

constructing scape

Diane Atkinson 2005

This exegesis is submitted to Auckland University of Technology for the degree of Masters in Art and Design.

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Appendices:

Visual Documentation of Exhibition of Practice-based Thesis Outcomes

Exhibition Catalogue *Constructing Scape*

CD with images documenting the Exhibition, documentation of catalogue, full text of exegesis

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

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Abstract

Constructing Scape explores our relationship with nature, focusing on the interaction of nature and culture within the construct of landscape. Utilising New Zealand landscape as a frame of reference, this research considers the construct of landscape and questions the position of culture within it. Speaking from a metaphorical position, incorporating notions of scale and materiality, sculptural works are constructed with the intent of a passage through scape, invoking an awareness of our experience with landscape.

This exegesis is constituted as practice based work 80% accompanied by an exegesis 20%.

Introduction

Landscape-noun, a section or portion of rural scenery, usually extensive that may be seen from a single viewpoint.

Webster's Dictionary (1989)

Landscape-noun, all the visible features of an area of countryside or land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal.

The New Oxford Dictionary of English (1998)

The definitions of landscape as defined above, describe a passive composition. Landscape is seen as a picturesque view of distanced 'natural' scenery, which forms a backdrop to human activity. These definitions allude to distanced scenery that trivializes landscape as decoration. This projects emphasis on *Constructing Scape* does not relate to the Webster and Oxford dictionary definitions of picturesque landscape but to older meanings, to the origins of the word landscape, where landscape associates people and place.

Landscape as a concept according to Schama (1996) entered the English language in the 16th century. It originated from the Dutch word *landschap*, which signified a unit of human occupation. The word *scape* is derived from Germanic languages such as *ship*; as in township, *shape*; as in carving out and *shaft*; objects with a shape suitable for carving out. *Constructing Scape* researches these notions of *scape*, where landscape is not distanced but that there is a sense of purposeful shaping or carving, in an associated relationship between culture and nature.

Existing research appears to be conflicting in its view on the relationship between nature and culture but concern is shared for the loss of wilderness and value placed on landscape because of our willingness and ability to reshape it. This has led to a consideration of the construct of landscape and a questioning of culture's position within it.

Landscape is never inert. Dependent on time, place and historical conditions, through horizontal and vertical movement, it is continuously in a process of construction and reconstruction. Travelling this shifting scape involves a journey through layers of memory and myth of both 'man' and nature held within its geological strata. *Constructing Scape* addresses these notions, asserting an experience, somewhat akin to a reinterpretation of the relationship between nature and culture.

Chapter One

Where is Nature Now?

1.1 DISCONNECTING FROM NATURE

‘Surfing the web, shopping in malls, exercising in gyms and sitting in traffic jams’ – our lives function in a world of manmade consumables. It is now possible to live our lives indifferent to a ‘non-human’ world. Gallagher (2000) states, “Our awareness of a world environment may have increased through the mass media and global travel, but at the end of the twentieth century our actual experience of nature is often increasingly restricted” (p.7).

Awareness of our increasing disconnection from nature has been reiterated through my involvement in landscape design and construction, where concerns arose about the way landscape is regarded. Economics drove decision making in large building developments, where I witnessed large tracts of land, not only cleared of vegetation, but the topography levelled, to fit as many houses as possible into the developed space.

Leatherbarrow (1999) states the following:

Levelled land calls for attention because it is arguably the first and most fundamental act of topographical construction... every terrain that has been transformed into a terrace serves as the physical and conceptual foundation for the accommodation and enactment of a broad range of topographical purposes... without this basis, most cultural practices are quite simply impossible. (p.171)

Landscape now devoid of its natural contours is decorated by 'land shapers' each with their own view and perception of landscaping. Sometimes the terrain takes revenge when an understanding and a relationship with it hasn't been fully entered into, leading to drainage problems, slips and flooding, which are often perceived as 'natural disasters'.

Borgmann (2000) argues that contemporary landscape is a space of destitution. "It has lost its cosmic scope and its terrestrial orientation, most radically of all, it has ceased to be the depth conferring space of memory and imagination" (p.12). In describing spaces of the past, he suggests that pre modern cultures were keenly conscious of nature. They inhabited the whole universe. Mountain peaks and rivers were large-scale landmarks for navigation while trees and rocks were particular points of orientation. As part of an ordered space, great mountains informed you of your place in the world, as sacred monuments they were cosmic links between the spiritual and material.

Travelling overland in the past, the tools of the trade, a map and a compass still required some intimacy and knowledge of the land as the topology was traversed, however, technology today according to Borgmann has little need of nature. GPS (Global Positioning Systems) demands no spatial awareness or competence as we fly enclosed in an air-conditioned cabin from one airport to another; travelling across the world is now a 24-hour plane ride. Telecommunications has little need of metric space; we can communicate in distance-less space with no concern as to whether the recipient is 2 or 22,000 kms away. Borgmann (2000) describes ametric space as a space of our memory and imagination, a space that the Internet has little need for. The Internet fills our world with information, which Borgmann suggests, that what we see flashing on our screens is a world without depth and weight, which in turn causes restlessness and unreality. Borgmann asks, that although untouched nature no longer exists today because technology has left its mark, even affecting climate change, is it possible to regain metric and ametric space? "The firmness of space along with its burdens and blessings are no more, unless a majority of us agree to restore and protect them" (Borgmann, 2000, p.16). He suggests, what appears to be a very simple solution, which is, that we leave technology behind for just a short while and get out of our cars and walk.

