

STARKWHITE

1 August 2025

The Public Art Team
Wellington City Council
PO Box 2199
Wellington 6140

To whom it may concern

Reference: Martin Basher Application for Public Art Funding

I have known Martin Basher since the mid 2000s. He's been a major artist in our roster for 15 years and he's shown many times both in the gallery and at art fairs, including including a solo show at The Armory Show, New York and a two-person presentation (with Australian artist Rebecca Baumann) at Sydney Contemporary.

Martin has a terrific, complex practice with all the attributes of the best contemporary artists: it is conceptually grounded, content rich and distinctively aesthetic. Moreover, his art making is multi-faceted. He can paint your socks off, but sculpture and installation are also highly developed strands in his practice. Martin's work addresses topical issues of the day – in his case an ongoing critique of consumerism, and increasingly, a meditation on climate change. But remarkably, he also has an ability to produce beautiful work attuned to the art market that catch the eye of art buyers and collectors looking for singular works to collect. In this respect, with his capacity to produce work that engages curators and exhibition makers and also buyers in the art market, I see him as an artist operating the same territory as Billy Apple, Michael Parekowhai, Gordon Walters, Mikela Dwyer etc, all artists I greatly admire.

Martin has a real willingness to take on risk - not by wading blindly into troubled waters, but rather by managing risk into his practice. At this transitional point in his career he has decided to go for broke, planning monumental work for the Te Papa adjacent Four Plinths, a major show around the same time at the gallery here in Auckland, and to follow, an artist book which we have discussed as an essential communications tool as he moves into the next stage of his career. Martin has had a couple of years off the exhibition program here while he was getting set up in New Zealand after 20 years in New York City, and I'm absolutely confident these concurrent projects are going to mark a big splashy return to NZ visibility - and to the market - and give him a terrific platform with which to push back into the US art world too.

Martin is financially right on the line with the four plinths project. The gallery is helping him by waiving commissions on a suite of paintings, and he's putting all the proceeds from these sales into the project - a huge gesture of commitment on his part when he's also raising a young family. But even with these sales, he's coming up short. He is looking for WCC to back him to make the biggest and most visible work of his career, work that will reach an enormous audience in what I think is a gesture of real generosity to Wellington.

The work is super exciting, and with the support of the Public Art Fund I think he stands to knock this next act of his already fantastic career right out of the park.

Starkwhite backs this project without reservation and I urge you to give his application your most favourable consideration.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'D' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

Dominic Feuchs
Owner/director



wellington sculpture trust

for a city of sculpture

Wellington City Council
PO Box 2199
Wellington 6140
NEW ZEALAND

4 August 2025

To the Public Art Panel

As Chair of the Wellington Sculpture Trust I am delighted to provide a letter of support for Martin Basher's application for the Public Art Fund.

In February 2026, Martin will be the 10th commissioned artist to exhibit on the Sculpture Trust's Collin Post 4 Plinths. The Plinths are one of the trust's premiere exhibiting platforms: four large Basalt cubes located on the forecourt between Te Papa and Circa Theatre. Based on visitor data from Te Papa, the Plinths will generate in excess of 1.2 Million impressions yearly, and this does *not* factor casual traffic across the plaza nor the thousands of people who use the waterfront daily. The plinths are arguably one of the most-viewed art locations in country. Over the two years Martin's work will be on view, we can expect it will have more than 3M views.

Martin has proposed work that meets the scale and visibility of this location head-on. He will present 'Big Flowers for a Wild City' - four monumental, pop-y flower arrangements standing over 8m above the ground, featuring neon flowers and stems abstracted into silhouettes of rods and circles. We are tremendously excited about Martin's project. Its our largest and brightest plinth commission to date - and a major statement of confidence and joy for the city at a time where Wellington is really doing it tough. Martin's sculptures are going to be visible right across the waterfront and we expect they are going to make a huge splash for the city. Its a deeply generous gesture.

The Collin Post Commission comes with a fixed, \$50,000 fee. We at the Sculpture Trust are not able to contribute additional funds to the project. Martin has been transparent that his work is going to cost significantly more than this - we understand that the project will cost more than \$100,000 to produce - without factoring the unfathomable amount of time Martin is contributing over the 18 months its taking to make. He's fundraising madly. That said, the Wellington Sculpture Trust thinks art of this scale and dynamism is exactly what New Zealand needs, so we are supporting Martins application to the full. We entreat the Council to lend its support!

