



ACT Heritage Council

## Entry to the ACT Heritage Register

*Heritage Act 2004*

### **10007. Ethos statue**

Section 19 Block 18 Civic Square, CITY

### **OBJECTS**

This document has been prepared by the ACT Heritage Council.

This entry which was previously part of the old heritage places or the old heritage objects registers (as defined in the *Heritage Act 2004*), as the case may be, is taken to be registered under the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Conservation Requirements (including Specific Requirements), as defined under the *Heritage Act 2004*, that are contained within this document are taken to be Heritage Guidelines applying to this place or object, as the case may be.

Information restricted under *the old heritage places register or old heritage objects register* is restricted under the *Heritage Act 2004*.

**Contact:** ACT Heritage Council c/o Secretary PO Box 144  
**Enquiries:** phone 02 6207 2164 fax 02 6207 5715

Lynham ACT 2602  
e-mail [heritage@act.gov.au](mailto:heritage@act.gov.au)



ACT Government



environment ACT

Helpline: 02 6207 9777  
Website : [www.cmd.act.gov.au](http://www.cmd.act.gov.au)  
E-mail: [EnvironmentACT@act.gov.au](mailto:EnvironmentACT@act.gov.au)

# **AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY HERITAGE OBJECTS REGISTER**

For the purpose of S12 of the Heritage Objects Act 1991, a citation for:

## **Ethos**

has been approved by the Minister for the Arts and Heritage for entry in the Heritage Objects Register.

The date of Instrument of Approval: 10 April 1996

Enquiries about this object and copies of this citation are available from:

The Secretary  
ACT Heritage Council  
TUGGERANONG ACT 2901

Telephone: 207 2179      Facsimile: 207 2177

# INTERIM HERITAGE OBJECTS REGISTER

## DRAFT NOMINATION

### ETHOS

**NOMINATED BY** Museums and Galleries Unit,  
Heritage, Museums and Galleries Section,  
Department of the Environment, Land and  
Planning

**LOCATION** Block 18, Section 19, City. (Civic Square in  
front of north entrance to South Building-  
ACT Legislative Assembly).

### DESCRIPTION

Sculpture of a winged female figure of cast electrolytic copper titled "Ethos", by the Australian artist, Tom Bass. The figure is robed in a fabric richly embossed with emblems and figures representing the Community. She rises from a hexagonal shaped saucer incised with the pattern of the Canberra Plan and reaches for the sun above her head. The lower part of the figure is filled with concrete for stability. In the saucer at the rear of the figure a cartouch is inscribed "Tom Bass 1961". The saucer is centrally drained and has breather holes placed at each point of the base.

The sculpture is set on a cement plinth which holds a time capsule. The capsule contains a range of material including a copy of the Canberra Times, the Annual Report of the Canberra Chamber of Commerce and a list of contributors to the sponsorship by the Canberra Chamber of Commerce.

The figure is 400 cm high, 76 cm wide, 90 cm deep and the bowl has a diameter of 170 cm. The circular concrete base of 50 cm height rises from a 204 cm square.

### CONDITION

The work appears to be in sound condition with the following noted :

1. Numerous cracks in surface of plinth with evidence of water seepage and copper staining. The source of seepage possibly from internal drain.
2. Minor losses of mortar at junction of work and plinth. Some copper staining is associated with these areas.
3. Corrosion at
  - i base of feet of figure - possibly differential and salt deposit corrosion;
  - ii beneath bowl - possibly water induced corrosion;
  - iii upper body - atmospheric corrosion and deposits.

### HISTORY

The sculpture by Tom Bass (b. Lithgow, NSW, 1916-) was the first commission by the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) for an

artwork in a public place. The NCDC was established in 1958 to plan, develop and construct Canberra as the National Capital and provided works of art as an integral part of its building and urban development programmes. The sculpture was commissioned in 1959.

Ethos was sponsored by the Canberra Chamber of Commerce which raised money by the sale of miniatures of the sculpture for 50 pounds and through other donations from both the business community and the public. The NCDC contributed the balance to meet the total cost of the 7,580 pounds.

The NCDC intended that the work would emphasize that Canberra is the non-political centre, the locale of commerce and of private enterprise in its best sense. "The restless, virile, energetic movement of free enterprise" arising out of the planned city "and the two facets should become as one, striving forward progressively". (NCDC Meeting notes not dated, early 1960, NCDC file 66/1181)

The sculpture was thus conceived as representing the spirit of the community. Bass interpreted this in the figure which he intended "the love which Canberra people have for their city to be identified with her...I want them to be conscious of her first as an image from a distance...then comes the moment when they become personally involved with her... they feel her looking at them, reflecting their love for the place". (Daily Telegraph 7/12/61) She was "beauty arising from and through a plan - in this case, beauty represented by the National Capital arising from and through a planned city" (NCDC file note 4/5/60) and in form possessing true civic style and scale.

