

"We had fun on the Inflatable Kingdom. There were handles you could hold onto. I went way under the wading pool. And we had a tremendous lovely time!"

-Miriam Palmer (four years old)

If Marcia Huyer gave her sculpture a name, I'm not sure I ever knew it. From the moment my daughter Miriam climbed on, it became known as "The Inflatable Kingdom." Or rather, "My Inflatable Kingdom," as in "loooooove My Inflatable Kingdom" and "My Inflatable Kingdom in SO super!" An amazing array of inflatable toys held together by copious amounts of waterproof glue became, for one quiet Saturday morning, a magical domain of play. It had its creaturely qualities-a serpent-like spiraling tail leading to a towering neck of multi-coloured rings- but its large scale allowed people to clamber on, over and through the sculpture. The children grappling with the outsized dimensions became Lilliputians navigating the daunting body of Gulliver, as persistent and tenacious as fleas on the back of a dog. A giant creature, it had outgrown itself to become a place, a space, a kingdom. Did the kingdom consist of the contained air inside the giant creature? Or the gaps between the many loops and twirls? Was it the complex curved surfaces of its many hollow rings? Huyer had inflated this sculpture beyond the everyday, creating a toy so enormous it was no longer a toy, but rather an imaginary territory over which some lucky child might reign. But can a kingdom have more than one king or queen? There were obvious moments of competition and rivalry between the children as they vied to ride the tail or to steer the precarious creature around the confines of the wading pool. After a few accidental groundings on the rough surface of the pool's edge, however, it became apparent that teamwork would be required to avoid punctures. The kingdom would not be a kingdom once deflated. After a few hours of playing in the icy waters of the wading pool-and surviving several accidental dunkings-it was time for us to move on. The breeze buffeted the creature from one side of the pool to the other. As we walked down the laneway beside the 519 Church Street Community Centre, and the wading pool, our Inflatable Kingdom receded from view, but not from memory.

-Juliet Palmer

published in wade 2006 catalogue / Sally McKay, Christie Pearson, Sandra Rechico, eds