

"What is an ocean of silence? To me, it is the immense continuum of space that in one direction expands into the cosmos and in the other direction compresses into the void. In this spectrum of space, our position appears to be middle range. Evolution has optimised our physiology for the perception and experience of space at the level that we occupy.

Space has been a fundamental and recurring theme in my work; from interior space to infinite space. Space is the conceptual environment where I research and position my work as an artist".

Chiara Corbelletto 2011.

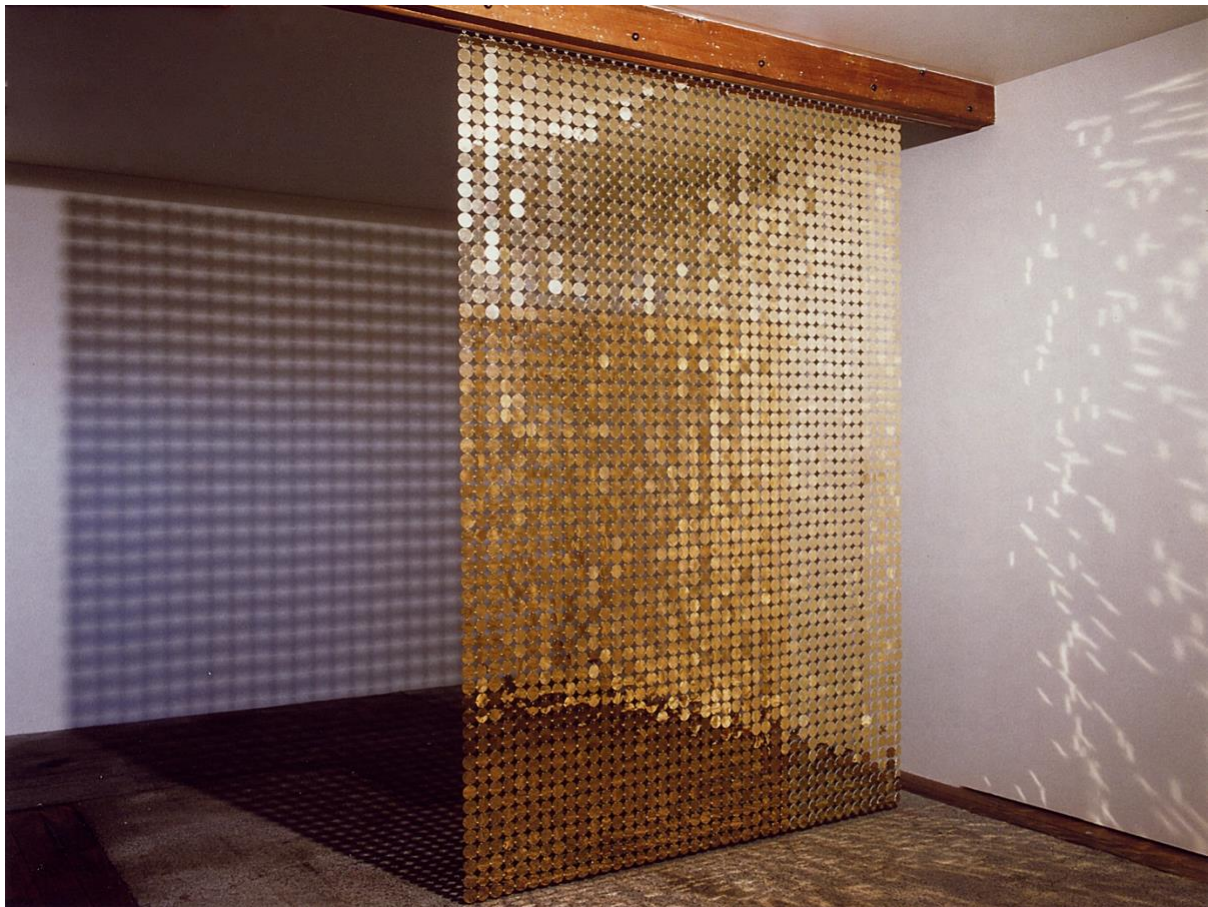
Chiara Corbelletto was born in Biella in the northern alpine region of Italy. She studied fine art at the Modigliani Art School in Novara and later gained a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Milan in 1979. In 1981 she first visited New Zealand and later made this her country her adopted home. Here she has developed a successful and fulltime career in the visual arts. This is the first survey exhibition of her work to be presented in a public art gallery.

Corbelletto's work has a distinctive style and position within New Zealand art. Although she firmly identifies herself as a sculptor, her work has strong architectural sensibilities in respect of its relationship to built environments and use of commercial materials and industrial processes. While this exhibition focuses on sculptural work that primarily operates and responds to interior spaces, these art works belong to larger series that have included public sculptures and collaborations with architectural firms on massive civic projects.

This survey exhibition includes representative works from each series of the last decade. These are arranged chronologically and describe three significant phases of investigation. This history not only provides an introduction to Corbelletto's working style but gives insight into her most recent sculptures, which signal new directions for this artist.

