

# Ballast Point Park Public Art

Ballast Point is one of Sydney's most significant headlands. The redevelopment of the site into an appealing park that reveals rich layers of history, a unique topography and exceptional setting is a rare opportunity for the Foreshore Authority and NSW Government.

In returning this recently industrial landscape to the community, the Foreshore Authority have aspired to create a strong sense of place that offers a variety of social and recreational opportunities. In this quest they have commissioned a major public artwork by one of Australia's leading contemporary artists Robyn Backen.

Robyn Backen's proposal was selected from a number of artists who responded to a brief requesting the art "provide a memorable cultural experience of the park, be of high quality yet innovative and culturally relevant, draw reference from the site's location, landscape, indigenous, colonial and modern history and add a poetic dimension to the park".

The resultant work, *Delicate Balance*, is intriguing and interactive, enticing visitors into its core to experience the natural surroundings in quiet contemplation. It frames and contains the immensity of ocean, nature and sky within an intimate and solitary space.

*Delicate Balance* hovers over the waters edge on the southern side of Ballast Point directly in front of the Ballast Garden. The artwork has an extraordinary form, its tall and tapered cylindrical shape leaning out over the sea wall. Although moored to the promenade it almost takes the appearance of an object in transit, about to depart. The artist explains, "It can be entered into suggesting the entrance to a jetty or a lighthouse, and once inside a series of cutouts offer glimpses capturing the harbour, city, sky and park. The ocean viewed through a metal grate in the floor reverberates through the artwork,

like the secret of listening to the sea in a shell held in the palm of a hand".



*Delicate Balance*

The sensorial experience of viewing, smelling and listening helps to heighten ones awareness of the surrounding natural environment. Indeed the elements of sound, light and water are important ingredients in the artwork. In the artists words "water lends itself to a multitude of possibilities (...) It can suggest strong emotion or the more delicate and poignant ripples of feeling".



In both appearance and content the artwork draws upon the history of the site as a place for mining sandstone, and as a repository for petroleum in the modern years. In concept it is primarily about balance. Viewed from many vantage points – ferries and boats, the promenade and park, surrounding parks and residents across the bay – *Delicate Balance* will no doubt become one of Sydney harbour's most signature public artworks.

Robyn Backen has exhibited widely in galleries and museums throughout Australia, Europe and Asia. Having studied in Amsterdam and Salzburg she has since received numerous major

public art commissions in Sydney, Liverpool, Brisbane and Canberra, the most recent being a light sound artwork for Old Parliament House in Canberra.

**Amanda Sharrad**  
*Public Art Curator*

## Artwork details:

Commissioning process: Process and brief written and managed by Amanda Sharrad, Public Art Consultant. Artist Brief sent to artists recommended by consultant. Robyn Backen's work was selected by the Foreshore Authority under recommendation from an Art Advisory Panel in July 2006.

Materials & fabrication method: Detailed design was developed over a twelve month period by the artist and public art team. A unique wooden form was created for the artwork shape, concrete was cast and cured, and the form transported to the site. (\*A high level of expertise to produce fine formwork and concrete casting for a relatively small object in the field of construction was required of Obnova Concrete.) The leaning structure is supported and balanced by a large concrete slab beneath the surface of the artwork foreground. The sea water beneath the heritage sea wall can be viewed through a stainless steel grate in the floor at the front overhanging section of the cylindrical form.

Dimensions: 400cm x 250cm x 250cm

Timeframe: The artist was commissioned in August 2006. The artwork proposal was worked up to detailed design stage over twelve months from 2006 to end 2007 with architectural design drawings, structural engineering, fabrication and installation input and expertise by the public art team. Fabrication was completed in 4 months in 2008. Construction commenced on Ballast Point Park in February 2008 and the artwork installation took place over a 10 day period in October 2008.