

Clifton Pugh - Transporting Art Tram No. 504 - Significance Assessment

This Significance statement follows the general accepted structure for such documents.

What is Significance?

Significance refers to the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities. Significance helps unlock the potential of collections, creating opportunities for communities to access and enjoy collections, and to understand the history, cultures and environments of Australia.¹

Historic – No. 504 demonstrates one of Melbourne’s (more than 400 in number) W2 class trams built for the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (MMTB) between 1927 and 1938; and a tram painted for the Transporting Art Project of 1978.

The tram has a very strong association with Clifton Pugh (17 Dec 1924 – 14 Oct 1990), a three-time winner of Australia’s Archibald Prize. The artist was strongly influenced by German Expressionism and was known for his landscapes and portraiture. Pugh was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1985 for service to Australian Art. In 1990 he was appointed as the Australian War Memorial’s official artist at the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Gallipoli landing.²

“Clif had always wanted to paint a tram. Artists loved the W class trams as everyone did, not as billboards, but as moving social places: the different compartments, the craftsmanship of leather, wood and metal, the conductors assisting with prams and shopping trolleys. When Lord Mayor Irvin Rockman said he wanted to liven up the city, Clif saw his chance, and suggested he and other artists paint trams. Irvin wrote to Rupert ‘Dick’, Hamer, the Premier, who was also Arts Minister, and Dick set up the scheme. So Clif had his wish, and a group of apostle birds travelled through Melbourne as they travel through the bush.”³

The artist is a significant figure in Australian modernist art history. He was one of the originators of the Transporting Art tram concept. Historically significant in that it was the second tram to appear in the first Transporting Art series of 1978 and travelled throughout many Melbourne suburbs during its eight years in service as a Transporting Art tram.

Clifton Pugh described the tram: “The apostle birds in flight, as if the tram has run into a group of them and they’re flying along the sides. Then I found the route was to be through Hawthorn and Collingwood football territory, and one cannot be one-eyed in that world, so there is a magpie and a hawk on each side!”

Tram 504 was one of 16 trams in the ‘Transporting Art’ program instituted by the Victorian Government’s Ministry of the Arts during 1978 and painted at the MMTB Workshops by Clifton Pugh and apprentices Zsuzsi Korchma, Wayne Sibbing, Craig Roach and T Glew.

¹ From Significance 2.0, p1, https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/significance-2.0.pdf?acsf_files_redirect accessed 7-12-2019

² Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clifton_Pugh - accessed 7-12-2019

³ Judith Pugh in an email to the Museum 22-11-2019.

This Victorian Government project led to the Transporting Art second series of trams from 1986 to 1993, which in turn led to the Melbourne Art Trams Project from 2013 to the present day.⁴

The Director of Victoria's Ministry for the Arts, Mr. Paul Clarkson: "is convinced the painted trams have given Melbourne a symbol of its individuality. The public has become very proud of these mobile canvases."⁵

Recognition of its special artistic value led to No.504 being selected to be given to the Museum of Victoria when the first series of Art Trams were disposed of by the State Government in December 1986. This donation did not eventuate. Nevertheless tram 504 was the only W2 class Transporting Art tram to survive in State Government ownership.

Ballarat Tram Museum (BTM) was approached by VicTrack in 2015, requesting that the tram be placed in under-cover, protected storage at its offsite store. This was due to its high historical significance and risk of weathering and damage. It could not be placed into outside storage at the former Newport Railway Workshops, together with other surplus – but otherwise comparatively generic – W series trams.⁶

W2 class trams and No. 504 – The tram can be associated with both the body builder, James Moore of South Melbourne, and with the staff of the Preston Tramway Workshops who maintained the tram and ensured that it was safely stored inside the workshops for almost 30 years after its withdrawal from service in 1986. This prevented the tram suffering significant weather damage.

The tram was built in 1928 at the time when Melbourne's electric tram services were growing to cater for both the growth of the city's population and the replacement of most of Melbourne's cable tram lines with electric tram services. The tram's body was one of 30 built by James Moore for the MMTB, with electrical and mechanical equipment being fitted at Preston Workshops.

