

Glass Ceiling (NZ Aotearoa)

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Submitted by Gill Gatfield

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Client: Silo Park Auckland

Location: Auckland, New Zealand

Completion date: 2019

Project Team

Industry Resource

NZ Glass
NZ Glass

Industry Resource

5R Solutions
5R Solutions

Industry Resource

Glasshape NZ
Glasshape NZ

Public Art Agent

Creative New Zealand
Creative New Zealand

Industry Resource

Art Workshop
Art Workshop

Artist

Gill Gatfield
Gill Gatfield Studio



Overview

Glass Ceiling (NZ Aotearoa) commemorates 125 years since New Zealand women won the vote, the first nation in the world to grant women's suffrage. Transforming the industrial architecture of a disused concrete Silo on Auckland's waterfront, 16.5 metric tons of smashed glass fill the floor and press against 30mH castle-thick walls. This symbolic shattered 'glass ceiling' liberates yet reveals hidden depths and new constraints. A heaving mass of crystalline parts, Glass Ceiling delivers a deep sensory experience and potent political metaphor.



Through arched doorways, the aquamarine pool glistens in the sun and catches the moonlight, tracking the passage of time.

Goals

Marking NZ Suffrage 125, Glass Ceiling (NZ Aotearoa) explodes the metaphoric 'glass ceiling' - an invisible barrier preventing the advancement of women and minority groups in public life. The monumental artwork aimed to engage diverse audiences visiting a popular waterfront park, encourage reflection, and generate discussion on gains made and the work ahead. The artist selected the muscular Silo space, a symbol of an Industrial revolution, as a key aesthetic and conceptual element. To 'silo' means to isolate a system or process from others. It suggests a barrier, akin to a political glass ceiling. Beneath the cavernous ceiling, the circular pool of 200 million glass shards shimmers like waves pushing against a sea wall. Both beautiful and profound, with stark contrasts of light and dark, the space captures the viewer's imagination. Archways offer safe havens and portals into this otherworldly glass moat. The hand-carved surface suggests a landscape in relief or impressions of human bodies. Situated on the harbour fringe, the smashed 'glass ceiling' is set apart, separate and distinct from its context, yet open for public view. Glass Ceiling invites people in and sparks conversations about personal experiences, diversity and access, topics typically confined to the private domain.



Process

Involving detailed planning and execution, the Glass Ceiling project presented several challenges to the project team, led by Gill Gatfield Studio. A massive quantity of glass had to be sourced, sorted and stockpiled, a task managed by 5R Solutions, an innovator in glass recycling. The artwork comprises multi-coloured glass (transparent, white, black, brown, and grey) in proportions that reflect the city's diverse population; and the recycled glass carries traces of earlier commercial and industrial use. These materials-based considerations add to the sculpture's sensory and conceptual content. Other logistical challenges involved physically moving 16.5 tons of glass safely through a busy public park and into the heritage Silo space, with its narrow entry-ways, elevated above ground level. Supported by Creative New Zealand, the installation team, led by Art Workshop, built a series of ramps and kept a smooth flow of glass going into the Silo where the artist smashed and sculpted the artwork. Curved glass panes designed and made by Glasshape, a leading curved glass fabricator, were installed inside the arched doorways by NZ Glass. Like a lens, these



thresholds complete the circular pool and enable close inspection of the internal workings of the 'glass ceiling'.

Additional Information

Signage designed by the artist and Red Gecko utilises the rough concrete surface and warns people to 'keep out' and 'not touch', messaging that also occurs subliminally when contemplating a metaphorical glass ceiling. Glass Ceiling has prompted additional creative projects including reviews, photo essays, and a documentary by videographer Conrad Morley, further extending the artwork's reach. While New Zealand was the first nation in the world to grant women the right to vote, opportunities continue to be adversely impacted by gender, race, and economic status. The OECD 2019 Glass-Ceiling Index shows no nations in the OECD operate a level playing field.





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