

brisbane**news**

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Flowing tribute ... *Confluence*, by Daniel Templeman, marks the entrance to the new Brisbane Magistrates Court

photographs: richard waugh

art of the city

A waste of money or inspirational works of creative genius? When it comes to public art, everyone has an opinion. Phil Brown looks at the works that are decorating our city

When three German garbage collectors recently dismantled and incinerated a public artwork in Frankfurt it caused quite a stir. They trashed *Nicht Innen Sondern Aussen – Nicht Drinnen Sondern Draussen (Not Interior But Exterior – Not Inside But Outside)*, part of a series of installations by artist Michael Beutler. Made of moulded and cut plastic, the discarded work was 10m long and 2.5m high – hard to mistake for litter and, for their sins, the offending garbage men now have to attend an art appreciation course to curb their philistine ways.

The incident is as instructive as it is amusing, and demonstrates the ambivalence, even hostility, with which some people approach public art.

In Brisbane, where public art is sprouting like mushrooms after rain, not everyone is impressed. The garbos haven't thrown any stuff out by mistake yet, but there have been dismantlings. A bus shelter at New Farm, for example, which featured a sculpture called *Merthyr Road Ferry* by artist Peter Dwyer on its roof – the target of constant complaints on aesthetic and safety grounds – was eventually "decommissioned" in 2000; put into storage, rather than binned.

Another is shortly to go, according to Deputy Lord Mayor and artist David Hinchliffe. Wendy Mills' popular glass and stainless-steel sculpture *On this Auspicious Occasion*, a cross between a dining table and a fountain, will be removed from the Queen Street Mall soon.

"It's being removed because there have been repeated incidents with vandals damaging the glass table top, along with ongoing and costly repairs to the fountain's water pump and tiles,"

David says. He adds it will probably be replaced by "another sculpture of seats and shade trees".

So, as the German refuse collectors and Brisbane vandals prove, not everyone loves public art, but the populace is coming around, insists David. He is the man behind Artforce, one of Brisbane's most popular and prolific public art projects – the painting of more than 700 traffic signal boxes by local artists, including David.

"It's one of the most successful public art projects in the world," he says. "It has been imitated by London, and other councils around Australia."

Mind you, not everyone was thrilled with the idea when he started the project in 1999.

"I was in Spring Hill one night, painting away in my overalls, and this elderly woman – who must have thought I was defacing public property – came up to me and said: 'You're an absolute disgrace ... and at your age.'"

But Brisbane people have slowly grown accustomed to the public art that now features in suburban centres and is most prolific around the inner city and CBD.

The Queensland Government's Art Built-In Policy, which came into effect on July 1, 1999, commits two per cent of government building project costs towards the integration of art and design by Queensland artists.

So far, about \$9.7 million has been spent on public art statewide, with \$7 million in Brisbane and a further \$4.6 million's worth under commission now for the city.

Brisbane City Council is less ambitious, but strongly encourages spending of 0.25 per cent of



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Watch this space ... from above left, artist and lecturer Sebastian Di Mauro with his sculpture *Drift*; Queensland Arts Minister Anna Bligh with the bronze statue of Queen Victoria; discarded metal makes for an indestructible national icon in *Kangaroos on George Street*

building budgets on art. For example, the developers of the Brisbane Square Project – ABN Amro and contractor Baulderstone Hornibrook – are negotiating with Brisbane artist Donna Marcus on a major work for the \$200 million building on the former Tritons site, bounded by North Quay, George and Adelaide streets.

The temple to public art must be the new Brisbane Magistrates Court on the corner of George and Turbot streets. It boasts Queensland's largest public art commission for a single building, with \$1.7 million worth of work by 14 artists, including Judy Watson (one of her murals covers one wall of the foyer), Barbara Heath, Bruce Reynolds and Fiona Foley, among others.

The largest and most noticeable of the works is a vast aluminium and concrete sculpture, called *Confluence*, a \$195,000 commission by 30-year-old Brisbane artist Daniel Templeman. This snake-like work also suggests the flowing river nearby, among other things, although to local skateboarders who have already defaced the artwork, it's a ramp for their hijinks.

Queensland Arts Minister Anna Bligh says the proliferation of public art proves that Brisbane is on the move as a city.

"Brisbane is emerging as a cosmopolitan metropolis, and our public art reflects that," Anna says. "It's inevitable that people will have different views about the works, but even when there's controversy about the work, that's a good thing."

"I visited Barcelona last year, and when I was looking around that wonderful city I thought it must have been controversial when the architect and designer Gaudi was doing his public work

at the beginning of the century, but now it's part of what makes Barcelona so attractive.

"I'm unconcerned about any controversy about public art because it simply means that people are talking about it. A city that has cab drivers arguing with people about the art in a city, is a city that's fun to live in."

Not that public art is a new thing. One of the minister's favourite works is Thomas Brock's bronze statue of Queen Victoria, completed in 1906, which presides at Queens Gardens between George, Elizabeth and William streets.

There is some fine historical and commemorative public art in the city, notably the sculptural reliefs by Daphne Mayo on the facade of City Hall and the walls of Anzac Square. But a modern renaissance of public art began when World Expo 88 came to town. Works commissioned for the South Bank site included several hundred fibreglass figures, some of which remain in the city.

Other Expo 88 works include the otherworldly bronze sculptures of Arnaldo Pomodoro (Italian for "Arnie Tomato", as David Hinchliffe is fond of pointing out) that grace King George Square. Then-lord mayor Sallyanne Atkinson forked out \$1.3 million for these works, collectively known as *Forme del Mito*, which are loved by some, scoffed at by others, and roosted on by pigeons.

