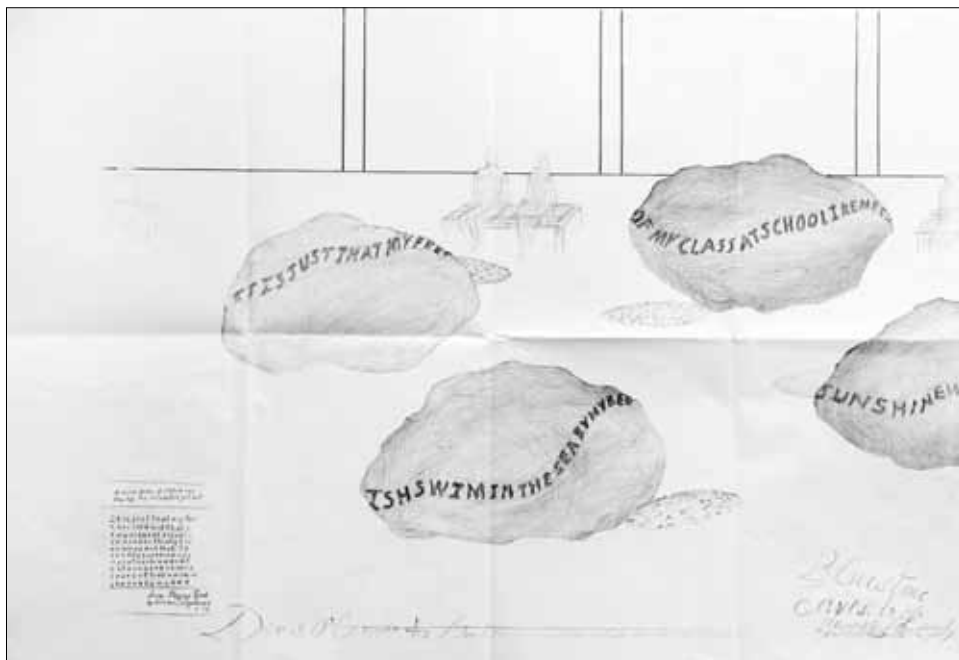


From the collection



Sited in the courtyard of the Population Health complex at Tāmaki campus are four bluestone basalt boulders with inscribed text.

They originate from the Mount Wellington quarry, a 220-acre site in Lunn Avenue established by Winstones in 1936. Operating until 2001, it employed 120 people and was once the country's main source for volcanic stones for roads and walls. Now G341, the ubiquitous Auckland kerbstone is quarried and manufactured in China, and mechanised, modern quarrying has shifted south to Bombay. A new residential suburb, Stonefields, has risen where stonecrushers once ruled.

Artist Denis O'Connor, who grew up nearby in Glen Innes, was commissioned to make this work by Peter Simpson, the curator of art works for the Tāmaki campus. In his concept proposal, he wrote: "To redress the extraordinary exploitation of this unique volcanic resource, I would like to honour the locale (especially the significant landmark of Mt Wellington) by preserving these

four representative stones." Acquiring the stones was not an easy business. The sculptor's original approach to Landco (the Todd Property Group) was politely declined, but he persevered, and in a chaperoned tour of the massive quarry site chose four two-tonne examples that could be removed by HIAB hydraulic truck-mounted cranes.

Thompsons Memorials of Henderson sandblasted the lettering onto the stones once they had been situated on the Tāmaki site. The words come from a poem which emphasises the importance of childhood memory and the New Zealand environment to health. Entitled "A short poem dictated one day by an intubated patient" published in the book *Playing God* by doctor and poet Glenn Colquhoun, the poem is reproduced there as a block with no punctuation or spaces between the words but reads as: "It is just that my feet are cold and that of my class at school I remember thirty-two names and that I feel the sunshine when you touch me and that

unspeakable colours of fish swimming the sea by my bed."

Denis O'Connor chose this text, he says, for its appealing representation of a patient's voice as well as the way in which it was printed with each letter and word spaced evenly and continuously. The letters appear on the stone in a continuous line ribbony around the forms like an arterial circulatory system, and resonating with the use of this type of stone historically in the creation of the region's roading. O'Connor writes: "The poem also suggests eavesdropping and guardianship and echoes the conceptual framework of the tableau's symbolic logic."

Beneath each boulder is an ellipse of coloured stones, lying flush with the surface of the courtyard like a small pool of water. Comprising aggregate inlays of agate, quartz, sandstone and sodalite, with the constituent gemstones polished to create flashes of colour, these subsidiary stones are meant to be suggestive of shadow voices, murmuring beneath the main narrative of the rocks above.

O'Connor writes that his approach to this sculpture was determined by the recreational function of the courtyard area – it was designated for repose, companionship and even meditation. The planting and seating was designed to harmonise with the formal elements of the tableau of stones in order to establish a sense of sanctum: "Something suggestive of an impressionistic zen retreat, or a jeweller's arcadia! I believe the luxurious colour codes and provocative dream-like metaphorical narratives of the natural materials enhance an architecture devoted to healthcare, and will cope well with the rigours of the weather!" he writes, "after all, it is said that stone weathers best nearest the quarry."

Denis O'Connor, Maungarei Eavesdrop, 2004, sculpture. (Illustrated with concept drawing)