

Contemporary Debates: The Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Māori Art Gallery

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What began as a humble sketch on the back of an envelope, the Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Māori Art Gallery project has evolved into a unique and ambitious quest for artistic representation in Northland. The history of this controversial public art project, yet to be built, has seen a number of debates take place, locally and nationally, around the importance of art in urban and rural societies and the broader socio-economic context surrounding the development of civic architecture in New Zealand. This project has not only challenged the people of Northland to think about the role of art in their community, but it has prompted New Zealanders to question whether there is an appropriate level of investment in the arts in New Zealand.¹



Figure 1: Sharp, Steve, *Photoshop Image of Hundertwasser Art Centre in Whangarei Town Basin*, c. 2015, reproduced with permission of YES Whangarei.



Figure 2: Hundertwasser, Friedensreich, ARCH 78/1 WHANGAREI PUBLIC ART GALLERY - DRAFT DESIGN, 1993, Hundertwasser Non-Profit Foundation, Vienna. © 2017 NAMIDA AG, Glarus, Switzerland.

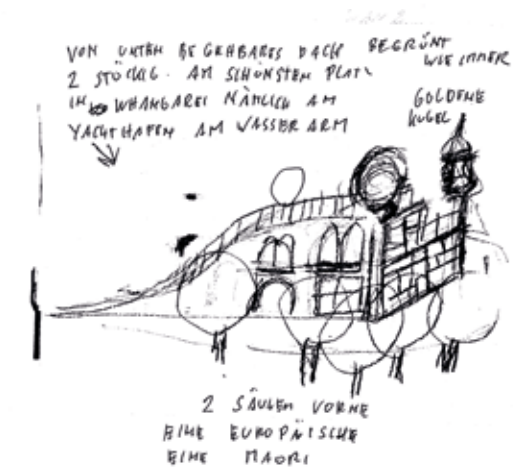


Figure 3: Hundertwasser, Friedensreich, ARCH 78/11 WHANGAREI PUBLIC ART GALLERY - DRAFT DESIGN, 1993, Hundertwasser Non-Profit Foundation, Vienna. © 2017 NAMIDA AG, Glarus, Switzerland.

The story begins with one of Austria's most celebrated modern artists, the self-named Friedensreich Regentag Dunkelbunt Hundertwasser (translating to 'realm of peace, rainy day, darkly multi-coloured, hundred waters'). The painter and 'architectural doctor' adopted New Zealand as his second home in 1974, purchasing land in the Bay of Islands, Northland. From the beginning, Hundertwasser was engaged in the New Zealand art scene and environmentalist circles, contributing his *New Zealand Conservation Week Poster* in support of the national movement in 1974 and his *Koru Flag* design in 1983. The late Jo Hardy, a highly regarded member of the Whangarei arts community, remembers how it was one of Hundertwasser's great wishes to have one of his signature designs built in New Zealand.² The rejection of his Te Papa spiral design in 1990 disappointed the artist, so the opportunity to design an art gallery for Whangarei in 1993 was encouraging for both Hundertwasser himself and the local arts community. There had long been a vision amongst local Northland artists, particularly Yvonne Rust and Jo Hardy, that Whangarei needed a dedicated space for the city's regional collections. Hundertwasser himself believed it was a disgrace that Northland had no regional art gallery of its own in which to celebrate the local artists, therefore the opportunity to design an art gallery was a chance to help rectify this situation.³

THE DESIGN

As a determined environmentalist and human rights activist, Hundertwasser put forward a provocative oeuvre, or body of work, focused on man's relationship with nature. Famous for his public demonstrations, such as the drawing of 'The Line of Hamburg' at the Hamburg Institute of Fine Arts in December 1959, Hundertwasser argued that the "straight line is godless."⁴ Hundertwasser's architectural proposal for Whangarei works on similar ecological principles, formally recognising the spiral as being an iconic motif in the New Zealand landscape. In the absence of straight lines, the design incorporates an internally spiralling tower topped by one of Hundertwasser's signature golden domes. Communal green spaces include a generous roof top garden, rising from ground level to the full height and length of the Centre. Planted with trees, this undulating public space will encourage visitors to relax; and while the curving walls and paved footpaths pay tribute to organic forms in nature, a decorative façade, featuring both Māori and Pākehā columns, pays tribute to New Zealand's multiculturalism. Designed to be multifunctional, the Hundertwasser Art Centre aims to provide an educational space where students can study art, architecture and ecology. The study of art occurs via two 'state of the art' exhibiting spaces, consisting of a main gallery of Hundertwasser's own art on the second floor and a contemporary Māori art gallery on the ground floor. The building itself will be a study of sustainable architecture with recycled and reused materials present in the design, and the study of ecology through Hundertwasser's inclusion of native flora and organic forms.



