

# Making art in the middle of Antarctica

by Owen Hembray

If you have ever wanted to visit Antarctica but have never been able to afford the bus fare then Polar Projects, a new Auckland art exhibition, will send a shiver down your spine.

Philip Dadson created the exhibition following a visit to the southern continent last year, which he says, was extraordinary from start to finish.

In 2003 he was accepted for the Artists to Antarctica Programme and an ambition born more than 30 years earlier was realised.

The requirement to wear full Antarctic gear for the flight from Christchurch airport to Scott Base made for a hot and sweaty journey.

"If the plane goes down, at least you'd be dressed properly for the occasion," Dadson says.

Following arrival at Scott Base, the first priority was survival training.

This included building a snow cave to survive the harsh environment.

With the relative comfort and safety of Scott Base behind him, he flew 160km to spend a week camping with scientists in the Taylor and Garwood valleys — collectively known as the Dry Valleys.

The receding glaciers in the Dry Valleys are leaving behind an expanse of rocks unique in Antarctica, including granite, basalt and quartz.

Here Dadson recorded more than 10 hours of video and sound in temperatures ranging from as cold as minus 12deg during the day, to minus 20deg at night.

There are no trees or flowers. There are no animals except for the visiting humans. The only sound to be heard is the wind and the movement of the glacier. Yet for Dadson it was a mystical world.

"I nicknamed this place the Garden of the Gods because each stone seemed to have an aura about it," he says.

The sun never went down, making sleep difficult. Yet ironically, the best light for filming was between 11pm and 5am.

Dadson would leave his tent and the sleeping scientists to shoot footage of the rocky landscape.

"They thought I was crazy, hoofing around recording stuff."

Randomly moving across the terrain, he used wide-angle shots to capture the dramatic barren landscape, and close-ups showing intricately-shaped stones carved by the moving glacier.

"I really like to use the camera as if it is an extension of the body."

At the exhibition, visitors watch Dadson's journey across the stone fields, entitled Stone Map, on large plasma screens while listening to his sound recordings.

The effect is dramatic. The creaking glacier, and occasional

**"I really like to use the camera as if it is an extension of the body."**

powerful crack that reports across the valley, punctuate the apparently lifeless and unearthly landscape.

Mixed behind this is music from one of Dadson's invented instruments — a barrel-string zither played by the blades of a rotating fan. The strange music heightens the feeling of isolation of this strange world.

Rock Records is a collection of rubbings of rock surfaces onto discs normally used by scientists to record ozone depletion. Displayed along the wall of the gallery, they are like a collection of colourfully patterned CDs linking the different parts of the exhibition.

In a large dark room, a projector plays Echo-Logo — an audiovisual artwork filmed in front of the 30-metre high Canada



ANTARCTIC ART: A still from Echo-Logo. Scientists in front of the 30 metre high Canada Glacier in the Taylor Valley.

Glacier in the Taylor Valley.

The scientists from Dadson's camp lope from rock to rock across the valley floor, taking care not to step on algae that lives in slush between the rocks — one of the only life forms to gain a hold.

A carelessly placed boot can destroy hundreds of years of growth.

Every four steps, they bang together two stones or let out an animal yell like a group of approaching cavemen. The sound, so foreign to this environment, echoes off the glacier towering above their heads.

Standing in the enclosed darkened room, even the handful of people watching somehow feels like an intrusion on this strange, empty and intriguing landscape.

Dadson's Polar Projects has an appealing simplicity that mirrors the uncomplicated nature of the place he visited, which, to him, felt like being in a

temple.

Life-changing, magical, spiritual. These are some of the words Dadson uses to describe his trip. Would he go again? Yes, most definitely, though maybe not for the food.

"Piping hot to stone-cold in 30 seconds. You basically quaffed like a dog," he says laughing.

It can only be regretted there was not a television documentary crew with him to film his extraordinary journey.

