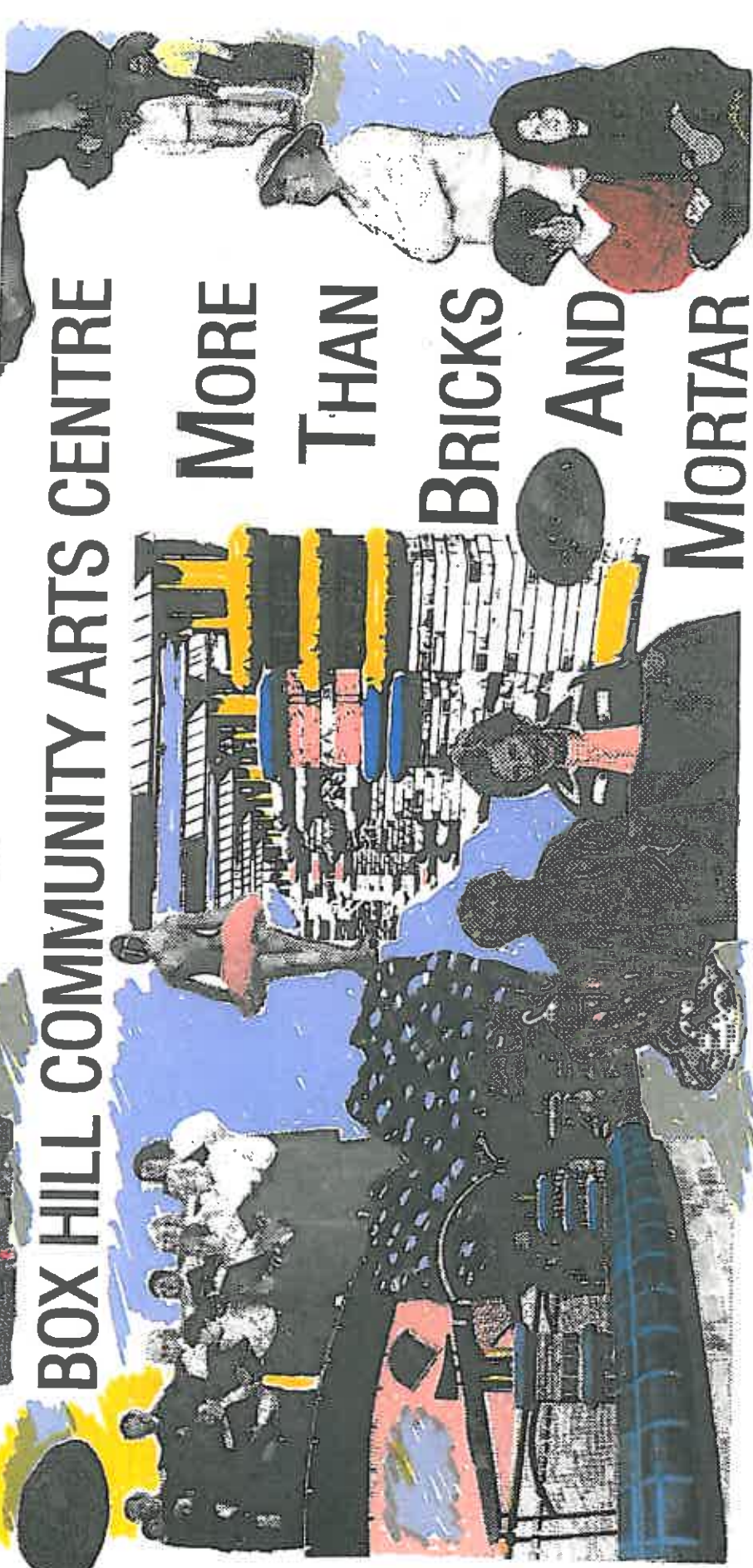




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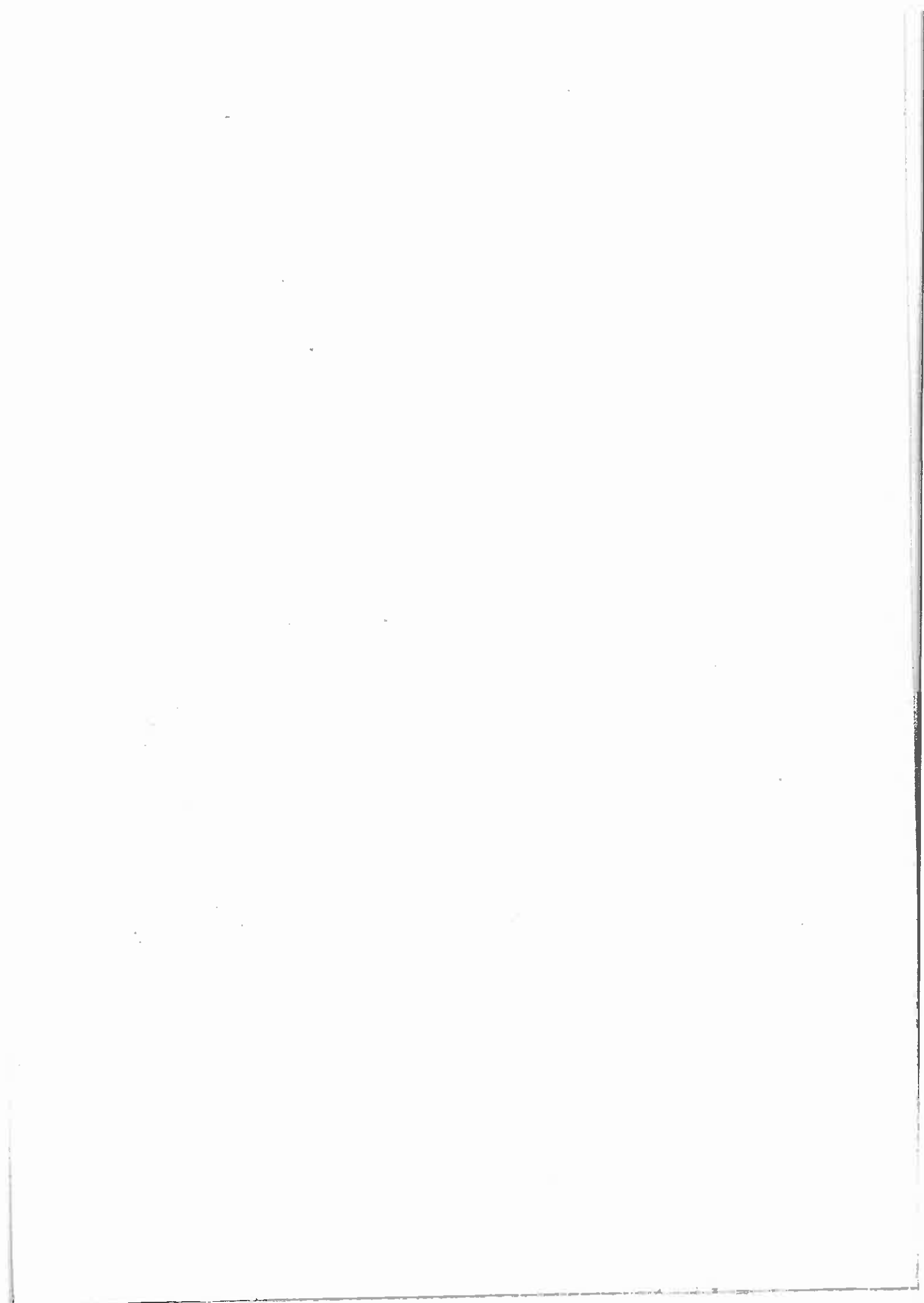
BOX HILL COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE

MORE THAN BRICKS AND MORTAR



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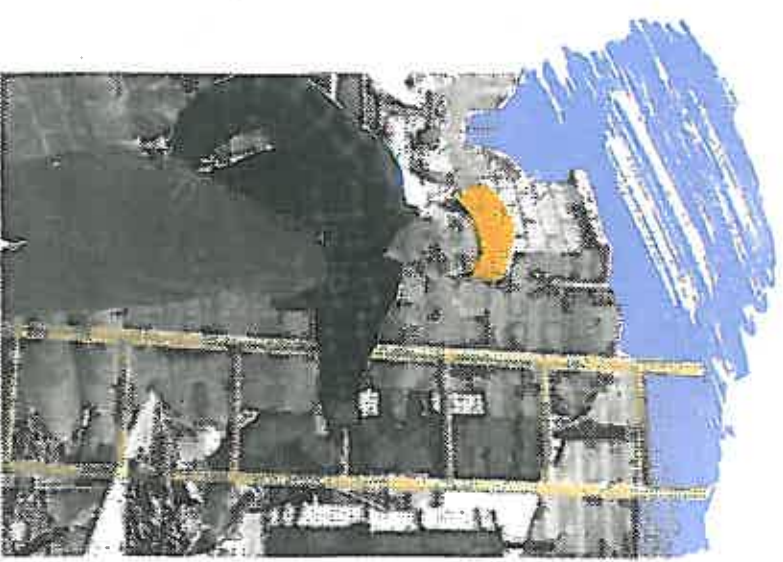


MORE THAN BRICKS AND MORTAR

BOX HILL COMMUNITY CENTRE
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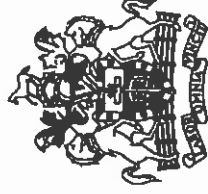
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Box Hill City Council



The Victorian Ministry for the Arts



Foreword

Local government authorities play a critical role in our planning processes. The Planning and Environment Act (Vie) (1987) confirmed local councils as planning authorities in their own right, and increased opportunities for public participation by extending the rights of "third parties".

In opening up our planning processes to greater public participation there is a risk of resistance to positive change in the urban environment. However, when there is a shared vision of the future of the city, and an understanding of the environmental, social and economic challenge facing us all, public participation becomes a potent creative force rather than a source of conservatism.

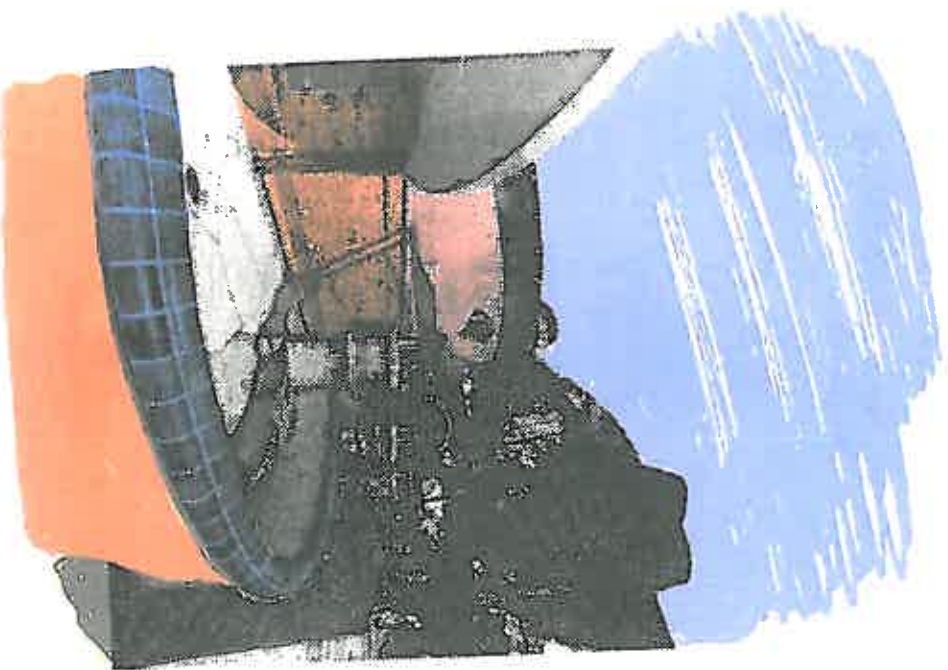
The development of the Box Hill Community Arts Centre highlights this potential. The role and purpose of the facility were clearly defined by involving community groups in the early conception of the project. This allowed potential users to play a proactive role in partnership with Council, rather than be placed in a reactionary position. This shared sense of vision included many of the design professionals on the project. Through the involvement of an artist opportunities were created for a direct physical expression of this vision as part of the building process. The shared sense of purpose, together with a genuinely open attitude to physical solutions has created a remarkable building which continues to adapt to its community. This is truly a public building.

The Box Hill Community Arts Centre is a living example of how local councils can become active "agents of change" through public participation. I hope this experience will act as a beacon when local authorities tackle broader planning issues in their communities.

THE HON. ANDREW MCCUTCHEON MLA

Minister for Planning and Housing

July 1991



Time Frame

1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
<p>APRIL Appointment of part-time C.A.O. and three community workers under C.E.P. (based at old Electric depot with small number of resident arts groups).</p> <p>JULY Meeting of artists and community arts groups to determine priorities and direction for community arts.</p>	<p>MARCH Appointment of permanent full-time C.A.O. (\$ 7000.00 in budget to modify tollens in old electric Supply depot).</p> <p>APRIL - AUGUST Decision to employ consultant to evaluate potential for development of Community Arts Centre as a resource and focus for local arts activity. Kevin Taylor and Kim Dunlop conduct an extensive community consultation process (see page 10). Greg Burgess Architects draws up schematic designs for the building.</p> <p>NOVEMBER Council assesses a number of alternative sites. Victorian Ministry for the Arts provides \$ 90,000 over three years to equip the facility. Council debate and approve the Community Arts Centre at a cost of 1.7 million.</p>	<p>MAY Council approves designs for purpose-built facility, rather redevelopment of old building for the same cost.</p> <p>OCTOBER Appointment of artist Meggie Focke funded by Australian Council to work collaboratively with architects and landscape architects. Work begins on the building.</p>	<p>MARCH - OCTOBER Community groups and school students work with the artist on community projects.</p> <p>SEPTEMBER Completion of the building. Staff move in.</p> <p>OCTOBER Official opening of the building.</p>	<p>FEBRUARY Building fully operational.</p>

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Introduction

I'm asked by people to talk about community consultation.... I talk about Box Hill, and I've never got a response other than that the whole thing has been inspirational. When people see the process they ask, why aren't all community buildings built this way?