Figure 4: Hundertwasser, Friedensreich; Hundertwasser Non-Profit Foundation, Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Māori Art Gallery Logo, reproduced with permission of YES Whangarei.

When Hundertwasser sketched his initial design in 1993 there was difficulty finding a suitable site and the project stagnated for the first time.⁵ The “uninspired alternative” to the Hundertwasser gallery, the Whangarei Art Museum opened within the old Plunket Rooms at Caffer Park in 1995.⁶ According to Jo Hardy, the establishment of the art museum at the old Plunket Rooms confirmed Whangarei’s historic legacy of minimal investment in the arts and prompted concern about the wellbeing of Northland’s cultural sector. There was particular concern that a limited investment within the arts would cause repercussions across the Northland region, particularly within schools where students lacked access to quality arts facilities, resources and institutions.⁷

Turning from this, Hundertwasser went on to design and build the Hundertwasser Toilets in Kawakawa in 1999. A hugely successful community project, the Hundertwasser Toilets have effectively re-stimulated Kawakawa’s fragile economy over the last decade by encouraging an estimated 150,000 visitors to stop in Kawakawa every year.⁸ Researcher Lorna Kaino discussed this point in her 2014 article, ‘There’s something special about this little town: cultural identity and the legacy of Hundertwasser in Kawakawa, New Zealand’ (Continuum 28, No. 1: 65-76). Kaino argued that Hundertwasser’s toilets have not only helped to protect the local community from further economic decline by providing local cafes and businesses with a steady stream of tourist traffic, but that more importantly they have helped to develop a sense of ‘community spirit’ in Kawakawa.⁹ Supporters of the Hundertwasser Art Centre believe the project will similarly draw people into Whangarei, supporting the local economy, providing jobs and a ‘point of difference’ within the community.¹⁰ Northland needs economic investment when you consider that in 2013 it held the highest unemployment rate in the country, 9.7 per cent, and also projected some of the lowest personal and household median incomes in New Zealand.¹¹

PROJECT HISTORY

In 2011, Deloitte was employed by the Whangarei District Council to undertake a feasibility study on the Hundertwasser Art Centre project. The purpose of the study was to assess the potential economic benefits for Whangarei and the wider Northland region. Deloitte’s assessment of the project’s net economic benefit was calculated at

Northland Regional level (as opposed to Whangarei District level), because regional data was more detailed in terms of visitor numbers and spending, both of which were necessary for an accurate feasibility study.¹² In 2011, Deloitte calculated that Northland’s net economic benefit could stand at \$3.5 million per annum (and potentially more) if the Hundertwasser Art Centre attracted the same proportional increase in visitor numbers for the Northland Region as Te Papa did for Wellington when it opened in 1998.¹³

In conjunction with the *Economic Impact Assessment*, Deloitte also produced a *Hundertwasser Art Centre Feasibility Study* for the Whangarei District Council in September 2011. Deloitte’s base financial projections concluded that the Hundertwasser Art Centre would make cash surpluses, sufficient for the Whangarei Art Museum Trust, which would be the eventual operator of the Art Centre, to make capital reinvestments at a later date.¹⁴ The report found sufficient evidence to suggest the Hundertwasser proposal would encourage further business development in the Town Basin precinct, which fits in with the Whangarei District Council’s long term strategic vision for “revitalising” the Town Basin by “developing a sense of place.”¹⁵ The ongoing economic benefit of \$3.5–\$3.7 million per annum would encourage further development within the tourism sector, including the potential for a four-star hotel development, a previously untapped market in Whangarei. The potential for the cruise ship industry to expand into Whangarei via Cruise New Zealand and Northport, the commercial port facility at Marsden Point, is also viable. Northport has agreed to accommodate the cruise industry and conveniently, has the ability to offer re-fuelling services, via the Marsden Oil Refinery situated nearby.¹⁶

