



LAURA WOODWARD - WILDFLOWERS

The First Ladies of Castlemaine Art Museum Public Art Commission

*(Images are indicative artist impressions
of proposed artwork, final forms in development)*

ARTIST STATEMENT

This artwork focuses upon the ways in which Castlemaine Art Museum came into being through a group of seven trailblazing women being present with each other – sharing their interests, their time and their knowledge – and how this communality resulted in them pushing boundaries, standing in solidarity for better representation of women in art, and building something of great significance to Castlemaine: the Castlemaine Art Museum and Gallery. The artwork will commemorate the important legacy of these women and highlight their contribution to the cultural life and art of our town and region.

It also considers their strong connection with local flora and fauna and the Botanical Gardens, and the ways in which they appeared to find joy and solace in observing and collecting local specimens and building knowledge around native species.

Approaching the Walker St entrance of the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens, visitors will encounter a series of seven timber sculptures on the grassy area – a direct reference to the seven women who founded the Castlemaine Art Museum. These abstracted, loosely human figures will appear to be engaging directly with the gardens. One may be looking up into a tree, another crouching down to inspect a flower. A few may be standing as if talking with each other, or inspecting something on the ground together. They are positioned directly on the grass, as if standing on the same ground as the visitors.

The use of timber as the primary material interlinks with the concept and site aesthetically and materially. The aesthetically “softer” material qualities of timber sit in contrast to many historical artworks which memorialise men and which are made from heavier, harder materials. Timber’s material warmth is appropriate for tactile engagement; with the figures at human-scale, many may wish to reach out and touch them, particularly children. The sculptures’ sympathetic materiality and positioning highlights the importance of the gardens as both a continuing, living botanical collection and a place of cultural and recreational importance to our local community. The lower section of each sculpture will be cast metal – likely bronze – to protect the timber from gardening equipment. In acknowledgement of the site’s indigenous history, this will be textured with subtle imagery of indigenous plants that were diet staples for Djaara people before colonisation, and that remain of particular importance to Djaara women. These will be selected in consultation with traditional owners.

Each of the seven figures will be unique, with its own character and mannerisms. The final forms will be informed by reference material gathered during the community engagement drawing excursions, where I will take photos, drawings, or three-dimensional scans of participants as they draw and learn about country – and as they literally embody some of the ways in which the founding women spent much of their time.

The abstract figures each have an individual character, yet they are also anonymous. From certain angles they may read as eroded river stones, time having worn away their details, their individuality. They are forgotten figures, speaking to the specific context of this artwork and the founding women’s stories, and also to the ways in which women’s stories and contributions have often been erased within art history. The anonymity of the figures also enables other potential readings of invisibility in relation to women, including the displacement of Djaara women from their traditional lands, which was occurring at the same time as the Castlemaine Art Museum was being founded.

However, I hope that this anonymity may also conversely make the work more accessible for visitors. Though inspired by the founding women’s story, these figures are not those women – they could be any woman, every woman, any person, every person. Despite the abstraction – or perhaps because of it – our bodies will recognise these forms as human, and in doing so, empathise with them, see them, embody them.

Importantly, the work will, despite its potentially heavy subject matter, have a sense of lightness and play, embodying the feeling of the gardens, of lying on green grass, of enjoying the air when surrounded by abundant and healthy plants. Children will love them and want to play with and near them. The figures, in their quiet contemplation of the gardens, will contribute to that sense of slowing down, of breathing, that many experience when entering green spaces. In doing so, I hope that they offer a moment of calm and reflection for visitors, and that in doing so, they help to tell this important story for many years to come.

PRIMARY ARTWORK MATERIALS**ACCOYA GREY**

The sculptures will be created in Accoya Grey. Accoya is an acetylated wood product (pine modified with acetic acid, heat and pressure) that has excellent properties in relation to longevity, rot-resistance, stability, sustainability and impact on its installed site. Accoya Grey is dyed throughout its grain. It therefore starts out as the grey colour that all Accoya will change to eventually through outdoor exposure. Using Accoya Grey will mean that the sculptures maintain a consistent appearance throughout their lifespan. It also means that if any penetration of the timber is required in maintenance, such as sanding out gouged graffiti marks, the fresh layer that is revealed through sanding will be the same colour grey as the rest of the sculpture, thus maintaining consistency.

**CAST ELEMENT**

In order to provide protection of the sculptures from garden maintenance equipment, such as whipper-snippers and mowers, I propose a protective layer of sand-cast metal – most likely bronze – around the lower part of each sculpture where it meets the ground. I envisage that this will be approximately 70 to 300mm in height, with the actual height to be determined through testing in collaboration with the Botanic Gardens gardening team.

I envisage that the timber under the casting will be rebated so that the cast layer sits flush with the outer face of the timber, ensuring that the sculptural form flows from one material to the next. The visual line of this material transition will be curved rather than horizontal, in order to contribute to the sculptural form and visual interest, and to increase the sense of flow between materials.

