

Place Citation HOXX Ceramic Mural, 4 Mair Street BENALLA

Address	4 Mair Street, BENALLA		
Heritage Overlay	<i>HO number to be allocated</i>		
Heritage Overlay Map <i>(proposed)</i>			
Designer/s	Community Design managed by Judy Lorraine	Dates	2010
Significance	Local	Builder/s	Gordon Jarvis Others
		Survey Date	March 2024



Ceramic Mural – showing decorated paving



Mural

Assessment against criteria

The following analysis is based on Victorian Government Planning Practice Note 1: Applying the Heritage Overlay (August 2018).

Criterion A: Importance to the course or pattern of our cultural or natural history (historical significance).

Criterion B: Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history (rarity).

Criterion C: Potential to yield information that will contribute to understanding our cultural or natural history (research potential).

Criterion D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments (representativeness).

Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics (aesthetic significance).

Criterion F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period (technical significance).

Criterion G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions (social significance).

Criterion H: Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history (associative significance).

Statement of Significance

What is Significant?

The ceramic mural and surrounding open grassed areas as found at Lake Benalla are significant.

Significant elements includes, but is not confined to:

- the original form, fabric and scale of the ceramic mural
- the grass setting surrounding the ceramic mural located on the bank of Lake Benalla

How is it Significant?

The mural is of local historical and aesthetic heritage significance to the Benalla Shire.

Why is it Significant?

The ceramic mural is historically significant as it provides evidence of an important community and civic project that was undertaken over a number of years. Few substantive works of art in Australia, since European settlement, have sustained a period of creation running for almost thirty years. Criterion A

The ceramic mural is significant for its rarity as a public art feature that was driven and made by community and artists. Criterion B

The ceramic mural is of aesthetic significance as it is a landmark public art work located in a prominent site on the banks of Lake Benalla. It is of aesthetic significance for its scale and diversity of expression. This is found in the contrast in form and colour with a counterbalance of deep terracotta and turquoise colours and its visual and physical relationship with the open grassed areas that surround the structure. Criterion E

The Benalla Ceramic Mural has an association with the original inhabitants of this land as pre European times this land was used as a corroboree ground and gathering place, and as such, the sculpture forms part of an on-going and ancient dialogue between Lake Benalla, its inhabitants and visitors, past and present. Criterion H

The Mural is of social significance as it testifies to the profound optimism, goodwill and constancy of Benalla's creative community as the project took more than thirty years to complete. The high level of community participation means that a large number of individuals and families have a personal connection to the Mural. Criterion G

Additional Controls

External paint controls apply	Yes
Internal alteration controls apply	Yes
Tree controls apply	No
Outbuildings or fences not exempt under Clause 43.01-4	No
Included on the Victorian Heritage Register under the Heritage Act 2017	No
Prohibited uses permitted	No
Aboriginal heritage place	No
Solar energy system controls apply	Yes

Place History

In General

The following history was produced by historian Dr Jacqueline Durrant.

The Benalla Ceramic Mural was first conceived in 1983 as a genuinely inclusive community art project, combining local creative efforts with the work of nationally renowned artists, and reflecting local, national

and international themes.¹ It was completed in 2010. It has been described by artist Ivan Durrant as ‘a monument to almost thirty years of dedication by a feast of artists, sculptors, potters and gifted Benalla art lovers – a true marvel.’²

The Mural is complex work of ceramic sculpture, built onto a substructure structure of brick, concrete and steel. Its multi-levelled architectural plan is based on two conjoined circles, ten metre in diameter (one of which is divided into a yin/yang pattern), with the entire structure designed to look as if it is emerging organically from the slope of the riverbank.

The Mural has a number of identified architectural components, mainly comprising a Colonnade (which wraps around the bottom of the ‘Upper Terrace’), sheltering a number of seats, and topped with a Frieze; above which sits an Upper terrace facing Lake Benalla. One end the Colonnade leads to a sheltered Winter Courtyard (‘the lower terrace’), with the opposite end of the Colonnade leading to a semi-enclosed Greco-Roman amphitheatre (the ‘Arena’) with in-built seating. Trailing off from the amphitheatre towards the bridge is the ‘Bridge Wall’.

