

THE PHYSICS ROOM

CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

A response to *Kiosk: Directors'* *Commentary* by James Hope

Danny MacAskill balances his trial bike on the edge of the awning overhanging the footpath outside the entrance to Java Cafe. Micro-adjustments keep him balanced as he studies the distance and visualises the order of execution for the manoeuvre. The crowd below spills out onto High Street, some with cameras at the ready. MacAskill licks a forefinger and holds it aloft, checking the direction of the slight breeze. Fifteen seconds pass, he looks over his right shoulder, torsioning his upper body and shifting his centre of mass lower and backward. Wrenching the handlebars counter-clockwise and towards his chin, he bunny hops and launches into a flawless 360, landing his back wheel dead centre on the roof of the Kiosk with a crunch. The crowd roars as MacAskill balances on his rear wheel, hopping several more times, enlarging the crater, before again 360ing down to the front of the rapturous huddle. "Danny!" Amongst the back slaps and high fives a maroon can is tossed towards him. MacAskill catches the Double Brown, cracks it, takes a long pull and shakes the foaming contents over his celebrating audience. Tossing the can into the air, it hits the Kiosk's roof on descent, jettisoning the remainder of the contents. Two rivulets of brown liquid run down the window.

Sometime in 2009, I helped a friend transport a work to a site on a pedestrianised Cashel Street. It was a pergola constructed of appropriated materials from the building industry—chipboard, zip-ties, orange PVC piping, connectors, and webbing. It was positioned at the entrance (or exit, depending on which direction you were taking) to a series of low steel bridges, providing a walkway for the public to navigate around the periphery of a worksite. The paving had been ripped up to allow for the laying of more tram lines, extending the tram's inner-city circuit, planned eventually to extend the length of High Street and beyond in anticipation of the 2011 Rugby World Cup. Footage shot from an elevated position shows the lurid orange structure in front of the old Westpac central high rise, near the corner where High Street runs diagonally southeast from Cashel. Members of the public and high-vis clad workers enter and exit the walkway, passing obliviously through the pergola; not registering its existence amongst all the other high-vis at the site.¹ It was a lychgate of safety, ensuring safe travels to all who passed through.

After the workday had ceased and everyone had gone home, my friend would retrieve the mangled structure from where it had been dumped by perplexed

workers, repair it and reinstate it. It lasted a week; its final demise possibly brought about in the early hours of a Friday or Saturday night at the hands of some revellers. The pergola feels like an apt correlative to the Kiosk; similarly ignored, misappropriated or abused; walked by (through) countless times; ultimately lost (destroyed?). They bookended the “cool” part of High Street, with its street fashion, record stores, and skate shops.

Conceived in 2000, the Kiosk contended with a certain amount of risk throughout its decade-long life. It was small though, so it wasn't overbearing. The brainchild of Julaine Stephenson and the Oblique Trust, the Kiosk wasn't skewered or stridently defended in the local rag as had a previous project, *Oblique: Culture in Otira*, commentary reflecting the perceived misspending of CNZ funds on “degenerate” art.² The Kiosk had to wear its art on its sleeve on the busy high street, High Street, and was therefore subject to more visceral critiques than The Press could dole out. Designed to be tamper-proof and unable to be scaled, powder coated a graffiti-repelling and innocuous civic grey, and harnessing 2000s tech-utopian aesthetics, it was sleek and oval. This was an era when Xtreme sports still carried some dimension of cultural and athletic cachet, and the Kiosk was decked in its sponsors' logos like the back of an MX rider's helmet. It had its own website, in a colourway of powder blue, light, and dark silvers. It was an art vehicle for the new millennium.

By the time The Physics Room took over co-ordination of the Kiosk from the Oblique Trust in 2003 that millennial optimism had dissipated. 9/11 had happened two years prior, and the US invaded Iraq in March. The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic had broken out in Guangdong the previous November. The Kiosk emerged anew into an era of emergency. But what better place for crisis-era art than a hermetically sealed, steel-clad construction modelled on a bollard to safely enclose the works from the hostile exterior? “Its glass windows and capsule-like structure resembles a vivarium, and much like a vivarium's purpose of holding and cultivating animals or plants—literally a ‘place of life’—The Kiosk harbours lone artworks so they may be appreciated and ‘live’.”³

The Kiosk: outpost, bollard, Tardis. Singular art sentry of the seedier end of High Street, well, until the *Nucleus* came along. The Kiosk straddled the public art/street furniture divide: none of the prestige of the former, and subject to the maltreatment of the latter—always in the firing line on calamitous Friday and Saturday Nights. The Kiosk's designer and project coordinator Julaine Stephenson mentions the glass used for the Kiosk's windows was “bandit-proof,” but this didn't extend to the bandits pouring out of the nearby Grumpy Mole Saloon early on Saturday mornings. Audrey Baldwin saw the Kiosk on the receiving end of battery in 2004: “It was the first time I witnessed an artwork inciting a physical reaction. It was Andrew Eyman's *Streetyrades* that did it. The endless repetition of Edith Piaf's sentimental Parisian music proved too much. In an uncharacteristic outpouring of energy, the Kiosk ended up being penetrated by a road cone, garnished by parsley and danced around by intoxicated hooligans.”⁴ It's amusing to think the Kiosk was vandalised to a soundtrack: At the exact point of the cone's penetration the climactic denouement to Piaf's *Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien* plays. Then there must have been the many instances of the less violent but unwittingly art historical critiques fuelled by brews à

la David Hammons on the side of a Serra in the 80s.⁵ And apparently the Kiosk even caught a bullet on one occasion.