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNER

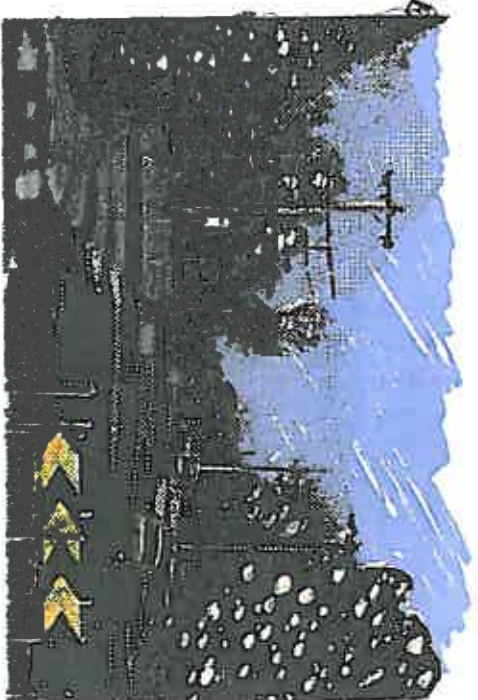
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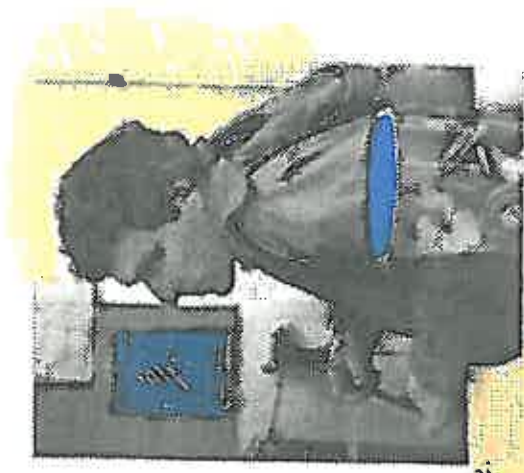
Public building development has generally been the exclusive domain of engineers, architects and planners. However, increasing demands from communities for involvement in decision making - especially in relation to their built environment - have questioned prevailing assumptions and underlined the need to explore ways in which that involvement might be achieved. Recent experience in the development of a public facility in Victoria demonstrates an interesting and fruitful approach to community involvement.

In 1987 the City of Box Hill provided a fairly unprepossessing building, formerly used by the Electricity Supply Department, for use by local arts groups and artists. Three years later, a new purpose-built Community Arts Centre was opened on the same site.

The new Box Hill Community Arts Centre provides both an exciting and challenging addition to the architecture of the area and stimulating, congenial work-space and meeting place for local arts and craft groups. The Centre is more than just a building. It is remarkable not only for its innovative design features but also for the process which were involved in its planning and construction.



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The key elements of those processes were:

The nature and extent of community consultation and involvement at all stages, from development of the concept to completed building.

The employment of an artist to work in collaboration with the architects and to facilitate the participation of local artists, craftspeople and other members of the community in creating finishes for the building.

A successful working partnership between local government, architects and planners, artist and community.

The creation of a public building which reflects, and relates to, the local environment and community - and which, as a Community Arts Centre, is a tangible expression of the vitality of local cultural life.

Particular and distinctive local and other factors make it unwise to present the Box Hill experience as a model, but it does provide a valuable case-study of the potential for genuine, productive community consultation and participation, and for the employment of artists in the planning and development of public places and spaces.

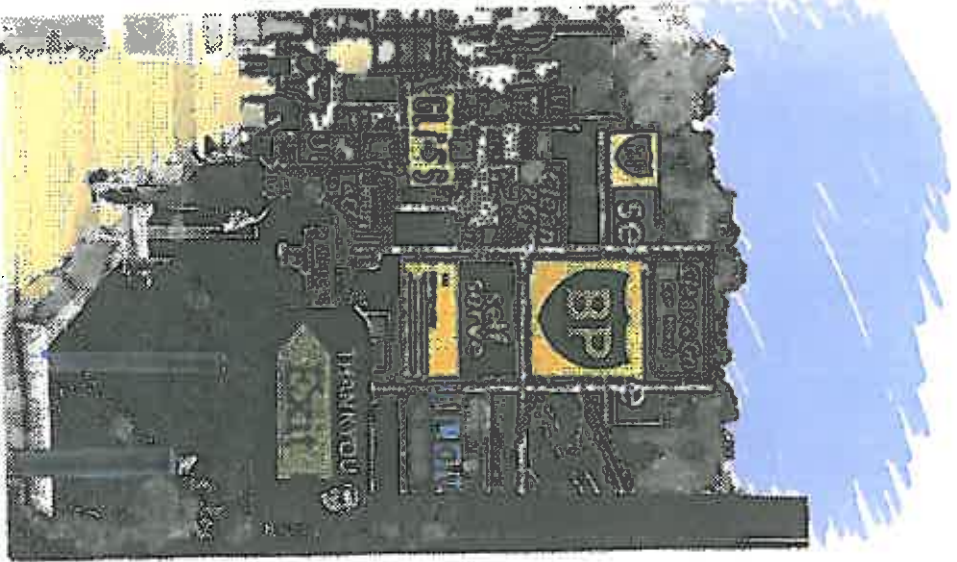


Background

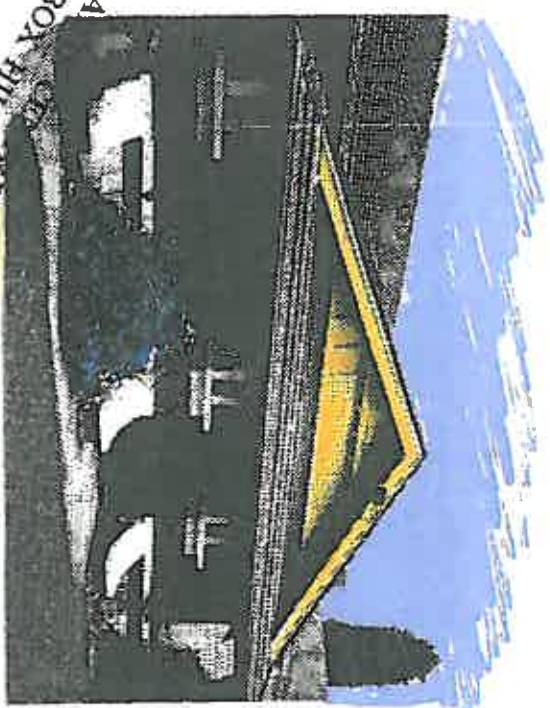
The Place

The City of Box Hill, sixteen kilometres from the centre of Melbourne, has a population of about 50,000 with a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. In the century or so of its development, it has grown from a small rural township surrounded by orchards, farms and bush to a major regional commercial, retail and transport centre.

Perhaps the best sense of the character of the area can be gathered from the words used by residents when asked to describe Box Hill during consultation on the Community Arts Centre.... "Busy", "typical suburbia", "commercialised", "unassuming", "comfortable", "established gardens."



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The Arts Community

In 1987 when a local arts resource directory was compiled, Box Hill had some thirty-five arts groups - many of them long established - and covering a wide range of arts activities, with craft and visual arts, dance, music and theatre being particularly well represented. The directory also listed almost seventy individual artists practising their art and craft independently of the groups.

In 1987 the City of Box Hill appointed a part-time Community Arts Officer, and provided a building for use as a community arts centre.

