

# THE PENGUIN STORY

## *The concept*

This started as an idea to semi mass produce a garden sculpture along the lines of a traditional garden gnome but a little more unique and funky. There were going to be 50 prototypes called Face Value Explorers made with individually stamped and numbered ceramic tile bases starting with number 50 running up to 100.

These prototypes would be used to develop the Standard New Zealand Model Original Lawn Penguin (SNZM) which would be sold from the Whakatiwai studio or pre paid and freighted.

The prototypes had individually stamped tile bases with the first penguin being number 50 which would retail for \$50, number 70 would retail for \$70 and so on. Hence the name Face Value Explorer

Sales of these early FVEs would help to defray development costs of the SNZM. Another purpose of the incremental increase in price was to find what would be a realistic and acceptable price for a basic model. Once I knew what paint finish and what price would work production of the Standard New Zealand model was to start. The FVE model would become an individual reasonably priced sculptural art work with it's own unique paint finish, rather than a funky black and white gnome type lawn sculpture.



Early prototype SNZMs about to leave the Penguin Studio Whakatiwai Xmas 2014

### ***Things were looking good***

After many moulds being made, many penguins being poured, many concrete recipes, many paint jobs, a final shape and paint job was established for the SNZM. The kiln was firing predictably, the SNZM was coming on stream, the workshop was getting tidy, it was close to paradise for me.

### ***Things were very busy and efficient.***

One evening I thought I would pick up some phoenix palm fronds off the lawn and burn them in the fire place in the workshop.

This was something I had done many times before, the workshop floor was concrete, the chimney had been worked on to make it draw efficiently.

I was so confident of the situation that I left the fire to it and started doing work in the studio which was some distance from the workshop.

A visitor arrived maybe 10 minutes later, going to meet him I returned to the workshop to discover an interior wall near the fireplace was on fire with flames running up it and into the ceiling. There was no fire extinguisher or high pressure hose either of which may have controlled the blaze. The whole scenario rapidly turned into an ever increasing catastrophe.

To cut a long story short the workshop, all my tools and equipment, resources that I had been collecting, all my books and most of my clothes that I had temporarily put in the workshop so that I could clean out my living unit were totally destroyed and my co tenants living space severely damaged along with all their possessions.

I think that night was one of the worst experiences that I have endured.

Thankfully everybody (except me) had total insurance cover.



### **Workshop after fire.**

The workshop contained 2 large LPG cylinders. One exploded and the other one vented into the workshop turning it into a kiln. The rear wall with chimney is still standing, as is a portion of the wall next to my neighbours, otherwise the workshop and all it contained was totally obliterated.



## ***Plan H***

With the kiln being destroyed in the fire, the firing of the tile bases was contracted out.

Different paint jobs were done on existing FVE prototypes and these and some of my paintings were shown to Wendy Harsant at Northart Gallery.

An exhibition was arranged and \$150 was thought to be about the right price for these collectable, handmade, hand painted, individual sculptures.

I then started making a new mould and new tile bases so that new penguins could be made to give me enough FVEs for the show.

## ***Current Overview***

The show was not very successful but certainly provide an impetus for production. Most FVEs have since been sold from the studio, some replacements made, and more SMNZ prototypes produced which have now turned into Special New Zealand Models (not Standard New Zealand Models) as they were used as special presents or tailored for special client needs.

The role of a standard semi mass produced lawn penguin is now carried by the OLPCO Harbinger limited edition range.

These have been sold from retail outlets and from the studio.

This is the second OLPCO Model.

The first was the XX very successfully introduced at New Zealand Sculpture on the Shore Exhibition November 2016. They were a limited edition run of 99 at \$99 each.

These were completely sold out.

Sales of Harbingers have been steady since then some 60 or so being sold.

Another series of OLPCO XX Penguins have been exhibited and sold at NZ Sculpture on the Shore in 2018.

There is currently 20 or so Penguins in stock at the Studio which are being refurbished and documented.

Prices range from \$100 to \$200