

Dani Marti was born in Spain, lived in Australia, and recently moved to Glasgow.

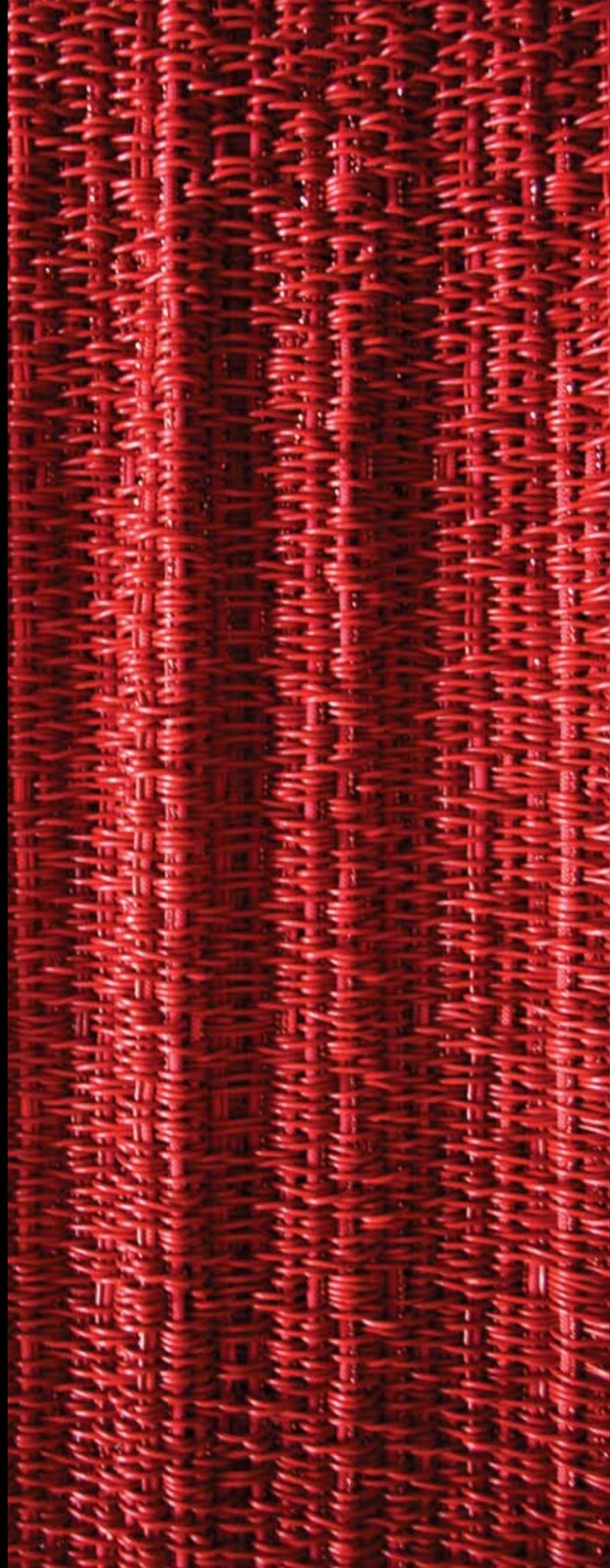
This bi-cultural condition, the feeling of not sitting squarely within either culture, is central to his work, showing us how he (re)builds his identity and faces the challenge of fitting into a different culture; being at home, but not at home.¹

This situation may, perhaps, shed light on the driving forces behind Marti's works which, on different levels, function as perfect dichotomies: minimalist–neo-Baroque, Catholic–Protestant, rational–emotional, natural–synthetic, local–global, relaxed–tense, excessive–restrained, mystic–erotic, dominant–submissive, painterly–sculptural, industrial–handmade, innocent–perverted.

Such ambivalence is a subtle representation of the complexities of neo-Baroque society, where people seek illusion and dystopias of excess because they perceive harmony and happiness as no more than a mirage. Marti's compositions are exactly this: a beautiful mirage, a seductive mirror that gives us back an uneasy – and even unpleasant – image of ourselves, at the same time providing us with a more realistic interpretation of the world.