Initial use of the building led to recognition of problems which resulted from trying to adapt the old building to a new use, and from trying to establish shared usage by the various groups. In July 1987 a seminar was organised, involving fifty artists and representatives of arts and community groups, to discuss the development of the arts and the Centre. This can be seen as the first step towards establishing the sense of an arts community.



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CITY ENGINEER

Consulting the Community



How do you communicate with the whole community? We can't even deliver mobile garbage bins and get everyone to use them in the right week.

CITY ENGINEER

Rather than giving architects a brief and they go away and present options, with very little interaction with the people who use the building, I thought it was important to involve the community. To discuss things other than just "What size room do you want, and how much storage do you need?" So we talked about things such as "What is Box Hill like?" How can a community arts centre best fit into the Box Hill community? What can it offer people?

COMMUNITY ARTS OFFICER

Community consultation is most valuable when you get the community to write the brief. If Council writes the brief then goes out to consult the community about what the building's going to look like or how big it's going to be ... that's nowhere near as good as what happened here... We felt really confident that what we were working with was what everybody wanted.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNER

Community consultation is frequently referred to as an ideal in local government programmes and projects. But the reality is often a token gesture, involving perhaps the display of plans for a limited time for public inspection and comment, or discussions with particular interest groups on a project which may already be developed beyond the stage where amendment to incorporate community response is impossible.

Consultation can also be problematic for local government, with the possibility of creating or highlighting conflict within a community, or of setting up a number and variety of expectations which cannot all be met.

One of those expectations is the actual extent to which the community's views can be considered in the planning process and reflected in the resulting building or facility. This, of course, raises questions about the real willingness to listen and the value placed on those views, and of ways in which genuine community involvement can be achieved.

A major feature of the Box Hill Community Arts Centre development was the emphasis on community involvement, with a process largely derived from community arts philosophy and practice. The unique outcome was that the community in effect wrote the brief for the development of the Centre, and participated directly in the design process and in the art project incorporated into the building design.

The Process

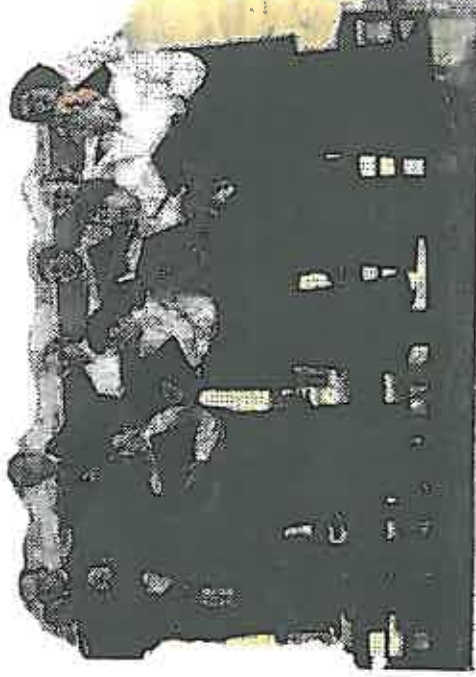
In April 1988 Box Hill City Council commissioned a Redevelopment Study as the major component of a forward planning study for the Community Arts Centre. The Redevelopment Study, carried out under a steering committee including the Community Arts Officer, the Deputy City Engineer, a member of the Town Clerk's Department and a Councillor, was undertaken by environmental designers in association with the architects. The brief for the study was to:

- Conduct a needs study of arts and arts-related groups with respect to possible uses of the Centre.
- Prepare a profile of arts resources in the Box Hill area.
- Prepare a development proposal based on that information.
- Suggest the most appropriate development within the existing budget.

Extensive community participation was achieved through three means.

- Meetings with representatives of local arts groups and individual artists to come to some understanding of the existing situation of the arts in Box Hill, to gauge understanding of community arts, and to discuss the Community Arts Centre in both its present, and possible future forms.
- A survey of arts groups and individuals to gather information about present accommodation, desired accommodation, and whether the community arts centre was a viable location for their activities.
- Three community participation workshops for which invitations were sent to specific interest groups, and which were also advertised widely to the general public.

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These workshops were the innovative component of the process, aimed at achieving more than the practical kinds of information derived from meetings and surveys. Their purpose was described to participants by the study team in these terms.

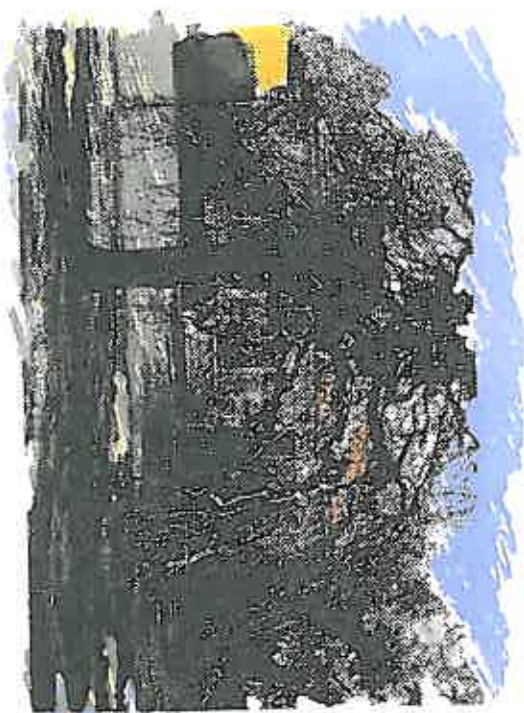
"As environmental designers we feel a responsibility to ensure that all our work grows out of the place and community in which we work. The workshop format.... is based on this desire to first understand the place - Box Hill, and the community - the people of Box Hill, before proceeding with the development of the Community Arts Centre. In the case of this building, we also need to come to some understanding of what community arts is and will be in Box Hill".

"So, this building should be changed in a way which reflects what this place-Box Hill - is like and what you would like it to be: what you as a community are and would like to be" and what you wish community arts to be in Box Hill. This is your opportunity to direct the study team so that this building becomes special to Box Hill, you community, and community arts as you practise it..."

The unfamiliarity with such an approach in the context of planning a building led to some intellectual scepticism, even hostility, amongst several participants. Others were merely puzzled: "A lot of people started off thinking 'What have we let ourselves into... why are we here, and what are we drawing things on maps for?'" But the rationale and the value became clear in the growing awareness of participating in the building of an arts community, and in the next stages of the process when the consultants presented sketch plans for discussion at a meeting of workshop participants and other interested people: plans which reflected the ideas and views expressed during the workshops.

In November 1988, the Council approved \$1.7m for the ensuing fully developed proposal for renovating the existing building. However, in May 1989 the architects proposed, for the same figure, a purpose-built building which would be more efficient, attractive and integrated, and this recommendation was adopted by Council.

Consultation continued between architects, Community Arts Officer and representative of user groups to incorporate responses into the design development process, and also to consider other crucial questions of how further community involvement might be achieved and then mainstreamed during the actual construction stage of the building. These issues were influential in the eventual decision to engage an artist to work on the project.



Responses

Participants in the discussions had initially found some aspects of the consultation process challenging. Equally challenging was the step of transforming their ideas into concrete form. In the early stage their discussions had related to an existing building with limitations which, in the architect's words, 'gave a very strong, negative touchstone... a good provocation to picturing a positive building' which it could become through renovation. In the second stage, the task was to picture a new building.

