

OXFORD & FOLEY

Background
Information on
WE ARE HERE 2013

BACKGROUND



WE ARE HERE artwork 2013

<https://www.cityartsydney.com.au/artwork/we-are-here/>

<https://www.weekendnotes.com/we-are-here-on-foley-street/>

<https://vimeo.com/72325526>

In 2013 the City of Sydney commissioned Juliet Rosser to curate the WE ARE HERE artwork, to be exhibited for 2 years. The fourth artwork as part of the Streetware temporary program of street art commissions by the City of Sydney. The work – collaboratively executed by artists Sarah Howell, Dylan Demarchi, byrd, The Dirt and Gui Andrade – revived lost fragments of the area’s history and brought it firmly to the present. The work took its shape from the hundreds of parades that have travelled up Oxford Street. The work was executed using a variety of forms – spray paint, paste up, mixed media, photography, neon signage and collage using historical imagery from the City of Sydney archives.

The work was created to be firmly embedded with a sense of place, referencing the colourful and varied history of the surrounding area. The work focused on locally specific themes:

1. The Owners and Custodians of the land
2. War and Peace
3. Fame and Shame
4. Freedom and Confinement
5. Commerce and Multiculturalism
6. Protest and Pride
7. From Paddock to Plate
8. Our transcendent tools of trade
9. One People One Destiny
10. Poets and Scoundrels

The WE ARE HERE artwork from 2013 is located on the rear façade of Building 2 within the proposed Oxford & Foley project. Since 2013 it has fallen into disrepair, paste ups have become weather damaged, torn and ripped. The paint has faded, and the neon sign is disconnected. Building works have also occurred on site, covering parts of the previous artwork with pipes.

WE ARE HERE 2013

To continue the through line from one artwork to the next the two bookend hands will be kept. These are the walking hand and the peace hand on the Crown Street and Palmer Street corners, also the colourful geometrics and the neon sign will remain.



Existing works to be restored from WE ARE HERE 2013

(Left) Cnr Foley and Crown Street - WE ARE HERE neon sign, walking hand and geometrics.

(Right) Cnr Foley and Palmer Street – peace sign

The building façade is undergoing significant changes, including the removal of the down pipes and redundant air conditioning. The Developer is re-surfacing the façade. This new façade will be the canvas for the new artworks. The new artworks will need to be integrated into the new façade of the building.

ANALYSIS OF THE PRECINCT

The Oxford & Foley project comprises three buildings that were constructed between 1911 – 1912 and are locally listed heritage items. The Zink Tailors building located at 56 Oxford Street is listed on the State Significant Heritage register.

Key attributes of the site are as follows:

- Iconic and historic location
- Connected to Sydney CBD (less than 1km East).
- Public Transport at doorstep including a 10 min bus transit to the City Centre.
- View corridors to the CBD and Harbour (on upper levels).
- Walking distance to Hyde Park.
- Linked to Taylor Square.
- Heritage Buildings.
- All buildings are situated on prominent Oxford Street and have rear lane accessibility (Foley Street).

The Site is surrounded by the following key sites:

- Crown Street Surry Hills.
- Oxford Village – ALDI, Fitness First, JB Hi-Fi.
- Taylor Square.
- Darlinghurst Theatre Company.
- St Vincent’s Hospital.
- National Art School.
- Oxford Street Bars and Music Entertainment Venues, the Burdekin, Oxford Art Factory, Shady Pines Saloon and Big Poppa’s.

The following key stakeholder groups have been identified:

- City of Sydney Council (Both as Landlord under the 99-year Leasehold and Consent Authority).
- Local community and residents.
- Retailers in close-proximity and neighbouring properties.
- LGBTIQ Community.

WE ARE HERE 2013: THEME DESCRIPTIONS IN ARTWORK

The Owners & custodians of the land

We honour the Gadigal elders past & present as the owners of the land surrounding you and under your feet. We imagine the land before colonisation with native animals and flora. Whilst the animals are beautiful the section as a whole is visually jarring alluding to the jarring event about to occur. Some of these native animals are a water dragon, a quoll, a cormorant, an egret, a frog, feather tail glider and a wattle bird, animals that lived in this area pre-colonization.

War & Peace

From Victory parades to anti-war protests, Oxford Street has been a witness to countless demonstrations and victory celebrations. With Victoria Barracks and the War Memorial nearby, Oxford Street has witnessed young soldiers marching off to war and marches commemorating the fallen. Anti-war protesters have gathered on Oxford Street protesting for peace both near and far from the Japanese invasion of China in the thirties to Vietnam and anti-nuclear demonstrations.