1.2 CONSTRUCT OF WILDERNESS

Wilderness is often seen as a symbol of undefiled nature. It is also seen as landscape situated far away from the city, untouched by man. It has been argued that there is no such thing as wilderness, as stated by Mann (2000). It has also been argued just as strongly that there is, by McKibben (2000), who suggests that there is an obligation to value nature for its own sake.

(McKibben 2000) states “we now possess the power to redesign every biological system on the planet, every living thing, every chunk of creation for our own convenience, pleasure and profit” (p.19). He suggests that because of this domination, we have failed to see the problems that the world is facing and since we have lived inside, in cities and suburbs for so long, contemporary space has lost its connection with the natural world. McKibben (2000) argues that we have become denatured, “the economy seems more real to us than the ecosphere” (p.20). He warns of ignoring nature at our peril, as the sky you ignore, because you ignore it, will one day blow your house down.

Whereas Mann (2000) argues that there has always been a human presence in the landscape, “We cannot escape from ourselves” (p.35). The Amazon is seen as an example of a sublime landscape untouched by human hand but in fact, he states, the forests are actually a patchwork of ancient orchards. They are cultural artifacts that have been developed by Indian cultures over thousands of years, who planted and transported edible trees up and down the river. The Amazon therefore could be seen as an artificial environment, but (Mann, 2000) states “whereas Disneyland, Manhattan and other human environments operate by the rules of economics, Amazonia is manifestly a kingdom of ecology and evolutionary biology, it is a civilized wilderness” (p.32).

1.3 SEARCHING FOR NATURE

Wilderness is usually enshrined in a national park but is it wilderness? National parks are signifiers of national values and those values influence the perceptions of administrators who decide just what constitutes wilderness and how it will be bounded, controlled and protected. It is wilderness framed through a cultural construct. It is this framed wilderness that Lucy Lippard (2000) wanted to avoid, when she journeyed into the Grand Canyon National Park. Lippard was searching for an unframed direct experience with nature. She found it, not at the top, where you find the most common view of the canyon - now a cliché, a picture post card of nature, but at the bottom, the unknown. Here she experienced wilderness, a wilderness before it has been controlled, packaged and understood. A control reflected by contemporary theorists.

Lippard (2000) argues,

Postmodern academic criticism has taught us, ad nauseam that the whole world is packaged for us, that nature is no exception that we never see what is before us without an invisible frame courtesy of the mass media or even of great art and literature. We are in other words virtually forbidden to experience anything directly. (p.6)

Lippard experienced the bottom of the canyon walking through rough ground, wading through streams and clambering over rocks, listening to the ever-present roar of the rapids. She experienced the Canyon without prior knowledge and suggests having preconceived and perhaps constructed knowledge would have taken from the actuality of experience.

Perceptions of wilderness may differ but the opportunity to encounter nature outside our control and possession, to traverse unfamiliar territory allows for an unanticipated experience, that is as Lippard (2000) states, "however our notions of wilderness may vary... I think most of us can judge when we are within it, or within our own notion of what it should be ... the level of uneasiness increases, matched by the level of exhilaration (p.7).

Consequently, at a time when the world has lesser and lesser wild places, my research project *Constructing Scape* questions the construct of landscape and considers our position within it.

Chapter Two

Construction of Nature

2.1 Experience into Research

How are the concerns about our relationship with the environment, the narrative of personal experience and the theories of others formed into questions for research in *Constructing Scape*? Terence Rosenberg (2000) states that in constructing our methodologies for research into art and design that “it is apparent that we are still not sure of what impulses lie in the core of our creative practice, and are consequently unaware and uncertain of how and what we may validate as research” (p.2). He suggests that we may begin with a ‘hunch’ but because it is just that and so slim, it is often subjugated by the follow up of rigorous methods, so that imaginative hunch is marginalized. *Constructing Scape* stems from a ‘hunch’ embedded in past experience. Active participation in a relationship with the surrounding environment and its changing idiosyncrasies and circumstance has been pivotal in establishing a conceptual framework that places my studio practice in a position that promotes the proposition of observer.¹

A Poetic model of research as advocated by Rosenberg allows for non-hierarchical entry and exit points. Drawing ideas from sources, such as a random collection of photography and text, recall of past experience, journals of travel (mainly in New Zealand), walls of post-it notes, models, drawings, site visits and diaries alongside experimentation with a range of organic and inorganic materials and processes, allowed new connections to form which questioned the direction of the research. These experiments are discussed more fully in this Chapter.

