



Geoffrey Drake-Brockman and Richie Kuhaupt, 'Chromeskin', 2001, chrome-plated figure, interactive plasma display, figure 180 x 110 x 35 cm

NATIONAL SCULPTURE PRIZE & EXHIBITION

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 30 November - 10 March, 2002

FOR the first time the National Gallery of Australia is awarding a major prize for excellence in contemporary Australian art. The inaugural National Sculpture Prize and Exhibition, which opened at the National Gallery of Australia on 30 November, 2001, showcases the diversity of Australian sculpture. This exhibition features 40 works by 30 artists (including two collaborations) and ranges from the work of well-known artists to young and emerging talent. It is an eclectic convergence of Australian sculpture today.

The National Sculpture Prize and Exhibition has been established as a joint partnership between the National Gallery of Australia and



Installation view of the foyer of the National Sculpture Prize and Exhibition featuring works by Peter Cole, Sebastian Di Mauro, David Jonsz, Ari Parhonen, Kevin Connor, Lena Yarinkura, Donna Marcus, Matt Calvert and Geoffrey Bartlett

Macquarie Bank as a means of promoting and supporting sculpture in Australia. The first prize of \$50,000 will be awarded for the most outstanding work, and all sculptors have received an honorarium of \$2,000. The exhibition is intended to expose the rich and stimulating field of contemporary sculpture to a broad audience and encourage serious discussion and critique of sculptural practice.

The initial selection of artists' work for inclusion in the exhibition was made by the judges in May, 2001 and was based on visual material and written proposals submitted by almost 500 artists from around Australia. The judges for the prize are Dr Brian Kennedy, Director of the National Gallery of Australia; Dr Deborah Hart, Senior Curator

Richard Goodwin, 'Prosthetic Resort II', 2001, bike, plywood, steel plate and sail cloth, 120 x 100 x 200 cm

Ah Xian, 'Human Human - Lotus, Cloisonné Figure 1', 2000-01, cloisonné ware, lifesize, 160 x 55 x 33 cm



David Jonsz, 'Parallel Horizons', 2001, steel, steel mesh and rubber, ht 310 x 360 x 520 cm

of Australian Painting and Sculpture at the National Gallery; Mr Julian Beaumont, Chair of the Macquarie Bank Art Committee; Professor Ian Howard, artist and Dean of the College of Fine Arts, University of NSW; and Mr Neil Dawson, a New Zealand sculptor renowned for his major public commissions in Australia and abroad, including two works for Stadium Australia at Homebush Bay, NSW.

In late November, this panel of five judges viewed the installed exhibition at the National Gallery and awarded the \$50,000 prize to the Sydney-based artist Ah Xian for his life-sized form: *Human Human - Lotus, Cloisonné Figure 1*.

Ah Xian was born in Beijing in 1960. He trained as a painter initially and, from the early 1980s, was closely involved in avant-garde artistic activities in China. In 1989



he was a visiting artist at the School of Art, University of Tasmania. He returned permanently to live in Australia in 1990.

Ah Xian's winning sculpture has a haunting, quiet, humble presence. It draws upon tradition but is also about re-invention and innovation. This is the first life-size figure by the artist and it is a feat of technical skill, ingenuity and imaginative possibility. His use of cloisonné technique is compelling and beautiful - the plant-forms have been applied in ways very different from their traditional application. The decoration over the body suggests a second skin or a splendid tattoo. It is about a meeting place between something permanent and fragile, between art and craft, the traditional and the contemporary.

A Highly Commended award of \$5,000 went to a digital installation, *Chromeskin*, a joint entry by Perth artists Geoffrey Drake-Brockman and Richie Kuhaupt. The audience is an integral part of this engaging work, which is about interactions in relation to the physical chrome form and particularly to the screen images. In each of the figures on the screen the skin is visible as a reflective surface that includes the viewer and all the people around the work. It gives feedback on our appearances and actions.

The following artists, whose works are also discussed, demonstrate the broad range of artistic concerns and approaches to sculptural practice represented in this exhibition.

The work of Sydney-based sculptor Richard Goodwin raises questions of how we inhabit our personal, social and structured environments. Goodwin originally trained as an architect and his work explores the balance between the internal and external, the organic and constructed. *Prosthetic resort II* is a continuation of works relating to the idea of exoskeleton, where the human condition is considered "insect-like", in Goodwin's words, an exploration of the zone where the 'body ends and architecture begins'.

