

# AXIOM

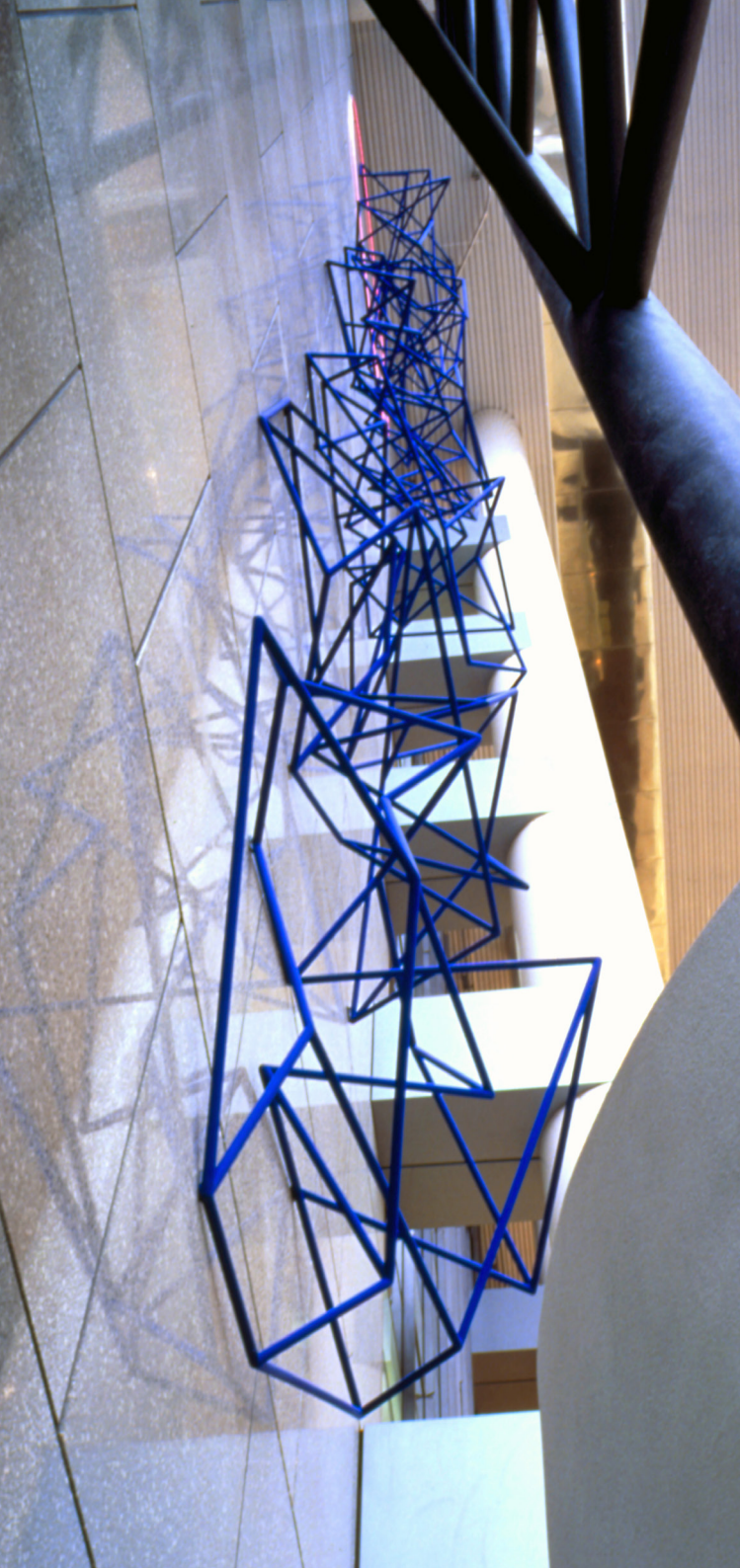
Robert Owen

Axiom was commissioned for the atrium of the New Commonwealth Law Courts, Melbourne in 1999. Robert Owen explores the symbolism of geometric shapes, numbers and colours in the creation of a work as a metaphor for the meaning and application of Law. The word axiom means 'self-evident truth; established principle; maxim; rule; law'. In designing this sculpture, Owen has sought to emphasise 'clarity, purity of form and truth, reflecting our Australian identity based upon trust, mutual respect and equality.

The work's sequence of geometric structures majestically ascends the wall as a metaphoric expression of transformation and change. Surrounding the uppermost structure is a perfect circle of light that at night imperceptibly changes throughout the seven colours of the spectrum; the circle represents unity and wholeness; the changing colours suggest difference and renewal. Together they are a symbolic celebration of 'the unity and diversity of the courts'.

Owen devised these elegant, geometric and mathematically complex shapes with the help of a computer. Two-dimensional drawings were randomly configured from a complex Platonic form, the three dimensional objects were then constructed in space from the two-dimensional drawings. He has painted them a deep ultramarine blue and in the symbolic dictionary, Blue is the colour that represents truth, revelation, wisdom, loyalty, fidelity and constancy. Each of the seven sculptural forms were devised from a dodecahedron – an object with twelve sides in which each side is shaped according to the five-sided geometry of a pentagon. These seven forms are symbolic in several ways: seven is the number of the universe and the macrocosm and represents completeness and totality; five, is emblematic of Man or humanity, as seen in the well-known Renaissance image of a man forming the shape of a pentagon with his outstretched arms and legs; twelve symbolises cosmic order and the annual cycle, as indicated by the twelve months of the year.

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In Axiom, Owen explores qualities of both constancy and change making a play between sameness and difference. Each of the seven forms shares the same basic structure (twenty nodal points and thirty edges), but each is quite unique. Lined up vertically, their shapes appear to transform and flow one into another, suggesting a continuum. Owen attributes this sequential transformation to something he calls 'cybernetic serendipity' – a process based in logic but also affected by intuition and play.

Axiom resembles a series of drawings in space; it is a work comprised entirely of edges – planar surfaces between the lines are implied, but not actually there. The work appears to be floating, its apparent weightlessness contradicting its actual physical sturdiness. Owen describes it as 'on the boundary of idea and form'. The vivid, ultramarine blue pigment heightens the poetic and metaphysical resonance of the work for blue is: 'the colour of the Void, primordial simplicity and infinite space which, being empty, can contain everything'.

In Laws of Form, a major foundation for cybernetic thinking, G. Spencer-Brown writes how our understanding of the universe comes 'not from discovering its present appearance, but in remembering what we originally did to bring it about'. Axiom's symbolic and abstract shapes model a process of philosophical inquiry and provide us with a visual metaphor for a process of transformation and change that is both transparent and complex.

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Commonwealth Law Courts

Photography by John Gollings