The Mural is designed so that ‘everywhere one looks’ there are ‘intriguing details’ and ‘expansive views.’³

The negative space around the Mural in the form of lawn is also integral to its design. The lawn around the Mural, combined with its organic form, suggests that the entire structure is actually emerging from the ground, almost as a living entity. In addition, the gently sloping green lawns around it provide a necessary contrast in form and colour to counterbalance the deep terracotta and turquoise colours, and the overall complexity of the design. As David W. Moore has explained, ‘the resting simplicity of the lawns balance the Mural... it needs room to breathe.’⁴

The Mural as a community project

The Mural project was initiated in 1983 by the Executive Officer of the Benalla Forum Adult Education Centre⁵ Michael Brown; other key organisers being local architect David N. Moore, Svetlana Karovich, then director of the Benalla Art Gallery, and local art teacher David W. Moore.⁶ They planned for a ‘true community project’ in which everyone in Benalla, no matter what their skill levels were, would be invited to be involved. After much community consultation, a design brief was prepared,⁷ and Council made land available by Benalla.

The project conveners were ‘were looking for something permanent; more than a painted mural’,⁸ and it was decided that the Mural would be ceramic: ceramics was an established craft already practiced in the community, and facilities such as kilns already existed. The Benalla Art Gallery already had a ceramics

¹ Joan Jensen and David W Moore, *Benalla Ceramic Mural, A Short History*, Benalla, 2013, p.7

² *ibid.* p.1.

³ *ibid.* p.12.

⁴ pers. comm. David W. Moore to Jacqui Durrant, 15 April, 2024.

⁵ This is now ‘The Centre’.

⁶ Joan Jensen and David W Moore, *op cit.*, p.7. Also on the first Mural Committee were Margaret Johnson, Judith Inkster, Robin Matthews, Kate McCrae, and Councillor Ted Bennison, who all contributed to the development of the plan and promoted the project in the community.

⁷ Joan Jensen and David W Moore, *op cit.*, p.7

⁸ pers. comm. David W. Moore to Jacqui Durrant, 15 April, 2024.

workshop, there was a strong Broken River Potters group, and the Benalla Technical School also had 'a really good ceramics department'.⁹

In the community consultation that followed, it was apparent that people wanted the Mural to have seating, they want to be able to see across the lake, it had to appeal to children, be interactive, and they wanted to involve the whole community but work to a high standard.¹⁰

In 1985, funding from the Australia Council Community Arts Board enabled the appointment of Wedderburn-based Judy Lorraine (Dip. Arch. and a noted potter) as Artist-in-Residence, to lead the ceramic co-ordination of the project for a year. Presented with the enormous challenge of laying the foundations for a work which would be both inclusive and cohesive, Judy developed the concept further, and created the first clay model.

Judy Lorraine said, 'In the development of the plan in which people were the main ingredient, it seemed to me that to engage as many of the senses of the people as possible would be an admirable goal. The senses of sight, hearing, touching, feeling, and the perception of space, enclosure, secrecy and the wide expansive views.'¹¹

Meanwhile, the construction of the foundations began, with help from local service clubs.¹² Gordon Jarvis, a local master bricklayer, built a large part of the mural's basic structure.¹³

Towards the end of 1985, Judy Lorraine's appointment was funded by the Australia Council for a second year. More funding from the Commonwealth Government enabled a workshop to be set up at the Benalla aerodrome,¹⁴ to replace the original workshop near the Mural in Mair Street.

The kiln base and kiln room at the workshop, in which all of the components were fired, was constructed by local Community Employment Program workers. The 52 cubic-foot kiln was donated by a local businessman John McIlwraith.¹⁵ Over a hundred and fifty firings over twenty-five years were needed to complete the task.¹⁶

The significance of the Mural

The Benalla Ceramic Mural is located on a site which was used in pre-European times as a corroboree ground and gathering place,¹⁷ and as such, forms part of an on-going and ancient dialogue between Lake Benalla, its inhabitants and visitors, past and present.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Joan Jensen and David W. Moore, *op cit.*, p.11.