Guilt (not duty)

Dani Marti's Catholic breeding and background informs his artistic practice literally, formally, and conceptually. In Catholic societies, life still revolves around the concept of 'guilt,' whereas in Anglo-Saxon societies 'duty' determines the course of life.² This pristine sense of guilt goes back as far as the Baroque era, where the separation of body and mind led to highly paradoxical artistic representations. As with Gianlorenzo Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Therese*, Marti's series of works – *The Seven Pleasures of Snow White*, *Un fraile y un muchacho (Take 1 and 2)*, 2006 or *Give a bit of Hmm to Me* and *Braveheart*, 2007 – suggest a state of quasi orgasm. The dwarfs, monsters, buffoons and bearded women that have inhabited Spanish culture from the Golden Age until today – Diego Velázquez, Francisco de Goya, Luis Buñuel,



the hell of the beautiful

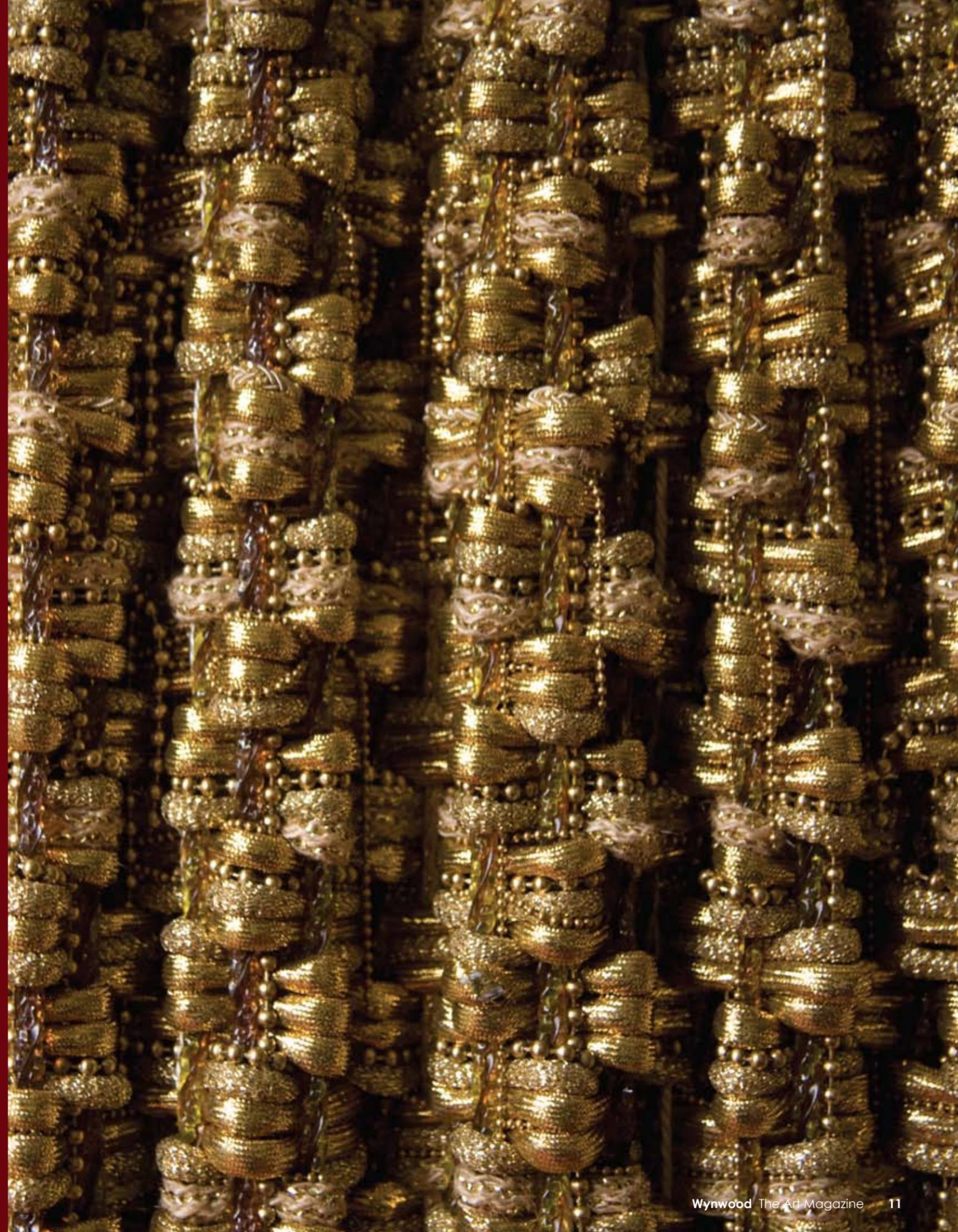


dani marti

By Paco Barragán

This Page: MONIKA- GLITTERING SHADOWS, 2008
Leather, nylon and plastic beaded chains on wood
110 x 95 x 6 cm (43" x 37" x 2")
Courtesy of Breenspace, Sydney