#### SPACE AND PATTERN

The earliest document in this exhibition is an image of *Gold Discs* 1996, from the 'Installations' series (1996 -2003). This was a suspended screen installation comprised of 4500 gold discs. While the installation was a simple, single plane, its reflected and perforated surface had a strong effect on the surrounding space. Orchestrated lighting created a dazzling reflection from the gold discs on one side while the projected gridded shadow of the screen created the illusion of a cube. This experiment with spatial perception and intervention was a breakthrough for Corbelletto and became the starting point for her signature 'Archimedes Garden' series (2000 – 2008).

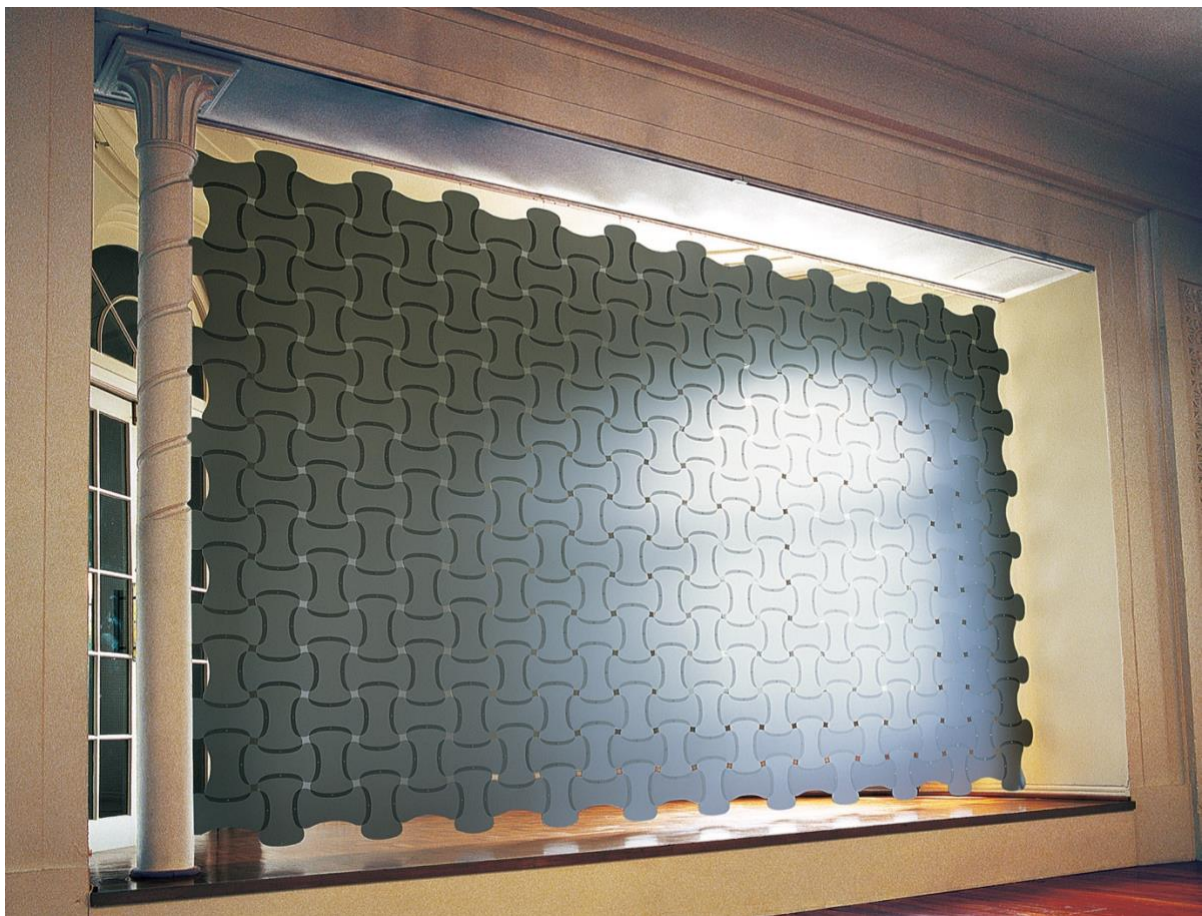


*Gold Discs*. 1996. Archil Gallery, Auckland. 2500 styrene discs, 450 brass links. 2800 x 2500 mm

Where the 'Installations' series was primarily concerned with the perception of interior space, Corbelletto was also interested in the visual complexities of pattern, and positive and negative shapes. *Otto Stelle* 2003 and *Cinque Stelle* 2005 are two examples that explore the effects of tessellation and rotational symmetry (in two and three dimensions respectively). The titles draw attention to the four-pointed star (*stelle*) shape that is formed in the negative space of the pattern. Corbelletto also developed a body of work, including a large bronze sculpture for Auckland Domain called *Numbers are the Language of Nature* 2005, based on this star shape, albeit refined to three points. The *Twin Stars* 2009 wall sculptures, which are included in this exhibition, are examples of from this series.

