

Port Pirie had a Rolf Harris mural – now it doesn't



The Rolf Harris self portrait, together with a smaller work, painted at the Northern Festival Centre during his tours in 1984 and 1989. Both are now gone. Image: ABC North and West.

By Carol Altmann

A few days ago, the South Australian town of Port Pirie had a mural by convicted sex offender Rolf Harris in one of its theatres and now it doesn't: it has been painted over.

No hand-wringing, no agonising that all "art" is sacred, and – thank god – no piece of black Perspex bolted over the top like a giant cover-up, which is the best the Warrnambool City Council can do [with the Harris mural at the back of the Lighthouse Theatre](#).

Once the presence of the painting became public, its owner –

the Northern Festival Centre – acted swiftly. Less than a week later, the painting is gone.

Such a decision rests on one simple belief: that we no longer tolerate sexual abuse and sexual assault against women, children or men.

Warrnambool City Council, are you taking notice?

See how this works? (Note, Crs Sue Cassidy, Peter Hulin and Tony Herbert earlier this year voted to get rid of the Harris mural. Crs Neoh, Gaston, Anderson and Owen voted to keep it covered.)

Despite the Port Pirie decision, Caravaggio paintings are still hanging in galleries around the world. Churches are still standing. And, despite warnings from our own council CEO Bruce Anson, there has been no revival in Port Pirie of the anti-intellectual book burnings of Nazi Germany, although I guess it is early days.

No, there has been none of that muddying rubbish. The decision-makers at the Northern Festival Centre just got on with it and got rid of it.

And I applaud them. Oh my, how I applaud them.

We can no longer say that we “didn’t know” what these sexual predators did: we do know.

And we can longer say that we “don’t know” the horrific impact that sexual assault and abuse has on the survivors: we do know and in 2018, celebrity is no longer an excuse.

From Bill Cosby, to Don Burke, to Donald Trump, to Brett Kavanaugh, to Harvey Weinstein, to Kevin Spacey, to Rolf Harris, to Woody Allen, to Roman Polanski, to Pablo Picasso

(#hannahgadsby #nanette), these perpetrators are being brought to account via the growing #metoo movement.

I keep hoping that one day, some day, the Warrnambool City Council will show a similar leadership to that of the Northern Festival Centre in Port Pirie.

Until then, we will continue to be a city that makes excuses for the inexcusable and that, to me, will always be a source of great shame.

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