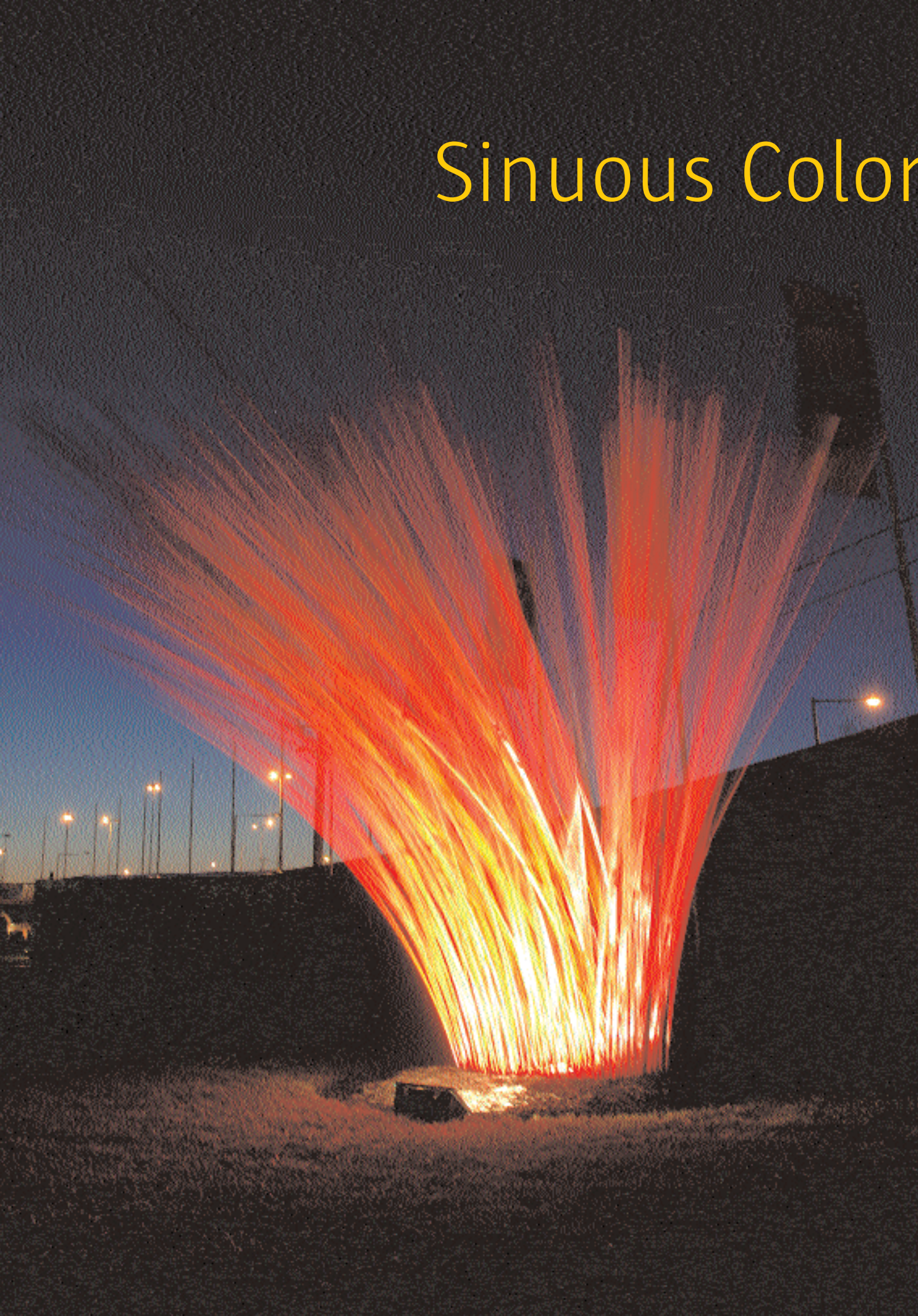


# Sinuuous Color



## Konstantin Dimopoulos



BY KEN SCARLETT

Konstantin Dimopoulos refers to his sculpture as dynamic rather than kinetic: for him, the term “kinetic” implies a mechanism with moving parts—and “mechanical devices always break down.” Since 1998 he has been exploring movement with his sculpture and has devised an ingenious way of harnessing wind power in works that flex and bend, vibrate and sway—without a single mechanized part.

His early ventures employed flexible steel rods, which had the disappointing tendency to stay bent. This problem led him to search for a material capable of movement that could also return to its original shape. Dimopoulos’s solution was to use slim rods of polyurethane resin reinforced with glass fibers, which are strong, durable, and beautifully supple. Grouped together by the hundreds in clusters of colorful strands, they quiver in a slight breeze and sway vigorously in a stiff wind.

