

PACIFIC WAY



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November 1995
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In works of great beauty, sculptor Lynn Dunn carves symbols of his feelings and reflections from the world around him.

Every Sunday morning, an intricately carved candlestick is lit in St Peter's Cathedral in Hamilton. The imagery on each wooden panel tells part of a story: stars in the night, sky, the sun, a violin, birds and fish.

Auckland sculptor Lynn Dunn was commissioned to design the two-metre high carving as a memorial for a young parishioner, Jenny Basley, who was killed at the age of 13 when she was hit by a car.

The candlestick, which took more than a year to complete, incorporates some of Jenny's own art work and weaves together the pieces of her life — from a passion for trout fishing and a love of music (she played the violin and sang in the church choir) to life on her parents' farm.

For Dunn, it was like meeting Jenny after

she died. "By the time that I finished, I had the distinct feeling that the carving belonged to her, not to me," he says. "I was just the vehicle by which it came into being."

The candlestick is illuminated with a candle at Easter and wreathed with flowers for weddings and baptisms. "We liked the idea of using light," says her mother, Ursula. "Jenny had a sort of lightness about her; a real zest for life. It all seemed to fit into place."

As an artist, Dunn sees himself as both a mirror and a conduit, reflecting the world around him and communicating positive images through his work. His studio in Swanson, on Auckland's west coast, is surrounded by native bush and the view from his cluttered workbench sweeps across the picturesque Waitakere Ranges.

A rainbow lorikeet called Baby sometimes watches him carve each fresh piece of wood, sitting



imperiously on his shoulder nibbling at stray strands of hair. Two budgies chatter together in another cage hanging from the ceiling.

The single-room studio is also his home, with a bed tucked up on a mezzanine platform and two gas cooking rings in the makeshift kitchen.

Environment colours an artist's vision



Above: A memorial for a young parishioner stands in St Peter's Cathedral, Hamilton. **Left:** The Old Man Of The Sea. Driftwood has such a distinct nature, that the material dictates the form of the sculpture.



and Dunn believes living in the city often produces negative images.

"Here, you're part of the wood," he says.

"Some of the art coming from Europe is very aggressive, filled with skulls and death, and that reflects some of what's happening there.

"I believe one of the things that artists can do is act as a channel and create beauty around them by identifying and projecting positive images.

"If it's any good, a work of art will speak to people and touch them somewhere, for their own reasons and in their own way."



Dunn's large-scale sculptures in kauri and driftwood can be found in city council buildings, school foyers, pubs, night-clubs and corporate offices. A kauri carving depicting the Maori myth of Maui taming the sun was commissioned by a blind physiotherapist as a gift for a physiotherapy school in London, a design which symbolised humankind harnessing nature.

One of his current projects is a 2.5-metre monument to the gumdiggers who were once the lifeblood of the Northland town of Dargaville. A mould taken from the sculpture will be cast in bronze and erected in the town centre, while the original wood carving goes on display in the local museum.

Born in Putaruru, a small country town in the Waikato, Dunn vividly remembers family trips to Rotorua where he watched Maori carvers at work.

After leaving school, he began making bone carvings and small wooden boxes for the tourist trade and sold pieces through the Auckland Museum.

At the age of 21, he signed up as crew on a yacht sailing through the Pacific and jumped boat in Hawaii. On the island of Maui he met a driftwood carver, Bruce Turnbull, who taught him how to work

with driftwood and extend his creative boundaries: "In New Zealand you tend to get locked into the Polynesian thing. He helped me break out of the mould and find my own direction."

Most of the driftwood Dunn uses for his work comes from the East Cape. One sculpture, for the Auckland Central Library, was made from the entire root system of a tree. Another, which depicts a Merlin-type figure with a lizard at his feet, is now in a private collection in Los Angeles. "A piece of driftwood has such a distinct nature and character," he says. "You have to do something that it will accept, flowing the shapes and forms so they naturally blend in and become part of the wood."

Dunn specialises in kauri, which he prizes for its warmth, texture and colour. Sourcing the wood can be a daunting task

Above: This mural in the Waitakere City Council building features dolphins, an often-repeated motif in Lynn Dunn's work. **Above left:** Dunn believes that, to a sympathetic person, the wood has a lot to say. **Left:** Earth, Wind And Fire was carved jointly with Bruce Turnbull from the island of Maui.