

Mr Thomas Dwyer Bass

The honorary degree of Doctor of Visual Arts was conferred upon Thomas Dwyer Bass by Pro-Chancellor John McCarthy QC at the Sydney College of the Arts graduation ceremony held at 11.30am on 6 April 2009.



The Pro-Chancellor (left) conferring the honorary degree upon Mr Bass, *photo, copyright Memento Photography.*

Citation

Pro Chancellor, I have the honour to present Thomas Dwyer Bass for admission to the degree of Doctor of Visual Arts (honoris causa).

Tom Bass graduated from the National Art School in 1948 where he had studied sculpture under Lyndon Dadswell in the Post WWII reconstruction scheme. At this time he evolved his philosophy as a sculptor in the second half of the 20th Century. He was challenged by the, then, unconventional role for the sculptor to be a social communicator, a maker of totemic forms and emblems; works that expressed ideas of particular significance to communities or to society at large. Well before the notion of 'social capital' was developed, Tom Bass' life and work was based on the belief that the values and ideals of communities bind them, and sustain the individuals within those communities to interact in a positive and supportive way.

Tom Bass engaged with Schools, Universities and Government, Corporate and Religious institutions and over a twenty-five year period this remained virtually the single focus of his work. In executing his work he had to develop technical processes such as copper deposit casting, necessary in an era when bronze casting was not available to the scale Bass required for his major works. He became the most sought after public sculptor in Australia and completed over 60 large works of sculpture during this time. He is represented nationally and overseas.

Within Australia, examples of his work include "The Trial of Socrates" portraying the values of sacrificial integrity he perceived were integral to a university community, and "The Idea of a University" based on the biblical parable of the Talents both on Wilson Hall at the University of Melbourne; In Canberra's Civic Square stands the 20 foot winged figure of "Ethos", representing the spirit of the community, and, at the National Library of Australia, the "Lintel Sculpture" spans 70 feet, expressing the archival and intellectual values of this significant Australian institution. Amongst the 30 religious sculptures are the 12-foot Goulburn sculpture of "Edmund Rice", Founder of the Christian Brothers, and the "Votive Figure of the Sacred Heart" at Sancta Sophia College on this campus.

In Sydney his foremost public work is the "P&O Wall Fountain", on Hunter Street, described in 2006 by Professor Richard Goodwin as the most significant public sculpture in the world. For the University of Sydney, Tom Bass made one of his earliest works "The Student" situated at the main gates, and on this Great Hall the sculptures of "The Arts and the Sciences" in the niches at the front of the Hall, commissioned by Dr Lloyd Rees in 1984.

In 1974 Tom Bass founded the Tom Bass Sculpture Studio School as an independent art school. It has seen thousands of students pass through its doors. In 2003 he handed the school over to become a not-for-profit Incorporated Association and he continues to mentor sculptors and student in this studio workshop, passing on the fundamentals of sculpture and his philosophy of public art, supporting emerging sculptors to find their individual expression.

In 1988 Tom Bass was made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to Sculpture.

In 2006 a major Retrospective of Tom Bass' work was held at the Sydney Opera House. This unique exhibition incorporated his four permanent sculptures situated within Sydney's CBD and was patronized by thousands of visitors. Distinguished art critic John McDonald has described him as a pioneer with "an indomitable spirit of perseverance" and acknowledged that "No artist had done more to shape the face of public art in Australia than Tom Bass."

Pro Chancellor, I present Thomas Dwyer Bass for admission to the degree of Doctor of Visual Arts (honoris causa), and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.