The 'Archimedes' Garden' series (2000-2008) is the culmination of Corbelletto's space and pattern investigations. It is an extensive body of work that explores the possibilities of pattern based on a single shape. In the beginning this bone-shaped unit was called 'pavesini' because of its resemblance to a novelty biscuit that was popular with Italian children in the 1960s. This shape was cut from sheet polypropylene, a heavy duty yet flexible plastic material that is produced in a range of colours, thicknesses and opacities. Corbelletto assembled these units into various configurations and presented them as hanging screens.

Early works in this series, such as *Pavesini* 2003, held in The Suter Art Gallery collection, is relatively simple in conception – a tessellation of alternating pavesini-shapes connected at ninety degrees. Later and more complex patterns exploit the semi-transparent nature of polypropylene to create a range of primary and secondary shapes. The repetitious nature of these patterns has also allowed Corbelletto to alter the dimensions of each screen in response to various spaces.



*Fringe of Heaven* 2003 semitransparent polypropylene. Lopdell House Gallery, Auckland. 2800h x 4500 mm

## ENCLOSED SPACE

The 'Bio.structure' and 'Fields of Energy' (2007-10) series are also based on the possibilities of serial unit design but configured into three dimensional forms with interior spaces. Where the artist had previously been concerned with demarcations of space and pattern, these sculptures are inspired by biological forms, permeable membranes and the fields of energy that is trapped inside the forms.

The 'Bio.structure' works are based on a threefold rotational geometry and are made from polypropylene, sheet metal and in some instances, textiles covering a metal armature. These structures mimic the growth pattern of membranes and resemble biological cells, the bio-architecture of coral and moss colonies and NASA concepts of dark matter cosmic scaffolding. Some of these sculptures are further complicated with the addition of secondary inter-twined forms. The intersections of forms, creating double-walled spaces, not only create a dynamic engagement of pattern and shape. They also generate a sense of static or contained energy; a curious phenomenon given the permeable nature of the structure.

The 'Fields of Energy' series retains the same interest in contained energy and porous enclosures but explores Euclidean geometric space rather than biological forms. Euclid of Alexandria (300 BC) was a Greek mathematician who is commonly regarded as the founder of Western geometry. His treatise on space was based, in part, on the existence of parallel lines in nature. Other forms and shapes are understood in relation to, or as deviations of, parallelism. *Fields of Energy (24 short waves)* illustrates this concept: when viewed from one side it presents a delicate set of parallel lines; from a different perspective, these lines take form and become a fluid sequence of undulating shapes.



*Double bio.structure* 2010  
coated steel, industrial polypropylene  
1200h x 1350 x 1500mm



*Field of energy* 2010  
MDF, s/s  
1850 x 1020 x 540 mm

## CONCEPTUAL SPACE

Corbelleto's most recent work is the 'Habitat' series (2008 -10), forms that explore the fluidity and continuity of non-Euclidean spaces. Non-Euclidean space is based on hyperbolic (curving outward) and elliptic (curving inward) geometry. Non-Euclidean geometries are important in the theory of relativity and when describing the mathematical model of time space, which combines the three-dimensions of space with the fourth dimension of time.

*String Theory* 2008 is model of hyperbolic geometry applied to a single surface plane. If you trace the surface, you travel from an internal plane to an external plane and back to the internal. As a shape, it expresses notions of curved space and perpetual energy. This form does not exist in our 'life environment' but is a conceptual model of time-space membranes as described in relativity physics.

The namesake works of this exhibition and the series, *An ocean of silence glides endlessly from an unknown beginning* 2008 and *Habitat* 2009, introduce philosophic concepts of space in Corbelleto's work. They are also emotional responses about the nature of matter, energy and infinity. *Habitat* is "an architectural model for a conceptual floating environment" <sup>1</sup> that investigates the fluidity and continuity of single surfaces in non-Euclidean geometry. *An ocean of silence ...* is "a messenger of ideas about darkness, the unsettling void of outer space ... the mystery of the unknown." <sup>2</sup>



*String Theory* 2008  
automotive paint on urethane foam  
530 x 550 x 440 mm



*Habitat* 2009  
Compound on fiberglass.  
210h x 430 x 620mm

Significantly, each work is made as a single sculptural object rather than an assembly of serial components. This quality, combined with her investigation of conceptual rather than physical space, indicates a radical new direction in Corbelleto's work. It is interesting to note, however, that Corbelleto has expressed these ideas in a modernist abstract style of sculpture with relatively conventional materials and processes. As she has proven with the 'Archimedes Garden' and 'Bio.structures' series, we can expect Corbelleto to experiment extensively with these forms and ideas and possibly transform the nature of this work as she encounters new materials, technologies or ideas.

These are the consistent qualities of Chiara Corbelleto's practice as an artist notwithstanding her inimitable Italian style.

Anna-Marie White

Curator

The Suter Te Aratoi O Whakatu

<sup>1</sup> Artist exhibition notes 2011

<sup>2</sup> Ibid