BECOMING ANIMAL, 2006
Polypropylene, polyester and nylon on wood
130 cm diameter x 35 cm depth (51" x 14")
Courtesy of Sherman Galleries, Sydney



The works exemplify a passionate labyrinth where the intricate relationships between body, eroticism and power are questioned

Pedro Almodóvar- become, in the hands and eyes of Marti, evidence of an eternally turbulent and dramatic world vision. In our culture the body –as Cuban writer Severo Sarduy would have stated- is the great sacrificed, but he keeps returning to our lives with the violence of the one who has been repressed.

And this set of allegorical and apparently minimalist 'paintings' – I say paintings as I consider Marti's work to be an exercise of 'expanded' painting and a clear example of what painting may mean these days.– is executed in a clean, meticulous and obsessive way. The Baroque fold, in this case hundreds of ropes and cables which fold and unfold endlessly, towards infinity – conforms with horror vacui,³ every orifice being formally and conceptually filled by the artist; and vanitas, a reminder of the fugacity of our lives. The works exemplify a passionate labyrinth where the intricate relationships between body, eroticism and power are questioned, reflecting societies' social, political and philosophical crisis.

The artist penetrates what Karl Rosenkranz called 'the hell of the beautiful,⁴ creating a narrative whose coordinates are revealed by the somewhat Deleuzian titles: **A Hundred Lashes, A Body Without Organs, Pablo (The Impossible Dream), and Troughman (The Yellow Peril),**

or more recent works like **The Pleasure Chest, Monika (submerged in glittering shadows), or Andrea (Greeted by a pubescent smile).** Moral tension, according to Rosenkranz, is caused by beauty, which camouflages the real and distracts injustice; the kind of beauty that goes beyond good and evil, that expresses the beautiful through the ugly, the real through the false, life through death. As these compositions show, this provokes ambivalent experiences and impossible conciliations: pleasure and political engagement, conformism and rebellion, spirituality and sensuality.

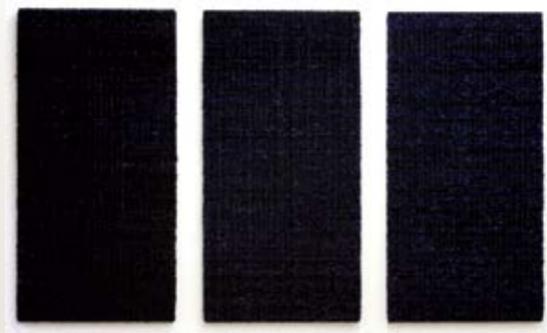
Obsessions

Representing ecstasy pills, flakes, sacred hosts – these cool, geometric, luxurious and virginal paintings reveal a highly-controlled passion for weaving. Such labor-intensive work may be considered a challenge to superficial ideas about memory, tradition and globalisation. By using the 'impure' and popular discipline of weaving, Marti's work addresses social interaction, politics and even the desire for self-sufficiency. (Although it should not be forgotten that 'impurity' is the trademark of globalisation.) Moreover, weaving was a tradition beloved of Marti's grandmother; in spite of which, the artist had to learn it for himself.⁵

Top Left : THE SEVEN PLEASURES OF SNOW WHITE, 2006 installation view with : Becoming Animal, Polypropylene, polyester and nylon on wood, 130 cm diameter x 35 cm depth Troughman (the yellow peril), polypropylene on wood, 180 x 180 x 180 cm (71" x 71" x 71") Courtesy of Sherman Galleries, Sydney

Top Right : BEIGE, 2008 - (Detail) Polyester, nylon, rubber and leather on wood 260 x 185 x 13 cm (102" x 73" x 3") Commissioned by the Casula Power House, Liverpool, Australia Courtesy of BreenSpace, Sydney

Right Page : GIVE A BIT OF HMM TO ME, 2007 (Detail) Nylon, polyester, gold thread brass chains, metal braids and Swarovski glass on wood - 214 x 425 x 6 cm (84" x 167" x 2") Courtesy of BreenSpace, Sydney and MASH Miami, Miami



