

Random perfection

Kon Dimopoulos is inspired by Mark Rothko in his bold new series of kinetic sculptures.

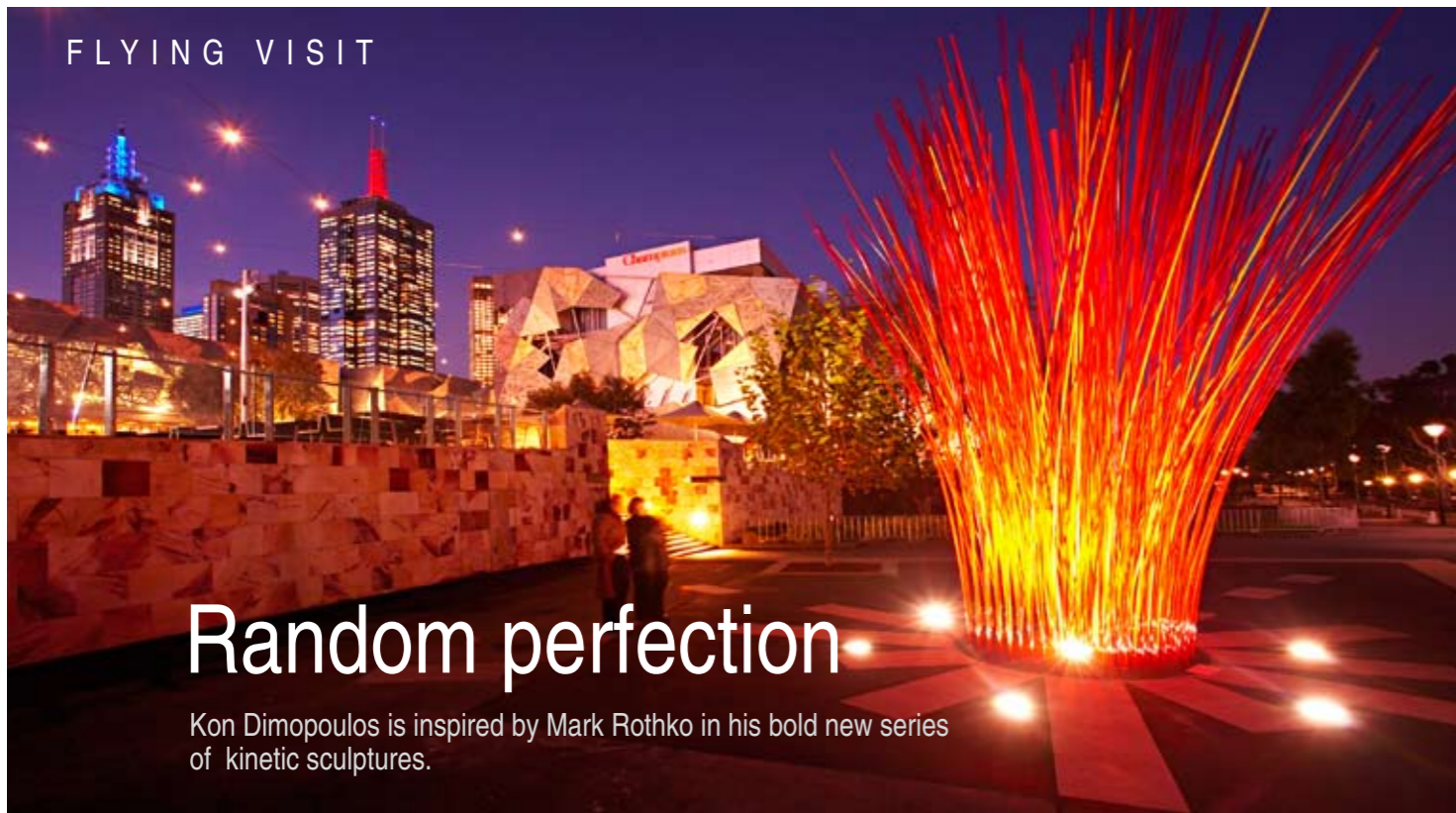


Photo: David B Simmonds



Photo: Kon Dimopoulos

Far left: *Red Centre*, 2006, polyurethane resin, reinforced by glass fibres, steel mesh, concrete, Kon Dimopoulos. Located in Federation Square, Melbourne

Left: *Sacred Grove*, 2005/06, 45 trees, water-based pigment, grass, digital concept image, Kon Dimopoulos

Meeting sculptor Konstantin (Kon) Dimopoulos in an airport lounge seems apt. Of Cypriot and Cretan ancestry, he was born in Egypt in 1954, and as a result of the unrest in the region in the 1960s, immigrated with his family to Wellington. Here his father, who was a master tailor in Egypt, had to resort to working on a car-manufacturing assembly line.

