The Us and the Object

Objects have no intrinsic meaning. According to this idea, we ascribe meanings to objects through our cultural and social interactions with the objects and with one another. Furthermore, our process for ascribing this meaning is constantly changing. Not dissimilar to the way we do this, we also construct the urban fabric as we walk through, work in, commute in and out of, carry out transactions within, and even imagine it. The urban fabric is full of objects, and yet is an object of sorts itself. It contains objects that we make socially and privately. It is a different object-space than the bush or the suburbs.

So, in this complex set of relations, what happens when sculpture and the urban collide? Or, more importantly, what can happen, what are the possibilities?

A limited definition of sculpture is the world of ideas as manifested in objects. In the contemporary practice of sculpture as a form of fine art, sculpture is much more expansive than this and can include, for example, object-spaces or object-derived experiences. Sometimes, sculpture doesn’t even have an object outcome at all, but rather a process. Yet it can shift our perception, make us aware of our own physicality, and completely transport us out of ourselves momentarily.

When we’re in the city, the built urban environment surrounds us. It is an object that we all help to construct and change, and yet not one of us is responsible for its form or how it behaves. Sculpture, on the other hand, is the idea of one person, or a group of like-minded people working together. Generated from a single, rather than a collective consciousness, it goes through a complex and idiosyncratically individual process in its making and realisation. It is an object with the capacity to distil a great deal of complexity in a single artistic manoeuvre.

The relationship of sculpture to the city is one of object to object. Again, the objects have no inherent meaning, only that which we ascribe. By unfolding and examining this collective environment and then collapsing it again into a piece of art, urban sculpture can describe and reflect the mindset, concerns, history and future of a place, a people and a specific time. It can even manifest ephemeral or nascent ideas before they are publicly acknowledged. Sculpture does this by using opportunities to engage what is collectively ascribed to objects and shifting it ever so slightly, reinscribing and reinventing what was already there in new and surprising ways.

We now have this opportunity in the Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture. Urban sculpture can expose the envelope of the urban environment at the very moment we are also actively engaging with defining it. It is important that we allow and enable such examination of our culture so that we can see our place, our direction and ourselves more clearly. After all, meaning is ours to ascribe.

Dr Marie Sierra
Head of Sculpture and Spatial Practice, Victorian College of the Arts
Strategic Adviser, Art, Melbourne Prize Limited and Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005, Advisory Group member

The annual Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture is run over a three year cycle.

An exhibition located throughout Federation Square over two weeks showcasing the ten finalists of the Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005. Focusing on urban sculpture, music and literature, the annual Melbourne Prize is run over a three year cycle.
The annual Melbourne Prize is an important initiative, the aim of which is to promote and recognise creative excellence. It is particularly appropriate that the inaugural prize is dedicated to urban sculpture, allowing a group of our most talented sculptors and artists to propose ideas for placing new artworks in an urban context. The exhibition of maquettes and designs in Federation Square is all about the future, and suggests what might be added to Melbourne’s already significant holdings of urban sculpture. The exhibition of shortlisted proposals is sure to stimulate debate about the role of public art, and what we want and expect for a cosmopolitan, visually aware city like Melbourne. The works on show will range from more traditional methods and materials to new media, and some will challenge our inherited ideas about what sculpture, or just public art, could or should be. What all the artists have in common is their vision for Melbourne and the quality of their ideas and designs.

Dr Gerard Vaughan, Director National Gallery of Victoria Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005 Awarding Committee member

The quality of the City is a direct reflection on the quality of its public realm – its streets and open spaces. Melbourne is one of the few world cities who have consistently invested in improving the quality of our public realm. So much so that Melbourne has become an exemplar of good urban design. An important component of any urban design strategy is the role and contribution of the arts and culture; and, in line with the City’s positive approach, Melbourne contributes more than any other local government towards the arts. Our contribution to the annual Melbourne Prize is synonymous with our ongoing support with quality art in the public realm.

Professor Rob Adams
Director Design & Culture
City of Melbourne Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005 Awarding Committee member

The urban environments of many major cities are the home of key works of art in the form of sculpture. As Melbourne evolves into the centre of Australia’s art world, it also matures into an intelligent city, one that respects the culture of the earliest inhabitants, is not afraid to be self-reflective on its past and is positively responsive to its future.

