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Hobart's heart starter: tower tipped to become icon

TIM DOUGLAS THE AUSTRALIAN JUNE 13, 2015



An artist's impression of Hobart's proposed Art Tower. Source: Supplied

Hobart's skyline may gain a 117m “art tower” — an LED-adorned steel column — that would be the highest structure in Tasmania and which would be open to the public to climb.

Plans for the \$8 million permanent installation, proposed and funded by non-profit cultural organisation Detached, will be revealed this morning at a public forum. The Weekend Australian understands the project is backed by the state government.

The Art Tower, designed by Robert Morris-Nunn and David Johnstone, will be a semi-transparent steel column, 6m in diameter, which viewers will ascend and descend via two sets of 650 power-generating stairs.

At the top, people will be invited to give a pulse reading, and their heart rates will be represented in the LED light display up and down the tower's exterior.

It's part of an artwork by Mexican-Canadian electronic artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, who has a similar work at Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art.

“Art Tower is a powerful symbol of creativity, and reflection of the people who live in this city,” said Detached project director Leigh Carmichael, who is also MONA’s creative director.

“(MONA founder) David Walsh has shown what happens when you dream big. (Art Tower) will provide Tasmania with a new cultural icon.”

If approved, Art Tower will occupy the space behind the former Hobart Mercury newspaper building in the city centre. It is the first major concept announced by Detached in its redevelopment of the site as a cultural hub.

It is understood that the project, expected to be completed by 2017, meets all legal building codes and will be open to a period of community consultation.

Architect Morris-Nunn said the “vertical audiovisual gallery” would reflect the city’s love for art, architecture and health. “Climbing up and down its 1300-plus individual steps makes physical exertion an integral part of the experience,” he said.

The Mercury building was purchased from News Corp by Detached director and entrepreneur Penny Clive in 2013 and has since undergone a dramatic commercial revival. Last night Detached opened two new gallery spaces in the building, one with a new show by acclaimed hyper-realist artist Patricia Piccinini.

Military-grade lights shot up into the sky in a representation of the tower, as part of MONA’s Dark Mofo mid-winter festival.