The figures stood up in 2011 and the project’s fundraising progressed under the Whangarei District Council in 2012, however when it came to the 2013 local body elections, the status quo shifted and the newly elected council took a stance opposing the Hundertwasser Art Centre project. In June 2014 the Whangarei District Council subsequently voted to drop the project, their justification for doing so: a telephone survey of a thousand Whangarei residents conducted by Versus Research in April 2014. According to Versus Research, 53 per cent of the people surveyed opposed the Hundertwasser project with its current funding model (which would see the Whangarei ratepayer invest \$8 million into the project).¹⁷ The accuracy of the survey was contested by Prosper Northland Trust, a community-focused collective formed in response to the Council’s decision to drop the Hundertwasser project. According to Prosper Northland Trust, the survey was “badly

designed” and missed 22 per cent of Whangarei households who rely on mobile phones.¹⁸

Following the Whangarei District Council’s decision to drop the Hundertwasser project, Prosper Northland Trust picked it up in late 2014. The Trust began working to secure the project’s future by establishing a sound funding model and business plan, which did not seek to overburden the Northland ratepayer, but instead aimed to source appropriate financial backing through well-trodden funding avenues.¹⁹

PUBLIC REFERENDUM

In September 2014, the Whangarei District Council opened up a public process to find an eventual use for the old Harbour Board Building in the Town Basin. Proposals were due by October 2014, so Prosper Northland Trust put forward their Hundertwasser Wairau Māori Art Centre proposal which joined 21 other public proposals. In November 2014, the decision was made that the top two proposals, the Hundertwasser Wairau Māori Art Centre project and the Harbourside project, proposed by Future Whangarei, would be put to the vote the following year in a public referendum. Demolition was added in as a third option.

Concerns were raised by Councillor Tricia Cutforth, who believed the submission time frame favoured the Hundertwasser project, which had the advantage of years of development and “considerable financial assistance” from the Council itself.²⁰ Cr Cutforth claimed the submission from Prosper Northland Trust was “substantially unchanged” from the project that had already been rejected by the Whangarei District Council in June 2014.²¹ These claims however, were disputed by Morris Cutforth, the former Mayor of Whangarei (2010–13), who argued Prosper Northland Trust’s proposal operated on a completely new funding model that presented minimal costs to the ratepayer.²²

In opposition, the Harbourside project targeted the existing history of the old Harbour Board Building and planned to house a museum of local maritime history. The museum would feature an aquarium, a Māori art gallery, facilities for digital art exhibitions and a learning centre.²³ According to Future Whangarei’s spokesman, Walter Yovich, the “Town Basin is maritime” and is not an “appropriate location” for the Hundertwasser project.²⁴ Cr Tricia Cutforth agreed with Yovich, stating that the Hundertwasser project has “no connection” with Whangarei. According to Cutforth, Hundertwasser’s

relationship was with the Kawakawa community in the Bay of Islands and that they are the ones who are keeping his legacy alive through the Hundertwasser Toilets he built there in 1999.²⁵

The decision to implement a public referendum allowed the Harbourside group more time to develop their proposal and left the decision of what would replace the old Harbour Board Building up to Whangarei residents. In preparation, the Whangarei District Council commissioned Deloitte to conduct a feasibility study on the Harbourside project and provide an updated report on the Hundertwasser project. Published in March 2015, these studies formed the basis of the referendum information prepared by the Council for voters.

When it came to the public referendum in June 2015, 51 per cent (14,256 people) voted in favour of the Hundertwasser Art Centre, while 29.9 per cent (8,080 people) voted for demolition and 19 per cent (5,609 people) voted for the Harbourside project.²⁶ As a result of the public referendum, Prosper Northland Trust was given two years to finalise their project plan and devise their fundraising model, with construction beginning mid-2017.