Fame & Shame

During the late 60s, 70’s, 80’s the area was a cheap place to live which encouraged a dynamic population of immigrants and students. The area grew into a culturally diverse music and arts hub. Pubs and clubs took advantage of the musical zeitgeist of the area and provided the space for bands to cut their teeth. Bands such as The Divinyls, Radio Birdman, and The Clouds were significant to the Australian scene whilst street performers and buskers were on every corner.

Freedom & Confinement

Darlinghurst Gaol was opened in 1841, and prisoners such as an inebriated Henry Lawson and Captain Moonlight were paraded up Oxford Street (then Old South Head Road) to meet their fate. Hangings were open to the public with people jeering from Forbes St. Louise Collins was the last woman to be hung in NSW who came to her fate in the grounds of Darlinghurst Gaol on the 8th of January 1889.

In 1922 Oxford Street saw a different sort of hanging on the same site with the transformation of the Gaol to the East Sydney Technical College (now the National Art School). Artists flocked to the new school and its alumni include Max Dupain, Charles Blackman, Jeffrey Smart, Margaret Olley Adam Cullen, Reg Mombassa and Wendy Sharp to name a few.

Commerce & Multiculturalism

In the late 19th century business was booming on the strip. Strange smells, mess, clutter and clatter were wafting down from Oxford Street to where you are now standing. The area was filled with businesses run by a different demographic to the rest of Sydney, there was Chinese, Jewish, Greek Italian, Russian, Spanish immigrants selling their wares from Swiss precision instruments to oyster bars, to Irish taverns.

Protest & Pride

The Sydney Mardi Gras grew from gay rights marches held annually from 1978. In these early days, many activists were arrested by police, outed by newspapers and considered criminals for dreaming of equality. Now the parade includes participants from the Police department and forces important issue such Same Sex Marriage rights into the public forum. Fred Nile, don't rain on our parade!

From Paddock to Plate

The Royal Easter show is the original celebration of buying local and understanding where our food comes from. The Show was held at Moore Park for 116 of its' 190-year history. The annual Easter Show Parade was a chance for the "City to meet Country" a parade for exhibitors to show off their livestock and produce to the urban dwellers. The parade went through Sydney streets along Oxford St to Moore Park.

Our transcendent tools of our trade

A recurring motif throughout the artwork is hands. The hardworking hands of the residents, artisans and business owners have created Darlinghurst. The hand also has the ability to transcend borders and verbal language through sign language which is peppered throughout the work – can you understand what it says?

One People One Destiny

Federation in 1901 saw celebrations all over the country. A huge parade made its way to Centennial Park along Oxford Street on the 1st of January 1901. Many Celebrations of nationhood have been referenced from sesquicentenary celebrations of 1938 to Centenary of Federation celebrations of 2001.

Poets and scoundrels

The Darlinghurst area has been immortalised by wordsmiths from Henry Lawson to Paul Kelly. At Lawson's death he was honoured with a state funeral and his casket traversed up Oxford Street on its way to Waverly Cemetery.

At times Darlinghurst was considered the epicentre of crime, corruption and the haven of the underworld. In the 20s and 30s the area was run by two women, Tilly Devine and Kate Leigh who headed up organized crime syndicates, ran brothels, sly-grog houses and 'snow parlours'.

Also Featured

Larry Foley, the namesake of Foley Street is considered Australia's father of boxing, he was a bare-knuckle fighter of the day.

The Plague hit Sydney in 1900 over 44,000 rats were officially killed in the cleansing operation.

CURATOR STATEMENT – WE ARE HERE 2013

A parade where the street becomes a stage

WE ARE HERE is an inclusive proclamation of present and past. A spectacle inviting you in; you are here, and WE ARE HERE.

The WE ARE HERE mural transforms Foley Street into a time travelling, rambunctious romp through the complex history of the local area. Taking its cue from the hundreds of celebratory and solemn parades that have travelled up Oxford St, the work turns the façade into a topographical map to create the WE ARE HERE parade route.

Deeply connected to the location this parade is filled with a motley crew of heroes, villains, musicians, bohemians and gangsters. Imbued with the ghosts of those that have come before, the prancers and preeners, bakers, brewers and whores. This is a celebration of the folks that have made Darlinghurst their home or the source of their bread and butter.

The work collaboratively executed by artists Sarah Howell, Dylan Demarchi, byrd, The Dirt & Gui Andrade brings to life lost fragments of the area's history and brings it firmly to the present. Using paint, collage, mixed media, photography and stencil, the mixed and contrasting mediums employed by the artists play with the inherent polarities of the Darlinghurst & Oxford Street narrative.

