

Hobart's proposed 117m Art Tower could become Tasmania's tallest building

Detached Cultural Organisation proposes semi-transparent climbable tower 650 steps high on the former Hobart Mercury site

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📷 A visualisation of Detached's Art Tower on the Hobart skyline. Photograph: Hero Day

Hobart's low-rise skyline could be transformed by a 117m "Art Tower", set to be Tasmania's tallest building if completed, as proposed, by 2017.

Plans for the climbable tower - a semi-transparent steel structure lit by a mesh of white-LED lights - were presented in a public forum at the city's Odeon theatre on the second day of the annual Dark Mofu festival of art, light and music.

While it has yet to gain Hobart City Council planning approval, festival and project director Leigh Carmichael said the Art Tower would give Hobart and Tasmania a "new cultural icon"

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that would attract local, national and international visitors.

“There is a groundswell of cultural activity in and around Hobart and this is part of the next wave,” said Carmichael, who is part of the creative team at the Museum of Old and New Art (Mona), David Walsh’s privately owned gallery on the outskirts of the city.

Since Walsh opened his museum, bar, restaurant and hotel complex in 2011, Hobart has seen a huge influx in tourists and a knock-on boost to food and arts across Tasmania.

The proposed tower is the flagship project of Detached, a new precinct being developed by the not-for-profit Detached Cultural Organisation on the former site of Hobart’s Mercury newspaper. Two new gallery spaces opened there on Friday, one hosting a show by Australian hyper-realist artist, Patricia Piccinini.

“David Walsh has shown what happens when you dream big,” said Penny Clive, the director of Detached, who bought the Mercury building from former owners News Corp in 2013. “In collaboration with others, we take on the challenge and responsibility to build on Mona’s success.”

Project architect Robert Morris-Nunn and structural engineer Jim Gandy explained in further details their designs for the tower at Saturday’s forum.

Just 6m in diameter but standing 117 m tall, it would be twice the height of Tasmania’s current highest building, the Wrest Tower, and would offer panoramic views of Hobart but at a cost - some physical exertion for those brave enough to climb its double helix steps.

“The tower has been designed around the challenge and experience of climbing up and down its 1300-plus individual steps, 650 ascending and 650 descending,” Morris-Nunn explained. The tower will gather interactive data on climbers’ heart health through a partnership with the Menzies Research Institute.

It will also play host to a program of art commissions led by Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, whose temporary light installation, Pulse Column - a beam of light that pulses to the beat of visitors’ heart-rates - is currently drawing Dark Mofo’s crowds to the site of the proposed tower.

Writing in the Mercury on Saturday, David Walsh dubbed Detached’s project the “Heart Tower” and said it was a good idea if a “little undernourished” in its design.

It should be built, said Walsh, but only if it is “bold and beautiful”, adding that “a reassessment to make it a little more aesthetically pleasing could be appropriate”.

