

The Mercury

Detached Art Tower: See it as our big, bold opportunity

- by: DAVID WALSH
- From: Mercury
- June 13, 2015



An artist's impression of the proposed Detached Art Tower development in central Hobart.

Source: Supplied

RECENTLY Greg Barns wrote in the *Mercury* that Tasmania needs bold projects. The proposal for the old *Mercury* building is a bold project.

This project, which might be more suited to the young and the restless, asks of the visitor to climb the equivalent of about 40 flights of stairs.

That isn't easy. I have an apartment in Sydney at about that height, and I used to climb the stairs regularly. In preparation for writing this piece, I did it the other day. I had to take numerous breaks. Some will make it easily. Some will fail. Fortunately there is an ingenious mechanism for those who pike out.

The lift can be summoned to provide a bridge to the intertwined downward stairs.

But the mooted Detached Art Tower (and I would like to suggest an alternative designation: Hobart Experimental ART Tower, or Heart Tower, and I will refer to it as such forthwith) is also an art work.

MORE: SKY HIGH PLAN FOR 117m CBD TOWER (<http://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/sky-high-plan-for-117m-tower-in-centre-of-hobarts-cbd/story-fnj2sjgx-1227395498859>)

In fact it will be many artworks since the first commissioned artist, Rafael-Lozano Hemmer, has designed a platform that other artists can employ. I'm told to expect a new commission every three to five years. That's a change about every 1500 days of our lives. That's a long time for Hobartians to be looking at a single light-scape, however dynamic.

But waterfront carousers in Hobart also have to suffer through the turgid, witless works of Stephen Walker, and the formulaic sails of light known as *Allure*, at PW1. And those are permanent works. I should point out that failures can be honourable.

The first person, whoever they were, who commissioned a Stephen Walker sculpture for Hobart deserves commendation. It was a risk, a worthy risk, but it didn't come off. The second commissioned Stephen Walker work, now that's a different story.

Taking risks is a fine thing. Typically democracies don't build great stuff because they don't have a mandate to take risks. Great stuff indulges a few, at the cost to many.

Chartres Cathedral may be one of the finest things built on earth, but it impoverished whole communities for generations. Democracies need to satisfy most of a community.

That's a worthy principle, and one I support, but it does not often engender excellence. Here, though, we have only a marginal financial cost to our community. Is the scale of aesthetic risk such that we should not engage?

I will say no to this, but acknowledge that my opinion doesn't count for much. And when it comes to grandiose interventions, I'm not above

reproach. Had the artless art overpass “designed” by Vito Acconci for the highway near the Cenotaph gone ahead, the neighbours at Government House would have been visually assaulted by the least appealing scene since the bubonic plague. And it was me who inveigled Acconci to Hobart.



An artist's impression of the Detached Art Tower proposed development in central Hobart.

Source: Supplied

Since I wrote that last paragraph I have had a conversation with Dark Mofo creative director Leigh Carmichael, who told me some \$8 million has been secured for the highway bridge.

My first designer suggestion for that project was off track, but that hasn't completely derailed my willingness to be opinionated. Let's try for Santiago Calatrava or Rem Koolhaas. Big names like those will resonate with everyone, both home and away.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer has worked in Hobart before. The searchlight work *Articulated Intersect* for Dark Mofo 2014 was an elegant intervention into the Hobart skyline. He also has a piece in the MONA collection, the pulse-reading and light-synchronising work that has featured in the Void for most of the past four years. In my opinion this is an extremely successful work. But I would say that. After all, I bought it.

The Heart Tower would be almost three times the height of the present planning limit in Hobart. Apparently, there is provision for the restrictions to be put aside for developments that would benefit the city.

The question is — will the Heart Tower benefit the city? And the answer is, we can't know for sure without letting those responsible build it. Those who care, however, can be asked to express their opinions on whether it should be built. I care, and this is my opinion. I will read any comments, and engage external discussion, with great interest.



Dark Mofo's tower of light 1:07

- **Play video** (<http://themercury.com.au/video/id-s5dGJtdTq3idu-BQRH-v9buuHLcFxrKC/Dark-Mofos-tower-of-light>)



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's light installation Pulse Column behind the old Mercury building. Footage: LUKE BOWDEN

- The Mercury
- 12 Jun 2015
- News/Tasmania
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The proposed tower is 117m tall — nearly twice the height of the Wrest Point tower. That tower has dominated the Derwent estuary for over 40 years. It was bold when it was built. It remains so now. I leave the assessment of whether it is as worthy as it is bold to the concerned reader.

Closer to the proposed site of the Heart Tower is the NAB building. Since 1968 it has been the tallest building in downtown Hobart, but at 58m, it may well suffer from an inferiority complex if the proposed tower is constructed.

It was marvellous to my seven-year-old mind. But I also loved the road at the eastern end of the Tasman Bridge, where there is both an overpass and an underpass, so I might be a little too easily pleased. If the Heart Tower is constructed, it is difficult to imagine any further high-rise development in the vicinity.

The *Mercury* has recently reported on **planned \$300 million investments in hotels** (<http://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/macquarier-st-new-tourist-mecca-as-developers-pounce-on-myer-site/story-fnj4f7k1-1227384941780>). MONA will soon propose a hotel complex that will add at least another \$100 million to that number.

The Heart Tower, should it be built, would provide another attraction for the throng of tourists we have every right to expect.

But the Heart Tower is only an \$8 million investment that will likely generate more publicity, and scrutiny, than these other vastly larger investments is a measure of its controversial nature. It's also an indicator of the skill of the design and marketing team, who understand that for a venture to work, it has to be visible, even before it is built.

Funnily enough, MONA has also been working on a tower, designed by Win Delvoye, in his gothic mode. At around 30m it isn't likely to be controversial, so these are not twins in any sense, and the only thing they are likely to be the target of is ridicule.

The tower idea is good. The developers seem to be well intentioned (but so I was in engaging Acconci). The art might be mesmerising.

The tower design, to my eye, is a little undernourished, at least in the light of day. I feel this tower is a creature of the night. It should be built, but a reassessment to make it a little more aesthetically pleasing could be appropriate.

That is, if others agree that a tower that bestrides the Hobart skyline like the Colossus (is it too late to have that, instead?) should be both bold and beautiful.

David Walsh is the founder and owner of MONA.



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