¹ Past experience has pre-empted the development of “Constructing Scape”. Drawing on memories of life aboard a yacht, sailing out into the Indian Ocean, I experienced a sense of vastness and uneasiness, becoming aware of the myriad of life in the ocean below . A shark swam off the stern of the yacht, menacing and opportunistic, letting me know by its presence that awareness of my surroundings was needed for survival. Alone with nature, I experienced awe. Realisation that this sense of heightened awareness no longer exists, like many others, I drive my car down the motorway buffeted from the elements with little appreciation of what I am passing. With little need to engage with the world outside, I am disconnected from nature.

Reflective analysis of collected documentation resulted in a divergence from the notion of confrontation between nature and culture, to a more considered approach through the exploration of the construct of scape within nature and culture.

2.2 EARLY EXPERIMENTS

2.2.1 Experimenting with Living Vegetation

Early studio experiments exploring the relationship with nature were approached with the intent of provoking confrontation. (fig2.1) Installing in sites where living vegetation interacted with urban architecture, the aim was to question the position and existence of nature in a contemporary urban environment. These site-specific works were the first in an ongoing investigation of our relationship with the living world. The works utilised size and scale to explore the relationship between organic and inorganic materials.



Fig 2:1 Diane Atkinson, *Studio experimental works*. Living vegetation. 2004

Poetic methodology allows for materials used in experimentation to have an equal value in the development of research. By giving materials authority, initial ideas were challenged and changed, as the materials indicated a new direction. For example, in the Flax wall work (fig.2.2), the notion of materiality was raised as a central concern, with the flax speaking directly of itself.



Fig 2:2. Diane Atkinson. *Flax work*. Flax pods.1500x2000mm. 2004

Initial interest in the Flax wall work involved looking at a single flax pod as a container, but on stapling it to the wall; the seeds fell to the concrete floor. More flax pods were added until the wall was covered. Through the sheer mass and interactivity of the flax with the wall and floor, the falling seeds added their voice to the work through the inherent action of falling and accumulation. By observing

relationships between the materials, new patterns emerged. These experiments with the notion of materiality influenced the approach to materials in *Constructing Scape*.

In the book “Transplant” Levins (2000) discusses the use of living plant materials by contemporary artists. Living plants are used, he writes, “to express ethical dilemmas about what is artificial and what is natural in a world where the boundaries between the natural and artificial are being rapidly erased” (p.46). Alan Sonfist is an example of one of few artists working with living vegetation in 1965. He addressed notions of bioregionalism, site specificity and ephemeralism when he planted a block of land in New York City with the seeds of beech, oak, maple and seed species native to New York, in order to recreate a pre-colonial forest. Sonfist wrote, “just as war monuments record life and death of soldiers, the life and death of natural phenomena such as rivers, springs and natural outcroppings need to be remembered” (Sonfist, as cited in Selz, 1996, p.545).

Time Landscape 1965 (fig 2.3) is an ongoing growing installation, restoring a forest to an urban site, a reminder to the city that it was once a forest. His work is also a prompt that what occurs in our own environment is unique and just as special as our perceptions of the ‘exotic’ elsewhere.



Fig 2.3 Alan Sonfist *Time landscape*. Native trees.1965.New York

Incorporating living vegetation with the processes of mass and repetition, Anya Gallaccio addresses her concerns about the appropriation of nature by culture. Her works change over time due to the ephemerality of the living material, as in *Glaschu* 1999, an installation set on the floor of a dining room in an English countryside house. A pattern outline of a paisley carpet has been pierced through a thinly poured layer of cement floor and vegetation planted in the cracks of the paisley outline. The vegetation is not tended, as it grows wild, thereby fulfilling Gallaccio's intent of allowing nature to reclaim its territory from culture.

2.3 ARTIFICIAL CONSTRUCTION

Miniature scale was introduced, with a shift to the use of non-vegetative materials. In attempting to develop a discussion on the loss of awe towards nature and appealing to poignancy through the reduction of scale, miniature clay mountains were moulded (fig 2.4), as objects that sat on architectural platforms.



Fig 2:4. Diane Atkinson, *Shelf work*. Clay, wood. 800x250mm 2004

I also experimented with representations of ocean waves, modelling them in miniature scale using a variety of materials – clay, plastic clay and MDF. I placed scaled plastic clay waves on white plinths (architecture suggestive) and located the plinth on the sand at a beach (Fig 2.5) to observe what kind of conversation they would set up within a natural environment. They didn't assert a conversation worth pursuing.



