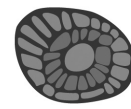


CHARGED LANDSCAPE SCULPTURE

BY BECKY NEVIN BERGER
AND JON DIXON



Inspiring a
Great South Coast
Arts Trail



LEADERSHIP
Great South Coast

Located a short walk from the start of the Rail Trail in Port Fairy

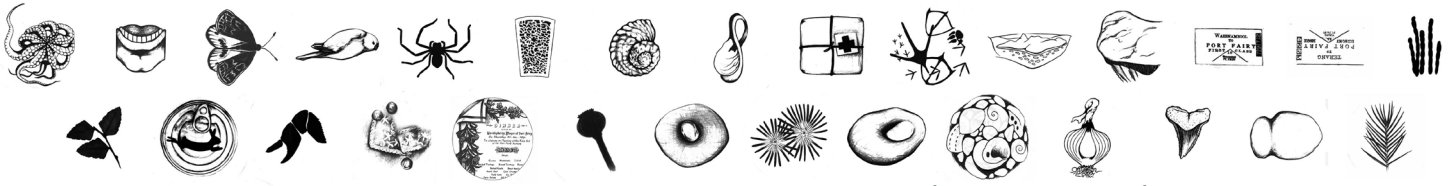


IMAGE OF THE DISCS (DRAWN BY THE ARTIST) FOR THE CHARGED LANDSCAPE

Charged Landscape is a sculpture which recognises the many overlapping histories of Port Fairy. Multiple aspects are brought together in a constellation representing the Emu in the Sky, from Australian indigenous astronomy.

Different materials have been used to represent stars and fossils. The sculpture invites you to activate it; as day becomes night, enter the salt marsh trail with a torch in hand, and wander forward until you find the eleven ancient rocks embedded with glowing blue stars. Take your torch and charge the stars until they glow even more brightly still; watch the stars move, hide and unfold as you move your body around this space.

THE EMU IN THE SKY

The Aboriginal star constellation the Emu in the Sky is comprised of the dark patches in the Milky Way, where thick clouds of interstellar dust obscure light from the galaxy's center.

This recognition of negative space, as well as the sense that some aspects of the world remain hidden from vision, provided a poetic lead for this sculpture. The Emu's head rests next to the Southern Cross, its body stretches across the sky through Scorpio and out past Sagittarius.

The Emu in the Sky is common to many First Nations people across Australia, from Papunya in the Northern Territory to the Grampians in Victoria. The Gariwerd creation story describes the Emu as the ferocious Tchingle. Locally, the Gundjitmarra also hold the Emu with reverence; unable to step backwards, he embodies the power to move forward with strength.

FOSSILS

In this miniature stellar nursery there is a series of stars, each of which contains a fossil record of the different histories which intersect across this landscape. Themes of ecology, geology, indigenous history, colonial history and the railway line itself can be found.

Here are a few starting points which may inspire your own inquiry into the different stories of this landscape:

- This railway line was born of the 1884 Railway Act, which was colloquially known as the Octopus Act, for the tendrils that it sent out into each Victorian electorate.

- By coincidence, a decade before the line's first sod was turned, a diver dynamiting basalt lining the Moyne River was attacked by a massive octopus, a terrible devil fish who, once defeated in battle, was measured to be eight feet across.
- Colonial women are somewhat hidden in Port Fairy's history. A shining exception is Annie Baxter, who briefly settled in Yambuk with her military husband. This infamous socialite was as well known for her fabulous style as for racing horses against men.
- Encounters with a mythical and terrifying great white shark in nearby waters have been reported since at least the 1970s. Locals have dubbed the beast Big Ben.
- The ancient megalodon who swam here when the sea was above this landscape 10-15 million years ago, makes Ben look like a sardine: a single megalodon tooth is bigger than a man's palm.
- More recently, the region has become home to some of the world's youngest volcanoes. The region stretches from the Blue Lake to Mt Leura to Mt Rouse and beyond. Charged Landscape's basalt boulders are taken from the Mt. Rouse lava flow which reached the sea here at Port Fairy. As the coast has ebbed and flowed, so too the land has morphed and buckled; the sea's edge was once 50km further out at the continental shelf's edge and before that it was joined to Antarctica.
- Aboriginal people have lived symbiotically with this landscape for tens of thousands of years. Their culture is so continuous here that the Tower Hill explosion of 30,000 years ago is embedded in their oral history. Local Stone formed an important part of their technology, stones were used as axe heads and to grind food and pigments. Stone was also used to form channel systems for eel farming, evidence of which can still be seen in the Budj Bim Landscape.
- Despite degradation of wetland environments since European settlement, they are among Australia's most valuable environments. Saltmarshes such as the Belfast Locke are in fact among the highest ecological value in this class. They support a range of unique plant and animal species, including the small burrowing crayfish whose presence is noted by small holes with simple mud chimneys. The endangered orange bellied parrot and hooded plover also find shelter in this internationally recognised Important Bird Area.

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