The W2 class trams evolved from the preceding W and W1 designs. 180 W2s were built new, and the earlier-built trams (226 in all) were converted to W2 class by 1938, bringing the total fleet number to 406. The W2s were the most numerous of the W series trams and were recognised as the quintessential Melbourne tram.⁷

A number of other W2 class trams have been preserved, but 504 is the only preserved Transporting Art tram.

Technical – The tramcar represents one of a numerous mass-produced type that in the 1920s exemplified modern design standards with the drop-centre design reflecting those of many other Australasian cities in that it provided a lower step height for quick loading and unloading at tram

⁴ For a detailed history see <http://www.hawthorntramdepot.org.au/papers/transportingart.htm> (accessed 7-12-2019) by Russell Jones of the Melbourne Tram Museum.

⁵ Panorama magazine, Ansett Airlines March / April 1982, "On the Right Track", p29.

⁶ The second series Transporting Art trams are stored under cover at Newport Workshops, but their future is yet to be determined by Victorian Government.

⁷ This number includes the six SW2 type, which were fitted with sliding doors. General tram reference is Destination City 5th edition 1993, Transit Australia Publishing, Melbourne.

stops. No. 504 incorporates technical components that are typical of W2 class trams⁸. The wheel or bogie sets were often changed over by the Preston Workshops as maintenance demanded.

Provenance – The formal chain of ownership and the context of the tram’s use is well documented with the transfer to the Museum’s ownership formalized by the Victorian Government during 2019. Prior to the transfer of ownership, from the State of Victoria to the Museum, the Museum made contract with the relatives of the Pugh Family and gained their support for the ownership of the tram to be transferred to the Museum.

Social – No. 504 is one of more than 400 similar trams that provided transport to Melbourne’s community from 1923 until the late 1980s when all similar types were withdrawn from service and replaced by modern trams such as the Z and A series. The W2 class trams featured strongly in Melbourne’s community culture with its affiliation to the Melbourne tram system leading to them become one of the city’s most recognisable symbols.

Rarity – No. 504 is the only W2 class Transporting Art tram not to be sold upon its withdrawal from service in 1986, and is the only example of a tram painted under the program to have survived in secure storage. Further, it is the only one of the first batch of Transporting Art trams that remains in a condition such that it could be restored to trafficable condition without extensive restoration of both its body and its electrical and mechanical equipment.

Representativeness – The work is representative of Pugh’s close observation of nature and its cyclical and savage rhythms. No. 504 is a pre-eminent example of the trams painted under the Transporting Art program.

The tram represents both a standard Melbourne W2 class tram that provided a way of life for Melburnians, and a tram that was hand-painted for the popular Transporting Art program which has been revived in recent years. However, under the current program, trams are vinyl-wrapped, presenting designs created by artists on computer screens.

Condition – Integrity – No. 504 needs a major mechanical overhaul and a professional clean. The artwork is in need of restoration, with some areas requiring complete restoration. However, the original artwork is largely intact and can be restored and or replicated where necessary. The tramcar body is intact and retains the original construction techniques. Where damage or deterioration is evident, this can be repaired without extensive invasive work. The Museum has the electrical and mechanical equipment that would enable the tram to be returned to operating condition for use on a heritage tramway.⁹

Interpretative Potential – No. 504, when restored and operational, would be readily appreciated by the general public because of its identity as a quintessential Melbourne tram. As well, can be enjoyed by art historians, particularly those with a specific interest in Clifton Pugh's work.

⁸ For a detailed listing of the technical equipment see www.btm.org.au/trams/504.html

⁹ This equipment was often changed over, for example the wheel sets, by Preston Workshops as a routine maintenance procedure.

Conservation Plan – The aim of the plan is to restore the artwork to an appropriate high standard such that it maintains the integrity of Clifton Pugh's work. As mentioned above, the tram would be restored to operating condition for use on the Ballarat Tramway Museum's heritage tramway along Wendouree Parade, Ballarat.

Museum Status – W2 504 is currently stored under cover (March 2020) at the Museum's offsite storage facility. The Museum obtained a detailed report titled *Survey of Clifton Pugh's 1978 Art Tram* in October 2019 from Grimwade Conservation Services of the University of Melbourne with further advice being obtained from a conservation artist. The Ballarat Tramway Museum is currently considering the extent and detail of the work to be undertaken for the restoration of No. 504 together with the funds that would be required to return it to heritage service as an operating Transporting Art tram.

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