

From the collection



Charlotte Fisher (b.1959) *Fathom* 2002, marine grade mirror finish stainless steel plate, 4600mm x 1750mm x 1600mm

The design for this sculpture, originally titled *She Shore*, was an entry in the competition for a sculpture to be sited at the back of the newly opened Kenneth Myers Centre in 2001.

Many of Charlotte Fisher's other works – like her name itself – carry a marine reference, sometimes deploying the imagery of moons, bowls and eggs to conjure femaleness as well. Relating to Shortland Street's pre-reclamation shoreline status, the shape of this sculpture was based on the form of an ancient fossil, the graptolite. Floaters in primordial seas, graptolites are extinct relatives of hemichordates – and therefore distantly related to the chordates, including humans.

Fisher explains the utility of this prehistoric referent: "My sculpture deals with the organic, the elemental, abstract and associative form. I feel part of the chain of human endeavour – work made by both women and men – whereby signs, symbols and objects from people long dead speak to us today."

From its inception, the Kenneth Myers Centre embraced the performing arts, and Fisher's design also alludes to the structure of the human body and the graceful lines formed when a dancer raises limbs in movement. Dentils, an ornamental architectural detail along the top of the parapet that edges the former 1YA building's flat roof, inspired the spikes that serrate the sculpture's upswept curves.

For its new site at Tamaki, Fisher upscaled both the concept and the form and retitled the work *Fathom*. It stretches to the same height as the portico of the nearby lecture theatre (4600mm) and still reaches for the sea, but more distantly. Now the form is striving, rather than dancing, marking a gathering place between Buildings 722 and 723. As *Fathom*, it now takes on meanings associated with inquiry, and the figuring out of answers. Significantly, a fathom is also an imperial unit of measurement for water depth (six feet) deriving from the Old English "faethm", meaning to encircle with outstretched arms.

Fisher says that her sculptures are associative and symbolic: "The stories I think they're telling are not always what people get from them. It's open. I enjoy words and titles. I indicate association through title. Everyone brings their own experience into it."

Made by a North Shore engineering company accustomed to making milk holding tanks for the dairy industry, the mirror finish stainless steel was cut to the sculptor's pattern, then shaped and welded into its evocative form. Appropriately enough, *Fathom* is polished biannually to maintain its lustre using marine cleaning techniques.