

# Portrait of an artist in flux

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**Evangelos Sakaris has used mud to create a piece of art while some people have not been able to appreciate his work. He is the artist whose model was seen fit to be used as the memorial of the Australian Hellenic Memorial Foundation.**

PEOPLE have stepped all over his art, they have not been able to detect it while left wondering if the sign on the wall with an alleged art piece title is a joke. But Evangelos Sakaris bears no grudges.

The designer of the marquette commemorating the alliance between Greece and Australia in World War II, commissioned by the Australian Hellenic Memorial Foundation and the City of Melbourne, Sakaris has art written all over him.

Responding to an advertisement in *The Age* seeking an artist to undertake the project, the City of Melbourne chose Evangelos Sakaris on the basis of the drawings and concepts he presented.

The memorial, due for completion in November 1998 and to be erected close to the Shrine of Remembrance, is a contemporary art work belonging to the debate of the differences between sculpture and architectural structures.

Although reluctant to define his art, Evangelos Sakaris describes what he produces as installation art, a form which according to Mr Sakaris has been revived from the 1960s in the 1990s.

"Now in 1997 it has pretty much become mainstream. It's an area which does not have any boundaries of what you use, you can use anything," he says.

As an artist he focuses in picking a space he can work with by using compatible materials and his main intention is creating poetry.

Working with the complete environment, Sakaris says people will often not know where the environment ends and the art creation begins.

"What I do is grung. It is dirty, it's not clean. It's fuzzy, it's not sharp. It's a thought in process, it's not thinking done. It's not finality, it's thought in flux."

One piece he had completed in the past comprised

small white replica of the Titanic which, according to Sakaris, symbolises the metaphor of the journey incomplete.

Two weeks after the installation, the moisture in the mud evaporated, a phenomenon encapsulating movement and the concept of flux.

**"Having been an Australian-Greek or a Greek-Australian I identify my self with the hyphen rather than one or the other."**

During the exhibition of this particular work, Sakaris remembers a Greek from Alexandria stepping in the mud.

"This guy comes into the show looking for the work and he stepped right in the middle of it. But I forgave him because he was from Alexandria," Sakaris says.

"Any Egyptian-Greek is welcome to walk in the mud because the mud was the substance in the Suez Canal and I thought of all the ships that

were sunk in there."

The element of water and the phenomenon of evaporation are often used by Sakaris in his art. Even when the water has evaporated he has endeavoured to ensure that signs of the evaporation are present.

"I use things which at

least leave a trace of there having been flux, that is, there is memory of flux, the memory of change, the memory of things having never been stable."

When forming the concept for the marquette of the Australian Hellenic Memorial Foundation, Sakaris was faced with the challenge of incorporating the idea of flux with the fixed properties of bronze and blue stone. Wishing also to

provide multi-level meanings he has juxtaposed opposites and connected ancient Athenian symbols of democracy with modern Australian elements.

His aim for the memorial was to incorporate the idea of flux, the dual use of elements depicting Greek and Australian identity and the hyphenated identity of the Greek-Australian.

"There is a splitness of identity in having an identity which is hyphenated. They are the things I often deal with in my work," he says.

"Having been an Australian-Greek or a Greek-Australian, I identify myself with the hyphen rather than one or the other."

The elements used for the art piece are doubled. Sakaris has deliberately created two ends to the fountain, two cups for the water clock, two surfaces to the structure. The colour scheme from one side is white asbestos paint, symbolising the Greek village yet from the opposite optical angle it is bluestone symbol-



Contemporary man: Evangelos Sakaris is creating contemporary art for the memorial honouring the World War II alliance between Greece and Australia. PICTURE: Antonis Baxevanidis

ising Victorian State architecture where bluestone is a dominating characteristic.

"I have been successful in keeping with my intent as an artist, where things don't seem to be fixed forever. Things aren't what they seem to be," he says.

"I tend towards making objects difficult to understand because they do require a viewer that is not lazy. I demand that you work."

The marquette is just one project concurring with another work named 'Blue Dye Jesus' currently on display in Melbourne.

Sakaris has covered the south facing door St Pauls Cathedral in the City of Melbourne with blue alfoil. The project titled 'City Provoked' involves eight artists from around Australia working with an art curator from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

Not unlike his work for the memorial, this work takes on multi-level meanings and symbolisms. The alfoil, according to Sakaris, symbolises blocked memory.