All these things can be done deftly and incisively through works of art in the urban environment. When sculpture is in the right place, at the right time, it can achieve a resonance far beyond its object, that it forms part of the collective memory and imagination of a city. Sculpture of this calibre is seen in many culturally astute cities in the world, and now we have an event which allows sculptors to bring an equal artistic intelligence to the urban environment of Melbourne. It is a mark of this city’s cultural maturity that, through the annual Melbourne Prize, it encourages and rewards its artists to reflect on and challenge what we think of as art in public space.

Mr Robert Owen
Sculptor and Adjunct Professor RMIT Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005 Awarding Committee member

The annual Melbourne Prize is a welcome addition to the suite of activities that make marvelous Melbourne justifiably the creative capital of Australia. As the CEO of the Victorian College of the Arts, it has been heartening to witness the development of such a significant and generous opportunity for artists.

Professor Andrea Hull AO, Director, Victorian College of the Arts Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005 Awarding Committee member
I believe the creation of urban sculpture should present an instant of heightened perception, not only drawing the viewer to the work but also to the surrounding environment, thus forming new vantage points from which to experience place.

In October 1883, the Yarra Yarra’s rocky waterfall in the City of Melbourne was blasted away, allowing a more accessible and commercially functional waterway. The blasting of the falls resulted in a dramatic rise of the water level and the entire river becoming tidal and saline. Ecophene sought to recognise this event in the history of Melbourne as both an important and devastating moment in the City’s development.

Ecophene created an interface between site and subject, framing one in relation to the other and transforming both at once. Ecophene was developed in conjunction with Kiko Gianocca. Photographic image by David Tatnall.

Ecophene was a temporary installation at Sandridge Bridge, Melbourne from September 22 to October 10, 2004. This project was supported by the City of Melbourne through its 2004 Young Artists Grants Initiative and Parks Victoria.

Karen Abernethy

Karen has studied at Melbourne University and completed a Masters of Arts in 2005 at RMIT. She has exhibited and been commissioned in Melbourne.

Other commissions: The Simple Life, 2005, City Square, Melbourne.
Explanandum is a sculptural installation the size of a small theatre. It is composed of a series of cones constructed from wire meshes of varying lengths, gauges and densities, suspended in dark space. Each cone is a container for light. Each light can react to sound. The light is programmed with music to provide a constantly changing series of effects, gradually dissolving and highlighting different sections of the installation. You could sit at the edge of it, looking in, and gradually let go of all other preoccupations. You could walk around it as though viewing deep space with sound effects. You could walk through it as though walking through a sky-poem. You could interact with it by playing the lighting desk to create your own mood. You could be transported way beyond or way inside yourself. You could open your imagination to time and the universe. You could be alone, with your friends, with your parents, with your children, for as long as you like, as often as you like. Explanandum can be seen as a projection on the Ground Floor at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image at Federation Square during the exhibition, or viewed online at asherbilu.com/installations.htm

Asher Bilu has exhibited in Australia and overseas since 1959, with paintings, sculpture and installations, including Escape, for the Melbourne International Festival (1992). Philip Lethlean has had over 20 years local and international experience as one of Australia’s foremost lighting designers and is currently working with the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games. Explanandum maquette is supported by The Theatre Board of the Australia Council.
“Architecture is a statement of power; the legacy of a king, a government, a state, a mayor or an architect for the future...the act of building carries an ideology and seeks to mark a certain idea on society”. Isabel Carlos, On Reason and Emotion; Biennale of Sydney, 2004.

Parasite is an architectural intervention and prosthesis, proposed as an addition to the facade of an urban ‘host’. The planning and architectural design decisions that shape the city are dictated by the governing ideology of economic power, leaving no avenue to respond or question. When attached to a congruent host building, Parasite references and recontextualises its surroundings, creating a feedback loop that momentarily interrupts this relationship between the city and power.

Thanks to Australian Glass Assemblies for supplying glass connectors.

