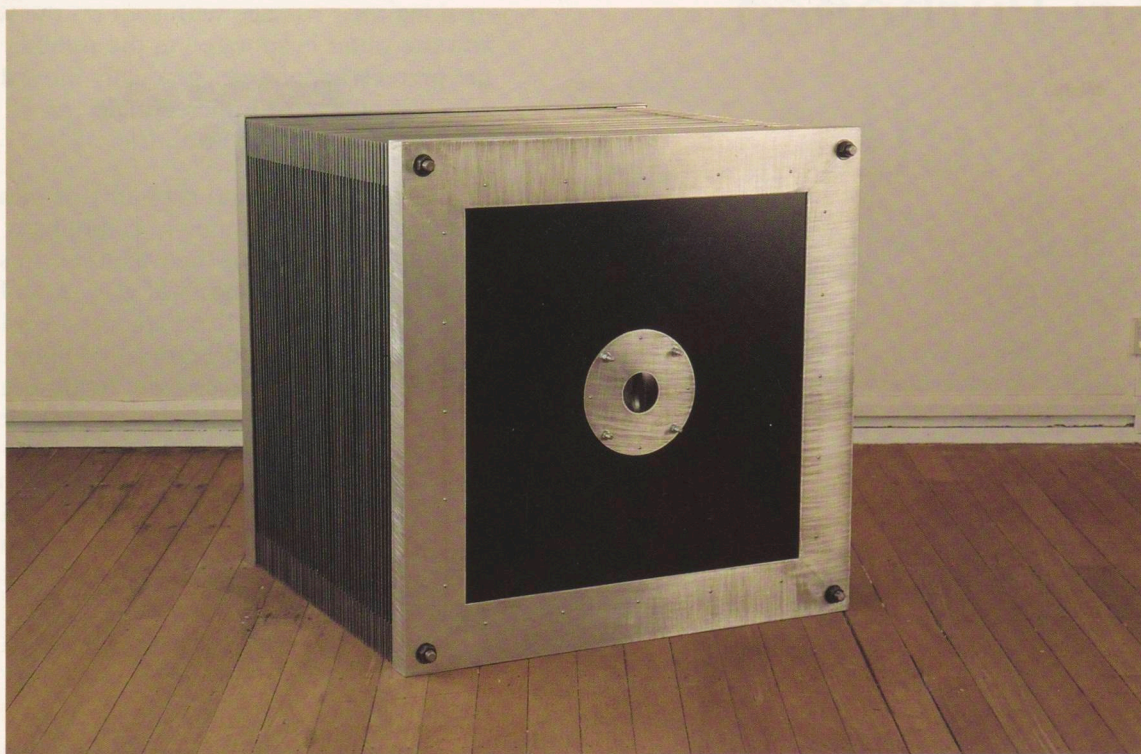


1991



Ari Purhonen

Cell

Auckland City Art Gallery

27 March – 19 May 1991

An Australian Artist's Project
organised by the Auckland City Art Gallery
Supported by the Australia/New Zealand Foundation

Cell 1990
aluminium, steel, glass
120 x 120 x 120 cm

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AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

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Ari Purhonen

Ari Purhonen, a Finnish-born sculptor who lives in Sydney, is the second Australian artist to participate in the Australia/New Zealand Foundation's artist exchange programme. The first, the Cairns sculptor, Tom Risley, practised an ad hoc style of assemblage, transmogrifying demolition materials – auto panels, fruit trays and the like – into giant still lifes of bottles and vases.

Purhonen's austere, machine-like constructions from steel, glass and aluminium are the antithesis of Risley's quirky assemblages of recycled junk. No two artists better represent than these the stylistic range that exists in Australian sculpture today.

The mechanical, engineered look of Purhonen's constructions suggests a practical application, but this is deceptive. They may allude to devices that once had a practical function (the camera obscura, the quadrant, the pantograph and the armillary sphere) but they are in fact inscrutable.