¹² *ibid.*, p.17

¹³ *ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.14.

¹⁵ The kiln is currently owned by Katrina Kell at El Dorado. She took it on when the Broken River Potters switched to a smaller electric unit instead of the large gas-fire unit.

¹⁶ Joan Jensen and David W. Moore, *op cit.*, p.16.

¹⁷ See for mentions of the Aboriginal use of this site: 'Consequent upon an article by Mr S. Uren...' *Kilmore Free Press*, Thursday 20 June 1907 - Page 3; 'Now and Then,' Ovens and Murray Advertiser, 25 May 1869, p.2; Edmund Charles Hobson, *Diary of a Journey with Lady Franklin's party, Overland from Melbourne to the Hume River*. Latrobe library manuscript collection. State Library of Victoria (Box 25/1, M383/09). (aka 'Diary kept by Dr. Hobson during Lady Franklin's journey overland from Melbourne to the Hume (Murray) River 1839' (M 383). entry 14th April, 1839.

The Mural is an extraordinarily significant project in terms of community cooperation and input. The high level of community participation (whereby anyone who wanted to contribute could) has meant that today, a large number of individuals and families have a personal connection to the Mural. This participation has also generated a strong sense of community ownership of the Mural, which is virtually unique for a work of art in Australia.

Few if any works of art in Australia, at least since European settlement, have sustained a period of creation running almost 30 years; and as such, the Mural also testifies to the profound optimism, goodwill and constancy of Benalla's creative community.

**Relevant Historic Themes as identified in the *Benalla Rural City Gaps Heritage Study: Thematic History*
Prepared by Dr Robyn Ballinger**

9. Shaping cultural and creative life

9.2 Nurturing a vibrant arts scene

Physical Description

The elements which make up the Mural

The Mural has many different architectural elements and spaces, with enough complexity that it can be read and re-read over many return visits. Thematically, it refers to the immediate riverine and lake environs, also expressing larger ecological concerns, although many other elements are mythological, and sometimes purely whimsical. The Mural also contentiously combines elements from the artistic traditions of broadly Eastern, Western, and Australian Aboriginal cultures.

The main architectural element facing the Lake is the Colonnade, topped by the Frieze Wall, which supports an Upper Terrace from where there is a panoramic view across Lake Benalla to the historic bridge, the Art Gallery, and the Botanical gardens. The Frieze was worked on by students from tertiary colleges in Box Hill, Caulfield, and Bendigo, who stayed in the old RAAF huts at Benalla Airport, where the workshop and kiln were housed.

Ginni Jones, from Queensland and David Waters, from Melbourne, helped in developing and creating the first section of Frieze. Others who assisted included staff from Northcote Pottery (supplier of the terracotta clay), and the Broken River Potters Group. Judy Lorraine and David W. Moore led the teams as each section of the wall was completed.¹⁸

The Upper Terrace above the Frieze has a wall of wave-form wall tiles, designed by Jill Symes, who also worked with many local and visiting artists and students.¹⁹ The entrance this Terrace has a depiction of water lilies created by Beth Randell; whiles Leonie Wren and Julie Ford created the tiles for the walls of the terrace, with watery motifs of fish and yabbies.²⁰

Beneath the Upper Terrace and Frieze Wall is the Colonnade, whose arches create a visual link to those under the nearby bridge which spans the Broken River.²¹ Bill Webster from Bendigo and Leonie Wren of

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.23.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.31.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.32-33.

