

Martin George  
born Melbourne 1980

*My public penance*

2017-18 Melbourne/ Lorne  
aluminium, timber, lacquer  
300 x 500 x 500 dimensions variable

On first glance, *My public penance* appears to be the classic monumental abstract sculpture pointing upwards to the sky, predictable in the curved shape of each element, although perhaps slightly out of place on the coastal landscape. The visitor may initially think the forms have been commissioned for a town square or forecourt of a city building. It is at this point that the deceit of the work begins to take hold of the spectator. In its complete form the sculpture is a folly that exists on the site for less than twenty-four hours before being ceremoniously desecrated and chopped down following the official opening of the Biennale, dragged in pieces by Martin George to be suspended from the boughs of the large Morton Bay Fig tree adjacent to the Lorne Life Saving Club.

The tearing down of his own work reflects George's circumspection at being a sculptor in this age when 'issues such as deforestation, pollution and war are all symptoms of selfishness whilst in power'. The public act of destruction of the modernist monolithic structure is his way of 'putting myself in the place of the perpetrator, I want to cut down my own thicket of colossal sculptures with an axe, dragging them by hand to their final location in a public place, mounting the structures in a large tree. The chopped stumps will remain in the ground as a land intervention and relic. I'm suggesting that we often speak of 'others' engaging in destructive practices, but I too perform acts that are selfish, and these actions affect those around me.

George's work is exhibited widely throughout Australia and internationally where he is represented in Germany. Many of his 'standard issue' modernist forms grace the rarefied world of private collections. Yet, as the leading expert in contemporary Australian sculpture, Ken Scarlett succinctly explains of George's practice, 'while Martin George can undoubtedly make a totally convincing piece of modernist sculpture, viewable from all directions and immaculately constructed, he also likes in catching the spectator unawares. Things are frequently not quite as they first seem'.

*Catalogue entry by Lara Nicholls*