After his obligatory OE, Dimopoulos returned to Wellington but for the past four years he has called Melbourne home, basing his burgeoning sculpture career out of “the third largest Greek city in the world”. He returns to New Zealand frequently to install commissions – most recently to participate in a child health organisation’s fundraising auction in Queenstown where his small kinetic sculpture fetched the top bid of \$8000.

Belonging is something Dimopoulos feels strongly about, both from a personal and creative standpoint.

“In Greece I’m not seen as a Greek because I was born in Egypt. In Egypt I’m a foreigner and in New Zealand I’m called a Greek. I empathise with Theotocopoulos (El Greco) in Spain, who also originated from Crete and saw himself as a foreigner all his life.”



Kon Dimopoulos

Dimopoulos is best known in this country for *Pacific Grass*, the six-metre high kinetic grass-like work that welcomes visitors to Wellington as it sways and chatters on a waterfront roundabout near the airport. More recently another work has attracted attention of a different kind. The *Red Ridge* sculpture was built for entrepreneur Michael Hill in Arrowtown but then dismantled

and put into storage after a resource consent impasse with the local council.

“It appears there’s a fear that such works as mine will ‘dominate’ the landscape. But this incredible landscape cannot be dominated; if anything it compromises all artworks.”

His move to Australia has proved fruitful. He is represented by Conny Dietzschold Gallery in Sydney and Cologne, has an exhibition coming up in January 2007, and a number of successful commissions have placed him at the forefront of the kinetic sculpture movement. *Firebird*, 2005, was acquired by a leading Australian collector; *Red Centre*, funded by Arts Victoria, has just been unveiled in Federation Square; *Black Cube* was a finalist in the prestigious 2006 Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award; and *Red/Black Cypher* will be included in Sydney’s Sculpture by the Sea in November this year.

Ironically it was a work that never saw the light of day that forced this modest artist into the media glare. As a statement against the logging of native forests in Australia and globally, Arts Victoria gave Dimopoulos a grant of \$96,000 to create *Sacred Grove*. For this work he planned to colour blue an avenue of 45 mature elm trees in Yarra Park by the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

“I planned to use a biologically safe water-based pigment that would have washed off after several months, causing no harm to the trees. What happened was that people got really upset about a small, temporary change in the park, yet they are happy to see irreversible changes made to the environment daily. They somehow remain blind to this anomaly.”

Even though the City of Melbourne reversed its permission for *Sacred Grove* only days before the event, Dimopoulos still had a victory of sorts. The Melbourne

Sofitel commissioned him to replicate a scaled-down version of the work, titled *Chapel*, using a small grove of trees in their courtyard.

Though disappointed at the outcome, Dimopoulos is philosophical.

“It ended up being the perfect conceptual work – if I’d carried it out it would have become an environmental piece. As a conceptual artist I enjoy the challenge where the idea becomes the reality. You cannot destroy an idea. For instance, when the Taliban destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, they only destroyed rocks. What they couldn’t understand is that the Buddha doesn’t exist in the stone, it exists in your mind and how you live. Their actions actually made the concept of the Buddhas even stronger in the eyes of the world.”

The elegant and organic forms of his earlier works have changed, becoming more formal and geometric, and the vibrant colours of the landscape are the basis for shimmering blocks and stripes of yellow, orange, ochre, which sway and unfold in the wind. Inspired by the paintings of Mark Rothko, Dimopoulos’ latest sculptures are sharper, delineated cubes or columns with lines of colour bisecting the forms.

“I’m still using colour, line and repetition but moving away from ‘content’ and using the simplicity of colour to evoke emotion. A new large work in development, *Colour Field*, is a homage to Rothko and is made of three to seven-metre high rods in reds and oranges, with a core of yellow through the centre. I’m fascinated with the idea of how a solid shape, solid form is abstracted through movement. I provide the colour and line but otherwise I have no control. You have a cube, then the wind opens it up and the cube is gone; then it becomes a cube again. It’s like moments of random perfection.”

And the legacy of Rothko will be the force behind

Dimopoulos’ next visit to these shores. His five-metre high swaying tower of red and orange, *Rothko’s Chapel*, will colour the Waiheke landscape over the summer in the 2007 Sculpture on the Gulf event. But it isn’t only the colours of the acclaimed American painter that give Dimopoulos his inspiration. On his recent visit to Queenstown he was energised by the hues of the sky and mountains and recalled the words of James K Baxter in *High Country Weather*.

*Alone we are born
and die alone*

*Yet see the red-gold cirrus
over snow-mountain shine
upon the upland road
ride easy stranger*

*Surrender to the sky
your heart of anger*

/Dan Chappell



Photo: Kon Dimopoulos

Black Cube, 2006, polyurethane resin reinforced by glass fibres, paint, concrete, Kon Dimopoulos