Darwin City Council

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Eye of the Explorer
by artist Roland Koch Laurie

Art in the public domain is becoming a recognised way of life and the Eye of the Explorer, Darwin City Council's first commissioned site specific public art work, serves to make works of art more available and accessible to the Darwin community. (from Darwin City Council's Public Art Strategy – 1999)

The Eye of the Explorer has been designed by artist Roland Koch Laurie as a tactile public art experience, visitors are encouraged to walk around the water feature touching the water, feeling the texturalised tiles and reliving their own journeys through Australia's landscape as they recognise many of the places, plants, colours and icons .

History is created by real people with an inquisitiveness and ability to ask questions and the conviction and commitment to seek answers, not by historians. We all have our own questions to ask and a part to play in our world. In commissioning this memorial Darwin City Council wanted to recognise the enormous conviction of John McDouall Stuart and to recognise the ability of all of us to ask questions and play a significant role in the history of our own life.

The Eye of the Explorer consists of three main elements:

1. Glass and sand mosaic water feature
2. Stuart descriptive tile wall and seat
3. Approach paths and ochre paving, steps and grevillea landscaping

The Eye of the Explorer is a memorial to the explorer John McDouall Stuart; the site being located at the northern end of the Stuart Highway. The site does not have any direct geographic relationship to Stuart or the events of his explorations. However, being located at the end of the Stuart Highway it marks a significant place for many travellers who end their journey to Darwin from other parts of Australia and from around the world.

The "Eye of the Explorer" melds together characteristics of Stuart's explorations in a symbolic format within the context of a piece of landscaped public art. The use in the artwork of sand samples collected from communities, links together present day communities with the past passage of Stuart. The sand is used in the construction of the dual 's' and half circle shapes of the water feature and the large 'eye of the explorer'.

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The water feature contains; elements of land, sea and sky, the rock cairns representing the land; the waterfall representing water sources along the route and sea at the end of the route and reflects the sky, clouds and the stars.

The memorial concept creatively combines:

- The ‘eye’ format recognising the physical sacrifices Stuart made during his journeys. When he returned in 1862 he was very ill, almost blind from sandy blight and scurvy and had lost the use of his legs
- The letter ‘S’, as carved into trees by Stuart on his journey
- Double horse shoe shapes of the Cobdogla colts branded half circle ‘c’
- The important contribution made by the seventy one horses in the 1861-1862 Great Northern Expedition by using a ‘double horse shoe’ design.
- The importance of precious water sources such as ponds and creeks
- Drop forms within the ‘S’ symbol reflect on the journey from the southern ocean to northern waters of Australia.

The Eye of the Explorer has been made possible through a collaboration of artists, engineers, historians and historical societies, landscapers and parks and gardens staff, construction crews, and technical services staff, non government organisations and community groups. For many this is their first involvement in art making. Their dedication to the project has been unyielding and has resulted in a successful construction process.

Darwin City Council would like to thank the following organisations for their support of the project:

- Power and Water Corporation
- NT Department of Planning and Infrastructure through the Explorer Highway program of the Federal Government
- John McDouall Stuart Society Inc

Construction support of the project:

- Giko Constructions
- Darwin Metal Industries
- Pool Filtration Services
- Northern Rivers Ptters Supplies
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- Fransceska Koch Laurie
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