

Statue of C Y O'Connor, 1999



Description

This is a statue titled 'C Y O'Connor Horse and Rider', by Western Australian sculptor Tony Jones. It depicts Charles Yelverton O'Connor looking back over his shoulder at Fremantle Harbour. It is a work in bronze made in 1999. It is positioned approximately 20 metres offshore in the ocean at North Coogee, south of Fremantle, Western Australia, at the location where O'Connor committed suicide. The statue is 2 metres in height.

Educational value

- This asset depicts Western Australia's Engineer-in-Chief Charles Yelverton O'Connor on his horse riding into the water at the place where he committed suicide on 10 March 1902 - each morning he would ride along the beach south of Fremantle with his daughter Bridget, but on this day she was unwell and did not accompany him; at the inquest held on Tuesday 11 March three jurors returned a verdict of 'Death by his own hand through a bullet wound from a revolver at Robbs Jetty while in a state of mental derangement caused through worry and overwork'.
- It commemorates a man known for his engineering achievements - at the time of his death, O'Connor was responsible for the Coolgardie Water Supply scheme, which was still 10 months from completion; this scheme was critical for the development of the wealth of the Coolgardie-Kalgoorlie gold fields, but O'Connor was placed under considerable strain as a result of it; on his suicide he left a note which stated in part 'The Coolgardie scheme is all right and I could finish it if I got a chance and protection from misrepresentation'; a local mythology wrongly suggested, that because the water was turned on in Perth but failed to arrive at Kalgoorlie, O'Connor took his own life.
- It suggests, by the ship in the background, the proximity to Fremantle Harbour - the Harbour was the first project O'Connor worked on when he arrived from New



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Zealand in 1891; Premier John Forrest persuaded him to take the position of Engineer-in-Chief in Western Australia where he would be responsible for 'Railways, harbours, everything' and, although it had been regarded as an impossible project, he was able to design a harbour that is still in use today.

- It is an example of the work of Western Australian sculptor Tony Jones - Jones works across a wide range of media and ideas that encompass and combine cultural and political issues, local history, maritime and aeronautical imagery, as well as themes from the personal and the dream world; his work is featured in many collections, both private and public.
- It is evidence of the fascination C Y O'Connor, a civil engineer, holds for artists - he is the subject of works by leading WA artists and others; in 1911 Pietro Porcelli sculpted a larger than life-size statue that stands on a pedestal outside the Fremantle Port Building and his 1907 bust of O'Connor overlooks Mundaring Weir, the source of the gold fields' water supply; leading WA artist Robert Juniper has painted both C Y O'Connor and the pipeline.
- It suggests that public interest in C Y O'Connor is still strong more than 100 years after his death - somewhat prophetically, when he heard of the suicide, WA's Governor stated O'Connor's name would be associated with his 'great works' long after their completion; a suburb of Perth and the C Y O'Connor College of TAFE are named after him; on the anniversary of his death the National Trust of Australia (WA) hosts an annual C Y O'Connor Address; a heritage trail around the port of Fremantle includes the Tony Jones sculpture in the Harbour and the Pietro Porcelli statue nearby.

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Creator Joy Lefroy, photographer, 2004

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