Marti's video works, deal with the same obsession as the woven pieces: portraiture. While **The Stamp Collector** (2006) delivers a more abstract and formal approach – we hardly see the person, and when we do so it is under the 'second skin' of a mask and a rubber suit – **The Evils of Forgetfulness** (2006) provides us with a greater, better sense of the persona, Robert. However, faced with the camera, the character soon slips into a succession of spontaneous performances, turning the whole idea of making a portrait into a contradictio in terminis. In other works like **Shadow after Shadow (Portrait of the artist's mother at the Age of 73)** and **Llorona (Arrangement in Grey and Black)** 2007, or **Bolted and Beige** (2008), there is a subtle interplay between the video and the woven piece. The pieces work on their own, but at the same time they engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue that takes the painting beyond its frame in an imaginative manner. For Marti, both weaving and (video) taping represent an act of bondage, a ritual which enables the artist to 'possess' the person that is portrayed. Aesthetics, pleasure, fantasy, (psychological) pain and (in)security come into play reminding us of Foucault's ideas about violence as an exercise of power that negatively affects freedom, and through which the dignity of the other is perceived under a new light. It is a question of faith, of mutual consensus, but also and most importantly of portraiture as an impossible act.

"His relationship –writes Lois Rowe- to the characters he portrays, whether intimate friend, stranger, or icon is an emotional one that becomes ritualized through both his methods of working and the claustrophobic proximity, which he develops to his subjects through his attempts to portray them."

Dani Marti looks deep inside his 'phillias' and phobias, his dreams and disappointments, for order, perfection and redemption; and he does so by way of allegory. His works are rich allegories in a Benjaminian sense; that is, they regain the original meaning where any person, object or action "talks" (from Greek agnorieri) about the "other" (from allos) having meanings that are kept out of view. In such a world, allegory is a powerful instrument for understanding the *zeitgeist*.

In his oeuvre, Dani Marti exposes the torture of our spirits, our desire for emancipation, in a visceral, suffocating manner – straight from the intestines, as neo-Baroque. □

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Left Top Frame : SHADOW AFTER SHADOW
 (PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S MOTHER AT THE AGE OF 73), 2007
 nylon, polyester, knitting yarn and stainless steel ball chains on wood
 each panel: 120 x 230 x 7 cm (47" x 90" x 3") Courtesy of Arc One Gallery, Melbourne

3 Left Lower Images : LLORONA (ARRANGEMENT IN GREY AND BLACK), 2006
 Dvd, one channel, with sound, 16' 30"
 Courtesy of Breenspace, Sydney and Arc One Gallery, Melbourne



Notes

(1) In this context, one might quote Irit Rogoff: 'In a previous formation there was a necessary alliance between identity (being Red, being French, being Muslim) and the placing of that identity within a national, regional or cultural location (being Turkish, being Northern European, being of the art world). In the current moment, however, the mutual dependence of these two categories has been loosening in intriguing ways.' See Irit Rogoff, 'The where of now', catalogue essay, TIME ZONES: Recent Film and Video, Tate Modern, London, curated by Jessica Morgan and Gregory Muir, October 2004, p. 87.

(2) See the Protestant theologian John Calvin's attack against the Catholic ascetic lifestyle when he writes in European Origins of American Thought: 'If we are to pass through the earth, we ought undoubtedly to make such a use of its blessings as will rather assist than retard us in our journey.' (David D. Van Tassel & Robert McAhren, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1969, pp. 11-12).

(3) Re the horror vacui: Baroque has not been eliminated but rather exacerbated by the high-tech communications and global visual culture that continue to define urban life.

(4) I co-curated with Javier Panera and Omar Pascual an exhibition on this subject called Baroque and Neo-Baroque: The Hell of the Beautiful, at the Domus Artium (DA2), Salamanca, Spain. See <<http://www.e-flux.com>> (15 October 2005).

(5) *ibid.*

Paco Barragán is an independent curator based in Madrid.

Above : CLOSER, installation view, 2007
 courtesy of Arc One Gallery, Melbourne

Right : THE PLEASURE CHEST, 2007
 Second beaded necklaces collected between 2000 and 2003,
 tubular mesh used for mussel farming on wood
 255 x 130 x 8 cm (100" x 51" x 3")
 Courtesy of Arc One Gallery, Melbourne

