 'see' through, revealing, as liminal, the movements and actions of a passage within the Cathedral and its rites and conducts.

This is not art as representation — but direct action. Nor is Mendelsberg an artist engaged in pure investigations of a medium, rather he activates the social and religious: this is what art can DO in people's daily lives in public. Mendelsberg uses dialectical relations of site and his structure is a situational cue.

**[SCREEN image of structure + Dean and Bishop]**





Mendelsberg, Martin. *Air Corridor* (1975), Interior View Dean and Bishop of Christchurch Cathedral. Cathedral Square, Christchurch, New Zealand. Image courtesy the artist, copyright © 1975/2009 Martin Mendelsberg.

---

Mendelsberg has told me that he felt the work was ‘absolute’ when the Dean and Bishop walked down it: and at the time an odd comment to grasp until he revealed this image to me. What in fact is realised is the situational cue of his project to the passage within the Church is completed by that further sanctified body of the Cathedral.

I accept that this image is somewhat staged appearing in Christchurch newspapers the following day; yet this acted to transfer a message. The Dean and Bishops’ ‘blessing’ turned what was at first an alien and inadmissible structure in the media and public consciousness, into greater, if modest, acceptance: art and religion as factors in daily life were bound to this: as Mendelsberg’s faith and his intentions and aims for the project: one that is compelling faith for members of the public to participate in.

[...BLANK SCREEN....]

---

I'll lead out to my conclusion, by quickly referencing two other projects by Mendelsberg :

With John Cousins and Lawrence Shustak, Mendlesberg staged the Duchampian and John Cage influenced, *Aggressive Theatre* in 1978 [screen image]. Fencers engaged in combat with electronic sensors attached to their armour suit, that when hit, emitted a chance- encounter of electronic sounds. The performance ended when the fencers stabbed the inflatable structure and stepped out and like all good swordsmen: took their bow.

Later, Mendelsberg's desire to locate art projects in the public sphere led to his creation of "Untitled Inflatable" [screen images] installed around public parks in Christchurch in 1978. [screen images] There is here an antecedent to the work of David Cross, though Cross's work addresses a different history of performance and participation.

[...SCREEN: David Cross Hold....]



David Cross, *Hold* (2007) exterior. Image from David Cross Hold You-Tube, 2009.

I'll note this as David has put many ideas into this programme, and Cross's projects also test a construct of 'one-day sculpture' within the regime of event-culture -- appropriating, from the everyday, children's playing castles that are designed to be

set-up as architecture of temporary consumer ventures. The difference in welcoming signs of today's adventurous contraptions are clearly seen and well understood by Cross as holding appeal yet alien re-deployment: performer/participator hinge on deft and bash skills, and the stakes transposed upon the difference of bodily presence(s) and views encountered within. More should perhaps be noted of Cross's work as stimulus for a genus in developing this programme as well as in their own right.

**[...BLANK SCREEN...]**

---

### **Conclusion**

A fact less about public sites, as urgently what becomes of projects in repository.

Martin Mendelsberg's final gesture before retuning to the States in 1980 is particularly acute. In communication with Phil Dadson he contributed records he had of his involvements with New Zealand artists between 1970 and 1979 to the setting up of the 'OPEN-DRAWER FILES' a repository for records pertaining to 'post-object' at Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland University; now, unfortunately seemingly much depleted, and known with less 'invasive' invitation as 'the post-object files'.<sup>9</sup>

And for One Day Sculpture today we must cast an eye to this country's past for a legacy that holds currency, here one nuanced community inflected temporary project in 1975 raises our expectations through document and image. So this reminds us of the capacity for memory – in all guises -- and the temporary.

**[... SCREEN One Day Sculpture logo...]**

The rolling-codex as logo to this programme might infer that this programme has taken a while to arrive! By which I mean it was first begun in early 2006 with Claire Doherty; but through double-entendre I imply it is also bound to a past in this country that was an equal to international trends in the 1970s.

IT IS the fate of records of temporary work that is crucial for the cumulative impact of any programme based on temporary projects: One Day Sculpture is not immune. The problem with one day sculptures is that they can be missed. What will become of what is being done?

### **Acknowledgement:**

I must acknowledge Martin Mendelsberg for taking interest in my research and for generously providing extant remaining images of this project held in his archives.

Thanks for listening.

### **References**

#### **Primary Sources**

Mendelsberg, Martin. Personal archives and files, telephone interview (15/01/2009) and various email correspondence with the author.

Artist's files, E.H. McCormick Reference Library, AAG, Auckland.

Artist's files, Te Aka Matua Reference Library, Te Papa Tongarewa.

