



Wanganui Culture of Peace Sculpture – “Handspan”

“Handspan” is the name of a large sculpture created to symbolize a culture of peace in the New Zealand city of Wanganui. The international NGO Peace Through Unity, based in Wanganui, initiated and fundraised for this Culture of Peace project. The sculpture was designed by local artist and potter Ross Mitchell-Anyon and, on the 21st September 2002, dedicated by the Governor-General of New Zealand, the Honourable Dame Silvia Cartwright to “a culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world”.

Preparing for and the building of this unique, interactive work of art, has taken almost exactly two years. The “Handspan” design was chosen from among other entries to a culture of peace sculpture design competition. This impressive structure is approximately 20m in diameter and 3 meters high and consists of a double-spiral pathway on which one can walk to the top. On each side of the pathway are walls covered with more than 4000 clay hand casts, made mostly from hands of community members of all ages, although some hand casts from outside Wanganui have also been included. Approximately 50 hand casts made in glass (by Wanganui UCOL glass studio), are also placed on the walls, through which a fibre-optic lighting system illumines the pathway of the sculpture at night.

Apart from the gathering, making and firing of the thousands of hand casts, which has involved the work of many volunteers, the construction of the sizeable structure itself has required the skills and expertise - and often the ingenuity – of many other crafts people. Engineers and architects, construction workers, electricians, plumbers and plasterers and others, under the supervision of master-builder Jamie O’Leary, all made invaluable contributions to the completion of the sculpture. Community involvement, cooperation and generosity are the qualities that have given life and meaning to this culture of peace work of art.

The sculpture stands on public land donated by the Regional District Council – on a hill at the heart of Wanganui, steeped in the history of the Maori and early Settlers.

On 20 December 2002, a coffee-table type of book, published by Peace Through Unity, was launched which describes the process of building the sculpture and tells about the people involved in the project.

It also mentions some of the visionaries who helped initiate the idea of a culture in which all cultures can stand united for peace, and prompted the UN General Assembly to pronounce 2001-2010 the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. The book, called “Wanganui Culture of Peace – 2002”, begins with a statement by Peace through Unity saying: *“Through this book we have sought to express our thankfulness to the One Life pulsating through all creation; each heartbeat offering new opportunities for learning and growing and loving together; the dream carried in the heart of humanity not even a breath away – its realization in our hands”*.

It is now truly up to us, the world’s peoples, to resolve to work together for the emergence of an assembly of peoples and cultures – for peace.

Operation Peace Through Unity (OPTU), an NGO associated with United Nations NGO/DPI, was founded in Sweden 1975 as a Charitable Trust, since 1988 based in New Zealand.

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E-mail: optubrookiana@xtra.co.nz websites: www.isleofavalon.co.uk/manytomany.html and www.angelfire.com/journal/brooke2000.

OPTU’s quarterly publication “Many to Many”, can be read on the above websites. Hard copies will be sent on request.

A copy of the book “Wanganui Culture of Peace 2002” can be obtained from the above address. To recover printing cost and costs of posting and packaging a donation of US\$30-35 would be appreciated.