Matthew de Moiser
Parasite 2005
Mild galvanised and stainless steel

Educated at RMIT and Monash University, Matthew has exhibited in Melbourne and internationally and has been commissioned in Melbourne.

Other commissions:
The piece is in part a celebration of people returning to the city to live, as symbolised through the domesticity of the clothes peg and line.

As the train approached Flinders Street on my daily trip into the city, I would look up and see a massive frame. Initially, as I watched it, I thought it was connected to the facade of a building, but as the train continued to move the frame appeared to also move. To my excitement it ‘came out’ of the building, a freestanding frame atop Number 11 Exhibition Street, overlooking and framing our city.

As an empty frame, it has the potential to represent a visual story that is Melbourne, perhaps to frame some future building, some future story, similar to how it currently frames the past.

Also framed is the diversity of the people that make up this city today. Positioned at certain entrances, the work frames various city icons as well as highlighting the role that Federation Square plays as a ‘linking’ architectural icon and centre of cultural activity.

Educated at James Cook University in Queensland and currently at the Victorian College of the Arts, Isaac has exhibited in Melbourne.
Trace

2005

Project proposed for Melbourne CBD

Visualisation digitally printed in two parts on vinyl and rubber, demonstration audio CD. Wall banner 3000 x 5000 mm, ground mat 3000 x 3000 mm, audio 60 seconds random play.

Our feet connect us to the landscape in a shifting contact that leaves a trace as ephemeral as our thoughts and voices. We are ciphers of the city, living cursors moving across a grid of fabricated surfaces. And each of us also exists in an inner world, a private landscape that is not immediately apparent to others.

Trace is a series of 50 markers randomly placed in pedestrian precincts throughout the city centre and its near environs. Each marker is unique and consists of a visual/text component underfoot and an audio/verbal component overhead.

The artist thanks Briele Hansen, Nigel Frayne, Roger Cameron and Tom Beattie for the invaluable contribution each has made to this project.

Currently a PhD candidate at RMIT, Louise has exhibited and been commissioned in Melbourne and regional Victoria.
‘the swing of things’

As a child I had a strong sense of order and balance in regard to movement. Like a would-be tightrope walker, I would often straddle a hand railing or any narrow raised surface (beyond the proverbial footpath) in an effort to maintain my balance for as long as possible. This was a purely physical act for me and I see it in children today. Nowadays, when I walk down a busy street I walk very fast and I take great pleasure in determining my way through a course. People and things are integral to my obstacle course but, like Fred Astaire in a dance solo, I want people and things to work with me – with each bouncing off the other.

The stride of Progeny is worth noting: it is much more purposeful than the idle stroll of the self-contemplating urban flaneur. With its aerodynamic design ensuring swift traversal of space, the sculpture calls to mind an elegant version of the familiar urban power-walk. Despite the figure’s confidence, the purposiveness of the stride reveals a hint of neurosis, of almost being an instrument rather than a metaphysical being as such and even its sex could be seen as a further aspect of its functionality. All in all, it is an efficient machine; despite, however, its greatest regret: that it is there before it arrives.

With thanks to Glenn Industries and Hyder Consulting. John Meade is represented by Sutton Gallery, Fitzroy.

John Meade
Progeny 2004/2005
Glass-reinforced, pigmented concrete, steel

Educated at the Victorian College of the Arts, RMIT and New York University, John has exhibited in Melbourne, Sydney and New Zealand. Other commissions: Aqualung, 2005, National Australia Bank, Victoria Harbor, Melbourne Docklands.
Slideshow is a mobile sculpture. Rather than sitting anchored in a finite position, this work relocates to different locations. It seeks to capture the public unaware and engage them in a public place about public art. A truck is modified to carry an audiovisual display which will, at each location, run a series of short slide shows. Pedestrians can view these slide shows as they are screened along the side of the truck. Slideshow will be based at Federation Square and also park in random locations around the CBD. Slideshow seeks to interrupt the daily routine.

