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Light filled artwork reveals hidden laneway

Brightly coloured light boxes beaming images and phrases of women's empowerment is the City of Sydney's latest laneway artwork that will captivate locals and visitors alike.

The City tonight unveiled a new permanent public artwork, *Patchwork of Light*, installed high on a building at the Pitt Street end of Reiby Place in central Sydney.

"*Patchwork of Light* immediately brings a smile to my face with its thrilling bright lights, colours and a uniquely Australian message about the importance of women," Lord Mayor Clover Moore said.

"Emblazoned with figures and phrases in English and Eora languages, the artwork brings Sydney's Aboriginal, European, political and sporting histories to life.

"The laneway art project is part of our long-term plan to revitalise Sydney's laneways and create a livelier, more vibrant city centre.

"This night-time work is one of many City initiatives to make the central city ever more attractive and well-visited at all times of day."

Dutch-American artist Lara Schnitger was commissioned to install a network of 10 light boxes blazoned with slogans and images, from Eora fisherwomen to Australia's first female Olympians and milestones in the nation's suffragette movement.

One light box charts four separate years significant in the advancement of women in Australian politics and civic life. In 1884, Henrietta Dugdale formed in Victoria the first women's suffrage society in the Australian colonies. In 1902, white women were granted enfranchisement to vote in federal elections. In 1962, Aboriginal people were finally granted the same right to vote. And in 2010, Julia Gillard was became the first female prime minister of Australia.

Another light box depicts Olympic swimmers Fanny Durack and Mina Wylie on the podium with crossed bodies and arms to suggest unity and defiance. Public fundraising enabled these swimmers to travel to the Stockholm Olympics (1912 was the first time women's swimming events were included) where they won gold and silver medals.

The artwork acknowledges the women of Sydney Harbour, and embracing Australia's Aboriginal past and present. Working in collaboration with Wiradjuri elder Aunty Bronwyn Penrith, Ms Schnitger developed the figure of the Eora fisherwoman as a central element to the artwork.

The location of the artwork, Reiby Place, commemorates Mary Reibey, the legendary businesswoman of colonial Sydney and now the face of the Australian \$20 note.

"I took inspiration from Mary Reibey's life and decided to amplify her legacy as a smart, tough and successful businesswoman," Ms Schnitger said.

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"In keeping with that spirit, the light boxes along Reiby Place would be similar to those found in the bustling streets of Tokyo. But instead of signifying restaurants and shops, the slogans and images along Reiby Place will illuminate messages of female empowerment, civil rights and political protest.

"The idea for *Patchwork of Light* grew out of my work creating quilts with stencils and bleach. In considering a work for Sydney, I asked myself how a delicate quilt could be adapted to life for the longer term in the city.

"Like a quilt made of light, my art will suffuse Reiby Place with brilliant light, and images and phrases of empowerment. With imagery and words that reflect the aspirations and diversity of Sydney's people, I hope it will become an artwork for all."

Women carrying quilted panels from the artist's Sydney and international artworks walked in a procession from Circular Quay to Reiby Place as part of the launch.

The artwork concept was selected from 125 local, national and international proposals by an evaluation panel that included Alexi Glass-Kantor, Executive Director of Arspace, and members of the City's Public Art Advisory Panel.

Lara Schnitger was born in 1969 in The Netherlands. Based in Los Angeles, she has exhibited extensively in the US, UK and Europe. Earlier this year, she was honoured with an artwork commission for the High Line in New York.

Since 2015, Schnitger's ongoing performance project *Suffragette City* has introduced themes of feminism and protest live, in the form of a procession, in cities around the world.

The new artwork is part of the City's city centre public art plan developed by curator Barbara Flynn with the City of Sydney City Design team

For more information about the City of Sydney's public art collection visit cityartsydney.com.au

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