Fig 2:5. Diane Atkinson. *Tidal Wave*. Plastic clay, MDF. 2005 Westmere

Following on from earlier experimental shelf works where a miniature clay mountain was placed on a shelf at horizon level that formed a platform for viewing, a waveform was constructed in MDF that became the shelf itself. Representing rolling waves, two metres in length but only 20cm wide, the object retained a small scale with the intent of invoking poignancy. A very practical mistake was made that affected the conceptual potential of the piece; the laminations were glued before shaping. Sections of MDF were laminated horizontally, with the intent of carving a wave into the laminations and painting it white. The white paint flattened the object and the more I attempted representation, the more the work lost its edge. I experimented with making a topographical model of a mountain by creating vertical laminations in the same manner as in half models for boats. At this stage decisions were now being made on potential readings in the work,

instead of an emphasis on a finished representational reproduction of nature, for example, should the mechanical marks of the maker (pencil marks, saw-marks) be left in the work (fig 2:6) acknowledging cultural construction.

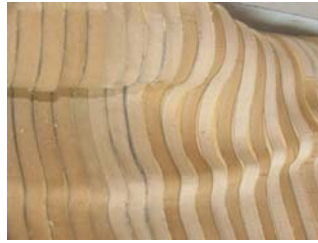


Fig 2:6. Diane Atkinson, *Experimental lamination wave work*, (detail). MDF. 2005

The seemingly unfinished nature of the work now speaks of potentiality instead of finish, leaving more room for possibility and an ongoing conversation with the viewer that invokes their own memory of scape compared to the earlier literal clay waves that appeared static and too defined. The additional decision to place the work on the floor (fig 2.7), raised a new conversation that spoke more fully to fluidity and movement than the wall work. This aspect contributed effectively to the idea of experience rather than description.



Fig 2:7. Diane Atkinson, *Wave form*, MDF. 2200x350mm. 2005.

Even though the wave work originated in seascape it now spoke to a more generalised topography. This marked a significant shift in the practice; from using small-scale literal works to invoke poignancy, to a metaphorical positioning based on the direct relationship of material to concept, utilising MDF as material and lamination as process.

From these experimental developmental works, the exhibition *Constructing Scape* developed, referencing an ambiguous notion of scape, an artificial abstract construction, topography of nature. Consequently, this research considers the position of culture in the construct of scape.

Chapter Three

Constructing Scape

“The earth’s surface and the figments of the mind have a way of disintegrating into discrete regions of art”.

Robert Smithson, 1968 (as cited in Flam, 1996, p.100)

3.1 BRINGING THE OUTSIDE IN



Fig 3.1. Diane Atkinson *Central North Island landscape*. Digital photographs. 2005.

Travelling and photographing the varying forms of New Zealand’s landscape, especially the regions of the Central North Island (fig 3.1), have influenced the development of a framework for *Constructing Scape*. Robert Smithson suggested that photography could provide

frames of reference within nature, “Let’s face it, the human eye is clumsy, sloppy and unintelligible when compared to the camera’s eye. Its no wonder we’ve had so many demented and conflicting views of nature.” (Smithson, 1971, as cited in Flam, 1996, p.375)

New Zealand landscape originates from unstable formation; we live on the edge of a fault line. Geologically young, our fractured land moves, changes and erodes. Since arrival of man, the land and forests have been cleared to cause even more instability. It is this volatile and diverse landscape that affects the shaping of my studio practice. It is a landscape that has been constructed through time by nature and culture. Schama (1996) states, “Before it can be a repose for the senses, landscape is a work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from layers of memory as from strata of rock.” (p.7). Throughout history, people have engaged with it, reworked it, appropriated and simulated it. Beneath the contemporary landscape, according to Schama, generations have written their recurring obsessions. Using this environment as a source of work with attention to the surroundings and the processes that shape them, I am bringing the outside in, but in the form of metaphorical elements of landscape, shaped by the constructed layers of memory of both man and nature. When Robert Smithson wrote ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind’ in 1968, he saw landscape as part of the human condition, when he aligned geological change with the process of thought, “One’s mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brainwaves undermine cliffs of thought... Slumps, debris slides, avalanches all take place within the cracking limits of the brain (Smithson, 1971, as cited in Kastner&Wallis, 1998, p.211).

Robert Smithson’s theories and practices on Sites and Non-sites are an important context in creating scape, as they inform the notion of cultural construction, he stated, “Instead of putting something on the landscape, I decided it would be interesting to transfer the land indoors, to the non-site, which is an abstract container” (Smithson, 1971, as cited in Kastner&Wallis, 1998, p.31). When comparing a site with a non-site, Wallis (1998) notes that Smithson considered that a site was about scattered information as it involved travel, whereas a non-site was about contained information. Wallis (1998) states “the key to the non-site is the concept of displacement, how the meaning of an object is changed by removal to another site... but it retains a connection to its original site” (p.31). Smithson filled containers with raw

material such as rocks, gravel and salt and with cartographic information from a chosen site, transferred the containers to a Non-Site, i.e. the gallery, establishing what Smithson described as a 'dialectic' between Site and Non-Site (Fig 3.2). Wallis (1998) suggests that Smithson's notion of the dialectal landscape takes as fact that landscape is culturally constructed, either developed or allowed to remain wilderness, through representations in the form of plans, maps and photographs.



Fig 3:2 Robert Smithson, *A Nonsite, Franklin New Jersey*.
Wood, lime stone, aerial photographs. 17x2x110 inches. 1968.
Museum of Contemporary Art. New York.