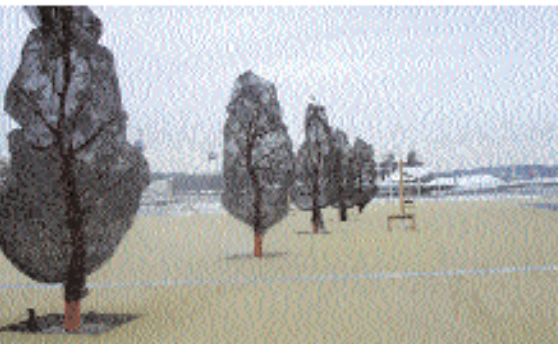
Wellington, New Zealand, which has been described as one of the windiest cities in the world, gave Dimopoulos the chance to “celebrate the wind” when he was commissioned by the Wellington Sculpture Trust in 2001. For *Pacific Grass*, he created three towering groups of rods—six meters high and covering an area of approximately four square meters—that freely and sinuously react to changing wind conditions. Illuminated at night, glowing red and black with white centers, they take on an incandescent, flame-like quality.

Since moving to Melbourne, Australia, three years ago, Dimopoulos has attracted attention with his highly individual work. In 2005, he was awarded a Celebrate Victoria Grant for a fascinating proposal that was remarkably simple, and could have been visually compelling. Melbourne, noted for its numerous and extensive public parks, has many impressive avenues of mature elm trees. Dimopoulos wanted to paint the

Opposite: *Alara (moving at night)*, 2006. Glass-reinforced polyurethane resin, steel mesh, concrete, and black bark, 6 x 1.8 x 1.8 meters. This page, left: *Pacific Grass*, 2001. Glass-reinforced polyurethane resin, grass, steel mesh, concrete, and black bark, 6 x 3 x 2.5 meters. Right: *Sacred Grove—the blue forest*, 2005. 45 trees and water-based pigment, 500 x 12 x 5 meters.

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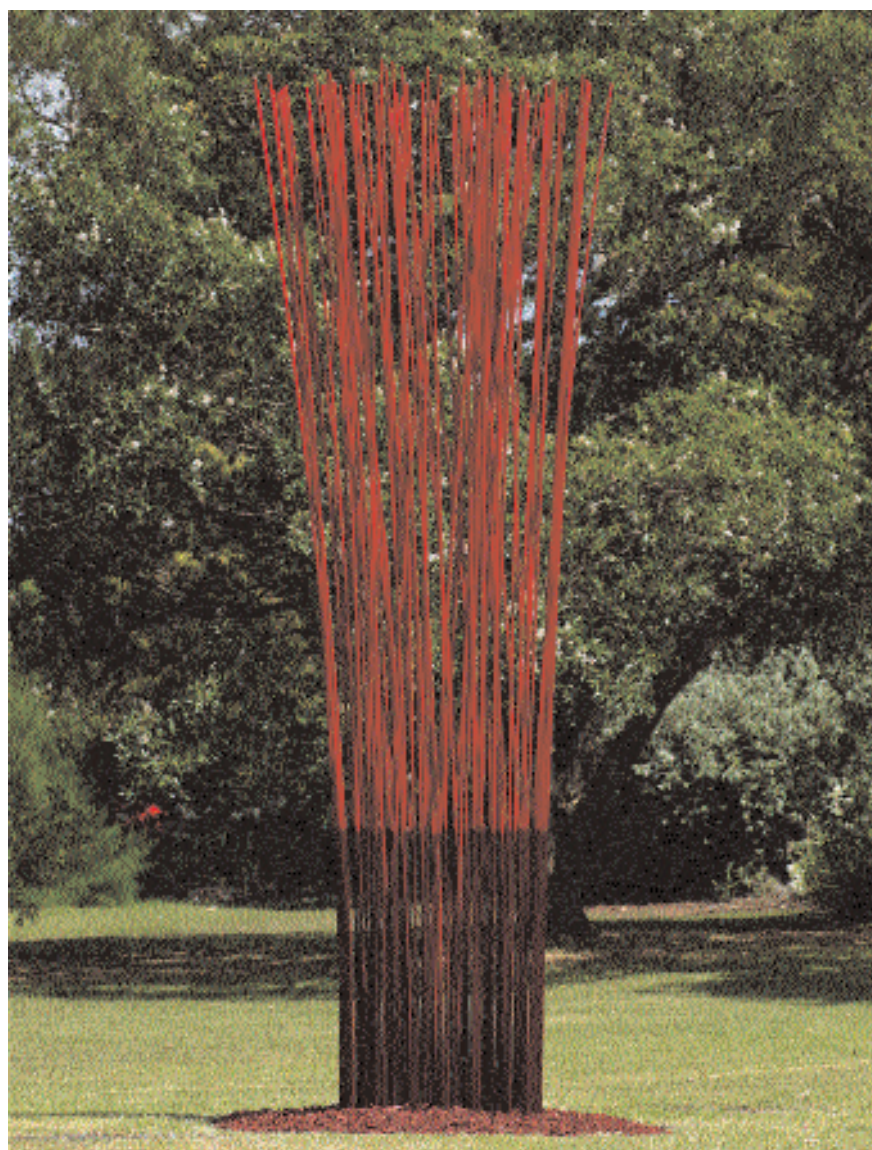


trunks and branches of the trees along one alley a vibrant blue, which would establish a cathedral-like avenue dedicated to nature, a *Sacred Grove*.