By September 2015 the Trust had finalised their project plan for the art centre, complete with its official name, logo and funding model.²⁷ The project’s official name, the Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Māori Art Gallery, was created in collaboration with the Wairau Māori Art Gallery Board. The logo is based upon the KunstHausWien (Hundertwasser Museum, Vienna) flag that was originally designed by Hundertwasser.²⁸



Figure 5: Yes Whangarei (photo image); Hundertwasser Non-Profit Foundation (scale model), Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Art Gallery model, reproduced with permission of YES Whangarei.

A central committee called the Project Control Group heads the project and includes representatives from Prosper Northland Trust, the Whangarei Art Museum Trust, the Wairau Māori Art Gallery Board and the Hundertwasser Non-Profit Foundation.²⁹

The opening of Te Kakano in the Whangarei Town Basin on Friday 21st October 2016 was an important milestone and an essential first step towards the realisation of the Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Māori Art Gallery. Te Kakano, 'the seed' was funded separately as the art folly or test piece required for the development of a full scale Hundertwasser project. Designed and built by the Whangarei-based firm Harris Butt Architecture, the architectural sculpture offered local craftsmen the opportunity to test all elements of the design, materials and construction needed to build the Art Centre. A spiralling koru, Te Kakano pays tribute to the work of Friedensreich Hundertwasser and was produced in close consultation with the Hundertwasser Non-Profit Foundation. Featuring Hundertwasser's iconic black and white mosaics, colourful glazed columns and terracotta paving stones, Te Kakano will provide the community and local schools with an interactive art study



Figure 6: Brown, Ben, Te Kakano, HB Architecture LTD.

and tangible concept of what is to come with the development of the Hundertwasser Art Centre.³⁰

Originally, and in accordance with the requirements of the referendum, Prosper Northland Trust had until the 30th June 2017 to raise the required \$16.25 million, along with a \$2 million underwrite over ten years. The estimated cost of the Art Centre has risen to \$20.97 million due to increased construction costs and enhanced seismic strengthening measures.

As of the 16th June 2017, the Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Māori Art Gallery is set to become a reality. The \$20.97 million fundraising goal has been reached with the help of a last minute \$3.5 million boost from the New Zealand Lotteries Commission on the 14th June, and a further grant of up to \$3 million from The Ministry for Arts, Culture and Heritage two days later. The Government's total contribution to the project now sits at a \$7 million. With the funding secured, the Project Control Group has a year to produce a fully-costed design and commence construction. There is potential for construction to begin prior to the mid-2018 timeframe, while the projected opening date still sits at mid-2020.³¹

THE WHANGAREI ART MUSEUM TRUST & THE WAIRAU MĀORI ART GALLERY

Central to the development of the Hundertwasser project has been the involvement of the Whangarei Art Museum Trust. The Trust was established by the Whangarei District Council in 1996 and charged with the governance of the Whangarei Art Museum Te Manawa Toi. Grant Faber, Chair of the Trust, explained that he believes the Hundertwasser Art Centre will generate a "significant operating surplus" which will feed back into the Whangarei Art Museum and the local arts community.³² As the eventual operators of the Hundertwasser Art Centre and the charitable trust responsible for facilitating the fundraising efforts, the Trust maintains a close working relationship with the Project Control Group.

The Wairau Māori Art Gallery Board was established by the Whangarei District Council in 2012, when the idea to develop a Māori art gallery in conjunction with the Hundertwasser Art Centre project was voiced among the Whangarei arts community. The incorporation of Māori art was one of Hundertwasser's original requests for the

gallery and thus the project evolved.³³ The Board is made up of a group of highly regarded Māori artists and scholars who recognise the importance of promoting contemporary Māori art within a dedicated exhibition space in New Zealand.³⁴ The original group has been maintained over the years; however, the deaths of Jonathon Mane-Wheoki in 2014 and artist Manos Nathan in 2015 have deprived the Board of two dedicated individuals.

