

Urban art force

Sunshine Coast artists have joined a massive public campaign to change the way we look at the humble traffic signal box and the results really can stop traffic

Words KYLIE JACKES

If you have stopped at the traffic lights and seen a dancing fish, bikini babes or a green pea boat, you have no doubt noticed the artwork that adorns traffic signal boxes (TSBs) stretching from Caloundra to Coolumb.

An initiative run by Urban Smart Projects, the concept of painting boxes originated 10 years ago in Brisbane as an inexpensive and creative way of tackling the spread of graffiti.

More than 2000 TSBs have been painted in south-east Queensland with 32 on the Coast undergoing a colourful transformation in the past 12 months. Urban Smart Projects director Catherine Ovenden says the response to the

program has been phenomenal. "People just love it, they contact us by phone and email, thrilled with the way the boxes have created something lovely in their neighbourhoods," she says. "It is a simple idea and perhaps one of the single biggest public art projects in the world."

Attracting a wide range of participants, including emerging and established artists through to individuals, families and school groups, who want to create a piece of original art in their area, the project has multiple community benefits. "The boxes really add to the aesthetic appeal of neighbourhoods

and research has found that 85 per cent of painted boxes remain untagged (by graffiti) after four years, whereas a majority of non-painted boxes are tagged within a few months," Catherine says.

Funded by the Department of Transport and Main Roads, Urban Smart Projects is currently waiting for more boxes to be released, but Catherine hopes to get the green light soon. "Running the project is far cheaper than the cost of graffiti removal, but we still need the funding for it. We're hoping it won't be long before more boxes will be released on the Coast," she says.



RUSSELL HAMPSON

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Deep Beneath the Bunyip Sleeps, King St, Buderim

With a fascination for bunyips, graphic designer, illustrator and children's author Russell Hampson decided to paint his concept of "Australia's national monster" on the side of his allocated box in Buderim.

Having lived in the town for six years the local winding streetscapes, trees and houses also provided inspiration for his colourful cartoon style box.

"At the top of the box I painted the suburban aspect of Buderim with lots of houses and noise, which compete with the natural ecosystem that lies deep beneath it all. And I added a bit of fun with the bunyip," Russell explains. "Because their appearance is not defined, there's so much room for the imagination."

Given a big box of goodies to complete the project — including paints, witches' hats and a reflective vest — Russell spent two days battling gusty winds while painting the urban canvas. "Over the two days I painted, it was particularly freezing and windy. Part way through, I had to go home and rug up so I think the conditions affected the work a bit, but it was a really rewarding experience," he says. "Whenever I drive past it now, I do think about what I could have done differently, but I guess that is just how artists think."

'THERE'S A FANTASTIC SENSE OF MORNING GLORY!'

— Paul Collins



NICOLE MURRAY

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The Song of Trees, Beach St, Maroochydore

When Maleny artist and musician Nicole Murray was asked if she would like to paint a TSB she jumped at the chance.

But, unlike many of the people involved in the project, she was unable to paint a traffic box in her own neighbourhood. "There are no traffic lights in Maleny, so there were no boxes to paint," Nicole says with a laugh. "I had to go a little further a field and venture down the range."

Nicole scored a signal box on a prime corner in Maroochydore and was inspired to show her love of trees. "Fig trees are a bit of a theme in my work at the moment, I love how sculptural and architectural they are. They create such interesting shapes which look a lot like Celtic knot work and only become more beautiful with age."

The old church, which sits behind the TSB was also incorporated in the design, with its spires depicted on the side of the box between the branches of the fig trees.

Nicole first became aware of the Urban Smart project after spying the work of Simon De Groot on the streets of Brisbane. "When I saw his work on boxes around the place, I thought I'd love to do that too," Nicole recalls. "Brisbane is chock a block with public art and it really wakes up your thinking and brings art into people's daily lives."

Nicole is keen to do another piece and while she believes traffic lights will one day be an inevitable consequence of Maleny's continued growth, she doesn't like her chances of snaring a box.

"With so many artists living in Maleny there would be a bunfight between us over who got to paint it," she says with a laugh.