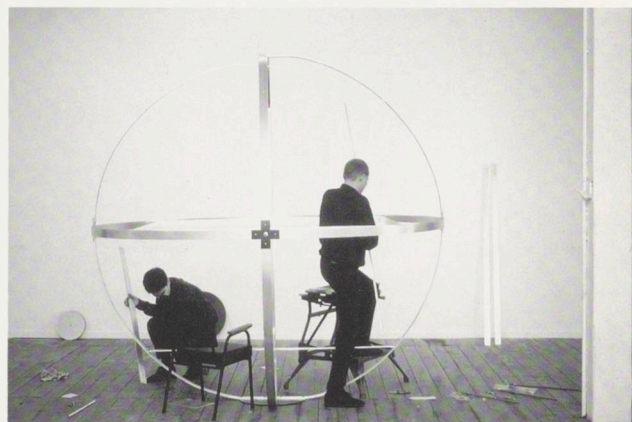
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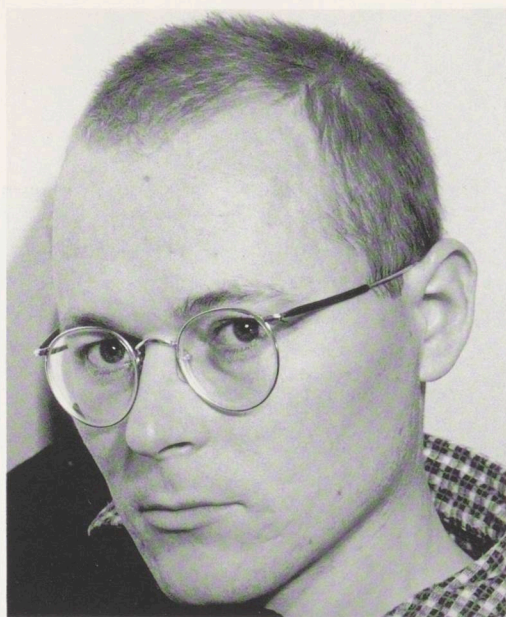
candles and small flasks of water attached to their extremities. As the candles burnt down, marking their passage with soot on the wall, and the water evaporated in the summer sun, the pivoted appendages gradually moved, affecting an almost imperceptible transformation of the sculpture.

The exquisite poise and economy of means that is a hallmark of Purhonen's sculptures is part of their appeal, and of their menace. In some previous sculptures sheets of glass, crab-like pincers, flasks of fluid and spindly steel legs were assembled in a precarious equilibrium in which contending forces were focused on a critical spot. When this spot was occupied by something as fragile as an egg, the tension was almost palpable. If the egg had broken the whole structure would have come crashing down. While there is a surgical precision to such works, there is also an important element of levity, which is pointed up by the incongruous combination of organic and mechanical components, and underscored by a precarious defiance of gravity.

The three sculptures Purhonen created during his Auckland residency share a common name, *Cell*, a word with several definitions. It means variously a small room in a prison; a voltaic vessel containing electrodes; the ultimate element in organic structures; and a compartment in a bees' comb.

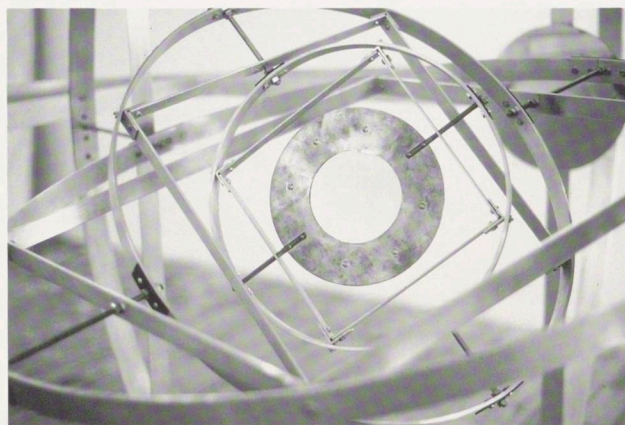
The cell can be a dynamic source of power, and conversely a place of confinement. This ambiguity of meaning also pertains to the





Biography

- 1953 Born Finland
- 1966 Arrived in Australia
- 1973–75 Studied architecture, University of New South Wales
- 1980–85 Employed as a project engineer with a brief resumption of architectural studies at Sydney University
- 1986–88 Taught sculpture at Nepean College of Advanced Education
- 1986–89 Director of AVAGO, Sydney University
- 1986–90 Sculpture tutor at the Sydney University Art workshop



Photography: John McIver

Solo exhibitions

- 1980 The Students Gallery, Sydney
- 1982 Mori Gallery, Sydney
- 1984 Mori Gallery, Sydney
- 1985 Mori Gallery, Sydney
- 1987 Mori Gallery, Sydney
Gryphon Gallery, Melbourne
AVAGO Tinsheds, Sydney
- 1988 Anima Gallery, Adelaide
Mori Gallery, Sydney
- 1989 Mori Gallery, Sydney
Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis, USA
- 1990 Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, *Sculpture 1982–1990*