Chair of the Board is Elizabeth Ellis CNZM, JP (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou). Ellis believes the Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Māori Art Gallery project is an outstanding initiative for Whangarei and will provide a means of promoting Māori artists and advocating for high quality Māori art.³⁵ The Board believes the inclusion of Māori art “will build a positive profile for all Māori, serving across all hapu and iwi, and will form an invaluable global link with other indigenous communities.”³⁶

THE HUNDERTWASSER NON-PROFIT FOUNDATION

Prosper Northland Trust also focused on re-forging important relationships between Whangarei and the Hundertwasser Non-Profit Foundation in Vienna. Obtaining the support of the Foundation is vital to the project’s success in many ways. As the kaitiaki or ‘guardians’ of Hundertwasser’s artistic legacy, the Foundation has the unique ability to provide architectural design support for the project, including Hundertwasser’s original concepts, architectural drawings, and most importantly, access to a series of architectural drawings developed by ‘Hundertwasser’ architect, Heinz Springmann. Enlisted by the Foundation in the early stages of the project’s history (2008), Springmann had developed a series of architectural drawings loyal to the artist’s original vision for Whangarei.³⁷ Prosper Northland Trust has proceeded to re-establish a good working relationship with the Foundation and with Richard Smart, their New Zealand representative.³⁸ The Foundation has generously agreed to circulate a selection of Hundertwasser’s original artworks through the proposed Art Centre, making it the only other dedicated Hundertwasser gallery outside of Vienna.³⁹ The art works to be circulated would include sketches, drawings, paintings and prints that Hundertwasser created throughout his lifetime. The Foundation’s support is linked to Hundertwasser’s love of New Zealand and the authenticity of the Whangarei project.⁴⁰

CONTROVERSY

Not everyone is convinced of the project’s merits, however, with approximately 49 per cent of voters in the June 2015 referendum choosing either the Harbourside project or demolition. Whether people think the project is too expensive, too commercially focused or perhaps ill-suited to the chosen site in the Whangarei Town Basin, the debate has highlighted the fact that many New Zealanders do not see an investment in the arts as a catalyst for economic development.⁴¹ Looking at Whangarei, it is clear to see the sports bias of previous regional investment with the Toll Stadium, Sport Northland’s Kensington Stadium, the ASB Leisure Centre and Whangarei’s Aquatic Centre. Jenny Pike, a resident of Whangarei, put forth such sentiments in a letter to the editor (*Northern Advocate*, November 18th 2014): “As a ratepayer I have not minded my contributions to the council being used to fund/support/enable various cricket grounds, stadiums, hockey grounds, gymnasiums and numerous other worthy causes. I always figured the arts community would have its turn.”⁴² This sentiment is part of a wider New Zealand struggle, where local and central government often underwrites the importance of cultural investment in New Zealand’s regional societies.

The debates surrounding the Hundertwasser project have been fuelled by political controversy. Over the course of the project’s twenty-four year history, seven councils have come and gone, each with a different take on the perceived benefits of the project. Whangarei residents and councillors alike have repeatedly raised concerns over the Council’s processes that have guided the project over the years. Tangled council procedure, personality conflicts and occasions of political manoeuvring which saw the Hundertwasser Art Centre become, in the opinion of Whangarei Art Museum Trustee Kirsty Hughes, “a bit of a political football”, have all contributed to the prolonged history of the project, and at times, overshadowed the artist’s vision for Whangarei.⁴³

Many of the debates have nevertheless been concerned with costs and funding. Understandably the Northland ratepayer does not want to foot the entire bill for the Art Centre, but even under the current funding model which requires more than 82 per cent of the capital cost to be raised through non-ratepayer sourced means, many are still opposed to the idea.⁴⁴ While the 2002 Local Government Act requires all councils to consider the cultural, social, economic and environmental well-being of the area in their decision making, there seems to be an unspoken assumption that cultural wealth is an

“additional spend” in Northland.⁴⁵ As one of New Zealand’s poorest regions, it is not hard to see how this perception is validated, when money is already spread so thinly that basic infrastructure is constantly in demand. In 2013, for example, 43 per cent of Northlanders were on the lowest band of the national deprivation index, compared with 20 per cent of New Zealanders.⁴⁶ So while the underlying scepticism of the arts as a successful means of enriching Northland’s economy is understandable, it is naive not to consider the international acclaim of the Hundertwasser brand.⁴⁷ Vienna has the acclaimed Hundertwasserhaus and the KunstHausWien museum. According to Vienna City Administration, the KunstHaus recorded 126 visitors for every thousand that visited Vienna in 2013. If you consider that 13.5 million people visited Vienna in 2014 and that by 2015 this figure climbed to 14.3 million overnight visitors, Whangarei has real potential to capitalise on the Hundertwasser Art Centre project.⁴⁸

