

Mayor, North Sydney Council

Jilly Gibson

Director, Sculpture at Sawmillers

Elsa Atkin

Exhibition organisers

Sally Tribe, Marg Simonsen, Jenny Thurston, Nicole Calma and Caroline Foldes

Selection Panel, chaired by **Michael Snape** joined for the judging by **Luca Belgiorno-Nettis**.

Sponsors –

Zurich, Nettelton Tribe, Australian Catholic University, family of the late Michael Tribe.

The Neilsen Foundation

Esteemed sculptors and artists

Members of local and arts communities.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I offer my respect to the traditional keepers and I acknowledge **the debt of gratitude** I owe to **wise indigenous women** who have taught me **across my life** what it **means to be an elder**.

Sharing language, culture, country.

FRIENDS,

I am **thrilled and delighted** to join you this afternoon at this **special spot nudging our harbour**.

And **how lovely to be welcomed** by a **Scouts guard of honour**.

McMahon's Point is nostalgic ground for me.

I lived in Blues Point Road for a few years in **the early 90s** when I was **working in the city**.

Every morning I crossed the water on one of **those little ferries**, *Twin Star* or

Emerald Star – so often depicted in a **Peter Kingston** painting.

Elsa Atkin was my **neighbour** and my **walking companion**.

Early morning conversations across the seasons.

The border collie **gallivanting ahead**.

Sharing friendship that has been **important and influential** in my life.

I came back quite often during my years as GG from the **splendid historic house** a couple of bays away.

During that time **Elsa paid me a charming compliment** – an invitation to open her first *Sculpture at Sawmillers* exhibition.

I vividly remember what a **gorgeous, exciting occasion** it was – something in the air – **vivacity, community** – amazing sculpture, **every form, every genre** all around us.

Among the crowd **my baby grandson, Charlie**. I am so pleased he is here **this afternoon** racing around, 6 years old – an age when **you always have a good time**.

As I **reminisce** and **take all this in**, I see plainly why *Sawmillers Reserve* became a **favourite retreat** for me to find **calm and quietness** and **take joy in reassuring natural beauty**.

I see too why **that first show** of the weekend, **exactly six years** ago was **such a success** that it was repeated two years later in response to *loud demand*.

Please Elsa do it again!

She did. The next ran for 8 days, attracting tens of thousands.

The judges held it to be **of very high standard** and superior to *Sculpture by the Sea*.

(Elsa has always been a little competitive).

The **intimacy of the reserve and harbour** helps to create **the perfect backdrop** for **this exhibition**.

And that's **what inspired Elsa** – an **inquisitive insightful experienced traveller**.

In **cities across the world** she saw numbers of sculptures **displayed in squares, gardens, forecourts**, sometimes they were **enchantingly beautiful** spaces, sometimes **more utilitarian**.

They sparked **her imagination**, a **clever idea** came to fill this reserve, **this place** that **she cares for so dearly, with art**.

Her aim to give the community the chance to **experience sculpture first hand without the constraints** of gallery walls.

Elsa wanted people to meander in the park with their families, **enjoying and absorbing** the atmosphere.

SO, SHE GOT ON WITH IT.

Local **volunteers** – planning, strategy, jobs for everyone.

It all came together. It worked.

Now the Exhibition **has a secure date in Sydney’s cultural calendar** as a **biennial celebration** of this art form which has become **popular again** in the last decade, **valued and admired** as it should be.

This year an incredible number of high end artists, **both established and emerging** have **been drawn to exhibit**.

And an **exciting new addition** under the banner *‘Poetry at Sawmillers’*.

Significant numbers of **budding and well known poets** have submitted poems – **a selection will be read next Saturday**.

So come back.

MY FRIENDS

What **extraordinary achievement** this **gathering signifies**.

Engaging us with others’ artistic shapes.

So much **to savour** and **to learn**.

Thanks to **terrific volunteers** who have **done the hard work**.

It’s all free.

Prizes are **non-acquisitive** and **no commission** is taken for sales.

Sponsors helping enormously in **providing prizes**.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

Each of us has our **own special affinity** with **the places we love**.

I know that Sawmillers reserve has **been in Elsa Atkin’s heart** for **more than forty years**. She has **lived and thrived** in its fold, **grown a family** here and **fought passionately** for its preservation.

Yes, the **personal is political**.

Throughout Elsa's **distinguished vibrant career** two themes shine.

- **Commitment to community**
- **Dedication to the arts.**

A **lifetime's professional contribution** in **architectural firms**, at the **ABC**, at the **National Trust**, the **Evatt Foundation**, on **government and non-government** boards and committees across many fields – too numerous to name, we see **service, selflessness** and **accomplishment in spades**.

Initiative, advocacy, always the **art lover**.

I want to acknowledge **the debt of gratitude** we owe to **Elsa and her colleagues** who **strive constantly** with **passion and purpose** to **promote the arts**, who **play key roles** in making them **accessible**, who **break new ground, exhilarating fresh initiatives**.

Encouraging **growth and development** of **talent, participation**.

Enhancing **our nation's cultural life** in a myriad of ways – **social, economic, private** and **public**.

MY FRIENDS

Every year and **especially now** as an elder I find myself **appreciating more and more the enrichment that the arts** bring to my life.

The **delicious pleasure, happiness, contentment** and **wonder** that they give to me.

How much they teach me.

I **am entranced** by the way a **work of beauty** demands so much.

The **intellectual challenge**.

The way love grows as you search for its secrets.

As it transports you to another dimension.

Always **more to discover** every time we **stop to look, to see**.

The way **Betty Churcher** told us.

We **never forget** the pieces that **truly capture us** – they make **an enduring impact**.

I think especially of the tender memorial to **Patrick Gowrie**, son of **Lord and Lady Gowrie**, who was killed during **World War II**.

In the wild garden at Yarralumla the **fountain** bears a sculpture of **a dancing faun**, beneath **a simple inscription 'Soldier and Poet'**.

Also **the great bird** ready to take flight on the vista lawn – created by **Nick Zeffrin** whose sculpture I have followed all my life.

For some time **one proud emu** lived in the front garden where **the military band** plays on official occasions – **on loan from Jane Dawson**.

I'm thrilled to see **one of his relatives here today**.

MY FRIENDS

We are **privileged to come close** to these works.

To enjoy them as part of **our public landscape**.

To allow them to **speak to our vulnerabilities and doubts**, our **aspirations and dreams**.

Ladies and gentlemen, sculptors, young people,

This occasion

- is a **marvellous expression** of the **power of individuals**
- of **community accord and goodwill**,
- it is a **celebration** of **voluntary effort**
- and a **fresh, exciting and challenging look** at contemporary Australian sculpture, **right here in our backyard**.

FRIENDS

I am delighted to **declare open** the Sculpture at Sawmillers exhibition.