



Kon Dimopoulos showing his work *Firebird* to Arts Victoria's Deputy Director, Greg Andrews, at the Toyota Corporate Headquarters in Port Melbourne. *Firebird* is currently part of an exhibition of indoor and outdoor works by Victoria sculptors, generously supported by Toyota

"Can one make works, which are not works of 'art'?"
Marcel Duchamp, 1913.

Konstantin Dimopoulos throws a stone in the lake as we walk around Melbourne's Albert Park, and watches the ripples emanate outwards. "A dynamic sculpture," he comments, "the simple elegance in the ripple."

Dimopoulos is a Melbourne-based artist who creates works where human or environmental actions, even short-term ones like the splash of a stone in water, become visual references.

Elegance characterises Dimopoulos' art. His reed-like sculptures move in the wind, swaying rhythmically like grasses. Standing in front of his sculpture, *Firebird*, at Toyota Corporate Headquarters in Port Melbourne, the sculpture moves back and forth in the wind, then swirls around in a circular way, the work opening up like a giant red star. Yet for such a large sculpture made up of hundreds of individual rods up to six metres tall, the work is strikingly elegant in its form and movement.

Story **Adele Dimopoulos**

Sacred Grove (bottom)

Konstantin Dimopoulos

- The man who coloured trees



Pacific Grass
2001

Wellington, New Zealand

600 x 300 x 250cm (3 sections)

Polyurethane resin reinforced by glass fibres, grass, steel mesh, concrete

Winner of the inaugural Wellington Civic Initiative Award for sculpture

Winner of the International Kinetic-Art Organisation award for public sculpture 2004

In Wellington, New Zealand, his sculpture *Pacific Grass* has become a well-loved icon of both locals and visitors to the windy city. The swaying sculpture moves gracefully even in gale-force winds, the rods chattering against each other. "People react to the movement and sound of my sculptures," says Dimopoulos. "Within one sculpture there are a myriad of movements, it's a ballet. People pause, watch and listen."

Dimopoulos was born in Egypt in 1954. His Greek parents were part of the cosmopolitan society that suddenly found itself unwelcome in the 1960s, so they moved to Wellington. The young Dimopoulos grew up in a home that he describes as a small part of Greece in suburban Wellington. It was a childhood rich in objects and images. Both parents were tailors, and their home was often filled with friends from work, chattering in many different languages. His parents each spoke six languages fluently, so could converse with most fellow immigrants.

Dimopoulos revisited his childhood in an installation

for the Arts Program of the 2005 Melbourne Fashion Festival. *The Tattooed Tailor* told the story of his father, a master tailor in Egypt, reduced to working long hours on the assembly line in a car-manufacturing company in Wellington. His fluency in six languages did not include English, and for Dimitri Dimopoulos life in New Zealand was always a struggle.

The Tattooed Tailor was the younger Dimopoulos' way of acknowledging both his father's tailoring talents in a strange new land, and what he describes as the engine-room of the fashion industry. The immigrants who fuelled the garment industry, anonymously pieced together the couture that sold in upmarket shops under designer labels.

Dimopoulos now calls Melbourne home, although he continues to return to New Zealand regularly to install his sculptures for private clients. In Melbourne he will install a public sculpture at Federation Square in 2006, and he is a finalist in the 2005/06 Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Awards, with his sculpture *Black Cube*.



Red Ridge
2005
Arrowtown, New Zealand
500 x 1800 x 250cm
Polyurethane resin reinforced by glass fibres, grass, steel mesh, concrete
Arrowtown Sculpture Park

Black Cube and his massive *Red Ridge* in Queenstown, New Zealand, are works of linear repetition, colour and symmetry. The linear qualities are changed into abstract chaos in the wind, the movement creating different works altogether. "I see my dynamic works having a strong affinity to George Seurat's pointillism technique, where hundreds or thousands of colour spots, or in my case rods, are organised on a rectangular base, plotting the main elements of the shape or form."

For Federation Square in Melbourne, Dimopoulos will create an abstract form like flames licking upwards, in his signature reds and oranges, with touches of yellow and black. He is in awe of the Australian landscape, particularly the intense reds. "Red is the colour that best describes this continent," he says. Standing up to seven metres tall *Red Centre* will be an iconic work for Melbourne, its colourful abstract form contrasting brilliantly against the angular Federation Square building.

Mass and repetition of both form and colour pervade Dimopoulos' work. "I describe my work in terms of a symphony rather than a single instrument or voice. The linear elements, the vertical lines that define the forest in nature and the way that those same lines are repeated and represented in three-dimensional forms in architecture, interest me."

But it's his afforestation art action, *Sacred Grove - the Blue Forest*, that put Dimopoulos on the map in Australia. The quietly-spoken artist was catapulted into the media spotlight when the City of Melbourne reversed its permission to allow him to colour blue an avenue of 45 mature elm trees just days before the artwork was to start. "*Sacred Grove* was an ephemeral artwork, using a biologically safe water-based pigment that would have faded off the trees over time. I wanted to use a dramatic transformation of the trees to highlight their beautiful sculptural forms. To create a pause where people noticed the trees. In cities, I believe they are understated, principally nothing more than decor in the urban environment."



Grassland
2005
Queenstown, New Zealand
470 x 200 x 200cm
Polyurethane resin reinforced by glass fibres, steel mesh, concrete
Private Commission

Sacred Grove was also an afforestation art action, stating the artist's concern about the rate of logging native forests, which is contributing to the increase in global warming. Dimopoulos had received a grant from Arts Victoria to create *Sacred Grove*. The Council's decision to withdraw permission to colour the trees meant the public artwork could not proceed. A portion of the funding was subsequently reallocated to enable Dimopoulos to create *Red Centre*.

Despite the positive outcome, Dimopoulos remains disappointed he could not create *Sacred Grove* in Melbourne, and is now looking at other alternatives for the work. He is also concerned that the public became the curators of public art. "While I do not seek to be controversial in my work, art is not democratic in its appeal. Just because some people don't want to see blue trees in their back yard is not a good enough reason to stop the work. There may come a time when whether the trees are blue or not doesn't matter any more because we've deforested our planet to such an extent that it becomes a hostile environment for human life."

Environmental and social responsibility permeates all of Dimopoulos' artwork. His work is always site-specific. His sculpture becomes a part of its surrounding environment, as if it has always existed there.

People are important in both the creation and experiencing of his work. "When you come to a sculpture you bring something of yourself to it. You view it in the mental space you're in at the moment. The physical part is the artwork. The human element is the viewer and these two together becomes social sculpture. "My public gallery installation, *Level 4* was a social sculpture, a large tent-like structure, in darkness. As people approached they triggered sound and light. The interaction of people varied. Some just walked around the tent, others found the opening and walked inside where they found gorse bushes coloured red. In New Zealand gorse is seen as a pest, almost a virus on the landscape. The question I was raising was: what the biggest virus is - man or gorse?"

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