Placing the Hundertwasser project within an international context has seen it being likened to the ‘MONA effect’ that has become apparent in Tasmania, Australia. The Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart is an excellent example of how an art gallery has positively impacted on the tourism of a city. Hobart has become an international tourist destination for the arts, due to the art museum’s modern architecture, reputation for the avant-garde and ability to attract internationally recognised artists such as Marina Abramović to Tasmania. The year ending June 2012 saw 25 per cent of all visitors to Tasmania visit MONA, while the year ending June 2016 saw 29 per cent of visitors head to MONA. According to the biannual Tasmanian Visitor Survey, MONA consistently ranks as the second most visited tourism attraction, behind the Salamanca Market (at 34 per cent of visitors).⁴⁹ Pro-Hundertwasser supporters have quoted the ‘MONA effect’ stating that a Hundertwasser gallery in Whangarei could have a similar impact on Northland’s tourism and could become a national icon.⁵⁰ Deloitte supports this theory in their *Hundertwasser Wairau Māori Art Centre Feasibility Study Update: March 2015* for the Whangarei District Council. According to Deloitte, not only is the Art Centre’s proposed location in the Whangarei Town Basin linked directly to the artist, Friedensreich Hundertwasser, it is “strategically located” (10 mins from the CBD) to incentivise investment in the local economy.⁵¹

Deloitte goes one step further, stating the building itself will be an artwork on a “grand scale” and will become one of New Zealand’s few iconic buildings. According to the updated feasibility study, the Hundertwasser Art Centre could have an impact on Whangarei which

“parallels” the economic revitalisation that has occurred with Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, effectively putting Whangarei on the international stage.⁵² On the opposing side, however, Councillor Tricia Cutforth believes that the Hundertwasser project is aesthetically a “cultural cringe” and is not suited to the Town Basin environment. According to Cutforth, Mt Manaia and the distinct landscape surrounding the city is Whangarei’s point of difference and she questions whether tourism is the “best type of industry” that Whangarei could be supporting.⁵³ Lorna Kaino’s research contradicts this notion, suggesting that tourism may just be one of the few industries preventing the decline of Northland’s towns.⁵⁴

In response to Deloitte’s economic assessment, supporters of Hundertwasser Art Centre have called upon Northlanders to look at the success of the Sydney Opera House, the Eiffel Tower and, more recently in New Zealand, the Len Lye Centre in New Plymouth, as proof that monumental and often controversial architecture can and does enhance a city’s attraction to international tourists. According to Sally Blundell, the battle lines in New Zealand are familiar, with councils deliberating over the merits of a landmark structure luring much-needed tourist dollars against a purely local institution reflecting community history and aspirations.⁵⁵ The Hundertwasser Art Centre debate has shown that it takes courage to invest in unique architecture, even more so in regional New Zealand where money is scarce.

As part of a broader assessment, a comparison can be made between the Hundertwasser Art Centre project and the newly opened Len Lye Centre in New Plymouth. The Len Lye Centre opened as a result of the New Plymouth District Council’s 35-year commitment to the project and houses art works gifted to New Plymouth by the world-famous multimedia artist, Len Lye. A monumental piece of modern architecture, the structure boasts a 32 tonne, 14m-high mirror-grade stainless steel façade that wraps around the centre. Designed by New Zealander, Andrew Patterson, the Centre is a contemporary interpretation of the “essence” of Lye’s art.⁵⁶ The shimmering and seemingly fluid façade presents a provocative expression of movement as the curving steel reflects the light.

Like the Hundertwasser project, the Len Lye Centre attracted its fair share of criticism in New Plymouth, with many calling it a waste of money and a burden on ratepayers.⁵⁷ However the New Plymouth District Council managed to overcome this, source the funding and build the Centre after a decade of planning. The Len Lye Centre opened in July 2015. This contrasts with the Hundertwasser

project which was eventually rejected by the Whangarei District Council, only to be picked up by Prosper Northland Trust, under whom the project has progressed to the point where the \$20.97 million fundraising goal has been achieved within the specified timeframe.

