

Tēnā koutou katoa

Ko RUAPEHU te maunga

Ko Whanganui te awa

Ko Kirikiriroa te whenua tupu

Ko Otamatea te kāinga

Ko Andrea tōku ingoa

Tēnā tātou katoa

Esteemed guests, fellow art enthusiasts, and distinguished artists, I extend a warm welcome to the inaugural Waikato Small Sculpture Awards.

The concept of a small sculpture award is specific in nature. While I am uncertain of the motivations that shaped this award, the idea resonated with me. A small sculpture is not merely a diminutive creation; it is an object that shares a direct relationship with the human body. It can be held in one's hand, worn as adornment, entice touch, and be easily carried. This notion immediately brought to mind the exquisitely carved Bactrian Princess figurines from over 4,000 years ago in present-day Afghanistan. It was their small scale that contributed to their longevity, unlike the colossal Buddhas of Bamiyan, tragically destroyed by the Taliban.

The purpose of these small enigmatic figures remains unknown, yet their sculptural form possesses inherent clarity. Their organic shapes fit comfortably in the palm of one's hand, while the carved ridges invite tactile exploration. Despite their age, these figurines continue to offer a tangible understanding of our shared humanity. It is this sensory aspect that has always captivated me about sculpture. While technology reshapes our cultural perceptions of life, our physical form, our ability to sense the world around us, has remained unaltered for nearly 160,000 years. The pleasure derived from engaging with the physical world transcends time, while culture is in a process of constant flux.

The works showcased in this exhibition stand as a testament to the artists' profound comprehension of this paradox. Through their chosen materials and techniques, they have embraced the significance of tactile engagement and physical presence in a world that often feels disconnected. These works beckon us to reestablish a connection with our senses, to delve into the intricacies of form, texture, and weight, and to appreciate the inherent beauty found in the physicality of sculpture. Simultaneously, these works must also reflect our contemporary context.

As a judge, I evaluated the competition blind (not seeing the artists' names). I believe that 75% of the works selected would have been chosen by any other judge, while the remaining 25% reflect my personal idiosyncrasies and preferences. Competitions of this nature are subjective. Given the newness of the award, no specific flavor or style is associated with it, resulting in a diverse array of entries.

Multiple criteria guided my assessment of value. Firstly, materiality played a crucial role. Did the artist exhibit a deep understanding of their chosen medium, exploring and pushing its innate properties, treating it with sensitivity, and presenting something exciting and innovative to the viewer? Technical excellence also appealed to me. Did the work demonstrate a level of skill that allowed the artist to effectively convey their ideas? Concepts also hold significance. While I do not believe art alone

possesses the power to save the world, I firmly believe that a thoughtful understanding of the world we inhabit, whether through exploring the conventions of art itself or reflecting on our contemporary zeitgeist, imparts inherent value to an artwork. Lastly, intent stands as a paramount criterion. Does the work possess a clarity that enables us to discern the artist's intention? Is there a harmonious alignment in the handling of materials, technique, and concept?

I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the artists whose works are exhibited. Your creations have captivated me, evoking a desire to touch, inspiring laughter, and provoking thought. Well done, and thank you for participating in this prestigious award.

It was difficult to select a singular work - a "standout work" – as there are good reasons for an award to go to many of the works in the room.

The first award, Highly Commended, goes to a beautifully realized work, modest by nature but significant in thought and making. The artist has couched the work in anthropomorphic language creating a lovable creature of hidden depths. Strong but winsome. The winner of the highly commended award goes to Stuart Bridson for *Hello*.

The merit award made me smile as soon as I saw it. Although provisional in its making, its intention shows a great awareness of what it is to make art. The work offers a moment of unique kindness; it gives back when most art just demands to be seen. The Merit award goes to Robyn Gibson for *Press for Self-Congratulations*.

The winning work leapt out at me for its pure saturation of colour. The form (and artists statement) show a sophisticated understanding of materials. It plays on a contrast between soft and hard creating an ambiguity between the materials. It looks effortless but shows a profound technical ability. It has a rightness of form and intention. The winner of the Waikato inaugural small sculpture award goes to Louise McRae for *Red*.