Group exhibitions

- 1982 Mori Gallery, Sydney
- 1983 Artspace, Sydney, *A Different Perspective*
Woollongong City Art Gallery, *Off the Wall*
- 1984 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, *The Second Australian Sculpture Triennial*
- 1985 Mildura Art Gallery, Mildura, *Ninth Mildura Sculpture Triennial*
- 1986 Art Gallery of New South Wales, *Australian Perspecta 85*
Contemporary Art Society, Adelaide, *Culture Drift*
The Performance Space, Sydney, *Nausea*
- 1986–87 Touring exhibition, *Australian Perspecta 85*
- 1988 EMR Gallery, Sydney, *Ariennale*
Boxley Gallery, Minneapolis, USA, *Four Sculptors*
- 1989 Link Gallery, Canberra, *Urban Ideas Competition*
Bratton Gallery, New York, USA
Craft Council Gallery, Sydney, *Sculptors at the Table*
Showroom, Canterbury, England, *In Transit*
Chisenhole Gallery, London, England, *In Transit*

Public collections

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Mildura Art Gallery, Mildura
IBM Australia Collection
University of New South Wales Collection, Sydney

Curator: Andrew Bogle
Technical assistance: Ian Bergquist
Design: Peter Dennison, Commodore Sheet Metal Ltd, Glenfield
Design: Ross Ritchie
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ISBN: 0 86463 182 0
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Ari Purhonen represented by Mori Gallery, Sydney, Australia

swastika employed in two of the works. An ancient symbol, the swastika has arms which can rotate clockwise or anti-clockwise. In *Cell II* where the swastikas are cut like shaped windows into the sides of the cubic structure, they can be viewed from both sides, and thus incline clockwise and anti-clockwise, depending on one's point of view. Originally a symbol of the power of good (from the Sanskrit word 'svasti', meaning well-being), the swastika has come to connote in the West the power of evil since its adoption by the Nazis as their emblem. In India and some other Asian cultures, however, it still retains its original meaning and is commonly used with a decorative function.

Purhonen has also used the swastika in the large spherical *Cell (will to power)*, a symmetrical nest of gimballed circular and rectilinear aluminium frames of diminishing size, culminating at the centre in a large pivoted glass lens. This lens interacts with a set of four circular mirrors girdling the outer sphere. From the threaded rods that anchor these mirrors emerge long electrical extension cords leading to a waterfilled pan, on the surface of which floats an aluminium swastika with a perpendicular rim to create bouyancy.

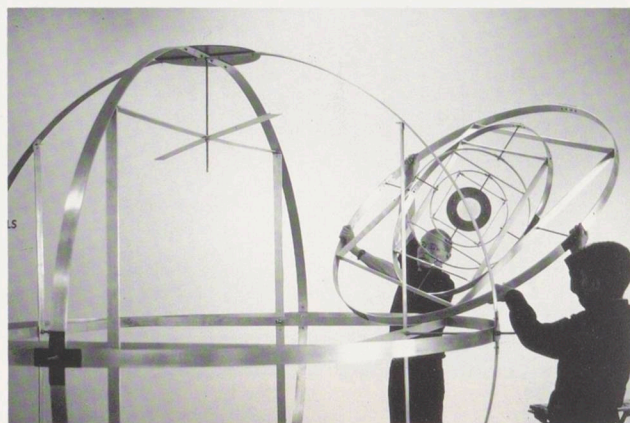
Purhonen says this latter element is 'based on a compass or orientation device. Instead of a compass needle there is a reverse swastika, not on a pivot but very loose like it doesn't know where to go. The loose thinking behind the sculpture is that it is a model of the mind turning around and finding a focus in the lens. The lens can be rotated and can focus energy

which is bounced back into the four mirrors.' This is then theoretically conducted along the extension cords to the dish as the motive power for the swastika boat.

The spherical structure is uncannily like an armillary sphere, an ancient astronomical device consisting of interlocking metal rings, gimballed (as in Purhonen's device) and representing the celestial equator, the ecliptic and other great circles. Employed by Hipparchus of Rhodes, Ptolemy of Alexandria and early Arab astronomers, it was used to convert star positions directly from the observed azimuth. As a model of the universe it was as schematic as Purhonen's is of the mind.