To this end, in terms of dollar value per view, this is a project with unsurpassed economy. Assuming 3M people see the work, \$40,000 invested results in an impression cost of something like 1.2 cents per view. Further, the plinth viewership represents a hugely broad swath of people from every section of NZ society, along with a huge number of international visitors. Te Papa reports almost half of visitors are from abroad. Meanwhile a full quarter of NZ attendees are under 25, and 39% of domestic attendees identify as Maōri, Pacifica, and non-Pakeha. We argue that these figures make the plinths an utterly unique point of access for New Zealanders (and international visitors), to engage with the best of New Zealand art.

Martin is coming at this work with an incredible level of commitment and ambition. He's on a real career upswing and we feel very fortunate to have an artist of his caliber returning to New Zealand. We cant wait to have his flowers on the plinths, and lend our support to this application without reserve!

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Black', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jane Black,
Chair
Wellington Sculpture Trust

August 3, 2025

The Public Art Panel,
Wellington City Council
PO Box 2199
Wellington 6140
New Zealand

To the WCC Public Art Review Panel,

I'm Chris Wiley, an artist, curator and writer, based between New York City and Woodstock, NY. I have exhibited at spaces including at Marian Goodman, Paris, MoMA PS1, New York, Hauser and Wirth, New York, and MoCCA, Toronto. I am a contributing editor to Frieze Magazine and regular writer on art for The New Yorker. I've also contributed to Kaleidoscope Magazine, Mousse Magazine, Art in America and ArtForum, among others. As curator, I worked on numerous exhibitions at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, was an assistant curator on the 8th Gwangju Biennial, and served as a curatorial advisor and head catalog writer for "The Encyclopedic Palace" at the 55th Venice Biennale.

I have known Martin for around 15 years. We've had many studio visits and talks, held a public conversation to coincide with a project he mounted with Anat Ebgi Gallery for the New York Armory Art Fair, and since Covid we've have had a robust, near-daily exchange of research and ideas on WhatsApp. Even though we've sadly lost Martin to New Zealand for now, we still manage to talk shop whenever we are in the same location, which happens most years.

I am lending my support here for Martin's upcoming sculptures on the four plinths. This is his biggest, most ambitious and undoubtably most expensive work to date, and he's throwing everything at the project. Its toe-curling to hear how much money he needs to raise, but the concept is fantastic, and its work that couldn't be more appropriate for its location. Support for his work would be money exceptionally well spent by Wellington City Council.

Martin has a fantastic practice. His thinking is rich and his work is compelling. He blends assured technical chops with a level of informational restraint that I love; his work has a leanness and ambiguity that lends well to his engagement with late capitalism and the anthropocene. But thats not to suggest his work isn't beautiful - because it certainly is - I mean that he's an artist who deftly negotiates the line between informational rigor and visual pleasure.

Parsed through the frame of his sculptural environments, with their consumer objects and retail display armatures, and more recently with his semi-natural, or perhaps more accurately post-natural tree and flower sculptures, Martin's work talks about nature and longing and beauty, escape and leisure, but does so with a measure of rage and criticality entirely appropriate for these uncertain times. 'Enjoy this beautiful tree', he seems to say, never mind that the tree is metal, and covered in epoxy paint, and sited in a gallery where there once was a real forest. 'Enjoy this photo-real picture of a tropical beach', just try to forget the beach is painted from an A.I. render thats been generated by computers running on coal power, helping real beaches get slowly drowned by seal level rise.

This said, Martins work hits on multiple levels, and there is just so much joy and optimism in this project as well. The giant vases of flowers he's making for the Four Plinths are going to be absolute bangers - work for everyone to get their Instagram selfies with. No shame in that!

Martin is running at full steam at the moment. He's making bold moves and fantastic work, and even though he's NZ based, I expect him to come charging back into the New York scene pretty soon. But more pointedly for your review, he's making his best work for Wellington right now - work that is resonant with kids and a general public while being conversant with globally sculptural themes as well. I think this project will find an international audience as well as a huge local one.

His application comes with my total support!

My very best

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Wiley', with a stylized, flowing script.

Chris Wiley,
Woodstock New York