

VIEWPOINT

Flourish. A project by Harbinger Consultants and Mandy Ridley in Brisbane, Australia

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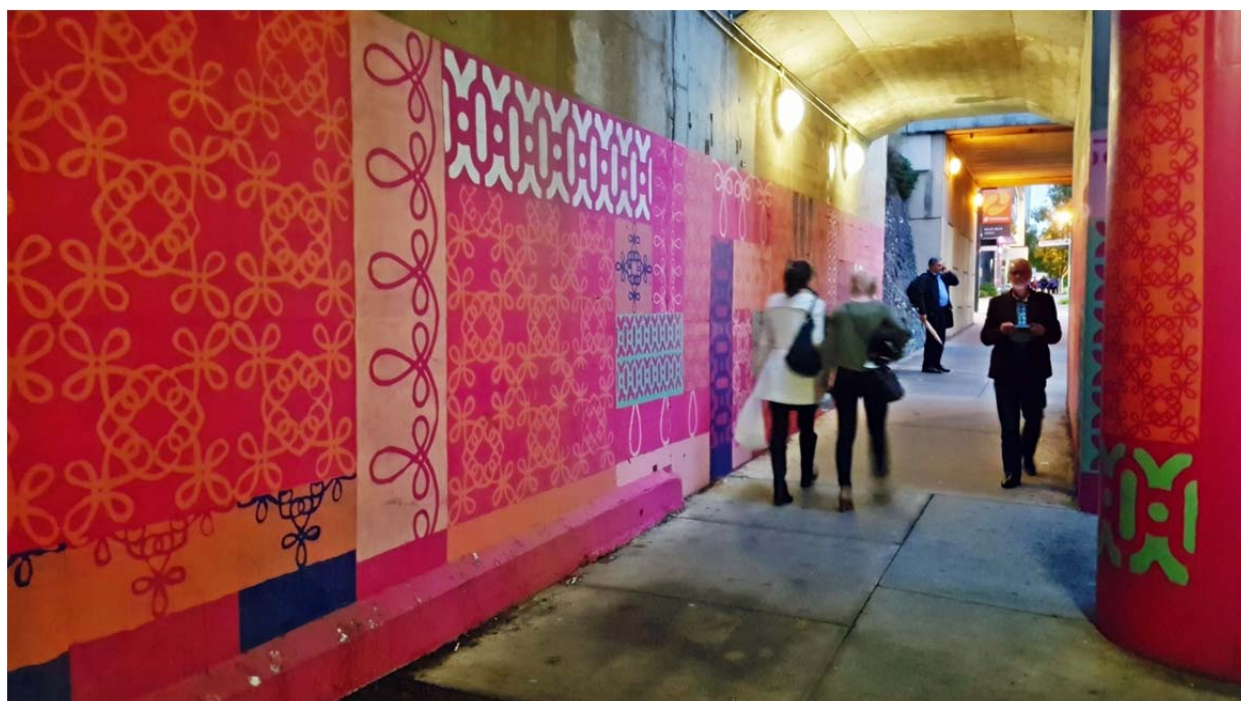


Figure 1. Ernest Street Tunnel, South Brisbane. Photo credit: Linda Carroli.

The Public Art projects that Harbinger Consultants undertake always provide a curatorial framework and strategy that draws out and documents the multi-layered histories of the area/site and its communities of users (both historic and contemporary). These are central to the development of the brief for the artist/s and the ensuring collaborative process between public art curator and artist. It is essential to understand the factors that influence perceptions of place, paying particular attention to personal and community interpretations of culture and make these available to the artists so the artistic process and artworks relate in a holistic and creative way to the specific resources of the area including existing artworks in the vicinity. Public artworks are principal elements, statements and markers of place encountered by people in their everyday experience of a locale.

Central to the development of the curatorial rationale is a comprehensive analysis of the merits and particularities for each site. Artwork/s scope and scale are explored to ensure fit with a sense of place through integration with the streetscaping as well as the current

and future use of the site/s. If appropriate there may be opportunities within the artwork development phase by the selected artist/s to involve the community in some form of creative engagement to generate some components and/or content for the new artwork/s.



Figure 2. Ernest Street Tunnel, South Brisbane. Photo credit: JM John Armstrong.

An example of a placemaking Public Art project developed, curated and managed by Harbinger Consultants is Flourish by artist Mandy Ridley at Ernest Street Tunnel, South Brisbane for Brisbane City Council, Queensland Rail and South Bank Corporation. The tunnel is formed by a railway line passing over a street and pedestrian pathway. With many constraints on the site, the client called for painted mural treatments of the tunnel walls and columns.

As with many pedestrian environments located under transit infrastructure, the area was uninviting and dark, dominated by the heavy rail footing. Our process involved undertaking a street survey of pedestrians at the site. This street was one of several over which the rail line passed and which formed entry and exit points for pedestrians to cross into different precincts. Through the survey, we learned that pedestrians had mixed experiences and feelings about the site ranging from a desire to rejuvenate and reconnect the area, make it feel safer and value the industrial and infrastructural history of the location. This feedback informed the curatorial rationale which drew on the concept of 'fabric' recognising that "the railway's physical form creates an edge; it is a site where the fabric seems frayed and disjointed".

The artist responded with a proposal that uses fabric and emblem details from historic railway staff uniforms as a key reference to develop a richly textured and layered patterning of the space. The artist also considered the adjoining retail and residential precinct and aimed to blur the distinctions between work and home. Ridley worked with the stylistic language she discovered within the textile sources and created overlaid images and motifs to convey a multiplicity of histories to reflect the urban experience and the changing nature of the immediate locality.