3.2 The Cut

The works in *Constructing Scape* are created through the removal rather than addition of material. The cutting out of the scape is evocative of many forms of scape but representative of none in particular. The cut could be the act of culture or nature or both. The inside of the cut narrows and thickens, waves and undulates, rises and falls as it contrasts with the leveled surface forming a line of movement as it travels through space. For ease of reading throughout this exegesis, reference to the removal of material from the work is described as ‘the cut’.

The Cut could also be a...

Gorge
Chasm
Rift
Schism
Crevasse
Valley
Furrow
Trench
Gully
Crack
Fissure
Fracture
Depression
Deflation
Fault line
Gash
Cleft
Indentation
Vale
Dell

Dale
Basin
Ravine
Gap
Channel
Dyke
Drain
Conduit
Trough
Ravine
Gap
Split
Rupture
Gulf
Crease
Rut
Groove
Undulation
Crack
Channel
Gutter
Abyss
Gulch
Crevice
Canyon
Groove
Hollow
Dip
Scar

Michael Heizer worked with a cut in the construction of a negative space in monumental scale. He created “Double Negative” 1969-1970 (fig 3.3) at a remote site in the desert, northwest of Nevada.



Fig 3:3 Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*. Rhyolite, sandstone.457x15x9m.1969-70 Morman Mesa, Nevada.

“Double Negative” consists of two trenches that are cut into the edge of the Mesa. Displacing more than 218,000 tonnes of rock, it is created through the removal of material rather than the addition, creating a negative space. Heizer stated that “I work outside because it is the only place where I can displace mass” (Heizer, 1970, as cited in Selz, 1996, p.536). When referring to the amount of rock removed, Wallis (1998) described it as a monument to displacement, where the vastness of the work competes with the environment it sits in. Heroically scaled, it can be only fully viewed from the air.

3.3. MATERIALS

A decision to use MDF to explore elements of the land in constructing a sense of scape was made because language exists in the material that is representative of building and construction. Its materiality speaks directly to the construct of scape. Medium Density Fiberboard (MDF) is an artificial building material made from wood fibers glued under pressure. It is an inert dense substance and because of its fine particles is easily cut, shaped and filled without concern as to direction of grain.

MDF's colour is benign as it is usually covered with a surface material such as paint. The works in *Constructing Scape* are not painted; the surface texture of the MDF is exposed to reference building construction. Painting would also cover up the lines of lamination, which are also an important part of the conceptual construction. MDF does not make the same visual demands as tree-wood. By using MDF, its materiality speaks without intrusion of an artificial material in constructing a 'natural' scape. Whereas tree-wood is visually loaded with past associations, and specific histories are often contained within each species, for example the language of Pine is very different to that of Kauri or Oak. Most varieties of wood would distract and initiate new conversations if used as a construction material in *Constructing Scape*.

3.4 CONSTRUCTION METHODS

The use of lamination as a process to build up layers of scape avoids representation of landscape, as in the manner of traditional carving. Carving risks illustrating the landscape as scenery as my early-modelled works tended to do. In this work, lamination is both a physical and metaphorical construction, signifying the passage of memory in time.

As with the building up of each section in the experimental waveform work, where each lamination of the wave, as it rose and fell represented progression in time, each lamination in the horizontal scape is a fixed point. As the eye travels the scape, it passes through each fixed point in time. The process of lamination, allows the static nature of the MDF to become fluid through the marking up and altering of each cut. Each cut is dependant on the cut that went before, each lamination evolving out of the cut of the preceding one. (fig 3.4)



Fig 3.4. Diane Atkinson, *Laminated Scape*, (detail.) MDF. 2005.

Carving into the work to achieve shaping would have reduced definition of each lamination and therefore lose metaphorical positioning. Lamination allows the work to be evocative of many forms of scape in nature and representative of none in particular. Maya Lin uses the process of lamination in her work *Topographic Landscape* 1997. (fig 3.5) .



Fig 3.5. Maya Lin, *Topographic Landscape*. Particle board. 16x18x2feet. 1997.
Retrieved 5th July 2004 from www.pbs.org/art21/artists/lin/card3.html

Unlike the individual cutting of MDF to achieve layering in *Constructing Scape*, a computer has precision cut strips of ply to achieve an undulating surface in *Topographic Landscape*. The waved surface of the work gives a three-dimensional surface to a topographic map, which is similar to my work in that it alludes to elements of scape.

