

K e l l y - A n n L e e s



Kelly-Ann Lees

Written by Anna Scobie

Large industrial sea urchins graced the Bondi to Tamarama coastal walk last October; the works -- part of *Sculpture by the Sea 2008* -- were the work of emerging sculptor Kelly-Ann Lees. She talks railway bolts, Hercules helicopters and the excitement of working on large-scale projects with writer Anna Scobie.

Newcastle-based artist Kelly-Ann Lees artfully manipulates heavy, manmade, scrap metal objects into light, whimsical forms inspired by nature. Lees majored in ceramics at Sydney College of the Arts in the late 1990s, before rediscovering a love of steel, a passion she first discovered in childhood. She recounts a delightful story of standing on her high school sports field, as a Hercules helicopter with an “enormous, angular, metal mass” hanging from its undercarriage, thundered overhead, as the first spark of her love affair with sculpture. Lees later discovered the work at a sculpture park on the Central Coast; the “metal mass” being a piece by Greg Johns, an artist who continues to inspire her to this day.

When asked why she moved the core medium of her artistic practice from ceramics to steel after leaving university, Lees listed three reasons; practicality -- the medium was affordable to an emerging artist; recycling -- scrap being an environmentally sustainable medium; and thirdly, she was intrinsically drawn to the material because of her ability to subvert the original function of the object. An example of this subversion of function can be seen in Lees’s work, *Urchins*, included in *Sculpture by the Sea* last year. The work consisted of hundreds of steel railway bolts welded together to create three, furry, organic sea urchins. The visually delicate work weighed literally over a ton, and created challenges for the *Sculpture by the Sea* installation team. The viewer, however, left simply to

marvel at Lees’ transformation of the material, and wonder how she came across so many railway bolts. The sensitivity to their setting highlighted the inspiration Lees draws from nature and alienated the objects’ industrial origins. The *Urchins* were acquired by the Transfield collection, and are currently installed at a private residence in Mosman.

Lees states that her inspiration comes not only from nature, but also from the objects themselves. She contemplates her pile of industrial scrap metal -- cogs, pipes and bolts -- as the seeds of future works, yet to sprout and take form. Scale has also been a driving force behind Lees’ recent works, that have been exhibited in art prizes, like *Sculpture by the Sea*, and more recently, the Mon-



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Kelly-Ann Lees,
Urchins, 2008.
Photograph by
RIKRAK. Cc

Above:
Kelly-Ann Lees
Convolutions,
2009, 1.5 x 1.5m
image courtesy of the
artist.

talto Sculpture Prize in Victoria. Each of these venues provided Lees a platform to explore the challenges and excitement of exhibiting larger works in the natural environment. Lees believes that working on a larger scale provides her with the opportunity to utilise the strength and durability of the material, whilst infusing the works with a feminine sensitivity not usually associated with steel work -- a traditionally masculine discipline.

Lees was thrilled to recently exhibit work at Global Gallery in Paddington, alongside helicopter hero Johns, and other well respected Australian and International sculptors.

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Information taken from an interview with the artist in March 2009.



To view future sculptural works by Kelly-Ann Lees, visit Willoughby Council's inaugural sculpture prize in Sydney, beginning in September this year, Sculpture by the Sea 2009 in October or her local gallery in Newcastle, SOAG, at Tighes Hill.

Top:
Kelly-Ann Lees, *Small Urchin*, 2007, recycled steel
40 x 40 cm.. Image courtesy of the Artist.
Copyright the artist

Above:
Kelly-Ann Lees, *Bolt Urchin*, 2008, recycled steel
40 x 40 cm.. Image courtesy of the Artist.
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Right:
Kelly-Ann Lees, *Bolt Urchin*, (detail) 2008, recycled
steel 40 x 40 cm.. Image courtesy of the Artist.
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