²¹ *ibid.*, p.43

Tungamah collaborated with David N. Moore during the design and construction of the curved formworks for the colonnade ceilings.²² Bruce Heggie, a leading Bendigo potter, and Will Matheison (formerly named Trevor Fynmore), a trained potter who became one of the mural's most stalwart contributors, made the columns, which were thrown and fired in the workshop at the Aerodrome. Many of the columns are stamped with the ecology symbols used throughout the mural.²³

Running along beneath the Colonnade are a series of eleven 'cave seats'. The first of the seats to be made (Seat 2), was the 'Leda and the Swan' seat by sculptor Fiona Murphy, who 'made in an old bath at the Mair Street workshop around 1985-86'.²⁴ Seats 9 and 10 were made at the same time, by the local Broken River Potters community group — led by Dulcie Sanderson, and including Verna O'Meara, Julie Tonks, Sandra Mason, Jill Jennings, Mary Button, Helen Munroe and June Wells — who worked with the guidance of Fiona Murphy.²⁵

The next four seats were made in 1988, as part of the Australian Bicentennial Authority's Visual Arts Program. Seat 1, with its climb-through hole, was made by Petrus Spronk of Hepburn Springs; Seats 4 and 5 by Sue Moorhead from Albury and Ian Sprague of the Hunter River, suggesting the twisted Eucalypt trunks of trees around Lake Benalla. (These seats were installed by Gordon Jarvis, assisted by Carolyn May, Peter Ward and Jan Twyerould.²⁶) Seat 6, was made by much admired Aboriginal sculptor, potter, linguist and educator Thancoupie of Cairns, who made the 'seeing-eye' cave seat which tells the story of the 'wild date palm', with accompanying possum ceiling.²⁷ While in Benalla, Thancoupie also worked with local children. Meanwhile, Judy Lorraine created the organic forms enclosing the 'thongaphones' by Ros Bandt.

Seat 3, portraying bird life on the lake, was made by Judy Lorraine and David W. Moore sometime after 1988.

Much later, local Aboriginal artist Chris Thorne created a 'spirit' design for his cave seat (Seat 7), assisted in the process by Will Matheison.²⁸ Seats 8, 9 and 10, were made at the same time, in the early 2000s. Seat 8, Judy Lorraine's cave seat, has an aerial plan of the mural at its centre in low relief, representing the heart of the project. The design masks a door, for access to the interior of the mural. The door is surrounded by an elaborate built-up frame, made by Regina Laity and Lisa Baier. Regina and Lisa also collaborated with Judy creating the ceiling above the seat, where a platypus, frogs, fish, water lilies and lily pads, birds and a long-neck tortoise are encircled with water, in terracotta and glaze.²⁹

Seat 10, the 'Fossil Chair,' featuring water fossils among the images, was created by Marg Altman, Brenda Brown and Sandra Mason working with Fiona Murphy. (Many of the Broken River Potters group assisted this part of the project regularly, including Petra Yates and Pat McGauty.)³⁰

²² *ibid.*, p.19.

²³ *ibid.*, p.25.

²⁴ pers comm. David W. Moore to Jacqui Durrant, 14 May 2024.

²⁵ Joan Jensen and David W. Moore, *op cit.*, p.66.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp.53-54.

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.58-59.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.60.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.63.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.66.

The last, Seat 11, was the 'Face Seat' in the winter courtyard, in the final corner of the Colonnade, by Ann Ferguson, and was made about a year before the mural was finished in 2010.³¹

In the final stages of the mural's creation, three artists worked in the space between Seats 9 and 10, and in an area above one of them. Yorta Yorta artist Treahna Hamm created a symbolic tree, linking the two seats and branching up to the ceiling. Its sculpted branches shelter Sam Jinks' arresting larger-than-life 'Baby' and surround Michael Leunig's whimsical and joyous 'Man and Birds'.³²

The Colonnade leads to the Winter Courtyard: a sheltered, sunny spot, with built-in seating including several of the cave seats. During the original excavation of the Mural site, an old blacksmith's forge box was unearthed, and this was incorporated into the mural structure.³³ This 'forge box' is at one end of the winter courtyard, and became a climb-in cubby hole for children. The interior is richly glazed with tiles in the colours of flames in a design suggesting the forge's fire (the design by David W. Moore and Regina Laity, with by Lisa Baier assisting with the glazing);³⁴ with the forge box space illuminated from above by an oval glass roof panel by Christof Morgeau, which is set into the Upper Terrace. On the eastern wall of the Winter Courtyard, there are three framed, turquoise-glazed symbols, which were designed in a collaboration between Indonesian artist Wulan Dirgantoro, with Judy Lorraine and David W. Moore: a two-headed bird, a tree of life, and a phoenix rising.³⁵ These were conceived as motifs which would reflect recurring worldwide cultural and artistic themes; and are surrounded by tear drop tiles installed by Regina Laity, Will Matheison and visiting artist Gunther Gorman, and sits atop a deep red serpent, created by David W. Moore, whose head points to the forge box.