3.5 PASSAGE

Laying out a full-scale plan on the studio floor brought the realization that there was not enough allowance for length in the work, to fully contemplate the horizontal gaze. At this stage too many forward decisions were attempted in visualising how the work would appear finished – joins, height, length, etc., but the work itself, appeared to be demanding its own autonomy as it evolved, each practical decision realising a new one. A framework developed. This included, allowing the gaze to travel the horizontal scape along the work within a set

width that related to the scale of the cut gorge, clearly showing the lines of the constructed laminate. Within that framework new decisions emerged, including experimentation with the construction of a horizontal wall work. (fig 3:6)



Fig 3:6 Diane Atkinson *Scape*. Cedar. 20000x300x200mm. 2005

Constructed in cedar for its lightweight qualities, I wanted to determine if the cut would allow for movement along a horizontal view at eye level. The choice of cedar and the smaller dimensions of the work initiated a new discussion, in that the cut did not flow and or set up a relationship with its levelled surface, however the cedar wall work, confirmed the proportions and scale of the width, depth and length of the horizontal floor work.

The wall work also confirmed, that too many issues and decisions were being forced onto one floor work. Two floor works of visual equivalence were subsequently constructed. Both works allow for movement and fluidity, but with different construction methods. In the laminated work, a sense of movement is created through the emphasis on the cut as it travels through static leveled blocks of lamination (fig 3:7).

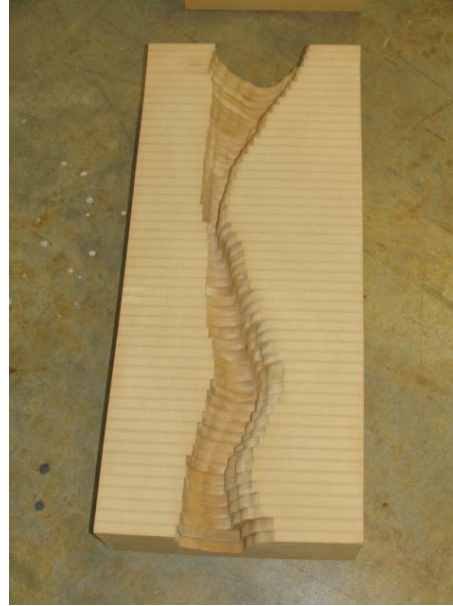


Fig 3:7 Diane Atkinson, *Laminated Scape* (detail). MDF. 2005.

The width of the scape is in proportion to the scale of the cut that travels through the work. By keeping the level width constant and the sides sharp and clean in line, emphasising the flat plane, there is not any overt visual disturbance or distraction, allowing the unimpeded gaze to fall on the cut as it travels through the scape.

The installation *Pathway to the Sea-Aramoana*, 1991, (fig 3.8), collaboration between Bill Culbert and Ralph Hotere addresses the anchored direct horizontal gaze. The installation follows a straight horizontal line of paua shells, cut through the middle revealing bright blue and green colouring of the shell. Neon tubes have been laid parallel to the paua, and together they stretch along the floor - a natural object interacting alongside a fabricated object, forming and reflecting a unified straight line.

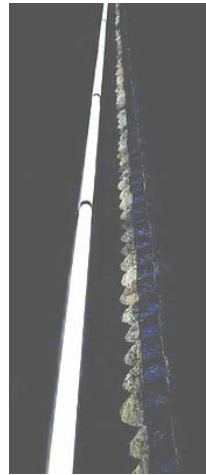


Fig 3:8 Ralph Hotere and Bill Culbert, *Pathway to the Sea Aramoana*.
Paua shell, rock and fluorescent tube. 30400mm x1170mmx340mm Te Papa 1991.

In contrast, movement in the unlaminated scape work is created by the stacking of varying heights of MDF, with a cut through each, that changes in depth, height and width as it meanders along the floor. The length of the work allows for gradual to dramatic changes in size

and shape, alluding to the various geological elements of landscape that occur throughout New Zealand. Although the width of the scape is constant, the sides alter and change from straight to juttered edges allowing for the movement of the meander. (Fig 3.9)



Fig 3:9 Diane Atkinson. *Stacked Scape stack passage*. (detail). MDF. 2005

Tania Kovats (2004) works with representations of landscape. She states that her main interest is in geologically explicit landscapes where the narrative of its formation can clearly read, as shown in her work *Sunk*1999 (fig 3.10).



Fig 3:10 Tania Kovats, *Sunk*. Acrylic composite, MDF. 90x90x110cm. 1999. Retrieved 6th April 2005 from www.uwe.ac.uk.

Kovats (2004) writes that although landscapes are culturally mediated, she has “looked to geology to help read landscape to further understand how landscapes are made outside of what we affect upon them. No landform exists forever but only within a particular time span in the earth’s history I see landscape as a series of incidents coming into being.” (p.2).

3.6 JUNCTURE POINTS

Constructing joins marks intrusion; it marks the change both in the physical and conceptual construct. It also marks the decision as to whether the joins in the laminated work become invisible and allow the gaze to follow the cut through the landscape with an uninterrupted view or to signal changes in the scape, which acknowledge the fluctuations in nature and memory markers of man.

In considering conceptual matters, the behavior of land in New Zealand depends on the balance between climate and geology, a delicate balance, which at times is upset by catastrophic change. In constructing the works, if the joins signify the interconnected events that naturally occur in nature, joining then occurs at ‘natural’ and irregular intervals. Experiments have been necessary to find out just how aesthetically and conceptually significant the joints should be and whether they should interrupt the horizontal gaze as it travels the work. Joining the laminations at juncture points forced the issue of how the overall aesthetic of the work in conjunction with the concept operate.