Philip Dadson won the NZ Arts Foundation Laureate Award in 2001. He has been involved in video and sonic art since the late 1960s. In 1974 he founded From Scratch, a performance group that plays instruments he invented. He now lectures in time-based arts at the University of Auckland.

The free exhibition runs at Gus Fisher Gallery on Shortland St until November 13 and at the Starkwhite Gallery on K Rd until October 23.



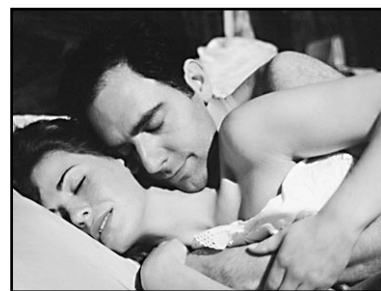
ARTIST: Phil Dadson in front of the sand dunes in Garwood Valley.

PHOTO: ASHLEY SPARROW

# A taste of Italy hits New Zealand cinemas



'La Finestra di Fronte'  
*Facing Windows*  
2003 Drama  
Director: Ferzan Ozpetek



'Il Cuore Altrove'  
*The Heart Elsewhere*  
2003 Drama  
Director: Pupi Avati



'La Dolce Vita'  
*The Good Life*  
1960 Drama  
Director: Federico Fellini



'Non ti Muovere'  
*Don't Move*  
2004 Drama  
Director: Sergio Castellito



8½: *The Lost Ending*  
2003 Documentary  
Director: Mario Sesti

by Jo Lewis

The 2004 Italian Film Festival started with something new this year — two lecture evenings by Auckland University Italian Studies lecturer, Dr Bernadette Luciano.

This is the ninth time the festival has been held in New Zealand, bringing classic Italian cinema to New Zealand screens.

Festival director Tony Lambert says this is the first time they have included lecture evenings at the festival but that they are the result of people having a considerable interest in Italy, Italian film and Italian history.

The festival will be held at the Rialto cinema in Newmarket

and Bridgeway cinema in Northcote in Auckland from October 6 — 20. It will then screen in Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Nelson and Hamilton.

Lambert says this year he has the "dream team of cinemas" for the festival.

It has been held at the Berkeley Cinemas for the past three years.

Lambert says in previous years he has struggled to bring classic Italian films to New Zealand. But this year is looking to be the "best year yet" as more films are being screened than ever before.

This is the third time Lambert has organised the festival and he hopes to attract large

audiences. He says a large number of people booked tickets for the festival before it started in Auckland.

The lecture evenings were held on October 7 — 8 before the screening of *Agata and the Storm* by Italian filmmaker Silvio Soldini — a filmmaker Luciano has a "particular affinity with" as she is writing a book about him.

"The lectures will give people a better understanding of Italian film and where it is going," says Lambert.

Luciano says she provided an overview of Italian cinema in the lectures as well as giving people some cultural understanding of the films.

"I tried to put the films that

are in this festival into the context of Italian cinema," says Luciano.

Luciano says the lectures were well-attended and received a lot of positive feedback, which could lead them to do something similar next year.

"They're nice for people who don't know anything about Italian film," she says.

Luciano says the films at the festival deal with new issues affecting Italy as well as historical and political issues in Italy.

"Crisis" was the theme of her lectures. She says this is because it has been a crisis getting Italian film into New Zealand and many of the issues in the films revolve around crisis.

In previous years the festival has struggled to bring the best of Italian cinema to New Zealand.

But Lambert says he has established good relationships with Italian film distributors and it will now be a lot easier securing the films for future festivals.

Luciano will present one more lecture during the festival at the Paramount Theatre in Wellington on October 21.

Films at this year's festival include *La Dolce Vita*, *The Heart Elsewhere (Il Cuore Altrove)*, *Facing Windows (La Finestra di Fronte)*, *A Journey Called Love (Un Viaggio Chiamato Amore)*, *Don't Move (Non ti Muovere)* 8½: *The Lost Ending*, and several more.