



After Don and Harvey, can we stick with Rolf Harris?

Description



Mixed messages: rather than get rid of a mural painted by sexual abuser Rolf Harris, the W'bool City Council opted to cover it up.

Image: ABC South-West.

What message does this black perspex send to women and girls in Warrnambool?

To me, it screams hypocrisy.

At a time when sexual predators – who also happen to be famous – are finally being outed for the scum that they are, surely Warrnambool can no longer hold on to this.

For those not familiar with this piece of black perspex, it is covering a kitschy mural painted spontaneously by Rolf Harris on a wall behind the scenes at the Lighthouse Theatre, way back in 1986.

A lot has changed since 1986.

We now know that Rolf Harris is a sexual abuser, down there with the likes of Harvey Weinstein, Don Burke, Lewis CK, Kevin Spacey, Bill Cosby and others who have finally been outed as the grubs so many people knew them to be.

In Harris's case, his disgusting crimes – for which he has been jailed – were against young girls. Kids.

And yet Warrnambool is sticking with Rolf.

We are still making excuses.

We have not yet had the courage, it seems, to actually paint over this work but to let it remain covered up, like a dirty little secret for somebody else to deal with down the track.

In the light of what is coming out now about Weinstein and Burke, does that “nothing to see here” approach sound familiar?

That decision was made on our behalf by a majority of the Warrnambool City councillors in 2015 who, using logic I still can’t understand, saw the covering up – rather than complete removal – as a sign of *support* for victims of sexual violence.

The main argument was that this mural was ART! and all ART! – even a slap-dash mural by a convicted child molester – is worth preserving at all costs.

Really?

Would we seriously consider hosting a gardening talk by Don Burke at the Lighthouse Theatre? Or a film night in honour of Harvey Weinstein, because, hey, their talents are quite separate to their being sexual abusers?

Fortunately a lot has changed since 2015.

We now have a new council. And we have now entered a time – AT LAST – when the powerful and the famous are no longer being given social immunity because of their particular talents, personality, wealth or likeability.

And right this minute, the council itself has the perfect opportunity to correct its mistake of hiding this mural and instead make a strong, symbolic gesture that we, as a city, do not tolerate sexual abusers – no matter who they are.

How?

Well, I saw on Facebook this morning that **Connect Warrnambool** (which is run by the WCC) is proudly supporting **16 Days of Action to support Gender Equality (#16days)** and it talks about things like promoting respect for women and increasing women’s safety and well-being.

All very stirring stuff, but such words, without action, are as hollow as Peter Dutton’s heart.

So here is my idea for Connect Warrnambool, and it is one that I have been pushing since 2015:

1. borrow a Makita drill and remove the screws that are holding up the perspex on the Harris mural;
2. ask for willing volunteers to come and run a paint roller right over the space (you will be inundated, Connect Warrnambool, I promise);
3. invite a young woman artist to paint a fresh mural and;
4. lastly, install the black perspex on the stage at the W’bool Civic Green and let little kids draw **their** art all over it.

What a message to say that we are absolutely serious about respect for women and girls.

I have my painting overalls ready...



Jackie Carruthers and I are ready to roll!

Category

1. Stories from life

Tags

1. abuse
2. art
3. Don Burke
4. gender equality
5. Harvey Weinstein
6. mural
7. painting
8. Rolf Harris
9. sexual abuse
10. Warrnambool City Council
11. women

Date Created

2017/11/27

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