

From the collection



The University of Auckland campus is now home to two new art works which are part of the public art trail, initiated by the Advisory Panel for Public Art at Auckland City Council.

The dozen works are all situated within what planners have deemed “The Learning Quarter”, an inner city precinct encompassing Albert Park, The University of Auckland, AUT and surrounding streets and neighbourhoods.

Called collectively Micro Sites, this idea for temporary art projects in public spaces has given 13 recent graduates the chance to come up with small scale art works which will act as subtle interventions in a busy academic world. Appropriately enough, the word microsite is a term used in ecology to describe a pocket within an environment with unique features, conditions or characteristics. A microsite is also an internet web design term referring to an individual web page which supplements the primary website. These virtual microsities are typically used to add specialised information, neatly coinciding with the purpose of these art works.

Meant to “run against the grain or interfere with everyday perceptions and experiences of a place”, The University of Auckland’s collaboration in the Micro Sites project has resulted in the unlikely placement of a small 1970s glass chandelier on the roof overhang adjacent to the Recreation Centre.

court below.

Around the corner in Princes Street, a bronze plaque designed by Elam MFA student AD Schierning is embedded in the footpath. The text on the plaque is in capital letters, and appears handwritten, distinguishing it from other commemorative footpath panels such as the one on Grafton Road marking the site of the original Auckland Philosophical Institute. Because such plaques are common in cities and parks, this art work is camouflaged and seems like an everyday part of its setting. Its appearance in Princes Street outside the service entrance to the General Library has gone unremarked.

The intention is for the text to be read in order to convey the uses of the leaves of the Ginkgo biloba tree, and in particular the properties which enhance memory. As AD Schierning has pointed out, here at the heart of The University of Auckland’s City Campus, where the highest concentration of learning and research takes place, stands a tree that itself is a symbol of knowledge, since its leaves can assist with the retention and distribution of knowledge.

The text which AD Schierning has chosen for the plaque reads: “Ginkgo (Ginkgo biloba) Maidenhair tree. Ginkgo has been used in traditional medicine to treat circulatory disorders and enhance memory.

Trembling slightly as buses roar past on the Central Connector Corridor that Symonds Street has become, Fairy Bright Eyes is a work by Ryan Monro, a graduate of the Elam School of Fine Arts. It adds a little touch of luxury to the otherwise utilitarian modernist architecture it adorns, and its faded glamour is an interesting counterpoint to the games of basketball played out in the

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Scientific studies throughout the years lend support to these traditional uses. Ginkgo can maximize the benefit of studying for tests and exams. To make a tincture, place 150g of dried powdered ginkgo leaves or 400g of fresh chopped ginkgo leaves or 400g of fresh chopped ginkgo leaves in a jar and cover with 500ml of vodka. Cover and store in a dark place for four weeks, shaking the jar daily. After four weeks, strain the mixture, pressing all liquid from the ginkgo. Stored in a glass bottle this will keep for up to a year. For those who wish to avoid consuming alcohol, ginkgo tea is very simple to make. Simply add one cup of boiling water to one teaspoon of dried ginkgo or one tablespoon of fresh ginkgo. Allow to stand for several minutes, then sweeten as desired. The disadvantage to taking ginkgo in tea form is that the required dosage is much higher – two to three cups per day, rather than one to three teaspoons of tincture.

“Haemophiliacs and individuals taking anti-coagulant medication should never take ginkgo. Pregnant and breastfeeding women should avoid using ginkgo preparations. In addition, ginkgo use should be discontinued at least 36 hours prior to surgery. Please respect the trees and only harvest leaves from windfall. See your medical herbalist for further advice. www.nzamh.org.nz”

Having held a Goethe Institute Scholarship in Germany, and exhibited in the Sao Paulo Biennale in Brazil, AD Schierning is also the artist behind The Starving Artists Fund <http://www.starvingartistsfund.com> and Freedom Fruit Gardens <http://www.ofourempire.com/freedomfruit>. This latter art project aims to plant edible gardens throughout New Zealand, choosing sites by using a statistical scale called The Deprivation Index. AD Schierning describes her art practice at looking at values and what she identifies as important, paring things back to a basic and fundamental transaction, in order to simplify a complex world.

Linda Tyler

Photo by Sam Hartnett

AD Schierning Untitled (Ginkgo biloba), 2010, bronze, 400x500mm.