From the consultation and discussion process, the community had defined the main roles of their arts centre as:

- a resource centre which provides information, a contact point, and co-ordination of activities as well as work-spaces for groups and individuals.
- A home for as many of the Box Hill community's arts and craft groups as practically as possible.
- A showplace for the community's arts; a selling point; and a place that inspires people to become involved in the arts.

The workshops had also elicited less tangible, qualitative needs and desires for an arts centre: that it should be, for example, a place which was welcoming and warm, and a place which was also lively, energetic - where things happened, a place which would inspire by example.

Responding to the brief, the design team produced plans for a building which included:

- an administration area for information and co-ordination
- a lounge for community contact
- a meeting room
- a shop and exhibition area.

In the beginning I doubt whether anybody in the groups had any concept of what the building was going to be. It was very much a conceptual process... What the people have seen is that those ideas which everybody was discussing then, with no idea what the result was going to be, have been reflected in this building.

LOCAL ARTIST

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The brief derived from the workshops was more than just having functional areas well dealt with... there was a need for the building to feel right - a more mysterious process.

ARCHITECT

...being involved for such a long time, going to all those redevelopment meetings, was something totally new to me, something which initially was vaguely puzzling - although very interesting. As the process went on I thought, well, perhaps they can get something out of this. Having seen what they have got out of it, I can also see what the input from the groups contributed.

LOCAL ARTIST



I think it's one of the richest buildings I've ever been involved in - in the whole process and expression.

THE ARCHITECT

BOX HILL COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE
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- a diversity of specially designed workshops to house a range of visual and performing arts groups and activities.

The influence of the community on the ultimate form and feeling of the building was reflected in the comment of a member of the team: 'I don't think there would have been a social space with a big fireplace and a kitchen if it wasn't a big part of what people asked for in the workshops... I don't think there would be so many courtyards and such a close relationship between the inside and the outside if people hadn't expressed that right from the start.

The outcomes of the consultation process went beyond the concrete product of the building design. A new awareness was created of the potential of such a collaborative process.

Community

For the representatives of the arts community involved in the consultations and discussions, one of the key elements was the opportunity to be listened to - 'You actually feel you have some involvement and that what you think is valued' - and that consultation was far more than a token gesture: 'It was astounding that out of all those early meetings something like this building could happen.... that some good ideas actually come to fruition'.

The significance of the consultative process can be gauged from the comment that, 'People couldn't initially relate their thoughts about Box Hill to the fact that a building could come out of it. Now they can see the result of that.' The result was not simply the emergence of a building which 'instead of being an architect's building was our building - everyone's building', a building for which a sense of ownership is felt. 'It means a lot more because I've been involved with it.' The result was also in the awareness the 'We weren't only developing a building, we were developing co-operation between artists.'

Design Professionals

The consultative and collaborative process was professionally challenging but ultimately stimulating, enabling 'the creation of a humane building. In contrast to the commercial architecture of Box Hill', a building which was an expression of both 'the new need for co-operation and sharing' and 'the contrast between what Box Hill was, or was becoming, and what it could be.'

One of the important factors for the architects was the value of the conceptual information from the workshops, comments which were 'directly usable in visualising what needed to happen'.

For the redevelopment study consultants, one of the major outcomes of the project was in the achievement of communication which evolved through the workshops process;

"Lots of community art projects have been done on the premise of trying to connect individuals with their community and communities with their place. When we started, I didn't have an expectation that we were going to work with people in a way where we were going to help them see that they were a community of people, that they shared values - the values being that they wanted to work artistically in some form... but all that evolved out of discussions".

Council Officers

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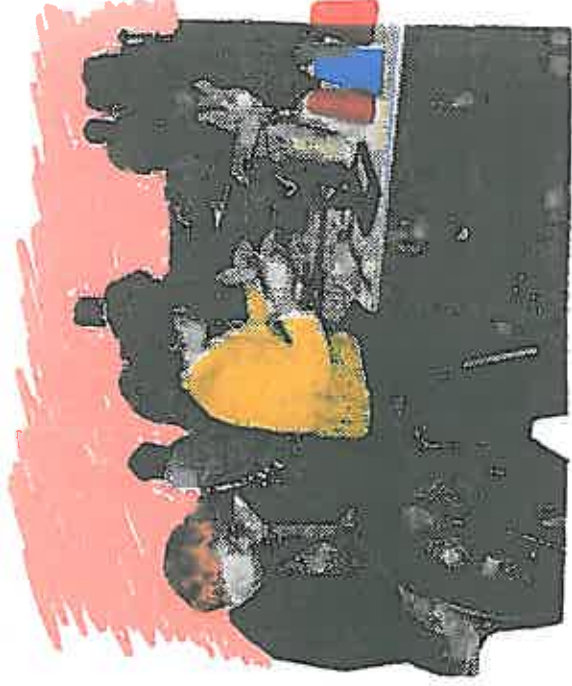
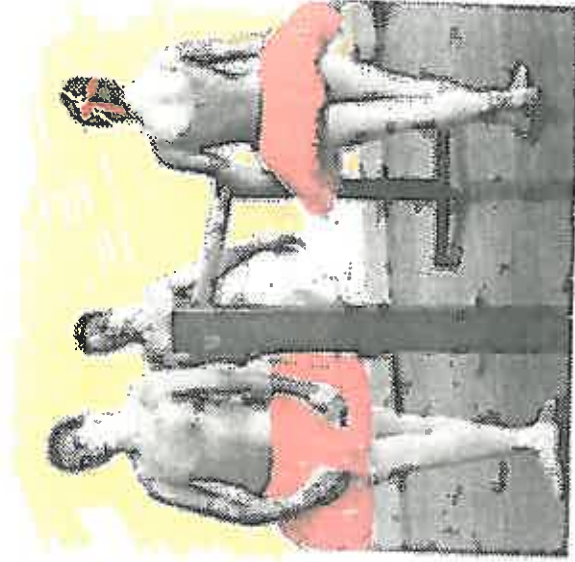
The difficulties of establishing the process of consultation were described by the Community Arts Officer:

"It's hard to inspire people around something which is a possibility rather than an eventuality. You're talking about something which might happen, and you're not exactly sure what it's going to be. Whether there's a role for people in it - but would they come and contribute anyway. It's a difficult thing to sell".

The City Engineer commented on the usual pattern of community consultation - and on what was different about the Community Arts Centre experience:

"We've usually consulted the potential user groups. On a sports pavilion, for example; there was a hockey club, a cricket club, football clubs... all those people were consulted about what they needed before any pen was put to paper. But it didn't go wider than that. A lot of difference here (the Arts Centre) was in the way that the community's voice was interpreted."

A further important point was made that the process had not been one of separate consultation with interest groups but had brought together representatives of many groups, thereby strengthening the sense of an arts community.



Artist Involvement

"If your architect is a decent architect, why would you need an artist?"
COUNCILLOR



Modern examples of public art tend, as one council officer commented, to stand alone rather than be integrated into the building. The role of the artist, that is, is regarded as adding some decorative element such as a piece of sculpture, a painting or a mural to a finished building.

In the Box Hill project the role of the artist was defined differently: the artist's work was to be integrated into the design and not a feature separate from the design. In keeping with the consultative spirit and principle of the project, the artist's role was also to link into the architecture and the community: to encourage and enable the participation of community members in the various stages of the building.