The clockwork precision of Purhonen's contraption is supremely ironic when its logical 'extension' is an ambiguous and highly charged symbol floating aimlessly in a puddle of cold water. There is no one reading of this elaborate and arcane metaphor; the permutations, like the variable positions of the gimballed aluminium frames, are endless. Possibilities ricochet endlessly like the light which reflects back and forth among the mirrors.

This idea of a mechanical model of the mind turning, reflecting on itself, and focused on a lens (the mind's eye?) is also expressed in a different form in the third *Cell* sculpture. Ribbed, like a transformer, it is neither a wholly open nor closed structure. And if you try and look into it through one of the two large lenses set in its ends what you see (from a distance of about 30 cm) is your own eyeball, enormously enlarged, eerily staring back at you.



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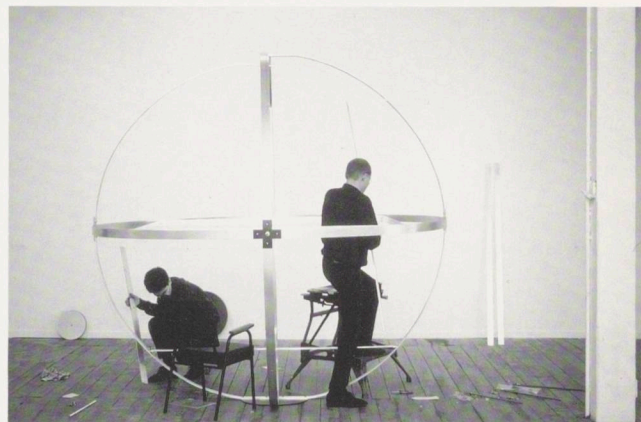
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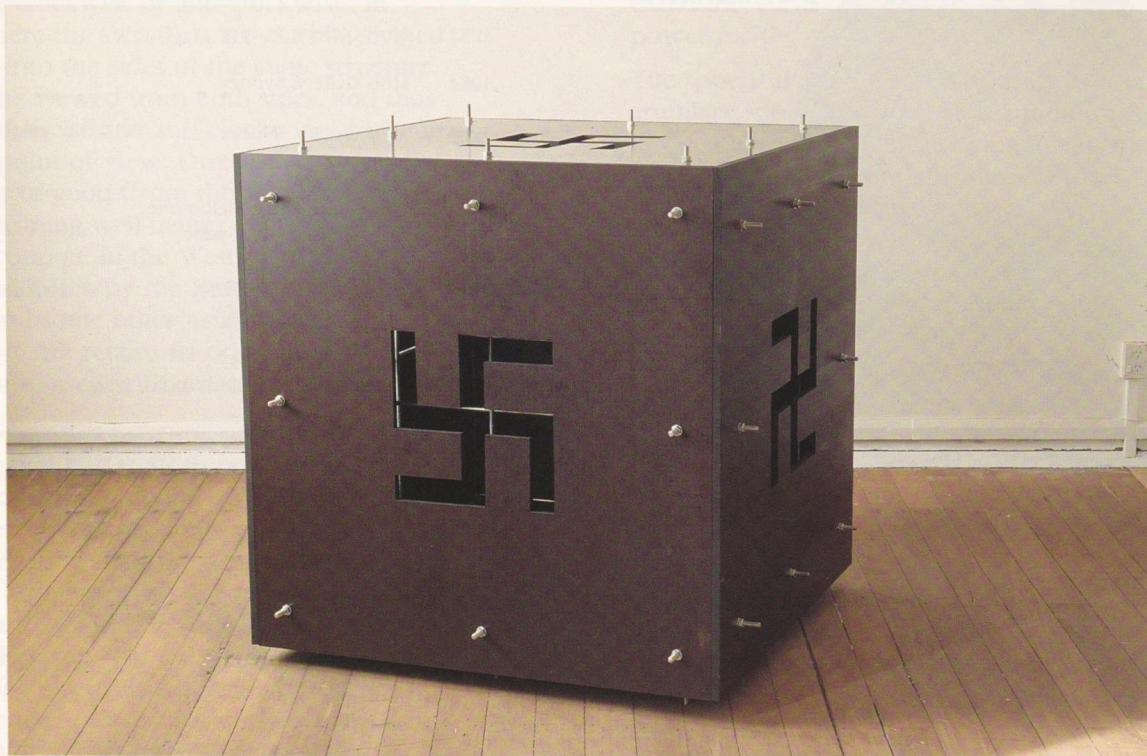
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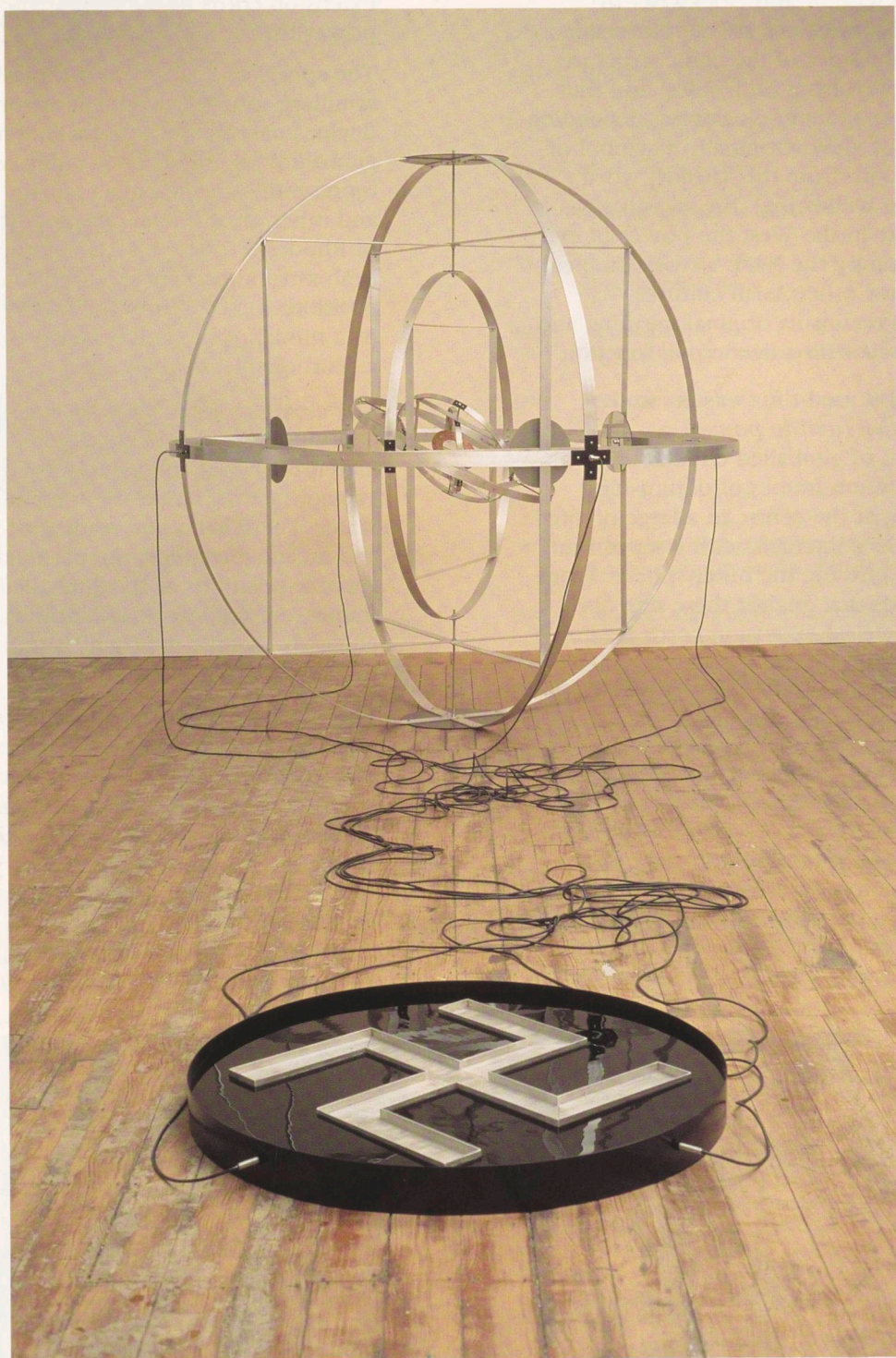
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Cell 1990
form plywood, steel
129 x 129 x 129 cm



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Cell (will to power) 1990
aluminium, steel, glass, copper, electric flex, water
258 x 273 x 700 cm