The two projects differ in a number of ways, firstly, that the New Plymouth District Council's decision to develop a gallery for Lye's work was based upon legal documents, a Deed of Gift and then a later Deed of Relationship. These documents effectively charged the New Plymouth District Council and the Len Lye Foundation with the joint guardianship of the artist's oeuvre. In contrast, the Whangarei District Council has not been driven by any legal commitment to Hundertwasser's legacy and his art is not in their possession. All access to Hundertwasser's material legacy is subject to permission from the Hundertwasser Non-Profit Foundation in Vienna. This brings the debate to an important point, the fact that Len Lye was first and foremost a New Zealand artist, whereas Friedensreich Hundertwasser was Austrian, although granted New Zealand citizenship in 1986. It could be argued that perhaps some New Zealanders feel a greater 'sense of ownership' of Len Lye than they do of Hundertwasser.

Also significant was the funding model chosen by the New Plymouth District Council and the close relationship between the Len Lye Centre project and the Govett-Brewster Gallery. The Len Lye Centre's funding model was largely supported by private and corporate investment, thus placing minimal stress on ratepayer revenues. Economically this has proved satisfactory in New Plymouth and now is also being met with success in Whangarei under Prosper Northland Trust's direction. Lastly, the immediate support of a highly regarded institution such as the Govett-Brewster Gallery cannot be overlooked when considering the successful development of civic architecture. For the Len Lye Centre, the Govett-Brewster Gallery provides extensive curatorial support and resources, and now a similar supportive network, made up of the Whangarei Art Museum Trust, the Wairau Māori Art Gallery Board and the Hundertwasser Non-Profit Foundation, is working to provide the Hundertwasser Art Centre project with a comparable support structure.

CIVIC ARCHITECTURE

Brent Mawson, the former Associate Dean of Auckland University's Te Tai Tokerau Campus in Whangarei, pointed out that the basic conflict underpinning the debate around the Hundertwasser Art Centre has been about the "purpose" of city councils in developing civic architecture. Mawson believes many people have a "very limited" view of what a city council's responsibilities are when it comes to the arts and culture; yet, for a healthy city, cultural investment is necessary and important.⁵⁸ Cultural developments like the Len Lye Centre and the Hundertwasser Art Centre are about cultivating a sense of pride among regional communities and supporting local economies. By investing in the arts in the regions, New Zealand is developing 'liveable' towns which work to attract new residents, whether they are young professionals, business owners or families. Put simply, if regional centres cease to be inspiring and positive places then people will leave. Urbanisation is a familiar trend, involving the relocation of people to larger cities to get better jobs, better education and greater access to services and facilities. The arts are part of this 'urban attraction', but at a time of a national housing crisis it must make sense to invest in regional communities which are able to draw people away and thereby ease pressure on the main centres.

In summary, the controversy attached to the Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Māori Art Gallery project in Whangarei has brought the topic of art and the city council's role in nurturing and developing the arts to the forefront of contemporary discourse in New Zealand.

Northland has always had a strong artistic community; Ralph Hotere (Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa), Seraphine Pick, Florian Habicht and Laurence Aberhart are well known figures in the New Zealand art scene. Despite this, Northland has historically lacked an engaging venue in which to display art. Friedensreich Hundertwasser had the architectural vision for such a venue in Whangarei. The stony path to realising that vision has involved a number of debates. Over money—who pays for the Hundertwasser Art Centre and the associated running costs. Whether the project is a cultural fit with Northland and does it fit the mandate of providing local artists with an engaging venue for the display of art. There is the question of what will be the benefits to the local community; which site will be used; and who will run it. Personality conflicts, back room political trade-offs and manoeuvrings have at times overshadowed the vision and hijacked the debating

process. However, the public referendum in June 2015 settled the question of whether Whangarei wants the gallery or not, and as a result, the project was able to progress. Recently on the 16th June 2017, anticipation levels reached a new high with the announcement that the Hundertwasser Art Centre with Wairau Māori Art Gallery had hit its \$20.97 million fundraising goal. Construction is now proposed to begin in late 2017, rather than mid-2018.

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