The aims and rationale for engaging an artist were formally defined as:

- To create a facility which inspires creativity by example
- To better resource the design team in the creation of a building which provides a public face for arts activity in the City of Box Hill
- To explore the continuum between the functional and the aesthetic in architecture, art and design.
- To provide an example to Box Hill of the possibilities for collaboration between artists and architecture.

A daunting brief! Clearly everything hinged on the individual who was appointed. Box Hill was fortunate in finding Maggie Fookes, an artist who not only had a background in architecture but also the skills of being able to work in a community context in a flexible and non-directive way.

The addition of an artist to the design team could have presented a challenge or threat to what one of the architects termed the architects' usual paranoia to have control over every detail". But in this case the collaboration was harmonious as well as fruitful for all concerned. The architects welcomed the challenge and regarded the experience as stimulating, a new expression of the co-operative processes inherent in the design and construction of buildings.

Maggie's work during the design phase involved community workshops as well as discussions with the architects and landscape architect, and she established contact with a range of community groups, artists and other individuals, schools, visual arts students and trade school apprentices, all of whom participated in the ceramics project. Their work on the various ceramic elements was carried out during the construction stage of the building. This meant that the artist provided the vital focus for continuing community involvement at a time which might otherwise have been a hiatus, a lack of opportunity for participation.

Maggie described her contribution as 'an extension of the architecture'. This can be interpreted in the intangible sense of extending the relationship between architecture, community context and clients, and perceived in the tangible evidence of her influence on the building - in colours and finishes, and most notably in the varied application of ceramics. This includes a large tile mural, glazed ceramic capping on the building and garden walls, glazed terracotta garden seats, tiled brick columns and the entrance to the building, hand-painted tiles in bathrooms and other areas, and ceramic leaf tiles embedded in pathways around the building. These are also tangible and lasting evidence of the contribution made by all those members of the community who worked with Maggie in the creation of what is much more than decoration or embellishment of the building.

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She was able to make her statement but people could go off and do what they wanted with the ceramics. Someone in her position could have been very possessive... she seemed happy to let it all evolve. A very flexible artist - it's a special quality - that level of trust.

LOCAL ARTIST

The artist's involvement brought more creative thoughts, more skills. Opportunities arose and were explored - whereas when you're working with trades people the opportunities sometimes get stifled because of "practices". Every idea was there to be explored with the artist - she attended all of us.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNER



My biggest contribution has been to stretch everybody... people who perhaps imagined that the artist would produce a small piece to put on the front of the building.

THE ARTIST

Responses

Community

I found it very special, being able to concretely do something that goes into a building... to work with Maggie and do the painting, and for my kids to be able to make leaves that are set in the paths was absolutely wonderful.

LOCAL RESIDENT

As a volunteer it would have been very hard for me to be excited about the project if it wasn't explained and if the artist wasn't excited about it herself... She articulated the design beautifully to her volunteers.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE



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Architects and Other Professionals

Local artists and craftspeople who worked on the ceramics project responded enthusiastically to the opportunity of working with an artist - and to see the possibilities of working with an artist- especially on such a large scale. 'Never before have I, or the community, been able to literally make a mark on a building.'

For others who'd been involved in the planning workshops and discussions, the artist's contribution was seen as 'another perspective on the total design', as enabling 'integration of hand-made materials with the building', as 'giving the building extra identity' - being part of the building's identity' and, perhaps most importantly, as 'involving so many parts of the community in her projects'.

The results of working in collaboration with the artist, and of the artist's role in the project, were seen very positively in terms such as 'Broadening the detailed expression of the building - and of the community', 'Opening up a lot of opportunities within the building, to enhance it, provide lots of surprises and a handcrafted feel', and 'Providing ideas for finishes which wouldn't normally be part of the architect's kit of tools'.

There was also an awareness of the risks involved in the collaboration: as one of the architects put it:

'We could have done something extra, too, but the whole point of this exercise was in opening up or letting go... It's what this project was about, rather than us saying 'You could pay us to do this, we could be the artist'. It's a surprise element: there's a risk involved but there's a rich payoff.'

Part of that risk, of course, was related to the collaborative process itself: to the personalities of individuals - 'the ego thing' - and their willingness and ability to work productively and in harmony. 'The spirit of collaboration and co-operation - you need very particular people to cope with that'. In this case there was a fortuitous combination of very particular people: one of the features which prevent the representation of this project as a model.

The project also took advantage of the skills of particularly creative crafts and tradespeople, in the use of special detail and finishes. The metal work, tiling, woodwork and bricklaying are examples of excellence in these fields.

The Artist

In a general comment on her role, Maggie Fooke reiterated the views of the architects. Whilst aware of the potential for an artist to extend the scope of any project, she acknowledged that "Artists aren't generally trained for this kind of work, so it does require a certain sort of person interested in working this way... Architects aren't trained in this way either."

Maggie described the working relationship: 'I responded very much to the building, to the thoughts expressed by the community, and to the way the architects expressed how they thought it was going to be.... Then going away and working on my own, developing my materials - figuring out what was actually possible. The work that I did fits in because it was designed to fit in.'

Council Officers

The perceived value of engaging an artist on the project might be gauged from the City Engineer's view that the artist should have been introduced at an earlier stage, to have an even bigger impact and 'suggest places where art forms and materials could be incorporated into the building' - and that allowance for the artist should have been made in the project budget.

The scope and potential of the artist's contribution is evident in the Community Arts Officer's expression of concern for defining the scope of the artist's involvement.

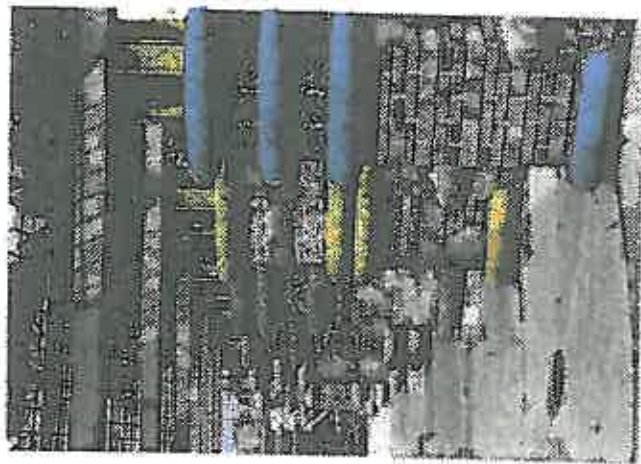
When you're working with someone like Maggie who opens one door and then another... it's like a Russian doll... where do you stop? It's a real difficulty to say that's not right for this project, or we can't encompass that at this time; it feels like putting a cork in creativity!

Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't... Maggie has had some experience with architecture - a real grasp of what architecture is... There was a good implicit understanding between Maggie and us

THE ARCHITECTS

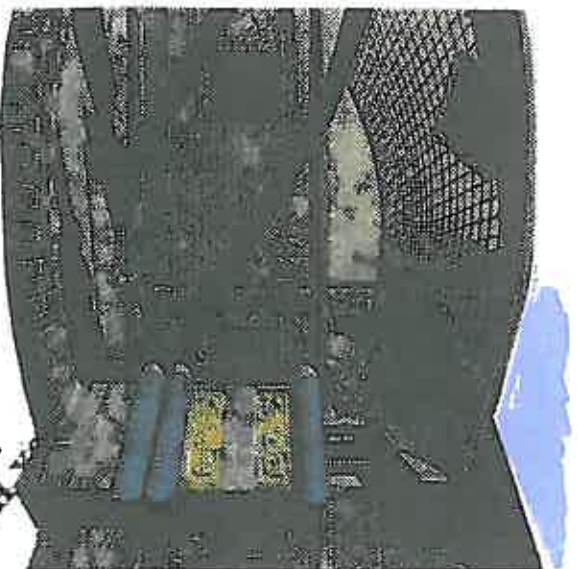
It's been a fantastic experience working with people. What the project did for me was reassure me that as a designer I can work in any materials... I liked the sense of experimenting and learning new things - the building is about that, too.

THE ARTIST



BOX HILL COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE
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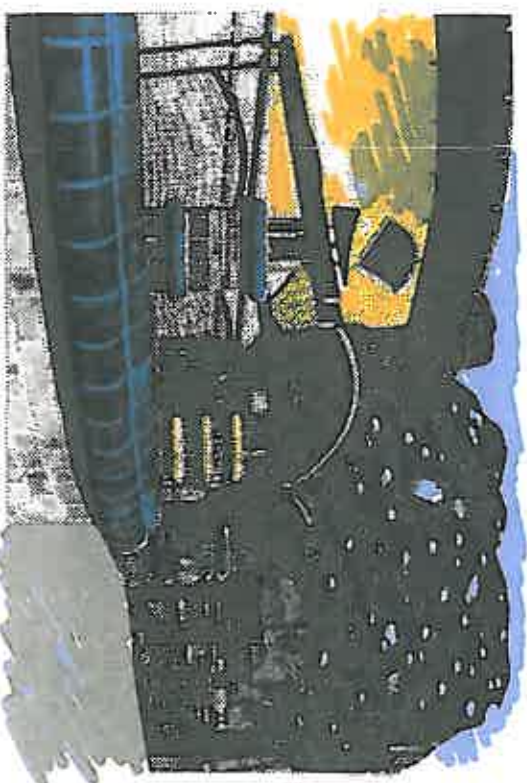
The Building



If a building can inspire I think this one might. It will challenge, because it isn't your run-of-the-mill public building.

CITY ENGINEER

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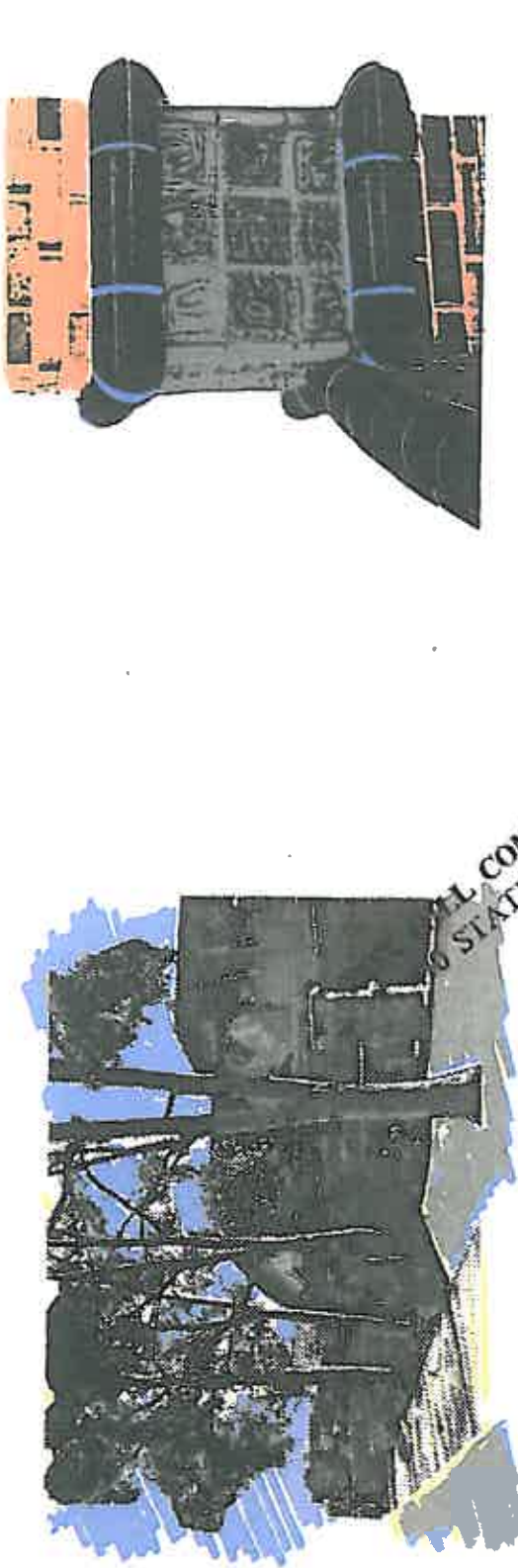


Unlike other community arts centres and similar buildings, Box Hill Community Arts Centre did not have to wait for the gradual attraction of users once it was completed. In the groups and individuals who had participated in the planning process and in working with the artist on the ceramics projects there was, as Maggie Fooko expressed it, 'a core... instant community'.

Because of their involvement and input into the design of the building, local arts and crafts groups have a place which meets their needs for work-space and facilities; a place with which they have a close relationship - a sense of ownership; and a place which offers something more:

"A wonderful way of not being a lonely artist but being a co-operative artist with other people. It's a magnificent home for a group of people like this." (LOCAL ARTIST)

The Centre also provides a congenial venue for other community groups and organisations who are regular or occasional users of the building.



There are, of course, limits to the way in which a multi-purpose centre can meet the needs of all arts groups and all other potential users, and compromises were required. Shared usage, for example, is essential, and for some groups this was a problem. But it is probably unrealistic to envisage a building which could provide a home for the entire spectrum of local arts activity, ranging from the municipal band, ballet and theatre companies, to painters, potters and tapestry workers. Box Hill seems to have struck a reasonably happy medium.

Several months after its opening, the Community Arts Centre has over thirty groups as regular users which, in addition to the Centre's own programme of courses and classes, and occasional commercial functions, has meant that for much of the time - especially evenings - the place is heavily booked. The number of users has exceeded initial expectations, but it is of equal interest and importance that there has been an increase in the membership of several user groups since they have been meeting at the Centre.

Council aims to generate sufficient income from facility rentals and programs to cover the overheads of the Community Arts Centre by the end of its third year of operation. Current trends indicate that this will be achieved. The only significant on-going financial commitment will be the salary of the centre administrator.



Responses



The Community

Two sets of responses need to be considered: those of the arts community - the main users of the building, and those of the wider community.

For the arts community, regardless of degrees of involvement in the creation of the Centre, the response has been overwhelmingly positive ('Even the toilets are a work of art!') The ambience is stimulating - even inspirational: 'It gives a sense of peace - it's a very peaceful building'.