But what seemed an innocent way to highlight an aspect of 19th-century garden design and temporarily draw attention to global deforestation attracted vociferous opposition. Even though the paint was biologically safe, water-soluble, and, with time, biodegradable, the project was seen as sacrilegious—the trees themselves were sacred. The project was banned by City of Melbourne councilors, creating a public art debate on a scale not seen in Australia for decades.

All was not lost, however, for the blue trees live on in the minds of Melbourne residents, a perfect example of the power of a conceptual work. Subsequently, Dimopoulos created *Chapel* at the entrance to the city's Sofitel Hotel, where the trunks and branches of a circular copse of trees have been painted an intense ultramarine blue. At once beautiful and slightly surreal, Dimopoulos's manipulation highlights the formal aspects of the trees and encourages reflection on the essence of art and nature.

Meanwhile, the funding allocated for *Sacred Grove* was diverted to a new work on the edge of Federation Square, along the banks of the Yarra River. The seven-meter-high *Red Centre* uses hundreds of Dimopoulos's distinctively colorful rods. Mainly red, but with a scattering of orange, yellow, and black, they not only make a variable, fluid pattern as they sway in the wind, but also emit subtle rattling, clicking sounds. The work can be viewed from above, from Federation Square, or its rods can be approached, touched, and activated. Dimopoulos recently installed a similar



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work, *Alara*, on a rural property (in contrast to *Red Centre*'s urban location), where the links with nature become more obvious. The tall, elegant rods, placed on the edge of a long stretch of water, read like a gigantic and colorful clump of grass. Grass, in fact, has inspired several works, including *Grassland* and *Yellow Carex* (both produced in 2005), as well as *Windgrass*, commissioned for the New Zealand Pavilion at World Expo in Japan in 2005.

Dimopoulos also made a temporary installation in Nagoya, Japan, a work that now exists only as documentary photographs. *Black Pharaohs Appropriation*, a one-off experiment, consisted of a row of five trees swathed in black frost cloth, a fabric similar to the white plastic protective netting used in vineyards. While creating abstracted, recognizably tree-shaped silhouettes, the transparent netting allowed the real structure of the trunks and branches to be seen. *Black Pharaohs* offered an interesting variation on the opaque plastic sheeting often used by those renowned wrappers of objects, Christo and Jeanne-Claude.

Dimopoulos's work is defined by his use of color, repetition, form, and movement, whether he orchestrates a row of 45 trees or hundreds of rods all moving to the wind's choreography. Recently he has been working on a series of geometric shapes using his signature rods. *Black Cube*, which was included in the 2006 Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award exhibition,

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formed a square prism of 1,600 rods that changed its shape with the wind. In addition, a horizontal band of white running through the work created a strange phenomenon. During the day, the white was almost invisible, appearing as a gap that cut the sculpture in half; at night, the black rods disappeared and the white section seemed to float.

In the "Chapel" series, Dimopoulos expresses the deep affinity he feels toward Mark Rothko's work, with its simplicity of color, line, and form. The works in this series, including *Rothko's Chapel* and *Glass Chapel*, explore the artist's hand, blurring the line between two colors so that they seem to merge rather than leaving them sharp and clearly defined. Dimopoulos says, "I feel that many sculptures today are manufactured rather than created by the artist. This is an understandable use of technology and modern manufacturing processes, but at times I believe it can exclude the artist's hand. For me, it is simplicity of color, line, and form that defines, creating reflective, reverential works. These are my homage to Rothko." Such characteristics can also be seen in *Cypher*, a five-meter-high and one-meter-square work that uses line and color combinations on a three-dimensional rod surface to express a simple beauty of pattern and chromatic tension, of harmony and rhythm in the form.

Dimopoulos is always keenly aware of the context in which his sculptures are

placed. At a new, environmentally sustainable urban development in Melbourne, the strongly linear yet organic form of his most recent commission contrasts with a sensitive landscape design of rich curves studded with plantings of native grasses. In his most challenging brief yet, Dimopoulos was asked to create a sculpture that would foster a renewal of community spirit and civic identity (it is a predominantly low-income area). He took his inspiration from the Southern Lights and the randomness and intensity of movement they create on the skyline.

Dimopoulos, whose surname identifies him as of Greek descent (his parents came from Cyprus and Crete) was born in Egypt and arrived in New Zealand as a young boy. Now resident in Melbourne, he sees himself, in this age of globalization, as "an artist of the world."

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