Educated at RMIT, Ben has exhibited locally and internationally in England, Germany, Switzerland and China. He has completed site works in Melbourne, Hobart, Adelaide and Brisbane. Slideshow is parked at Federation Square 9am to 2.30pm, 6pm to 9am and touring the CBD 2.30pm to 6pm daily during the exhibition.
The work is an action. 1,000 pairs of posters are pasted around the city on a nightly basis for the duration of the exhibition. The posters show William Buckley, the escaped convict from Macclesfield, who lived with the Wathaurung people around Geelong for three decades until 6 July 1835. The work centres on 6 July 1835 when Buckley rejoined European settlers, arriving with several Wathaurung men at a campsite at Indented Head established by John Batman and his commercial venture The Port Phillip Association.

The work is conceived as a meditation on this meeting, a moment of peculiar political significance which was also a popular subject for 19th century image-making. The action is undertaken in a nocturnal space, a space connected to the work’s function as a kind of memorial. The work is also conceived as a meditation on sculpture itself. The work is materially light, and disperses into the city over the course of the exhibition. The political poster, like a daily newspaper, is ephemeral in its nature. In these respects, the work defies the principles of the Victorian monument, even as its insistence on history and a public sphere reiterate them.

Educated at the Victorian College of the Arts and the University of Melbourne, Tom has exhibited in Melbourne, Sydney and internationally in Auckland, London and Berlin.
The intervention proposed by OSW involves the installation of three large slowly rotating platforms into the sloping lawns of the Victoria Gardens. The site is an area situated between two pedestrian pathways, a mound of palm trees, commonly used by visitors as a place to sit, and the sculpture of a hammer thrower. This site marks a location of rest and renewal criss-crossed by promenades and edged by public monuments, including the Floral Clock.

The platforms, ranging from 7 to 10 metres in diameter, blend seamlessly into their surroundings sitting flush with the existing level and surfaced in grass to form a continuous ground. The platforms constitute a zone of intensified space for a public to traverse and inhabit, offering a perpetually rotating surface for physical engagement. Slowly turning, these zones provide an interface for a different experience of movement through and in the park, activating another relation between the sky, ground, bodies and the surrounding urban environment. The revolving ground zones become surfaces in flux, constructing a spatial poetics based in movement, transition and time.

The presentation at Federation Square is a diagrammatic suggestion that seeks to convey this propositional concept-design through a series of material interpretations. At the same time this installation, comprising a video animation, information board and three tethered helium-filled spheres, is a 'work-in-itself' that responds materially to the given spatial context of Federation Square.

A projection of the video animation of groundings can be seen on the Ground Floor at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image at Federation Square during the exhibition.

Individual members of OSW have studied at various institutions, including the Victorian College of the Arts, RMIT, Monash University and international tertiary institutions. OSW has worked together and held exhibitions in Melbourne since 2003. As individuals, they have exhibited throughout Australia and internationally.
The megaphone is a literal mouthpiece that is designed to amplify one person’s voice so that it can be heard by a large audience or crowd. It is associated with political demonstrations, public oration and authoritarian instruction. Symbolically, it is a ‘public object’ concerned with language and communication.

The sound of snoring is indicative of sleep and the private realm of the unconscious. Within the urban context, the snoring megaphone becomes an object imbued with both humour and pathos. Public Address is paradoxically both public and private. Like a collapsing star, contradictory forces in the sculpture open up something akin to a poetic hole or portal in space, drawing everything around into dialogue with the work.

If one thinks of the history of the city as a text constantly being re-written, then Public Address attempts to punctuate that text and subtly shift its reading. In so doing, it raises questions about the contested nature of public space, the possibility for a public voice and suggests a malaise symptomatic of cultural and political fatigue.

Educated at Chelsea School of Art and the British School in Rome, Simon has exhibited in Melbourne and internationally in London and Rome. He has been commissioned in Melbourne, Brisbane and London. Other Commissions: The Public Purse, 1994, Bourke Street Mall, Melbourne Threaded Field, 2000, Telstra Dome, Melbourne The Mockridge Fountain, 2000, City Square, Melbourne Colony, 2004, Seasons apartments, Swanston Street, Melbourne RACV Club commission, 2005, Bourke Street, Melbourne
The Advisory Group extend their appreciation to all of the artists for their ideas and imagination. As markers of time and place, memory and projection, we are excited at the promise of works which propose new possibilities for urban sculpture, now and in the future. We hope that the 2005 Melbourne Prize will stimulate discussion, support and new insights into the critical role, and potential, of art in public places.

