

2008 SCAPE  
Christchurch  
Biennial  
of art in public space

TE PUNA O WAIWHETU  
CHRISTCHURCH  
ART GALLERY

## SCAPE 2008 Christchurch Biennial of Art in Public Space

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### **WANDERING LINES: TOWARDS A NEW CULTURE OF SPACE**

**“The function of public art is to de-design.”<sup>1</sup>**

Vito Acconci

Cities are complex dynamic systems that are constantly in flux. Together with the impact of globalisation and growing populations which reflects greater mobility and migration, they are rapidly transforming. This is evident in terms of urban spaces that operate as complex habitations for social and political representations, cultural production and consumption, tourism and leisure. Alongside this, the conception of public space has also changed.

‘Public space’ is difficult to define in urban centres where space is increasingly moving into the hands of private developers. Together with the adaptation of neo-liberal global economic models and budgetary limitations imposed on councils, change in cities is now largely motivated by private enterprise. This has spawned a heightened focus towards consumption. With life organised around consumerist culture, visible socio-economic divides within cities are created.

In order to think through these issues, ‘public space’ is defined as negative space – the voids, façades, streets, publicly owned buildings, sky- all the possible spaces in-between private space. This provides a starting point to reflect on how cities can produce a sense of ‘publicness’ through space and to consider how ‘publicness’ can be reinfused into cities to create a more relevant public space to be enjoyed equally, it is important to unfold city space in terms of social fluidity and “hybridity” through a close examination of the structures that organise it and the conditions of its development.

## Contingencies of Space

The exploration of urban spaces that construct and contain the life of the city engages with issues regarding how we live and how culture is constantly transforming and adapting to new conditions.

Unlike early permanent 'drop' sculptures in public space, temporary art interventions respond to the contingencies of real-time and space: everyday life. The SCAPE 2008 Christchurch Biennial is firmly positioned within the dynamic systems of the city and will develop relationships between artworks and an infinite number of spatial, urban, social, psychological, individual or communal, political and historical contingencies that exist in the city. Making these seemingly invisible contingencies visible, the artistic interventions can propose an entirely different experience of locale and situation. In this sense, interweaving art within a social and urban context is vital in activating a critical dialogue towards a new culture of space.

In line with Vito Acconci's definition of the function of art in public space, all SCAPE 2008 projects will be selected in accordance with their ability to de-design/deconstruct the spatial politics of established 'ways of operating' to reveal conflicts in specific localities.

The title *Wandering Lines*<sup>2</sup> is drawn from the notion that 'indirect or errant trajectories obeying their own logic'<sup>3</sup> can provide new understandings of space. Chosen because of SCAPE 2008's desire to unfold the constituting structures and conventional ways of operating within the existing urban design. This suggests a deconstruction of the city grid which can reveal new possibilities beyond those the city proposes.

## SCAPE 2008 Locations: Christchurch in Context

SCAPE 2008 is structured around three intersecting layers: 1. Researching the drivers behind global conditions of transformation in cities. 2. Mapping the complex textures and terrains that are specific to Christchurch city and 3. Creating a spatial dialogue within the city that brings to the fore palpable aspects of Christchurch city's structure that resonate with global issues.

Through artistic interventions, SCAPE 2008 explores points of connection, disconnection, and conflicts, where artists work site-specifically to draw attention to the current situation from an oblique perspective.

One of the closest urban centres to Antarctica, Christchurch is the largest city located on the East Coast of the South Island in New Zealand. The original settlement of Christchurch was at the port, now named Lyttelton. Due to the previously established Maori settlements on the coastline and as well as a restriction of agricultural flat land and space for urban development, the city centre was not developed around the port. Instead, it relocated to flat inland marshland. Originally built as a classic English grid-planned-town, the city has been altered over time, creating a number of disconnections in traffic and pedestrian flow.

Surrounding the city, sprawling suburbs have grown across the plains, and subsequently along the coastline. Though Christchurch is in close geographic proximity to the ocean and

described as a “coastal city” in the tourist guides, the relation of the city with the coast line is largely suburban and leisure based.

**Doppelganger Effect:** There is an apparent mirroring, asymmetry or doppelganger effect (an alter-ego or opposition situation) between locations in Christchurch, both spatially / geographically and socio-economically. This provides leverage for examining different spatial and cultural contexts, as well as the relationships between particular sites.

Walking from **Cashel Mall** down **Cashel Street** to the suburb of Linwood, **Eastgate Mall** reveals an interesting cross section of Christchurch’s urban fabric. There is a dramatic contrast in the physical and social space of **Cashel Street** that suggests the dichotomous relationship between the inner-centre and periphery. The expansiveness of **Cashel Mall**, with its pedestrianised, open-air experience developed by the City Council, and the encased, interior focus of **Eastgate Mall** developed by a private company, exemplifies the contrasting socio-economic make-up of consumers in these spaces while indicating the impact of private enterprise on public life. This becomes a point to investigate the draw that malls have for the public and provides a platform for thinking about how private spaces have become surrogate social spaces for public life. **Cashel Street**, is chosen as a main artery of SCAPE 2008 as it constitutes a metonym for the relationship between the city centre and its immediate vicinity. It particularly illustrates how cities transform around the culture of consumption as life becomes organized around shopping malls.

