



Sculpture No.23
Photo: Clyde Yee

ART THIS WAY

At this year's *Sculpture by the Sea*, Alex Seton will provide the exhibition's best view

In preparation for 2004's *Sculpture by the Sea*, Australia's largest outdoor exhibition of contemporary sculpture, artist Alexander Seton is working hard on creating a couch. It may look just like "the average 2.5 seater couch – as if tossed by the roadside" except that it will be placed on Bondi's foreshore, in Sydney, and made from cold, hard, Italian marble. "A lot of my work is [based on] optical illusion. I carve all the intricate details, and I should be able to make it look, for all intents and purposes, like stitched leather. [It will be] beaten up, with a bum print from having people seated on it."

Like his award-winning 2003 entry *Sculpture No.3* – a seven-tonne marble replica of a postal package marked with 'Fragile' stickers – Seton's work will again be placed in Marks Park, overlooking the sea. However the couch will deliberately face away from the ocean, towards a bank of grass. "It's a challenge for the artist to create something for that environment. But we spend so much of our lives on the couch watching television, and I'm trying to create

that idea of being an active viewer, rather than a passive viewer. So if you actually sit on the couch as you would a normal couch, you're going to look at the least interesting view. But to really enjoy it, you must twist your body to see what's going on around you. It's about encouraging, in a very gentle, prodding manner, through a series of casual,

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playful prompts. You don't sit in the normal fashion to really enjoy the breadth of the actual place. It's very soft, very subtle, and hopefully my audience sees that."

Seton has worked with many materials, but lately believes all his best ideas are suited to marble. "One of the challenges that sculptors face is to find something that will withstand audience participation. But for me, that works very well because my pieces require the audience's tactile response. They

require observation with hands, not just eyes. The seven-tonne block [in 2003] was a very coarse texture, but by the end of the show, some of the main spots – generally eye level – were polished smooth. People think there's such a rock-solid sense of memory to marble, but in fact, it moves so easily. You get 200,000 people lining up to touch a piece, and it'll polish in no time!"

Integral to the success of *Sculpture by the Sea* is the interaction between the audience, the artists and their work. "There's 110 works competing for attention, but it's one of the few chances artists get to observe the life of our artwork, and engage with our audience. That's quite amazing for me as an artist, because the artwork takes on a vitality of its own, as the response brings it to life. And hopefully continues to bring, even in a small capacity, a sense of the joy of creation."

DIARY DETAILS:

Sculpture by the Sea 2004 is held along Sydney's Bondi to Tamarama coastal walk, from 28 October – 14 November.