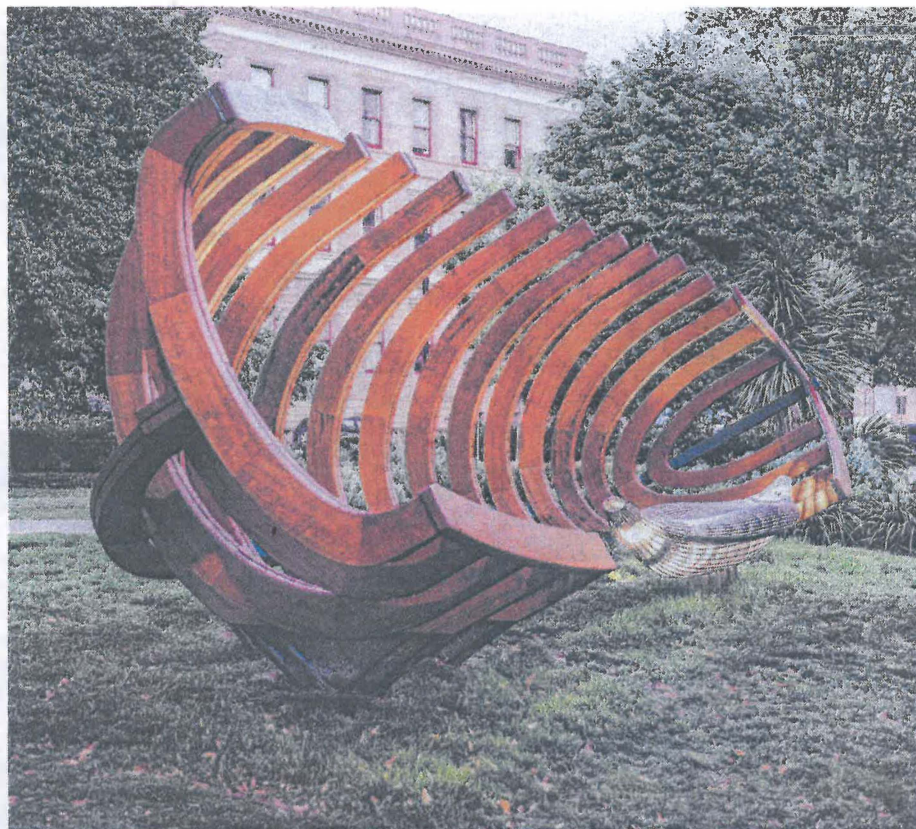
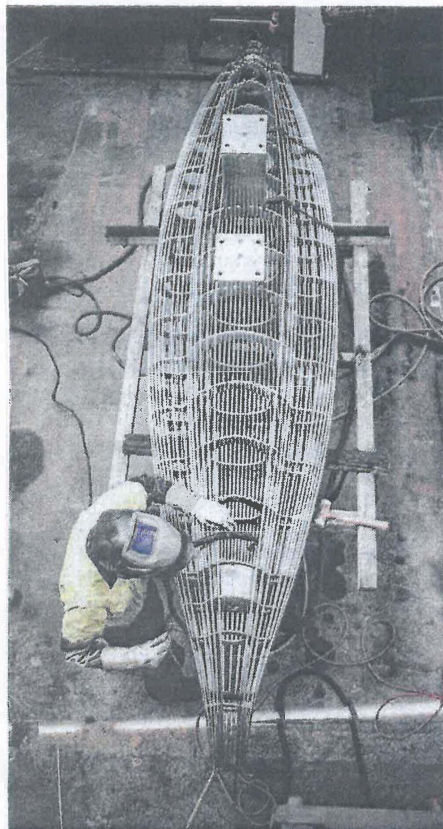
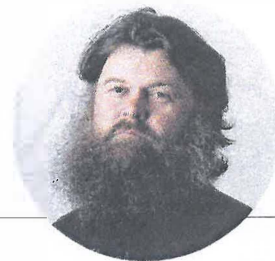


OPEN TO INTERPRETATION



Nigel Helyer's radical and forward-thinking Franklin Square sculpture incorporates the structure of an old, sunken wooden boat and a traditional Aboriginal canoe reproduced in bold, a shiny metal. Pictures: ANDREW WILSON

TWO ISLANDS Nigel Helyer Franklin Square, Hobart

One of the most controversial works of art in Australian history is an infamous piece of public art called *Vault*, found in Melbourne, Victoria. *Vault* is a big, bright yellow, abstract minimalist sculpture created by Roland Charles Robertson-Swann, and the work attracted flack and criticism before it was even built.

Vault has been moved a number of times, and played its part in a saga of union actions and the sacking of the Melbourne City Council by the Victorian State Government in the early '80s. Now *Vault* is recognised as significant piece of public art and has been recommended for heritage protection.

Vault, and its story as a piece of public art, is a fascinating one that demonstrates the importance of public art leading the way with cultural shifts as they occur.

Much has changed in Australia since 1980, and cultural shifts still occur. The national debate about 'states of explorers' and colonialists has reached boiling point, with suggestions that statues be torn down. This is another controversial viewpoint, and while arguments are strong for removal, the new work *Two Islands* by Nigel Helyer suggests another strategy.

Helyer's work appeared in Hobart's Franklin Square earlier this year, and in terms of how we understand public art, it's a radical sculpture that has a lot of ideas jammed into its structure.

The scope of the work is certainly bold: it resembles the structure of an old, sunken wooden boat, most of its actual structure

gone, leaving only the solid timber that made the skeleton of the vessel. It exudes a feeling of age, of the past as it sinks into the ground.

In contrast, there's another vessel. This one is made of shiny metal, and it's instantly recognisable as being the traditional canoe of the Aboriginal people of this island. This boat is not sinking — indeed, it's positioned to float above the ground. It looks strong and indestructible and, while the other boat is clearly failing, this smaller vessel is not. It's not just a sculpture — it incorporates sound art — when you approach the work, the cries of birds emerge and a voice speaks to you.

There are many voices and perspectives here, and hearing them all takes time — but the work is not going anywhere, and multiple visits are likely required to really get to grips with all the layers here.

The purpose of the work is clear: Helyer, and everyone we hear through *Two Islands*, want us to consider survival and renewal.

However, *Two Islands* is also about public art. The work sits in proximity to older statues that lionise the historical figures of colonialism. *Two Islands* creates a dialogue with those older works. It interacts with them, and comments on them with the understanding about Tasmania's history we have now.

It does not suggest tearing them down: it suggests that we look, that we think about what history means, that we understand what has occurred here in Tasmania, and the voices that bleed out of the shining canoe demand it is time for us to listen.

For more information about *Two Islands*, visit <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Community/Arts-and-culture/Public-art/Current-public-art-projects/Two-Islands-Franklin-Square>

FELT
Judith Abell
Project Space
Contemporary
Art Tasmania
27 Tasma St
North Hobart
Until June 2



This discrete collection presents a number of works that emerged from a residency in the CAT studios by artist Judith Abell. Abell allowed herself room to explore and the results are almost organic pieces that use industrial felt and hand stitching in an abstract, primal manner. The works have a parallel with the guide of rough, slightly disordered beauty one might find anywhere in nature. There's something about the materials used, and the tight intimacy of the small Project Space that makes this selection of works feel private as if found in a lair.

The work is tactile too. The hanging industrial felt seems like a kind of soft book one could read equally well by touching or by looking.

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