



Sculpture in the Gardens

The *Sculpture in the Gardens* project is an initiative of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery which has been made possible through the assistance of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens, and the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand.

This project illustrates the richness and diversity of contemporary sculptural practice in New Zealand. Through three temporary installations, the public of Christchurch have been invited to enjoy three stylistically different works in the familiar surroundings of the Botanic Gardens.

The Robert McDougall Art Gallery hopes *Sculpture in the Gardens* will be a step towards greater understanding of the innovative work being carried out by New Zealand's leading contemporary sculptors. The three sculptors involved with this installation have between them, an outstanding national and international reputation. These sculptures will be on display in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens until May 1994.

JEFF THOMSON

Jeff Thomson's 14 year association with corrugated iron began with rural letterboxes in 1980. While taking a year out from his fine arts studies, Thomson travelled the South Island, on foot, and during this time became fascinated by the paraphernalia of rural New Zealand.

What began with corrugated iron animals (sheep and cows) on letterboxes then, has today led to LYSAGHT GARDEN, an early work in a new direction for Thomson—known as 'the Corrugated Iron man of Australasia'. LYSAGHT GARDEN is a work which celebrates the qualities of corrugated iron. The media of the sculpture is also the subject of the sculpture. The title comes from the reference manual Lysaght Referee: A Handbook of Useful Information, a book published by an Australian company which specialise in making corrugated iron. The design of the sculpture is based on the way corrugated iron can be stacked, layered and joined. What may appear as a random grouping of materials, is in fact a calculated and planned sculptural piece, designed to show off to the best advantage the many different ways this medium can be used. It is an example of Thomson's ongoing exploration of this medium, and an example of his ability to "turn a sullen and uncooperative material into accessible sculptures that draw on humour and undercut preconceptions". (1)

Jeff Thomson has been working as a full-time artist since 1986. He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Auckland University in 1981 and held his first solo exhibition one year later. He has exhibited extensively throughout New Zealand and Australia, where he has been based periodically for the last seven years. Thomson now works from his studio in Wellington.



JEFF THOMSON
 LYSAGHT GARDEN 1993
 corrugated iron 8 metres long,
 3 metres high, 2.5 metres wide.

Photo MICHAEL PROVOST

(1) D. Binney, 'Back to root where it all began', Any old Iron, Auckland, 1992, The Bathhouse Rotorua's Art and History Museum.

NEIL DAWSON

When Neil Dawson begins a commission for a public site-specific sculpture, the natural power and character of the site becomes a major contributing factor. This consideration is the key to Dawson's success, for when the natural attributes of his chosen site are placed in partnership with his artistic vision, the result is a large scale, innovative work, which 'celebrates and interprets the very qualities of the sites themselves'. (1)

FLYING CHAIRS incorporates all the qualities essential to a Dawson sculpture. On viewing the Pine Tree Mound site, Dawson observed the everyday use of this popular area. Those who use the area, do so for contemplation or rest. Visitors come to sit and reflect in the uplifting tranquillity of the sheltered, quiet areas, dominated by pine trees. Chairs were thus a direct way to relate to the space.

The chairs are made from aluminium expanded mesh and are suspended at heights varying between 12 and 16 metres off the ground. They are economical, non-functional structures and through interaction with each other, and their environment, the chairs animate the quiet natural space in which they are suspended. As the light and background surrounding the chairs alters, so does their appearance. Amongst the variations in appearance the media of the chairs are capable of evoking, are qualities of translucence and weightlessness in some lights, or a dark and heavy appearance in others. Dawson is a master of large scale public sculpture. He intentionally creates works which are extroverted and defy traditional notions of sculpture. Among the aims of his sculpture are the qualities of fun and accessibility.

Neil Dawson was born in Christchurch in 1948 and since 1981 has worked increasingly in the public eye on large scale public commissions. He studied at the University of Canterbury's School of Fine Arts and later at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School in Melbourne. He has established a significant reputation both nationally and internationally, and is recognised as a pioneer of large scale innovative sculpture. Probably his most important international installation to date has been GLOBE, a model of the earth installed outside the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, which depicted the world as it appears from space in N.A.S.A. photos. This representation of the earth offered the Parisian



public an opportunity to see the world from a different perspective. Dawson has been commissioned to provide public works in most of New Zealand's main centres.