Max Delany, Artistic Director, Monash University Museum of Art
Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005 Advisory Group member

The Committee for Melbourne and its member organisations are proud to have been a champion of the Melbourne Prize Trust and annual Melbourne Prize. The Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005 will highlight the significant talent we have in our community and recognise the importance of supporting and encouraging creativity, as a central element of a vibrant and diverse community and economy. The organisations, patrons and committee members who have enthusiastically thrown their support behind this important initiative are testimony to the contribution the annual Melbourne Prize will play in further establishing the renowned cultural identity of Melbourne, both locally and overseas.

Janine Kirk, Executive Director
Committee for Melbourne

The City of Melbourne is delighted to support the Melbourne Prize Trust which, through the Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005, celebrates Melbourne’s artistic and urban vibrancy.

The Melbourne Prize Trust recognises talent, inspires creative development and enriches public life. The Prize and the exhibition will showcase Melbourne’s abundant talent and reinforce the city’s reputation as the cultural capital of Australia.

The City of Melbourne is pleased to support the Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture and wishes the Melbourne Prize Trust well for future projects that deliver challenging art to the people of Melbourne.

Garry Singer, Deputy Lord Mayor
City of Melbourne

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Max Delany, Artistic Director, Monash University Museum of Art
Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005 Advisory Group member
The Melbourne Prize Trust has three objectives, to recognize and reward excellence and talent, to inspire creative development and enrich public life. The Melbourne Prize Trust is coordinated in conjunction with the Committee for Melbourne, a not-for-profit think tank that works collaboratively to champion ideas and issues to contribute to Melbourne’s success as one of the worlds most livable cities.

The Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005 will promote Melbourne creative talent locally and overseas through an association with the City of Milan, Melbourne’s newest sister city.

For further information, please visit www.melbourneprize.org

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The Melbourne Prize Trust would like to thank Garry Singer, Deputy Lord Mayor, City of Melbourne for his support. Professor Rob Adams, Director Design & Culture, Morris Bellamy, Manager Arts and Culture, Jeffrey Taylor, Program Manager and Jane Shawcross, International Relations Program Manager and the Arts & Culture Branch at the City of Melbourne are gratefully acknowledged for their support.

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The Management Committee of the Melbourne Prize Fund including Jack Smpson AM, Director Escor Pty Ltd, Jane Kirk, Executive Director, Committee for Melbourne, David Blake, Partner, Ernst & Young, Anthony Poynton, Partner, Minter Ellison and Simon Warrender, Melbourne Prize Trust are thanked for generously provided their time.

The Melbourne Prize Trust coordinates the annual Melbourne Prize. Focusing on the following areas, the annual Melbourne prize is run as a trilogy every three years.

Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture
Melbourne Prize for Literature
Melbourne Prize for Music

The Melbourne Prize Trust would like to thank the many Exhibition Partners who have generously contributed to the success of Urban Sculpture 2005. Simon Green and Evan Evans has made the city street banners and a number of the finalist’s exhibits. The public exhibition design was undertaken by Dion Hall and management of the exhibition signage by Premier Graphics, both of whom are gratefully acknowledged.

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The Melbourne Prize Trust is listed on the Australian Federal Government's Register of Cultural Organisations with Deductible Gift Recipient status and is an Income Tax Exempt Charity.

The public exhibition of finalist's entries in the Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005, exhibited at Federation Square between November 07 and 21, can be viewed online at www.melbourneprizetrust.org

Please visit melbourneprizetrust.org for further information on the Melbourne Prize Trust and annual Melbourne Prize.

For information on how to make a tax deductible donation to the Melbourne Prize Fund or enquiries about miniatures of The Magic Pudding sculpture located at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, please contact the Melbourne Prize Trust on 03 9650 8800.

For enquiries regarding works exhibited at the public exhibition at Federation Square, please contact the Melbourne Prize Trust.

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