

From the collection

Back in June 1975, the University's Works Committee resolved to provide for "fine arts embellishments of new buildings and their precinct" and allocated funds for the acquisition of art works as part of building contracts.

The Council recommended the adoption of the Works Registrar's policy that "a realistic allowance for such work would be one-half percent for Government buildings but that where buildings of national or prime community importance are involved allowance of up to one-and-a-half percent would be more appropriate". Commissioning of fine art for specific sites around the University resulted in the Medical School Link building on the University's Grafton Campus being the first to benefit from the new policy.

The School of Architecture, completed by Kingston Reynolds Thom and Allardice in 1982, was the second building to get the art treatment. Painter Pat Hanly, then a lecturer in drawing at the School, chose the all-male team of artists. As well as selecting a site on the exterior of the conference centre for one of his own paintings *The Golden Age*, Hanly chose interior walls for works by Don Driver, Barry Lett and Dick Frizzell. He also identified sites in the grounds for a sculpture by Greer Twiss, and for a large wooden piece by Peter Nicholls.

Nicholls was an Elam graduate who had just completed his Master of Fine Arts at the University

of Wisconsin at the Lake Superior Campus and was poised to return to New Zealand to take up a position as lecturer in sculpture at the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, in Dunedin. The resulting commissions were documented by Pat Hanly's wife Gil Hanly who produced a photographic essay for *Art New Zealand* published at the end of 1982 entitled "Seven artists contribute to the Auckland School of Architecture". In her commentary, she writes of the art works as "among the most impressive recent contributions of artists to the aesthetics of public buildings in this country".

Nicholls' work *Measure* had originally been made in 1979 as part of a Dunedin sculpture festival organised by gallerist Patricia Bosshard for significant sites around the Octagon and Moray Place. Created as an angular sight line to direct the gaze of passers-by to the 54-metre top of First Church's decorated Victorian Gothic tower, *Measure* is conceptually minimal in style, and subtle in gesture. It is intended to conjure the notion of measuring, which is often part of architectural practice, appropriately enough.

As part of the ongoing maintenance of the art collection, *Measure* was demounted in 2007. It has now been beautifully restored by sculptor Matthew Thomson in association with Peter Nicholls himself, and will be reinstalled in its original position in the Architecture courtyard.

Art



Peter Nicholls (b.1936), *Measure*, 1981, Recycled Australian hardwood, 6000 x 3000 x 1500mm, The University of Auckland Art Collection