

Time & Memory at the Water's Edge - Wendy Hoddinott
INNZ Spring Workshop – Pecha Kucha Session, Presentation Text – 16 Sept 2012

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- Tena kotou. Hello everyone, my name is Wendy Hoddinott and I'm a Landscape Architect with Opus here in Christchurch
- This afternoon I am going to present an abridged version of one of my design experiments, set on the shores of Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere – which many of you will know, is a wetland of international significance
- This project was the culmination of my postgraduate studies 6 years ago with some of the ideas having evolved into project work for DoC this year

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- Wetlands are dynamic yet subtle landscapes which are easily overlooked
- So today I want to talk about how design might be articulated and stories told in these places...
- In a way which engages people's imagination and draws visitors into the presence of a place

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- It was along the site of a disused railway embankment, now the Little River Rail Trail, I illustrated how art, architecture and ecological restoration can allow us to more fully appreciate the passing of time
- "The landscape can strengthen our sense of the passage and organisation of time. The Cycles of the sun and of human activity can be celebrated, and our orientation to the past can be maintained."

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- The project had drawn on the philosophy of Swiss Landscape Architect George Descombes who suggests that...
- to recover something, that is 'a site, a place, a history or an idea – involves a shift in expectation and point of view"

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- Ngāi Tahu regard Te Waihora as *Te Kete Ika* or *The Fish Basket*
- referring to the abundance of resources which in previous times allowed for sustenance throughout the year
- It's Ngāi Tahu's association with the lake which has resulted in many stories and traditions which reveal the origins of features and the way in which landforms and resources were used for day to day life

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- My design strategy for the lake was based on the concept of whakapapa

- Which recognises the connectedness between the spiritual and the physical
- My intention was to develop an experiential journey along the margins of the lake
- Engaging visitors with the passing of time which continues to shape this landscape

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- The Little River Railway embankment now dissects these wetlands
- It's a reminder of the changes that draining the land and railway construction brought to the area
- Some of you will know of the Little River Rail Trail and the development of the embankment as a walkway and cycleway
- It's one of a collection of sites around the lake encouraging recreation and appreciation of heritage in the region

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- Wide open spaces and open skies are characteristics of Te Waihora
- The open lake edge has a strong horizontal emphasis, its panoramic views emphasising distant mountains, cloud forms and changing weather patterns

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- Left to itself, the lake level would rise as high as 4m above sea level before naturally breaching Kaitorete Spit
- So to stop surrounding farmland and roads being flooded, lake levels are managed by artificial openings made about 3x a year through the beach at Taumutu

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- I thought I would show you an international site that illustrates how the most minimal design interventions can evoke a multitude of memories and associations contained in the landscape.
- This is George Descombes 'Chanzeli' along Lake Lucerne in Switzerland

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- This is one of a series of elements around the lake
- A circular, metallic structure with a curved, large postcard-shaped opening
- From which to view the seasonal changes of the landscape
- The structure accentuates the ordinary details of the site so that the landscape itself becomes a channel for evoking new feelings and associations

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- Getting back to Te Waihora, my design process started by creating a collage to determine some of the less tangible activities and processes that have occurred over time in the landscape

- The changing lake levels
- The railway line dissecting the wetland
- The ways in which Ngāi Tahu accessed the lake

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- My design response included creating a generous boardwalk taking the visitor along a reconstructed wetland
- The orientation of the timber deck and form is as a waka would have been pulled ashore by early Maori

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- At the end of the boardwalk, and at higher lake levels, the idea is that water would gather around the timber deck in the shape of a fish hook
- a reference to the once higher lake levels and plentiful fish in the lake
- At lower lake levels, steps are revealed in the form of a waka
- The forms and levels of the structure have been designed to work with the changing lake levels

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- So I've been keen to explore ways to make ideas like this into reality
- Lynda Burns and Robinne Weiss had developed an interpretation plan for the lake a few years back
- This became my basis for the design themes and artistic elements that might help trigger people's imagination and associations with this landscape

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- Through Robinne, I became involved in developing a context for signage around the lake
- And this is one concept developed for DoC at the Kaituna Quarry site
- I used an abstracted form of the flounder which could be constructed as prefabricated decking to the lake edge
- It is reminiscent of tukutuku panels...and the form sits comfortably with the horizontal nature of the lake

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- Another idea was to insert vertical elements representative of ko or the traditional Maori digging stick once used to open the lake to the sea
- These would serve to entice people to the lake while remaining relatively unobtrusive to the lake's horizontal character
- They would be marked at 4m above sea level – as I've mentioned, the depth that the lake historically reached before breaching Kaitorete Spit

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- With limited funding, what has eventuated at this stage is a compromise
- - we have incorporated the digging stick into the supporting structure for the panel
- And these structures are to be sited in strategic locations around the lake

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- A prototype has been constructed
- And we are expecting the remaining 5 to be completed any day now
- But we're still hopeful to develop a wider masterplan for the lake with ideas similar to those I've mentioned today

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- In conclusion, my message today is that even the smallest intervention, well designed, can elicit a profound experience
- As a landscape architect, my approach for Te Waihora has been to use art, architecture and ecological restoration
- To create a series of dispersed interventions across a wider scale
- These interventions can act to stitch a narrative through a landscape
- And provide subtle triggers that stimulate emotions and the imagination of visitors

Kia ora, thank you.

Wendy Hoddinott

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