"You don't remember the details of things, you only remember the general form," he says.

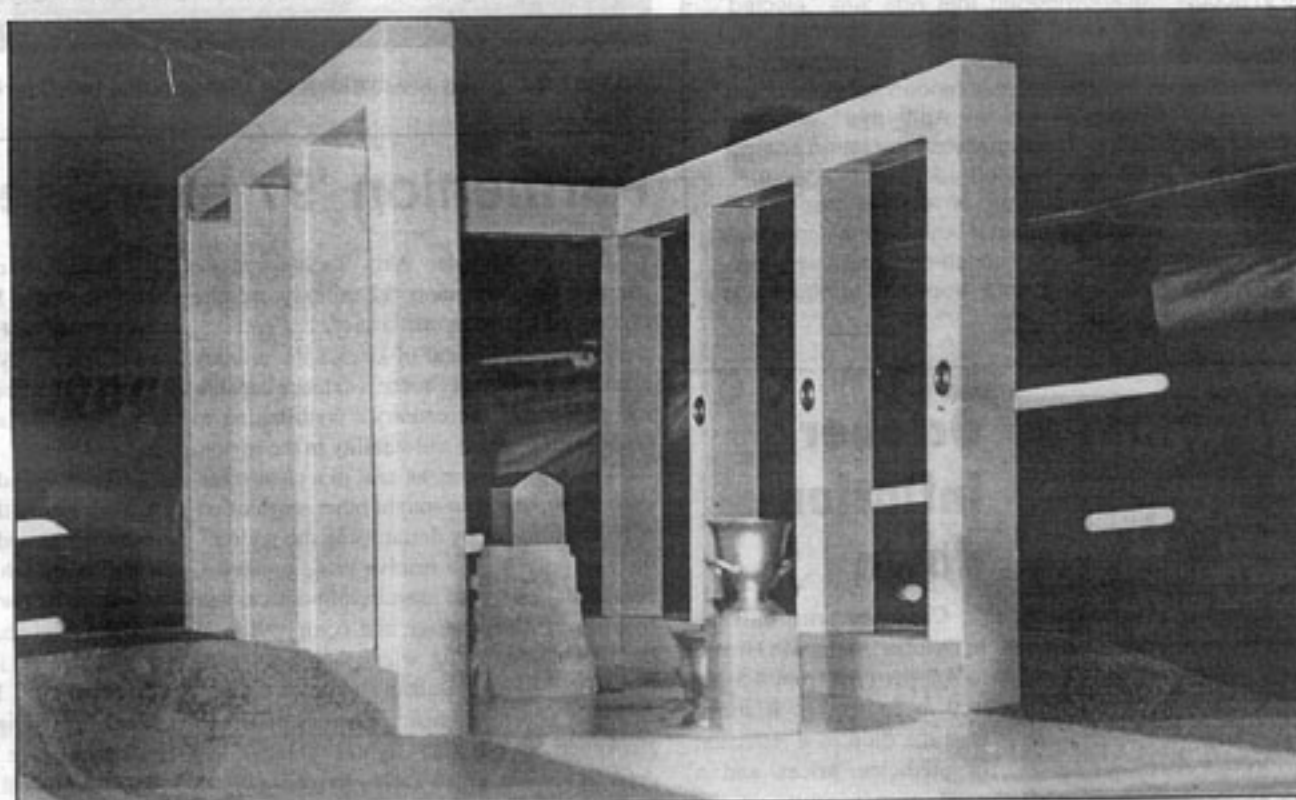
The religious connotations emanate from the fact the art work is sculptured on a church door while the door in itself carries a concept of reality intrinsic in Sakaris' art; the form of the threshold.

"Doors are not inside, they are not quite outside, they are on the threshold," he says.

"People walking past the doors never recognised them for what they are and so I simply covered them to reveal them. I covered in order to reveal."

The blue dye emulates the way in which corporate advertising depicts blood. Sakaris refers to the example of advertisements of menstrual pads where blood is depicted with blue ink dye.

"Even though we have some crazy programs with blood gushing everywhere, we can't show healthy blood which is about fertility."



Winning model: Evangelos Sakaris' model that was chosen for the Australian Hellenic Memorial Foundation's marquette.