As discussed earlier, MDF languages building construction so in experimenting with jointing materials, adhesion products used in building construction were trialed, such as Builder’s Bog, No more Gaps and Expanding Foam (fig 3.11).



Fig 3:11 Diane Atkinson. *Bonding experiments on MDF. Builder's Bog, No More Gaps.* 2005.

Use of these materials included the consideration of thickness, colour and exposure, i.e. how obvious do I want to make the joint? I also experimented with felt and blanket.(fig 3.12).



Fig 3:12 Diane Atkinson *Bonding Experiments on MDF 2.* Felt, sponge, blanket, MDF, 2005.

There is also the consideration as to whether the laminated blocks should be joined with another material, or whether the gaps between the laminated blocks themselves, are enough to signal change, allowing for little interruption to the flow of the horizontal gaze (fig 3.13).



Fig 3:13. Diane Atkinson, *Gap Experiments*. MDF. 2005.

Change is signaled in the stacked work, with a modification to the form and shape of the cut, as it meanders through the work. Each cut of in the MDF is stacked against the next, allowing for continuous flow and movement.

3.7 SCALE

The notion of scale is a key element in *Constructing Scape*. When discussing scale in the context of this work, it is essentially a conversation about our perception of size and the work's relationship to human scale by referencing back to the way we see ourselves in relation to the rest of the world. Maya Lin underpins this view when speaking about her sculpture', "the scale of any of the works I do is human scale. No matter how large they get, they break down so there is a level of intimacy and that level of intimacy is about one on one interaction" (Lin, cited in Rabinowitz, 2000, p.2).

The scale of the works in *Constructing Scape* involves not only the relationship between work and viewer, but also to the architecture of the site itself, where a large floor area allows the work to travel unrestricted through space. A smaller space would restrict horizontal

viewing. Each work in *Constructing Scape* is large in scale in relation to the gallery, but small in scale in relation to the landscape they represent. The works are not models for enlargement; they are autonomous, in that each work narrates its own story.

James Meyer (2004) refers to large-scale installations constructed with intent on spectacle, where mass, shape and volume in the installations occur in epic scale. He states that, there is now a trend by museums to endorse art of size. (Meyer 2004) “More and more we are accustomed to installations that are keyed not to the individual body and its perceptual grasp but to an increasingly grandiloquent architecture ... a demand for aesthetically awesome situations” (p.222). The intent of my work is not aimed at overwhelming or pacifying the viewer via in works of spectacle, but rather scale is used to engage the viewer as their gaze travels the scape.

Robert Smithson, when discussing scale, stated that, “size determines an object but scale determines art. A crack in the wall if viewed in terms of scale, not size, could be called the Grand Canyon. A room could be made to take on the immensity of the solar system. Scale depends on ones capacity to be conscious of actualities of perception. When one refuses to release scale from size, one is left with an object or language that appears to be certain. For me scale operates by uncertainty.” (Smithson, cited in Flam, 1966, p.147). Smithson constructed Spiral Jetty, 1972 (fig. 3.13) in monumental scale, but that scale is relative to the immediate environment it sat in, as Reynolds (2000) states ‘Spiral Jetty was difficult to find because it was dwarfed by the enormity and strangeness of its surrounding landscape’ (p.66). Spiral Jetty, was built on a site that (Selz 1996) states “gave evidence of a succession of manmade systems mired in abandoned hopes” (p.532). Using the form of a spiral, the earthwork of rocks and boulders packed with soil, stretches out into a remote salt lake in Utah. Through the red algae that lives in the lake, Smithson evoked associations with growth and destruction. Howett (2000) notes, “Smithson was digging through histories as he described

it, searching out the sources of how we came to think about nature as we do, examining alternative conceptions that might help us to think more perspicaciously about the relationship between human culture and the rest of nature.” (p.26).

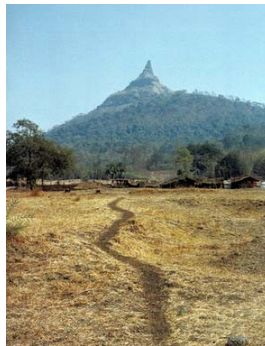


Fig 3:13 Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water coil.
1500x15m Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah. 1972.
Collection DIA Center of Art, New York

3.8 THE LINE

In both the laminated and the stacked work, the continuing cut forms a line. This line is of primary concern to the works, as it allows for movement through the space. (Weilacher 1999) states, “The line is one of the most fundamental one-dimensional signs. In contrast to the point, it appears directed, in motion and in a process of development.” (p.19) The width of each scape also forms a line from which the cut moves through. It is approximately the width of a walking path, just wide enough for an individual to represent the experience of walking along. Many of Richard Long’s marked walks created in the landscape are the width of a path for an individual.