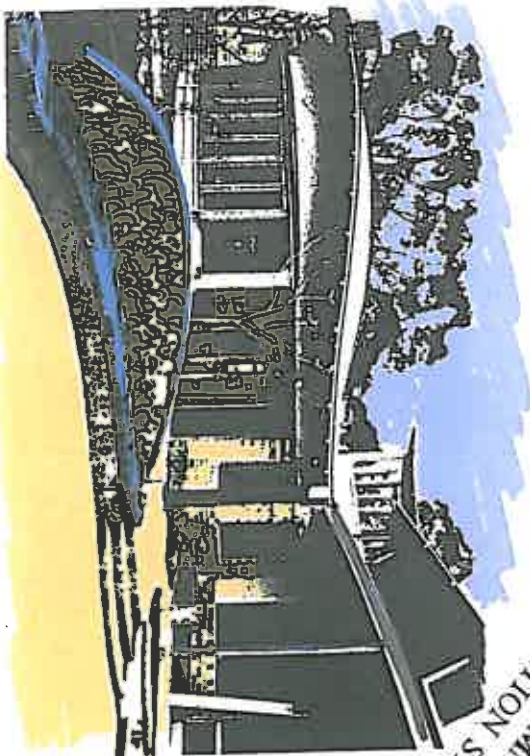
"People say they find it a building that's inspiring and they choose to work or meet here because of that. They feel they work better here than if they were in a box with a couple of windows." (COMMUNITY ARTS OFFICER)

The design of the building is seen as conducive to the establishment of contact between formerly disparate groups. 'We mix, we talk to other groups before we get started on our own work...' The Community Arts Centre has, in other words, enabled the strengthening of the sense of an arts community.

For the wider community, the emergence of an unconventional building in a generally conventional social and architectural environment has been a challenging experience. There may still be, as one participant in the planning process put it, 'a strong sense of ownership from the people who use the building, but not from the people around this neighbourhood.'

There've always been lots of arts groups in Box Hill but they've never known of each other's existence let alone had a place where they could share... There's far greater interaction between the groups now. The building certainly helps.

LOCAL ARTIST





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Comments range from 'it's not going to please everyone... some find it very unusual, very strong', and 'it's a shock at first, but then it grows on you', to 'it's very brave... wonderful having something so innovative in a place like this'. A Council officer reported that the most consistent criticism received was that 'there's too much. It gives the impression that "they" tried everything they could think of - colours, style, the curved roof - everything.'

Clearly the difference in community response is between those who merely look at the exterior of the building, seeing only an exotic example of architecture, and those who actually enter and use the Centre:

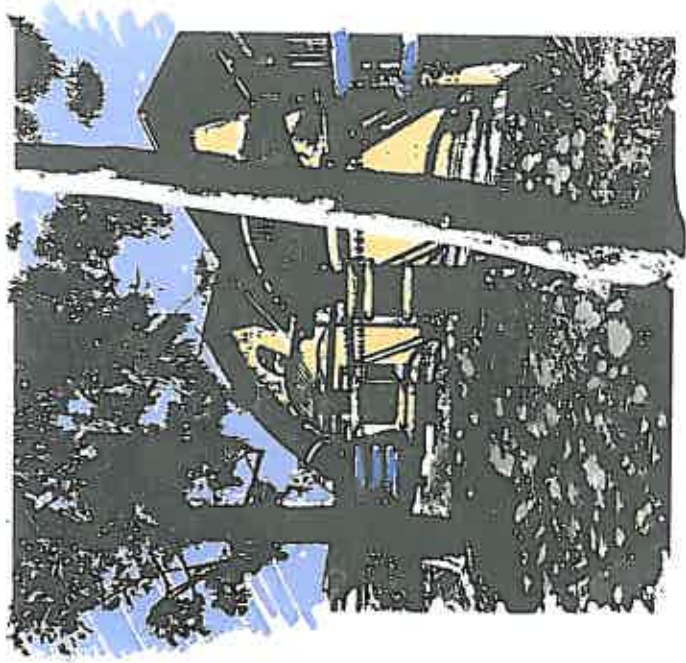
"Some members of our group have said 'Oh, it's terrible - what have they built? Now we hear differently: 'Isn't it lovely - we love coming here.'"

There is, a reflection of the achievement, through the whole process, of something more than a building:

"I was a volunteer, working with Maggie on the ceramics project. Since then I've started a clay-workers' co-operative with people who were involved in the project. We're now working happily at the Centre."

The response of the designers and consultants can be summed up in an architect's comment:

"I've found it particularly rewarding coming back here after such a long process, getting a sense of the movement and activities... the way the building is being used... the unusual amount of occupation. It's really the completion of the building to see that."

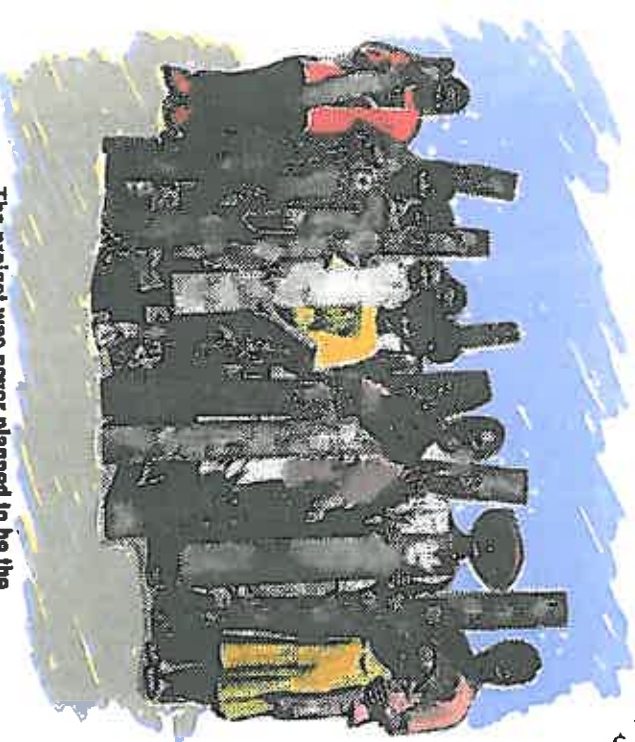


Conclusion

It's easy to build things and forget that we're building them for people.

COMMUNITY ARTS OFFICER

BOX HILL COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE
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The project was never planned to be the project it became.
ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNER

Remarking on the number of requests for information about the building from people outside Box Hill, the Community Arts Officer asked:

"How can we communicate to people outside the City what's happened here - in a way that will be useful to them, rather than being a recipe.

This booklet is one answer to those questions, and indicates the impossibility of presenting that 'recipe' since the ingredients from which the Box Hill Community Arts Centre were made may not be generally available. But the Box Hill experience has many implications and applications for other communities and other projects."

* It demonstrates the kind of process through which communication between local government and community can be achieved, and through which consultation with community groups can be both positive and productive.

* It emphasises the point that the built environment does affect the community, and that the community's ideas and views should be taken into account in the planning and design of public buildings.

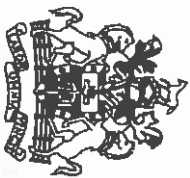
* It demonstrates the possibilities for collaboration and co-operation between local government, architects and planners, and community - possibilities which depend for their realisation on flexibility amongst all involved, and willingness to work co-operatively.

* It also demonstrates the need for a degree of trust in the outcomes of an innovative and evolving process of collaboration and consultation

* It shows the potential for engaging an artist to work on a public project in ways which achieve far more than the mere creation of a work of art as enhancement or decoration.

* Above all, it indicates the pride and sense of ownership in a public building which result not just from consultation with a community, but from the opportunity for direct participation in its creation.

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