Ole by Brian Tisdall in Baden Powell St, Maroochydore

PAUL COLLINS
Shades of Morning Glory, Bowman Rd, Caloundra

As an avid surfer, Paul Collins knows just how temperamental the ocean can be.

"When you get up really early and head down to the beach for a surf, you don't know what to expect. You hope for the best conditions but expect the worst. Yet on the days when it is perfect for surfing there's a fantastic sense of morning glory," he says.

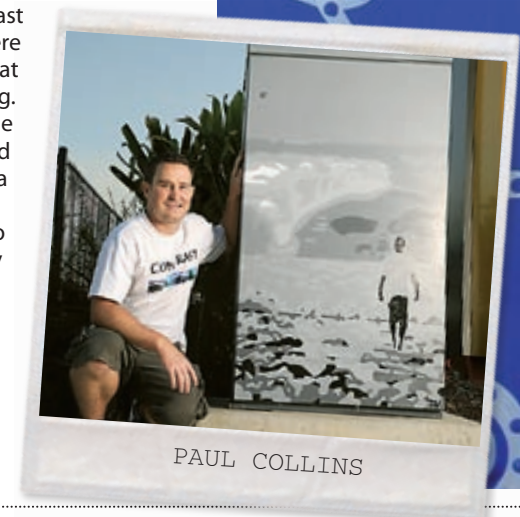
Looking to reflect the various moods of the ocean, the graphic artist, used his creativity to depict surf culture on a TSB as you head up into the main street of Caloundra. "I've been a surfer for the best part of my life and to combine my love of surfing with art was great," he says of the opportunity.

"I wanted to reflect Caloundra's huge range of water sports. When you head out you'll see regular surfers, body boarders through to kite boarders, windsurfers and stand-up paddlers, depending on the conditions, so on each side of the box I represented something different."

Spending two days on the side of the road painting and blending various shades of grey, Paul was surprised how interactive the experience was.

"People would wander past in the morning when there wasn't really much to look at and wonder what I was doing. Then they'd come back in the afternoon, see what I had done and strike up a conversation," he says.

"Everyone's response to the work was really supportive. And when I look around at some of the other boxes which have been painted, it really does raise your awareness that there's some very talented people around."



PAUL COLLINS

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Home is Where The Heart Lies by De Green/Indimincartie



'... SINCE THEY'VE BEEN DONE I HAVEN'T SEEN GRAFFITI ON THEM.'

— De Greer-Yindimincarlle

as a large four-sided canvas. "I used vibrant reds, oranges and yellow to represent the sun, which in Aboriginal culture is considered the giver of life. The seed pod in the centre portrays the action or the word, the branch is the journey, and the leaf at the end is the reward or consequence of that initial small action or word," says De who documented the painting process on YouTube.

Co-owner of the Blue House Art Gallery in Landsborough, De says visitors to the gallery often recognise her seed pod work after noticing the TSB at Alexandra Headland. "Because the image has become so popular, I've developed a whole series of works based around it," De explains. "When people come into the gallery they are amazed when they meet me as the artist who, 'did the box at Alex.'"

De was asked by Urban Smart Projects to paint a second box, this time in Caloundra.

Titled, Home Is Where The Heart Lies, it centres on the theme of home, whether that is a physical place, family or group of friends.

"I think the painting project is a fantastic initiative because, besides looking nice, it gets artists' work out there in the public and it exposes art to people who may not go into galleries," she says. "And since they've been done I haven't seen any graffiti on them either."

DE GREER-YINDIMINCARLIE

From *Small Things Big Things Grow*, Alexandra Pde, Alexandra Headland, and *Home Is Where The Heart Lies*, Bowman Rd, Caloundra (see page 19)

"From small things big things grow," is a philosophy to which artist De Greer-Yindimincarlle subscribes in every part of her life.

"I believe very strongly that everything you do, everything you say, every action in your life lays a path and takes you on a journey and the end result is the consequence of those words and actions," she explains.

To depict her philosophy through art, De embraced the opportunity to use the TSB



HOW TO TAKE PART

There are no age restrictions, anyone can take part and all the painting and safety equipment is supplied. To apply submit your design to Urban Smart Projects. For more information phone 3211 7178 or 1300 872 022 // www.urbansmartprojects.com or info@urbansmartprojects.com

