
Robert Prenzel -Our Lady Of Mount Carmel Sculpture



B7324 Robert Prenzel sculpture



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Location

Richardson Street, MIDDLE PARK VIC 3206 - Property No B7324

Municipality

PORT PHILLIP CITY

Level of significance

State

Heritage Listing

National Trust

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - March 1, 2006

The sculpture of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (1927-8) is a standing figure with the infant Jesus held in her arms. The original was carved in wood by Robert Prenzel and then sheathed in copper sheeting. It was erected on top of the dome of the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in 1928, but due to the decay of the wood at the base, it blew down during a storm in 1987. An exact replica was cast in bronze (reproducing the joins of the copper sheeting and heads of the copper nails), and was placed back on the dome in July 1989. The original was restored by Ron Brady and then placed in a garden setting on the east side of the church. Robert Prenzel, 1866-1941, is highly regarded as an extremely skilled wood-carver, designer and manufacturer of domestic and ecclesiastical furniture. Even though he was of German origin and came to Australia with a European cultural background he was amongst the first to use indigenous flora and fauna and Australian timbers in his decorative panels. His work illustrates the range of styles in fashion during his life-time, from the

Renaissance and Rococo Revival, to the introduction of an Australian version of Art Nouveau and the continuing use of the Gothic style for ecclesiastical furniture. The vast majority of his work was associated with functional furniture for homes and churches, and his output of free-standing sculpture appears to have been limited to three works. The statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is therefore an extremely rare example of his sculpture. How is it significant? The statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is aesthetically significant as a clear representation of contemporary fashion and taste. Aesthetically the statue is a well-designed and convincing image that would have been very meaningful to the Catholic congregation. Unlike so much religious statuary of the period, it was not imported, but carved by a local artist.

The statue is architecturally significant for the close collaboration which it represents between the architect, Augustus A. Fritsch, and the sculptor. Perspective drawings of the church by the architect before its construction show the church with the sculpture surmounting the dome at the entrance to the building.

The statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is historically significant because it was one of the earliest commissions to an Australian sculptor by the Catholic Church in Melbourne. It is historically significant as a rare example of a sculpture by Robert Prenzel. Prenzel was very well known as a decorative wood carver and furniture designer, but appears to have only produced three sculptures, and the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is the only work signed by the artist. It is historically significant because whereas statues of the Virgin Mary are extremely common, depictions of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (which show Mary in the robes of a Carmelite nun) are relatively rare. The sculpture is also historically significant as a demonstration of the influence of the Carmelites in this area of Melbourne: the Carmelite Order has had long-standing links with the Middle Park and Port Melbourne localities.

The sculpture is technically significant for the unusual technique used. The original sculpture was carved in wood and then sheathed in thin sheets of copper, which were nailed in place with copper nails. This was not a new technique but has seldom been used for sculpture in Australia. Because of the lack of professional bronze casting facilities in Australia early in the twentieth century and the high cost of sending work overseas to be cast, this probably represents an innovative and cheap alternative.

Classified: October, 2006

Hermes Number 71658

Property Number

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

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