The Goss government started the recent push for more public art. The Kangaroo Point Cliffs boardwalk project, finally completed in 1996 at a cost of \$223,000 – peanuts in comparison with

CONTINUED PAGE 8 ►

WORKS TO WATCH

Offshoot, by Clement Meadmore (1985), Queensland Art Gallery forecourt, \$192,400: Proof there was life and expensive public art before World Expo 88, this large steel sculpture was done in the mid '80s.

Kangaroos on George Street, by Christopher Trotter (1998), \$35,000: The artist used recycled machinery parts to make these cute roos.

Watermark, by Richard Tipping (2000), Brisbane Powerhouse, \$54,000: This red metal sculpture by the river spells "flood" and creates a submerged effect.

No Small Thing, by Katrina Steel (2002), Nundah, \$53,000: These granite sculptures resemble clothes pegs and celebrate pioneering spirit, domestic work and women.

Veil, by Jill Kinnear (2002), Suncorp Stadium, \$218,539: The statue of Wally Lewis may be the most famous public artwork at Suncorp

Stadium, but Jill Kinnear's *Veil* "clothes" more than 330sq m of a corner of the building with 96 screen-printed glass panels.

Cicada, by John Coleman (2004), Melbourne St busway, South Bank, \$100,100: This giant steel and glass cicada, below, lights up at night and is teamed with a cicada soundtrack.

Unclassified Flowering Organism or UFO, by Luke Roberts (2004), Boundary St, West End, \$135,000: This controversial "organic curvilinear sculpture" hovers a few metres off the ground at the intersection of Melbourne and Boundary streets.

Felix, by Terry Summers (2004), corner Mary and Felix streets, city, \$100,000: At 75, Terry Summers is almost certainly the oldest artist in Brisbane dabbling in public art. His 3.55m cast aluminium figure was commissioned by CitiMark Properties for the Felix Apartments.



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art of the city

today's budgets – was the first major integrated public art scheme and features works by Mona Ryder, Ron Hurley, Jandy Pannell, Christopher Trotter and John Coleman, whose sculpture *Sunflower* is perhaps the most memorable piece.

Under former Queensland arts minister Matt Foley, a stream of other projects followed, including 111 George St (with \$250,000 worth of public art), the Roma Street Parkland (with \$1.44 million worth), and more recently the Southeast Busway (with \$208,996 for two works, *Growth* and *Rhythm*, by Toowoomba artist Jill Kinnear).

Millions of dollars are now spent on public art, something that has prompted some to claim that public art is a gravy train for artists. If that is the case, it's a train that has been a long time coming, according to John Stafford, executive manager of the Public Art Agency for Arts Queensland.

A former artist, he says his colleagues had a very lean time of it before public art came along.

"There has always been a cash-flow problem for artists," he says. "It's a long time between exhibitions and it's hard to make ends meet sometimes, but public art is really contributing to their income and professionalism."

"Now you can actually find artists who are in their 30s and buying real estate, something they probably never thought they'd be able to do."

The mindset that artists shouldn't be making money is fading, says John, who has studied public art via a Churchill Fellowship in 2003 and says our city now compares well "on a pro rata basis" with metropolises like New York.

One of the best known of the local public arts push is Sebastian Di Mauro, creator of what is arguably the city's best-known public art work – the giant aluminium cast hands (one with a finger extending skywards) on Eagle St. It is entitled *Chat*, but is now commonly known as "the Hopoate", a nickname that refers to rugby league player John Hopoate's infamous digital niggling of other players some years ago. It's thought local cabbies first dubbed the \$75,000 work "the Hopoate" and nowadays even Anna Bligh lets the nickname slip in conversation.

Sebastian, also the creator of the \$400,060 sculpture *Drift*, outside 33 Charlotte St, and the \$24,286 wall piece *Blur Between*, an artwork made of wetsuit material in the new Magistrates Court building, is anything but offended.

"The exciting thing about public art is that it evokes an individual response and people are allowed to read it as they like. I mean, not everyone likes the *Mona Lisa* and yet it's an icon. And as for *Chat*, well, if cab drivers are talking about it... what more could an artist want?"

YOUR SAY



PLACE: outside the Brisbane Magistrates Court, city.
QUESTIONS: What do you think of Daniel Templeman's *Confluence*? Should taxpayers' money be spent on public art?

1. Leith MacMillan, Kangaroo Point: I hadn't noticed it – but it looks pretty good. Generally, I am aware of public art and I'm in favour of spending public money on it because art does beautify an area. *Confluence* looks like waves in a stormy ocean and that's probably appropriate for the building because things can be a bit tumultuous inside. My favourite piece of public art is the hands (*Chat*) on Eagle St, and I love the works around the Kangaroo Point cliffs.

2. Chris Ireland, Ipswich: It makes a wave motion obviously – building up and up – and I guess that's what's happening to

Brisbane really. As for whether public money should be spent on it, well, that's an interesting question. It's good because it beautifies the city and takes the edge off the harshness, but I can't say I notice public art too much.

3. Nadine Van-Heer, Kippa-Ring: It's huge, you can't miss it – I guess it symbolises the Brisbane River? It's a shame about all the scuffmarks from the skateboarders, though. It's OK for public money to be spent on art. There's not enough art around actually. Without art, cities have no aesthetic value. The *Kangaroos on George Street* is my favourite artwork.

We invite you to share your thoughts on public art in Brisbane. What's your favourite piece, and do you think it's money well spent? Email us at letters@brisbanenews.com.au

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