NEIL DAWSON FLYING CHAIRS 1993

*aluminium expanded mesh chairs,
2.2 metres high, suspended 12–16
metres above ground.*

Photo NEIL DAWSON

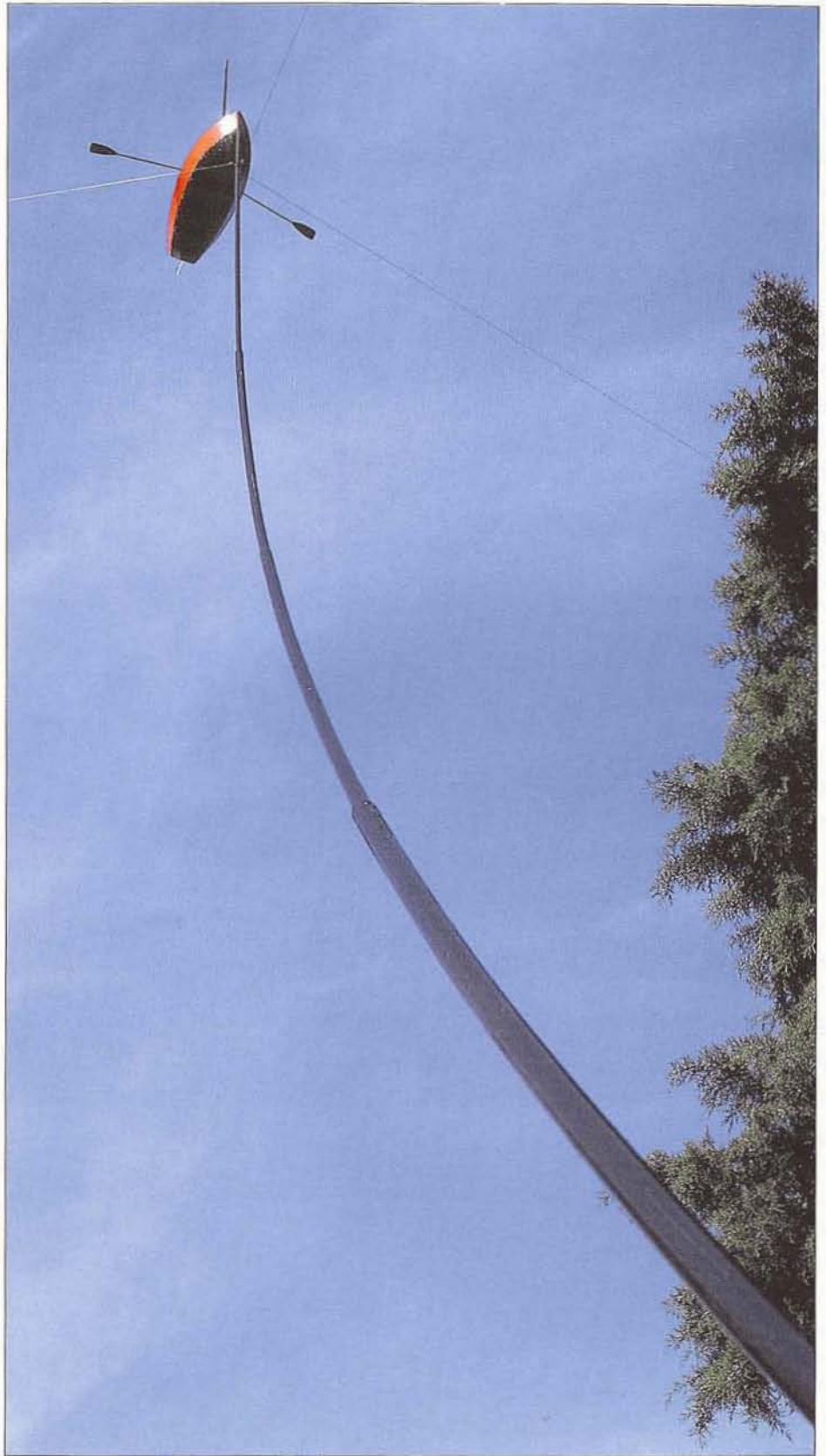
(1) Barr, J. and M., 'Natural Selection', Neil Dawson; *The Japan-New Zealand Cultural Exchange Exhibitions*, Japan, 1993.

PHIL PRICE

GONE FISHING by Phil Price is a sculpture with several different levels of reading. In the first instance, this work depicts a sailing ship anchored in a quiet bay, flanked by trees. The viewer observes the scene from the bottom of the ocean floor: the boat floats on an imaginary waterline, 14 metres above.

The element of surprise in coming across an anchor in the Gardens is part of the experience Price creates in this work. From the anchor the viewer is drawn upwards to the boat. Movement through space is a constant element in Price's sculpture. In this work the movement is implied, as the nature of the boat is to move, but here it is rendered motionless by the anchor, which appears to hold the boat in place.