The often dark and gruesome history is melded with times of celebration. The work rejoices in the swinging pendulum of its fortunes from cultural backwater to creative epicentre, from slum to designer living, a place of protest to a place of celebration, from the 6 o'clock swill to sophisticated cocktail culture, criminal to respectable, addict ridden to health driven. This is an area that has seen and been it all.

Whilst the work honours the past it is also firmly placing a stake in the ground for the present. Celebrating the renewed creativity that is re-emerging in and around Oxford St. The artists and the culture creators are here once again in and around Oxford St, building it with their hands (or the click of a mouse button) and proclaiming WE ARE HERE.

Curator

Juliet Rosser

HISTORY OF OXFORD STREET

by local historian Clive Faro for the WE ARE HERE 2013 program

A back lane in the city's back yard

Originally a bush track that ran along the ridge between Botany Bay and Sydney Harbour, by World War 1 Oxford Street had morphed into a boulevard that joined the city to the suburbs to its east.

The history of this street - how it came to be built, and the people who came to live on it - is in many ways emblematic of the history of the city. Early in the 19th century, Governor Macquarie, for largely strategic reasons, constructed a road to the South Head along that ridge. However, it soon became a place claimed by Sydney 'society': a place to parade, to see and be seen.

As the city grew, and the localities of Darlington and Surry Hills were sub-divided, a web of smaller streets and even smaller back lanes spread out into what eventually became suburbs of the city. In the 1840s, a new courthouse and gaol brought significant public buildings to the area. Gradually the South Head Road was becoming a 'high street', a place of commerce and communities; its commercial success in turn led to a name change - it became 'Oxford Street'. With aspirations to elegant London shopping, a merchandising revolution saw the advent of new department stores, many located in lower Oxford Street.

Foley Lane edges along these lower reaches of Oxford Street and forms a kind of backstage to the mainstage of the boulevard on the ridge. It is in lanes like this that the life that supported the main street has played out: where the supplies arrived for shops fronting onto Oxford Street; where the kegs of beer were offloaded for the pubs; and where the detritus of daily life was taken away by garbage and night soil collectors. It is here that the corpses were discreetly offloaded by hearses to be installed in the funeral parlours facing Oxford Street; and it is in these lanes where the ladies of the night and their clients have danced the dance of desire.

Shadows of these previous lives live on in the present-day lanes of Darlington. It is here that you'll see cats preening in the late afternoon sunshine, a drag queen fix her makeup before launching herself onto Oxford Street, or a group of clubbers gather for a chat and a 'breath of fresh air' before heading back into the maelstrom of Oxford Street

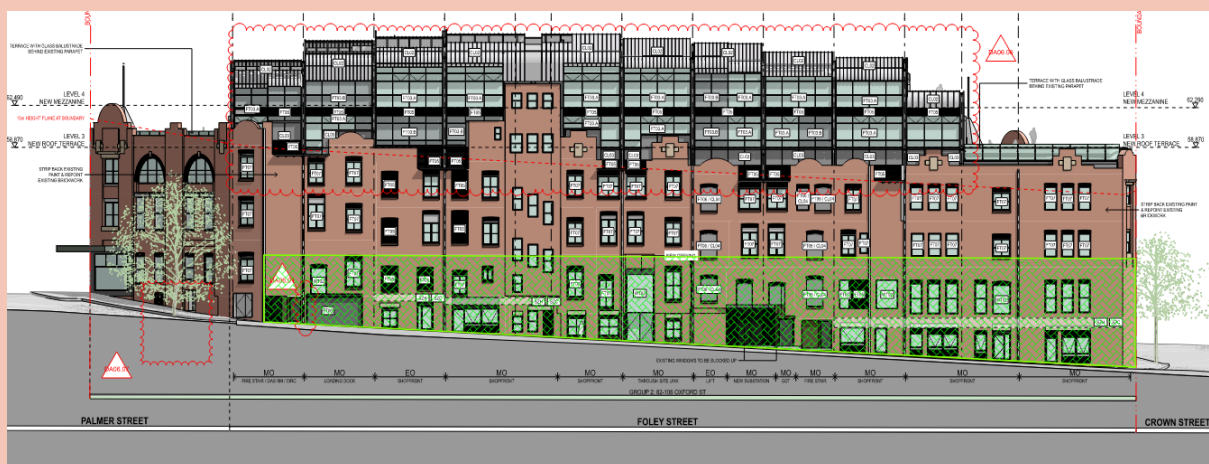
A back lane in the city's back yard, Foley Lane has seen it all.

Author of *Street Seen: a history of Oxford Street*

Clive Faro

WE ARE HERE (STILL) 2023

Proposed area



Green hatched area indicates the proposed zone on the façade for WE ARE HERE II (STILL).