The form of the work is highly symbolic. The figure is robed in a fabric richly embossed with emblems and figures representing the Community. The shallow saucer on which the figure stands represents Canberra's nick-name "Frosty Hollow". The saucer is 6 sided because the plan for Civic square is itself hexagonal. The surface of the saucer bears a relief map of Canberra and the rolling countryside around it. At the feet of Ethos are indentations that represent the lake that was later to fill the space between the Civic Centre and the administrative part of the city. The bursting sun she holds aloft is symbolic of culture and enlightenment which the presence of Canberra's University, its research organisations and the Diplomatic Corps and so on give to the city.

In 1965 Bass considered "Ethos" the most important of his civic works. (NCDC File 66/1181).

Mr Bass' previous works, the "Tea Drinkers", the "Herald" group and "The Falconer" were identified as having the qualities required by the architects for the Civic Square. The site for the sculpture was carefully selected by the architects of Civic Square, Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths & Simpson of Melbourne. Works by Tom Bass, one of Australia's leading sculptors, are located in cities around Australia including Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart.

Tom Bass was chosen in consultation with Sir Daryl Lindsay and Professor Trendall.

Sir (Ernest) Daryl Lindsay (1890-1976), painter, connoisseur and art adviser, was the youngest member of the Lindsay family who achieved distinction in the art world. He was Director of the National Gallery of Victoria from 1942 to 1956, a member of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board and the National Capital Development Committee.

Professor Arthur Dale Trendall (1909-) a prominent classical scholar, member of the Council at the Australian National University (ANU) from 1954 to 1964 and Master of University House ANU from 1954 to 1969. As Master of University House he was in a key position to give advice on the choice of the sculptor for this project. University House was described in 1962 as "The greatest cultural force in the Australian Capital Territory" 12 March 1962 Canberra Day supplement to Canberra Times.

The sculpture was unveiled by the Honourable Catherine Sidney, the daughter of the Governor-General Lord De L'Isle, on December 15th 1961.

In the 1960's and early 1970's tourist posters of Canberra extensively featured the sculpture as a symbol of Canberra.

The sculpture became the responsibility of the Department of the Interior and at self government that responsibility was transferred to the ACT Government.

Ethos is located in Civic Square which is bounded on two sides by North and South Buildings which are used for the administration of the ACT. The Canberra Theatre is on the western side of the square.

## **ANALYSIS AGAINST THE CRITERIA**

### **2 An object which exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group.**

"Ethos" is one of the best known works of sculptor Tom Bass, one of Australia's leading artists. The outstanding and unique design of the sculpture is highly valued by the Canberra community.

### **4 An object which is highly valued by the community or cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations.**

The sculpture was conceived as the spirit of the Canberra community which is evidenced in it's form and the contribution made by the Canberra Chamber of Commerce to its purchase. The sculpture in its prominent location in Civic Square remains highly valued by the community for its special association with the development of the city of Canberra.

### **7 An object which has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase in local or national history.**

The sculpture has a special association with the history of the development of Canberra as it was the first commission of a work of art for a public place by the National Capital Development Commission.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

This unique work is highly valued for its special association with the Canberra community and for its special association with the development of Canberra being the first commission of a work of art for a public place by the National Capital Development Commission.

## **CONSERVATION POLICY**

1. "Ethos" remain in Civic Square.
2. A repair and maintenance program is to be prepared and submitted to the Heritage Council prior to action. The approved program is to be implemented.

## **SPECIFIC CONSERVATION REQUIREMENTS**

In accordance with section 6 (d) of the *Heritage Objects Act 1991*, the following requirements are identified as essential to the retention of the heritage significance of the object :

1. The work is to be returned to the state envisaged by the artist which will include cleaning, repairs and repatination.

## **RESTRICTED INFORMATION**

Nil

## **PREVIOUS ASSESSMENTS**

Durr, Mark Report on conservation ID 48

Riboust, Patrice 1993 *Civic Square Precinct* Nomination to the ACT Heritage Places Register

## **REFERENCES**

*Canberra Times* 12 March 1962

Department of the Interior file 66/1936 *Erection of Statue of Ethos in City Square*

National Capital Development Commission *Catalogue of Artworks in Canberra* Catalogue No 3

National Capital Development Commission file 66/1181 *Civic Square - Sculpture*

National Library of Australia Newspaper Clipping file *Canberra Sculpture*

National Library of Australia Oral History Collection [Conversation with Tom Bass] 1965 Oral History RR LG1 Oral De B 117-118

National Library of Australia Oral History Collection [Interview with Tom Bass] 1985 Oral History RR LG1 Oral TRC 1802. Transcript available.

Scarlett, Ken 1980, *Australian Sculptors* Thomas Nelson Australia Pty Ltd Melbourne. Transcript available.

*Who's Who in Australia* 1968

**NOMINATION NUMBER** 7  
**DATE OF NOMINATION** 23 March 1994  
**REGISTER NUMBER**  
**DATE OF GAZETTAL :**  
INTERIM REGISTER  
REGISTER  
**FILE NUMBER** 93/08061  
**TYPE OF OBJECT** Manufactured  
**OWNER** Commonwealth Government ?  
**KEEPER** Commonwealth Government ?

Prepared by Pamela Fabricius  
4 May 1994