'Post-object' files, Elam School of Fine Arts Reference Library, Auckland University, Auckland.

#### **Secondary Sources**

Allen, Jim and Wystan Curnow. *New Art – Some Recent New Zealand Sculpture and post-object art*. Auckland: Heinemann, 1976.

Barber, Bruce. 'Found Situations 1970-1972'. *Z/X* #04. Auckland: Manukau Institute of Technology, 2008.

Barton, Christina. *Some Experiments in Art and life: 'post-object' art 1969-79*. Unpublished MA thesis. Auckland: Auckland University, 1987.

Barton, Christina. 'What was directly lived has moved away into a representation'. *Action Replay* (exh. cat.) Auckland: Artspace Auckland, 2002.

Curnow, Wystan. 'Writing and the Post-Object'. *Action Replay* (exh. cat.) Auckland: Artspace Auckland, 2002.

Curnow, Wystan. "Aspects of New Zealand Sculpture – Recent Developments 2." *Education* Volume 26 No. ten, 1977. pp 20-22

French, Blair. 'Critical Forms: The Wake of Conceptualism'. Text based upon paper at *Symposium 2000: An International Conference on Post-Object Art in New Zealand*, Centra Hotel, Christchurch, New Zealand 12 November, 2000.

Green, Tony. 'New New Zealand New Art.' Hay, Jennifer and Felicity Milburn (eds.). *Intervention*. Christchurch: Christchurch Art Gallery, 2000.

Hay, Jennifer and Felicity Milburn (eds.). *Intervention – Post Object and Performance Art in New Zealand in 1970 and beyond*. Christchurch: Christchurch Art Gallery, 2000.

One Day Sculpture. [www.onedaysculpture.co.nz](http://www.onedaysculpture.co.nz) Litmus Research Initiative, School of Fine Arts, Massey University.

Rendell, Jane. Various readings and essays distributed as key-note delegate to this symposia. (cite, [www.onedaysculpture.co.nz](http://www.onedaysculpture.co.nz)).

Saper, Craig J. *Networked Art*. University Minnesota Press, 2001.

## Notes:

---

<sup>1</sup> Green, Tony. 200, p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Curatorial Statement, cited 13/01/09

[http://www.onedaysculpture.org.nz/ODS\\_programme\\_cstatement.html](http://www.onedaysculpture.org.nz/ODS_programme_cstatement.html)

[www.onedaysculpture.co.nz/curatorialstatement](http://www.onedaysculpture.co.nz/curatorialstatement). Cited on 12/01/2009.

<sup>3</sup> In terms of historical programmes of temporary public projects we'd do well also to think of the cause and effect of Christina Barton's 1987 extensive research on the Auckland 'post-object' scene followed in 1994 when she curated *Art Now* a programme that included an extensive number of temporary public projects of various duration: Terry Urbahn's 'Pretty Vacant' arguably being the most successful in terms of the investments of a personal reflection of site and history and deploying situational cues in public space.

<sup>4</sup> Barton, 1998, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Curnow, 'Aspects of New Zealand Sculpture 2', in *Education Gazette* (p.20).

<sup>6</sup> (Action Replay, p. 40)

<sup>7</sup> Sharing as they did certain "foundational principles ... with critical models of both art and arts criticism." [Curnow, 2002, Action Replay, p. 37]. Blair French (2000) also questions: "the means by which [that art-form] might be encountered some two to three decades later by a non-participant" suggesting that doing so only compounds and "the elusiveness of its actions and forms in the face of [such an] encounter [well after the event itself]. French, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> On Billy Apple's work, when Apple toured New Zealand in 1974 Curnow wrote: when dealing with works that are temporary or ephemeral: 'Whatever was good about them must be singled out by circling them in memory, multiplying the angles, opening them up to consciousness that they may be reclaimed for consciousness. Perhaps the critic should always behave as if the works he discusses were impermanent.' Curnow, 2002.

**Copyright.** The author asserts his intellectual right copyright © 2009 Marcus Moore and retains right to develop and publish this research material. Images are copyright © 1975/2009 Martin Mendelsberg and copyright © 1974/2009 Bruce Barber. Still of David Cross's *Hold* was obtained from You Tube.

---

© Marcus Moore and Litmus Research Initiative, Massey University. Published by Massey University, 2009. The person using One Day Sculpture Academic Papers online may view, reproduce or store copies of this paper providing the information is only for their individual use, and is not used for commercial purposes. Any copies of this paper, in whole or in part, must include the copyright notice above and the customary bibliographic citation, including author, attribution, date, article title, One Day Sculpture Academic papers Online, and the URL <http://www.onedaysculpture.org.nz>

The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the Publisher.