Figure 3 (left). Ernest Street Tunnel, South Brisbane. Pink wall. Photo credit: Rod Buchholz.
Figure 4 (right). Ernest Street Tunnel, South Brisbane. Blue wall. Photo credit: JM John Armstrong.

With motifs sourced from the decorative trim of railway uniforms Ridley succinctly articulates the qualities of the site. The insignia and emblems were magnified and transferred to the site using large stencils and the result is reminiscent of tiling or wall paper to address the conflicting scales in the site.



Figure 5 (left). Ernest Street Tunnel, South Brisbane. Pink wall. Photo credit: Rod Buchholz.
Figure 6 (right). Ernest Street Tunnel, South Brisbane. Blue wall. Photo credit: Rod Buchholz.

Many major projects are collaborative in nature and their success is reliant on the ongoing and creative involvement of all stakeholders and potential users of the sites and environments. Since 2005, Harbinger has sought to enhance locales and sites by working with stakeholders and the public to create spaces and places that are meaningful and enduring. Harbinger Consultants have accrued extensive experience working in curatorial development, project management, community engagement, urban contexts and the cultural sector. Building on our experience in the development of curatorial rationales for urban and regional public artwork projects ranging from medium scale Suburban Centre Improvement Project (SCIP) sites to healthcare environments to large scale infrastructure sites, Harbinger works collaboratively with clients and other stakeholders to generate understanding and dialogue about a site. Harbinger's experience in the development of

curatorial frameworks and strategies at a variety of scales ranging from major regional heritage tourism projects to intimate artworks within the suburban context is built upon an acute awareness of the complexities of places and their users and uses. The approach is informed by diverse thinking drawing on community cultural development, place activation and placemaking in the public realm.

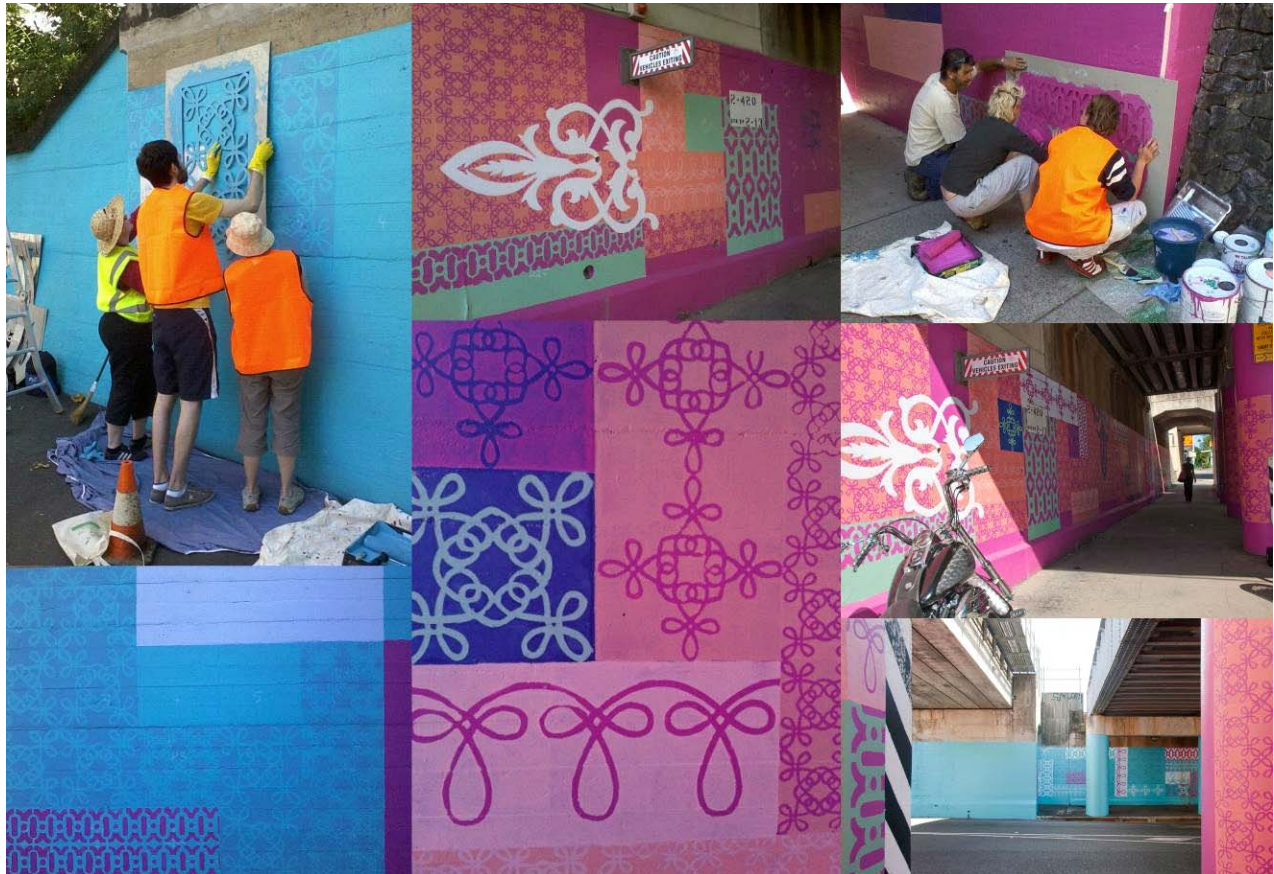


Figure 7. Ernest Street Tunnel, South Brisbane. Photo credit: JM John Armstrong and Rod Buchholz (bottom right).

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