

# THE 1001 SPHERES OF AN ARTIST

## A JOURNEY OF ART AND ADVOCACY

by **Giovanni Butera** | Images provided by **Chiara Corbelleto**

*Segmento* speaks to artist Chiara Corbelleto about her life as an Italian visual artist working in Aotearoa-New Zealand, and about her most recent public sculpture dedicated to gender equality, *1001 Spheres*, commissioned by Auckland City Council for the beautiful Monte Cecilia Park.



Chiara Corbelleto, *1001 Spheres*, Aotearoa-New Zealand, 2023. Commissioned by Public Art Auckland and dedicated to the journey towards gender equality

**B**orn in the picturesque town of Biella, in the Italian region of Piedmont, Chiara Corbelleto's artistic odyssey commenced as a graduate of the Modigliani Art School in Novara (also in Piedmont) and as an architecture graduate from the University of Milan. It was, however, in 1981, when she embarked on a journey to embrace a new cultural milieu on the other side of the world, that her creativity truly flourished. She landed in Auckland, on the north island of Aotearoa-NZ, and there, amid its vibrant landscapes, and after a number of years as an art restorer, she ultimately found her voice.

Corbelleto has been a visual artist in Aotearoa-NZ for more than thirty years. Renowned for her compelling public

sculptures, she has left an indelible mark on the artistic landscape. Her extensive record includes exhibitions, installations in public galleries and museums, a public gallery retrospective, public art commissions, and art integrated into architecture-civic projects.

This vast layering of Corbelleto's evolving body of work is too complex to summarise, but a connecting thread can be found in the intersection between art, mathematical, and scientific thinking. Her recurring investigations are about space, the structure of form, the language of replicated forms, and how organized complexity can emerge out of simplicity ... not easy concepts to express with three-dimensional sculpture.



Chiara Corbelletto in front of her *1001 Spheres*, Monte Cecilia Park, Aotearoa-New Zealand, 2023



*1001 Spheres*. Details of the polished stainless steel dome, reflecting the surrounding environment and viewers. Photo David St George

Another layer to mention is her mastery of her craft and its flawless execution. She says, “This is a culturally intrinsic aspect of my education, having grown up in the golden days of Italian design, where the aspiration to beautifully made objects was omnipresent. The experience of beauty is necessary and can be satisfying and profound. It is an emotional response to an intangible essence that can be embedded in the work by striving for that quality.”

In 2004, Corbelletto made the bold decision to move her studio to the Corban Estate Arts Centre, a move that would provide her with the space and resources to fully realize her artistic vision. It was here that she embarked on her most ambitious projects to date, producing large-scale sculptures for parks, universities, city councils, and private collectors.

Among her most renowned works is *Numbers are the Language of Nature*, a bronze sculpture commissioned in 2005 for the central city and historic Auckland Domain. This mesmerizing sculpture, with its intricate interplay of three-dimensional form, serves as a testament to Corbelletto’s mastery at provoking thought and awe in equal measure.

Her most recent public art project is a meaningful departure and possibly an indication of the future of her work. In 2023, Corbelletto once again captivated audiences with the unveiling of *1001 Spheres*, a public sculpture dedicated to gender equality. It was commissioned by Auckland Council to mark the 125th

anniversary of women's suffrage in New Zealand, the first country in the world where women won the right to vote.

Located in Monte Cecilia Park, a 15-hectare urban park with expansive views, rolling hills, and large exotic trees, once a huge private estate, *1001 Spheres* serves as a poignant reminder of women's resilience and fortitude throughout the history of the ongoing struggle for gender equality, and of women's contribution in all spheres of life. A joyous presence in the park, this sculpture invites viewers to reflect on the legacy of those who paved the way toward a more inclusive and equitable society.

Three defining features of *1001 Spheres* convey its powerful message. The wire hemisphere, crafted from hundreds of intersecting wires, symbolizes the myriad paths crossed by the suffragist movement and the waves of feminism that continue to shape our world. The spheres nestled within the sculpture evoke a radiant future of possibilities, while the repeating circles that form its structure speak to the ideals of inclusiveness and equality. The sculpture has initiated a program of public engagement designed to engage diverse audiences in conversation about the evolving concepts of gender equality and gender identity in today's society.

Corbelletto is also very involved with the Italian community in Aotearoa-New Zealand. She served for five years as a member of the first Com.It.Es NZ (the elected council representing resident Italians abroad), and in 2016,



*1001 Spheres*. Details of the double wired hemisphere and the vibrant multitude of spheres. Photo Jay Farnworth



*Hybrid Encounter*, SCAPE Public Art, Botanic Gardens, Christchurch, 2019. Photo Chiara Corbelletto



*Number are the Language of Nature*, bronze sculpture commissioned by Auckland Domain, New Zealand, 2005.  
Photo Gadfium



The team at *Ondazzurra*, the podcast providing a voice to the Italian Community in New Zealand

spearheaded *Ondazzurra*, the only Italian podcast program produced in NZ, with the intention to preserve and celebrate Italian identity in NZ.

*Ondazzurra* is a labor of love for Corbelletto, who has produced more than 310 episodes of interviews and conversations organized in thematic series that examine cultural, economic, literary, and bi-cultural issues. Overall, the podcast serves as a vital repository of the Italian presence in New Zealand, capturing the voices and experiences of generations past and present. This commitment has cemented her legacy as a cultural innovator. Moreover, reflecting on her *1001 Spheres*, we are reminded of the power of art to transcend boundaries and unite us in a shared celebration of beauty, diversity, and humanity.

Chiara Corbelletto, through her evocative sculptures and fostering of Italian culture, is inspiring future generations to dream boldly. In her hands, spheres and wire hemispheres become vessels for the human spirit, weaving stories of strength, resilience, and hope that will echo for generations to come.