On the coping at the street entrance leading to the Winter Courtyard, Braille symbols reading 'The Benalla Ceramic Mural', were specially created by Rex Wills, a skilled local engineer, who also provided assistance with other technical aspects of the build.³⁶

At the other end of the Colonnade is a small Amphitheatre paved with hand-made hexagonal tiles. The performance area is surrounded with tiered seating made of bullnose bricks, which can seat about a hundred people.³⁷ The walls, reaching around into the Colonnade, are lined with thousands of round 'doughnut' tiles, containing 'crumpet' tiles (as they became known). The 'crumpets' are imprinted with designs created by hundreds of local people.³⁸ One side of the Amphitheatre also features Twin Domes topped in turquoise tiles, which are visible from all around the Lake.

When music is played in the Amphitheatre, it 'echos around the town, and bounces off the water'.³⁹ Additionally, there are two playable 'Thongophones' on either side of the Amphitheatre, tuned to a minor pentatonic scale, created by an eminent Australian sound artist Ros Bandt.⁴⁰

Leading away from the Amphitheatre, beneath the Twin Domes is the snake-like Bridge Wall, which tapers-off towards the bridge. Designed by Judy Lorraine and David W. Moore, and made by David, Will Matheison

³¹ *ibid.*, p.44.

³² *ibid.*, pp.70-72.

³³ *ibid.*, p.18.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.83.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.75.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.98.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.38.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.43.

³⁹ per comm. David W. Moore to Jacqui Durrant,

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p.40.

and Regina Laity, this took several years to complete. In particular, its second stage was one of the largest single components of the project, and was finally completed in 2010. The design includes raised forms which continue around the wall, amidst stylised glazed fish.⁴¹

Separate to the main structure, sitting close to the Bridge, is the 'Cockatoo Seat' by Fiona Murphy, which is, in reality, more of a sculpture than a functional seat.

Finally, there is also a separate round seat at the Mural's street entrance, with a turquoise spire at its centre, which was completed by another Mural stalwart, Mick Beggs.

The Mural was designed to be subtly illuminated at night, with lights outlining the colonnade, pathways and steps. The lighting was funded by the Benalla Rotary Club, while the Larkin family of Tatong volunteered for the install.⁴²

The gifted 'Benalla art lovers' who contributed to the mural also included children from 27 of the district's primary schools, who incised designs on raw clay pavers to produce 1600 tiles for the mural's paving.⁴³

Physical Description

The Mural is complex work of ceramic sculpture, built onto a substructure structure of brick, concrete and steel. Its multi-levelled architectural plan is based on two conjoined circles, ten metre in diameter (one of which is divided into a yin/yang pattern), with the entire structure designed to look as if it is emerging organically from the slope of the riverbank.

The Mural has a number of identified architectural components, mainly comprising a Colonnade (which wraps around the bottom of the 'Upper Terrace'), sheltering a number of seats, and topped with a Frieze; above which sits an Upper terrace facing Lake Benalla. One end the Colonnade leads to a sheltered Winter Courtyard ('the lower terrace'), with the opposite end of the Colonnade leading to a semi-enclosed Greco-Roman amphitheatre (the 'Arena') with in-built seating. Trailing off from the amphitheatre towards the bridge is the 'Bridge Wall'.

The Mural is designed so that 'everywhere one looks' there are 'intriguing details' and 'expansive views.'

⁴¹ Joan Jensen and David W. Moore, *op cit.*, p.93

⁴² *ibid.*, p.100

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.91.