In *Kiosk: Director's Commentary*, the gallery is dotted with translucent inflatable donuts, each emblazoned with the Oblique Trust, Kiosk, and old Physics Room “atom” logos. The donuts are the physical manifestation of Oblique’s logo—a toroid presumably meant to represent the O in Oblique, rendered in 3D. The logo looked sick on the pristinely archived website in any case. These donuts could be life-preservation devices, or they could be shooting down a hydroslide, or towed behind a jet boat; the kinds of passive yet dangerous activities that just require you to hang on. The show has Eddie Clemens breaking down the Kiosk into its constituent parts. In this mimetic installation, he has re-presented not only his three projects shown in the Kiosk—*Blade in Gum* (2003); *Blade in Phone* (2009); and *The God Particle* (2010) along one wall of the gallery—but has also re-constructed elements of the Kiosk itself. The volume of the Kiosk—its proportions and footprint, simplified as a steel frame—houses a platform for a projector to screen the hour-and-a-half-long film of a journey down the Ōtākaro Avon River in the style of a director’s commentary such as is found on the extras section of a DVD. The film is overdubbed with the commentary of Julaine Stephenson, Paul Johns (pivotal Kiosk custodian), Paul Sutherland (long-term Chairperson of The Physics Room Trust), along with Physics Room director at the time, Jamie Hanton in discussion on the Kiosk’s history, with plenty of anecdotes. Capping the platform is an oddly-shaped paddle board, the nexus of the show, installed in a bright “safety orange” in its rightful place as the roof of the skeletal Kiosk replica. Modelled on the shape of the original Kiosk’s roof, the board is the conveyance through which Clemens makes his way down the Avon River to light an elegiac flare.

It’s like Clemens has trimmed the fat, reduced the Kiosk down to its basic elements, and apportioned them throughout the gallery. A danger/safety dichotomy traversed Clemens’ original Kiosk works: There was A BLADE in some gum. A BLADE in a phone. A LASER in a CIRCULAR SAW. They variously referenced an urban legend, popular culture, and current events: *Blade in Gum* cited a horrifying urban legend about razors embedded in hydroslices. *Blade in Phone* removed a handle from the iconic American-style payphone booth. In *The God Particle*, the Kiosk played nasty with some big-boy art using a high-powered laser. The logbook pouch attached to Clemens’ skeletal Kiosk ensures its regular maintenance and that any incidents are recorded. Perhaps there was an actual logbook recording any incidents associated with the Kiosk that has now been lost in the mists of time. Not that any incidents are likely to befall this Kiosk, the small gallery is now housed within its parent institution, not outside cavorting with the punters. This means the safety glass can come off and a replica of the Kiosk display area complete with recessed halogen lights—the *Invitational Kiosk Archive Platform (IKAP)*—allows previous Kiosk-showing artists to re-present their work. An archival image covering one of the gallery’s smaller walls beside the *IKAP* shows the Kiosk in-situ, grey on grey, with Warren Olds’ hard drives, done up in Kiosk blue, housed inside the photographed monolith.

The Kiosk went somewhere, but no one knows where. Tip-offs on sightings of it locked up in a City Council storage facility reached a dead end. If it did indeed

embark on a voyage into the future, it has reached back across time to screen its own funeral procession in the gallery's projection space. Jamie Hanton and Eddie Clemens enter the Ōtākaro in their drysuits and begin their journey down the river toward the estuary. Eddie quickly finds that the roof-as-paddleboard passes muster—"It's pretty stable." GoPros positioned on the front of Eddie's paddleboard and mounted on Jamie's chest give POV footage as we switch between the two cameras intermittently. Eddie's GoPro provides a view from the paddleboard's prow with the Oblique and Kiosk logos placed prominently. They are using the accoutrements of Xtreme sports (to the extent that stand up paddle boarding and inner tubing can be considered extreme) to navigate down what must be one of the most languid rivers in Canterbury. Through the GoPro footage, we are floating with them. Moving through the city, the flotilla passes construction sites, remnants of old Christchurch and the brand new built environment of post-earthquake. "Should there be another Kiosk?" Eddie muses. "It's the big question. It's on everyone's minds." Further on: "Could the Kiosk be a vehicle of some sort? Could it be rolled out? It could just be a small boat." The shaft of Jamie's oar passes across the GoPro's field of vision. On it is written the word "fanatic."

When they reach the estuary, Eddie paddles a small way into the ocean and lights a flare. Billows of bright orange smoke pour out, marking the end of the duo's journey. They are emissaries delivering the Kiosk's posthumous SOS from across a decade.

¹ "Welcome Welcome Welcome Welcome Welcome," Hooves to the Horns YouTube Channel, accessed August 16, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6847jPFPIA>.

² See the articles under "Media" in the Oblique Trust's archived website: www.physicsroom.org.nz/archive/oblique/otira/backgrnd/.

³ Sophie Keyse, "The Kiosk," *The Physics Room Annual 2009*, (Christchurch: The Physics Room Trust, 2010), 81.

⁴ Audrey Baldwin, "The Kiosk," *The Physics Room Annual 2010*, (Christchurch: The Physics Room Trust, 2011), 57.

⁵ Greg Allen, "Stop and Piss: David Hammons' Pissed Off," greg.org, <https://greg.org/archive/2013/08/06/stop-and-piss-david-hammons-pissed-off.html>.