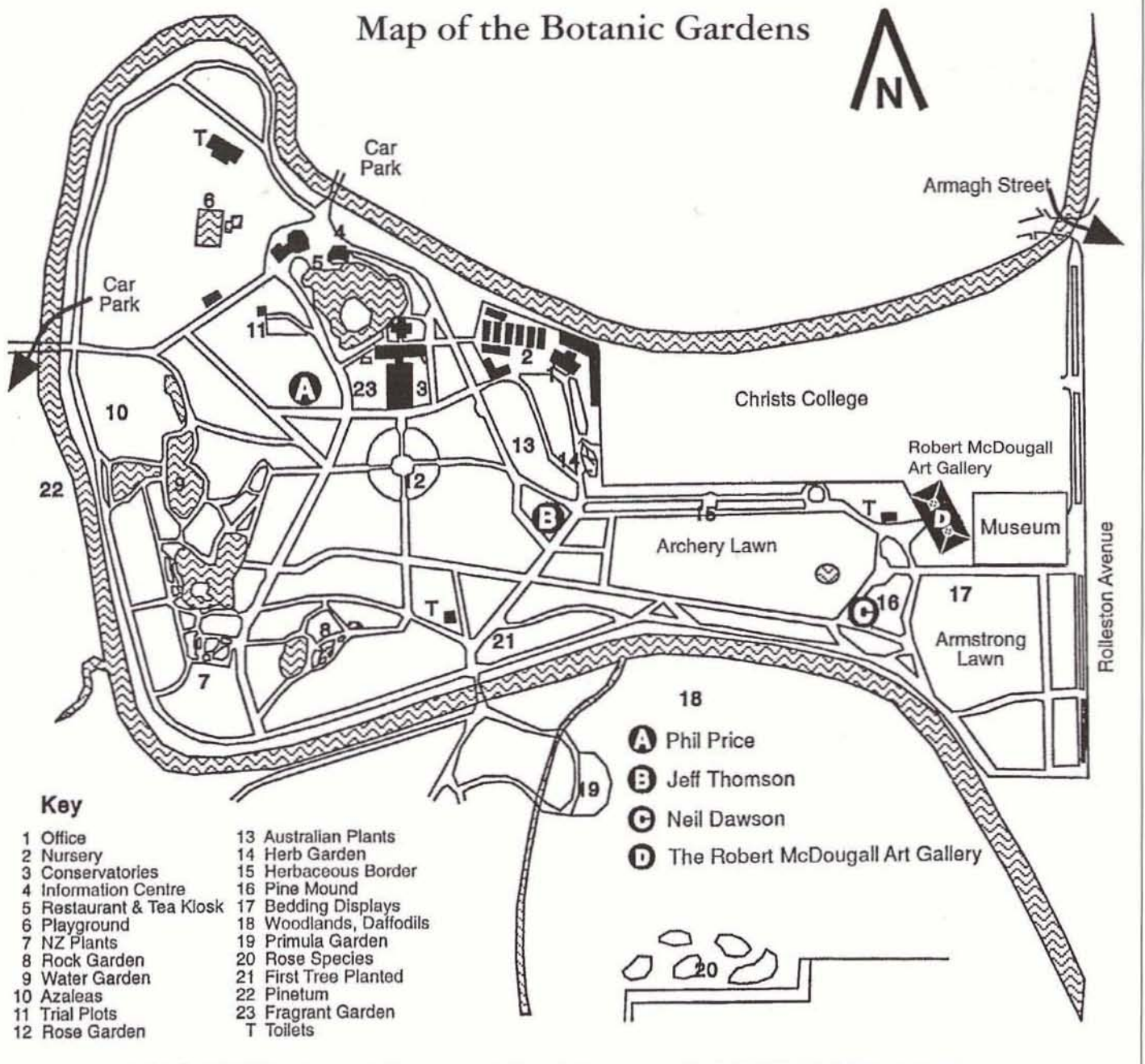
Phil Price graduated from the University of Canterbury with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in Sculpture, in 1988. In the last five years, Price has established himself, successfully, as a notable contemporary sculptor. In 1993 Price was artist in residence at Hanmer, where he completed two permanent outdoor sculptures. Recently he completed a commission for the Foundryman's Guild of a bronze drinking fountain, now installed in the Woodland area of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens.



PHIL PRICE
GONE FISHING 1993
steel and fibreglass ship 800mm,
anchor 1600mm, sailing ship suspended 14
metres off the ground.

Photo PHIL PRICE

Map of the Botanic Gardens



In these temporary installations, three noted sculptors have been invited to create works for specific sites in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens. Neil Dawson, Jeff Thomson and Phil Price are well-known throughout New Zealand for their achievements as sculptors working in the public arena. The works, made possible through the collaboration of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, the Christchurch Botanic Gardens and the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, introduce public sculpture into public garden settings. Viewers are invited to visit all three works as part of the experience of enjoying the Gardens.

*John Coley
Director, Robert McDougall Art Gallery.*



Photo NEIL DAWSON



Photo MICHAEL PROVOST

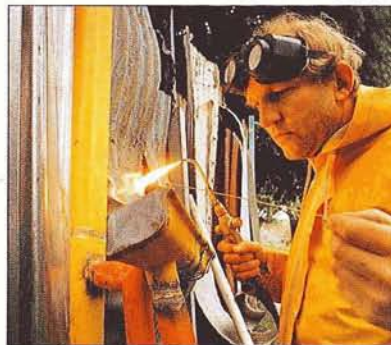


Photo MICHAEL PROVOST

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