Richard Long creates his art works by walking in lines, across landscapes throughout the world. He explores relationships between time, distance, and topography by laying down the most minimal of marks, such as stones or driftwood, in shapes common to ancient cultures, markers of time and distance, such as lines, circles, spirals and squares. His sculptures, from his first work made by walking a straight line in a grass field in England in 1967, to the *Mahalakshmi Hill Line in India* 2003 (fig 3.14) are about place as well as material and form.



Fig, 3:14 Richard Long,
Malalakshmi Hill Photograph
2003.Retrieved 24 June2005
fromwww.richardlong.org/sculptu
res/mahalak, html

Long as well as photographing, textualizes his experiences and relationship with the landscape (fig 3.15).

“I like the simplicity of walking, the simplicity of stones.

I like the idea that stones are what the world is made of.

I choose lines and circles because they do the job.

My work is not urban, nor is it romantic

It is the laying down of modern ideas in the only practical places to take them.

The natural world sustains the industrial world.

I use the world as I find it.

A walk is just one more layer, a mark laid

Upon the thousands of other layers of human

And geographic history on the surface of the land”.

(Long, cited in.Fuch,1986, p.236)

CONCLUSION

Hamish Fulton, like Richard Long walks the landscape to make art. (Fulton 1995) stated that, “the physical involvement of walking creates a receptiveness to the landscape. I walk on the land to be woven into nature” (p.34). Whereas Fulton physically walks the landscape, *Constructed Scape* through the horizontal construction of the scape itself, purports an aim in the work, which is to appeal to the receptiveness that Fulton is referring to – of a passage through landscape with the intent of invoking an awareness of our experiences with it.

The opportunity at present, to be receptive to and engage with nature is increasingly restricted as the topography of diverse land formations are levelled for development, alluding to Borgmann’s notion, that contemporary space is destitute space. It would be easy to succumb to pessimism through observing the way contemporary landscape is regarded. However, it is intended that through viewing *Constructing Scape*, the process of bringing the outside in invokes an experience of scape, giving rise to fresh perceptions of our relationship with the land.

Travelling the horizontal landscape affirms that in our interaction with scape, we imprint ourselves on the land leaving behind traces of memory and myth. Schama (1996) states, “to see the ghostly outline of an old landscape beneath the superficial covering of the contemporary, is to be made vividly aware of the endurance of core myths” (p16). Is it possible that these mythic qualities embedded in scape could invoke a receptiveness that would redeem the destitution of contemporary space? Instead of travelling way out onto the ocean, or to the bottom of the Grand Canyon, maybe our understanding the interaction of culture and nature within the construct of scape can be found in our own backyard, if only we are aware.

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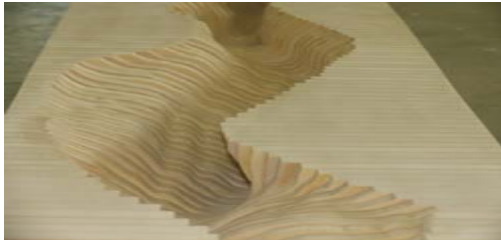
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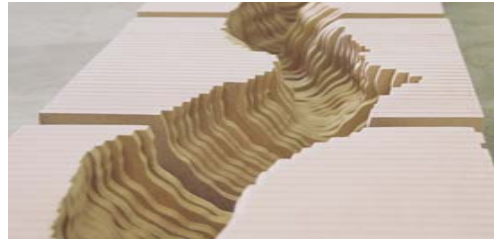
Visual Documentation of Exhibition of Practice-based Thesis Outcomes.



Diane Atkinson. *Cut*.MDF.360mm x 6900mm.2005



Diane Atkinson, *Cut*, (detail.)MDF.2005



Diane Atkinson, *Cut*, (detail.)MDF.2005



Diane Atkinson, *Cut*, (detail.)MDF.2005



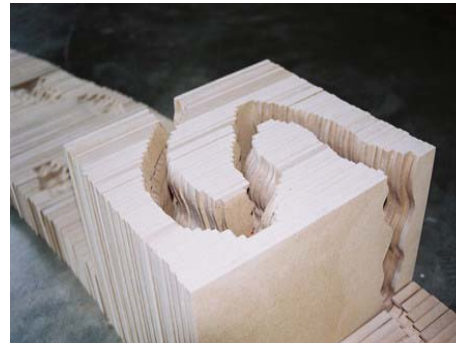
Diane Atkinson, *Passage*,(detail) MDF.2005



Diane Atkinson, *Passage*,(detail) MDF.2005



Diane Atkinson, *Passage*,(detail) MDF.2005



Diane Atkinson, *Passage*,(detail) MDF.2005



Diane Atkinson, *Passage*,(detail) MDF.2005



Diane Atkinson, *Passage*,(detail) MDF.2005



Diane Atkinson, *Passage*,(detail) MDF.2005



Diane Atkinson, *Passage*,(detail) MDF.2005

Exhibition Catalogue



Passage MDF 360mm x 17500mm

Cut MDF 360mm x 6900mm

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