**Lichfield Lanes** on the other hand, is chosen as the ‘doppelganger site’. The Lanes contrast with Cashel Street by proposing a human-scale design encouraging a slower and more intimate circulation of people.

The centre of the city constitutes the counter-site of Cashel Street’s Linwood area, thus indicating the other focal point of the exhibition. At the centre of Christchurch is Cathedral Square, the ‘Cultural Precinct’ and Cashel Mall. The ‘heart’ of the city is promoted as **Cathedral Square**, where an iconic Anglican Cathedral remains a prominent feature from colonial settlement.

At the centre of the square is the Christchurch Cathedral, adjoining visitor centre and police pavilion. While traditionally squares function as meeting places for social encounters or leisure pursuits, Cathedral Square, despite significant efforts in revitalisation, does not function effectively as a space for local culture. Dominated by the blind façades of finance buildings with limited other social stimulation, the square is mostly used as a thoroughfare or as a destination for tourists.

**Cranmer and Latimer squares** are park blocks that form a symmetrical image of each other, yet each dramatically reflects different socio-economic realities. The other main square in Christchurch is **Victoria Square** which features a prominent hotel that has literally cut -across the grid on a diagonal, taking over a large portion of park space. Traffic which would have previously flowed down Victoria Street to the city is now diverted.

Public art and cultural institutions such as Christchurch Art Gallery, The Arts Centre, Christchurch Library and Canterbury Museum are in the ‘Cultural Precinct’. The **Christchurch Art Gallery**, the city’s major civic art institution (funded by the Christchurch City Council), offers a space for artists to investigate and deconstruct the function and processes of the gallery as a public institution. Along with a number of artist projects, it will also be a ‘central hub’ for information and programmes related to SCAPE 2008.

The **Avon River**, which historically linked Christchurch to a port, has an organic shape which radically contrasts to the inner city's urban grid. This suggests the colonizing aspect of the city that fought to control the marshland and river. As it also proposes a metaphor for flow and connection challenged by the city structure, it is designated as one of the sites for SCAPE 2008. Alongside this, connection points or 'gates' that offer local, national and global networks access and flow in and out of Christchurch are also emphasized, these include the **airport**, **Lyttelton** (port town) and the **bus exchange**.

## **Public Programme and Publications**

**Public Programme:** To create a critical platform to discuss the issues related to the politics of space, SCAPE 2008 will generate a series of public programmes to operate locally and nationally. A range of lectures, panel discussions, workshops, and artist talks drawing on the perspectives of the spatial practitioners as well as artists, theorists, curators, critics will explore critical discourses on urban transformation and its impact on public space. The programme will focus on emerging tendencies, creative strategies, and possible futures for art in public space. These programmes will begin prior to the opening of SCAPE 2008 (in March 08) and be concentrated around the opening and closing of the project. They will be developed in partnership with a number of national and international organisations to ensure discussions also occur in Auckland and Wellington leading up to SCAPE 2008.

**Student Workshops:** SCAPE 2008 is working with lecturers from a number of universities around the country to engage students in research projects on the intellectual premises of SCAPE 2008. They will be invited to discuss the conceptual framework and the issues it raises, and present their approach – this could be in the form of writing, magazines, videos - or a form that supports their studies. These 'workshops' will be formulated in a collaboration between the curators of SCAPE and the lecturers of the students. The student presentations will be publicly available to view during the exhibition.

This engagement with universities is an essential part of the public programme encouraging students to participate and to formulate their own ideas and responses to SCAPE 2008.

**Publications:** Two publications are planned to maximise the impact and distribution of ideas raised by SCAPE 2008. The first will be a guidebook with basic information on the project, including the curatorial outline; artist biographies and information about their work; maps; and sponsorship information. This will be available for the opening.

A second more substantial publication will contextualise SCAPE 2008 within a broader discussion on the politics of space through commissioned essays from national and international writers. This publication will be an in-depth analysis of issues relating to public space raised by the project as well as a documentation of the exhibition. It will be produced at the end of the exhibition and distributed internationally.

### **Proposed national partners include:**

Public Art Advisory Group - Christchurch  
Christchurch City Council – City and Urban Planning Departments  
University of Canterbury, Christchurch  
Design & Arts College of New Zealand

Public Art Panel, Wellington City Council

City Gallery, Wellington  
Massey University and Litmus Project, Wellington  
Te Papa, Wellington

Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland  
Artspace, Auckland  
Auckland Art Gallery  
Auckland City Council – Public Art Department

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<sup>1</sup> Vito Acconci, "Leaving Home, Notes on Insertions into the Public" in Public Art ed.by Florian Matzner, 2004, p.30

<sup>2</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Los Angeles: 1998

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. From de Certeau where he describes Francios Deligny experience working with autistic children who "trace "indeterminate trajectories" that are apparently meaningless, since they do not cohere with the constructed, written and prefabricated space through which they move. These trajectories are sentences that remain unpredictable within the space ordered by the organizing of techniques and systems. Although they use as their material the vocabularies of established languages (those of television, newspapers, the supermarket or city planning), although they remain within the framework of prescribed syntaxes (the temporal modes of schedules, paradigmatic organizations of places), these "traverses" remain heterogeneous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful rules of different interests and desires."