

## **Public Places, Private Vision**

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Anita Glesta's work in New York evolved from painting into sculpture. Over the years, the main thrust of her work has been the dynamic of how people interact with their environment. This often manifests in works that require the physical participation and interaction with the viewers.

Her interest is twofold—firstly, re-examining the role of the artist and the artist's contribution to development of critical thought, and secondly of the contribution that artists can make in developing awareness of the landscape. This makes their role a political one, by breaking down the walls of the gallery and freeing artists to integrate ideas with actual situations.

In New York, Anita chose to work outdoors in an urban context. Recently, in New York City, artists have begun to claim leftover public spaces to develop their work in response to funding cuts from the federal government.

Her recent piece, "Echo of Faraday Wood", is sited in the Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney. On a gentle slope, the composition comprises an arrangement of untreated, cut logs supported by square steel frames. As if to counter these provocative tree parts, are symbols of growth—garden beds of rubber tires full of saplings, grasses and other plants. As a composition, it is quite brutalistic, while her approach to the scale of the components has a tension with the scale of the Gardens and the Australian landscape that she so appreciates after the confines of New York City.

The piece seems to be confronting us with questions about growth and decay while, at the same time, enticing us to participate—the trees we harvest with such abandonment are part of a larger, fragile ecology that seems remote from our urban living. People sit on the logs, trying to spin them, not letting other people touch them—claiming the piece in a similar way that the sponsors supporting the project were doing.

All her sponsors appreciate the participatory nature of Anita's process. They supply and advise her on the materials, engineering and construction. Anita involves them all and like the work itself, the interaction is an insight into what makes her work appeal; talk to people, objects need to be accessible; this she does particularly with the selection of materials and drawing on their tactile properties.

For Anita's, Jenny and Michaelie's environmental art, the type of collaborative process is distinct for each project and yet follows similar principles. If collaboration is the final representation, product or form of an integrated and balanced exchange of ideas, then all these projects reflect this process with varying degrees of success.

This reflects alternative roles that artists can fulfill. Jenny and Michaelie believe that the role of artists has been evolving and this contemporary role needs to be reflected in the educational process as well as the collaborative one.