Tasmanian artist Matt Calvert fuses historical associations of objects with modern economic and social observations. As an artist-in-residence in Sapporo, Japan during 2000, Calvert noticed the increasing cultural disarray and traditions made redundant as a consequence of the commercially and globally driven marketplace. In *Face Value*, he uses the *Manekineko* (fortune cats), that are associated with happiness and good fortune, to hold a cylinder of 10,000 one-yen coins. The *chi* (one) yen are almost worthless, and Calvert states that like 'most smaller denomination coins,

Liu Xiao Xian, 'The way we eat', 2001, unglazed bone china, multiple elements, dimensions variable



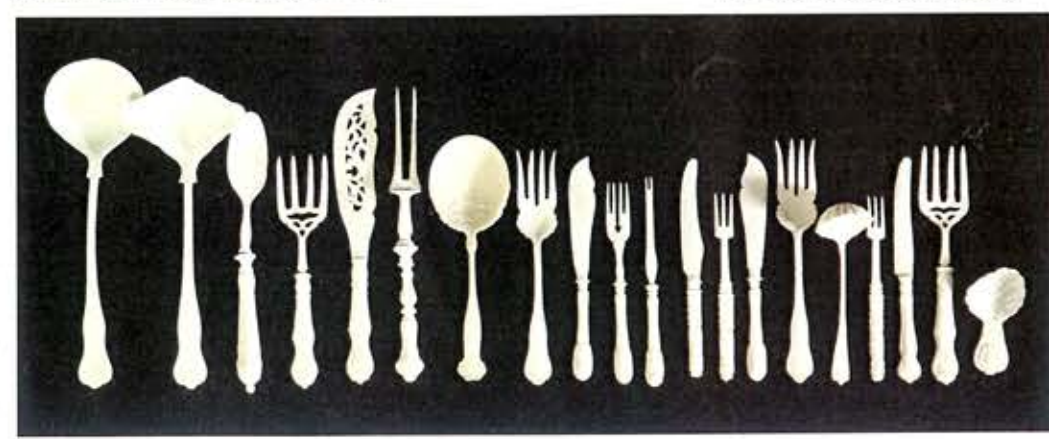
Ruth Downes, 'Tea party in the Mayoral garden' (component details), 2001, mixed media, multiple elements, dimensions variable, approximate installed size 170 x 400 x 400 cm



Heather B. Swann, 'Herd (All 16 hands)', 2001, polyurethane, leather, metal, paper, wood, varnish, 5 elements, each approx. 165 x 91 x 60 cm



Matt Calvert, 'Face Value', 2000, 10,000 one-yen coins, cast porcelain cats and etched glass, 48 x 15.5 x 73 cm



they become more and more difficult to justify in terms of face value and what they cost to produce'. *Face Value* makes ironic reference to this worthless denomination - money coined in aluminium that floats on the surface of water.

With a history of major public sculpture and community-based projects, Ruth Downes conveys her ideas of community and cultural intersection through the rituals associated with drinking tea. *Tea party in the Mayoral garden* is an installation consisting of 40 individually crafted cups and saucers. Characters including *Amnesteia*, *GS Tea* and *Celebrica* come together to represent the diversities of cultural and community life in Australia. The use of humour and play with language are also evident in these works, which Downes constructs from prefabricated and found objects, demonstrating an inventive use of organic matter and throwaway materials.

Sydney-based artist Liu Xiao Xian has utilised the social activity of eating and the game of chess to delineate the cultural dialogue between East and West. In *The way we eat*, Liu has created bone china replicas of Victorian cutlery and flatware, juxtaposed with a pair of chopsticks, symbolising traditional Chinese culture and philosophy that "less is more". In his second work, *Games 2001*, inspired by the politics of reconciliation, he uses three chess sets in unglazed porcelain, marble, cast glass and paper-clay to convey the preciousness of life and the struggle to live harmoniously in multicultural Australia.

Beatrice Galton

The artists exhibiting in the inaugural National Sculpture Prize and Exhibition are: Ah Xian, Geoffrey Bartlett, Lionel Barendsen, Janet Birchill and Jennifer McGanley, Kristian Burford, Matt Calvert, Peter Cole, Kevin Connor, Sebastian Di Mauro, Ruth Downes, Fred Fisher, Mathieu Gallon, Richard Goodwin, Timothy Horn, Linda Jermey, David Jonsz, Gunther Kopietz, Pamela Koussouhova, Richie Kuhaupt and Geoffrey Drake-Brockman, Liu Xiao Xian, Donna Marcus, Bronwyn Oliver, Louise Paramor, Roslynd Piggott, Ari Parhonen, Sarah Robson, Neil Roberts, Heather B. Swann, Ken Unsworth and Lena Yarinkura.