The surface of the cast elements will be textured with subtle imagery/reliefs of a selection of indigenous plants that are of particular importance to Dja Dja Wurrung women. These will be low-growing plants such as grasses, murnong, and so on, represented at actual scale and with the bottom of each plant starting at the base of the sculpture, to appear as if they are growing there. Traditional owner Auntie Kerri Douglas has agreed to consult on the selection of appropriate plants.

ARTWORK LOCATIONS

The seven figures are located so as to strengthen physical engagement with the Botanic Gardens and to expand their reach in terms of audience engagement. The final proposed locations have been determined through consultation with relevant stakeholders including the Botanic Gardens maintenance team and the Council engineering team.

Five core figures mingle within the primary 5m x 6m envelope whilst two venture further afield, appearing to be inspecting other plant specimens.

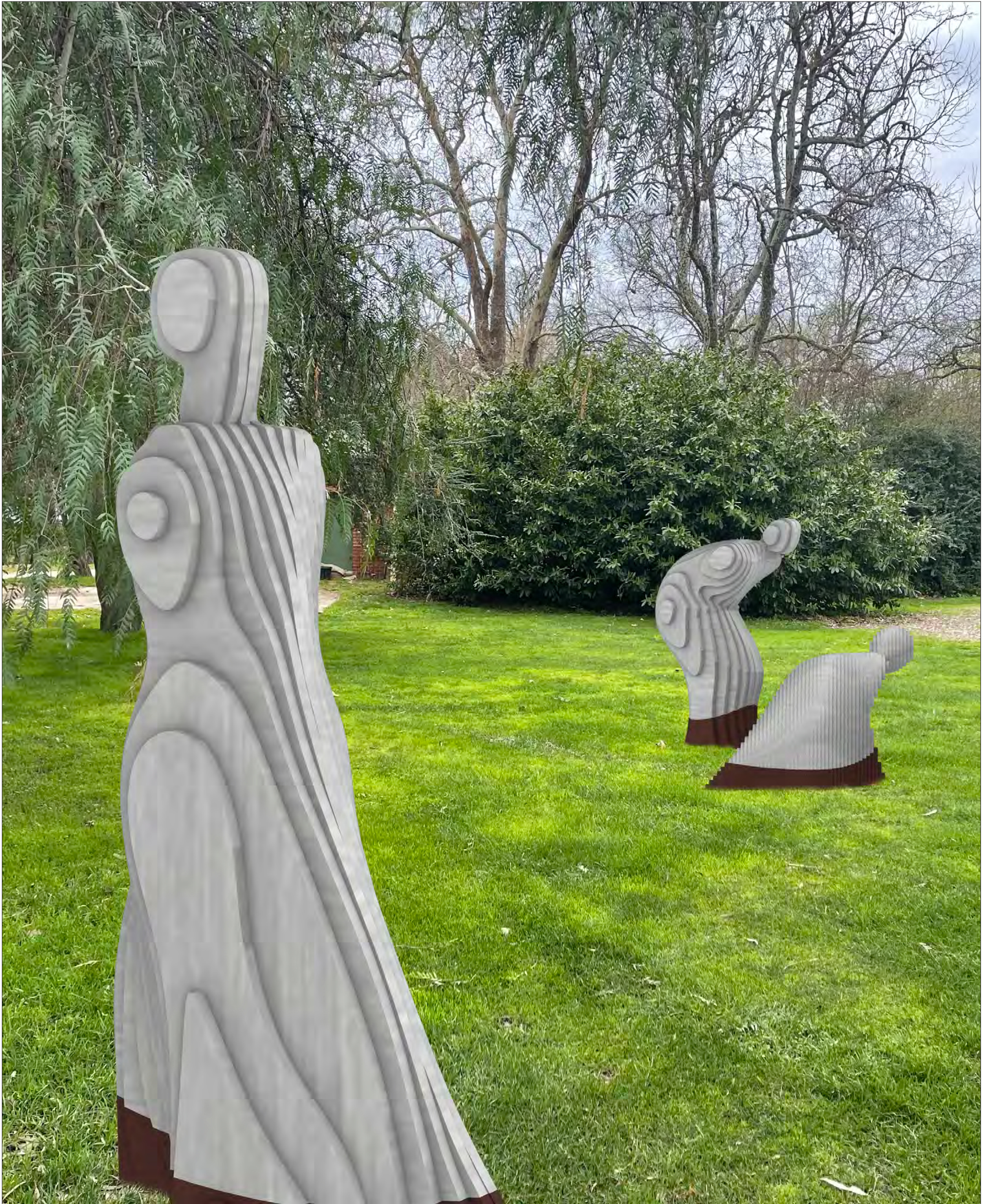
One sculpture will be adjacent to the pathway near the entry gate, in order to provide proximity for those with limited mobility including wheelchair users, with the aim that they may be able to reach out and touch the sculpture or view it at close range. Another figure will be walking towards the round garden bed, as if they have seen something there that they wish to inspect more closely.

Another pair crouch and lean down to look at something in the grass, whilst a group of three stand and chat whilst looking up at the Box Elder tree – the most significant of the trees in this part of the gardens.

This approach was developed to open opportunities to improve access for people with limited mobility, whilst also more convincingly suggest that the figures are actually engaging with the gardens.

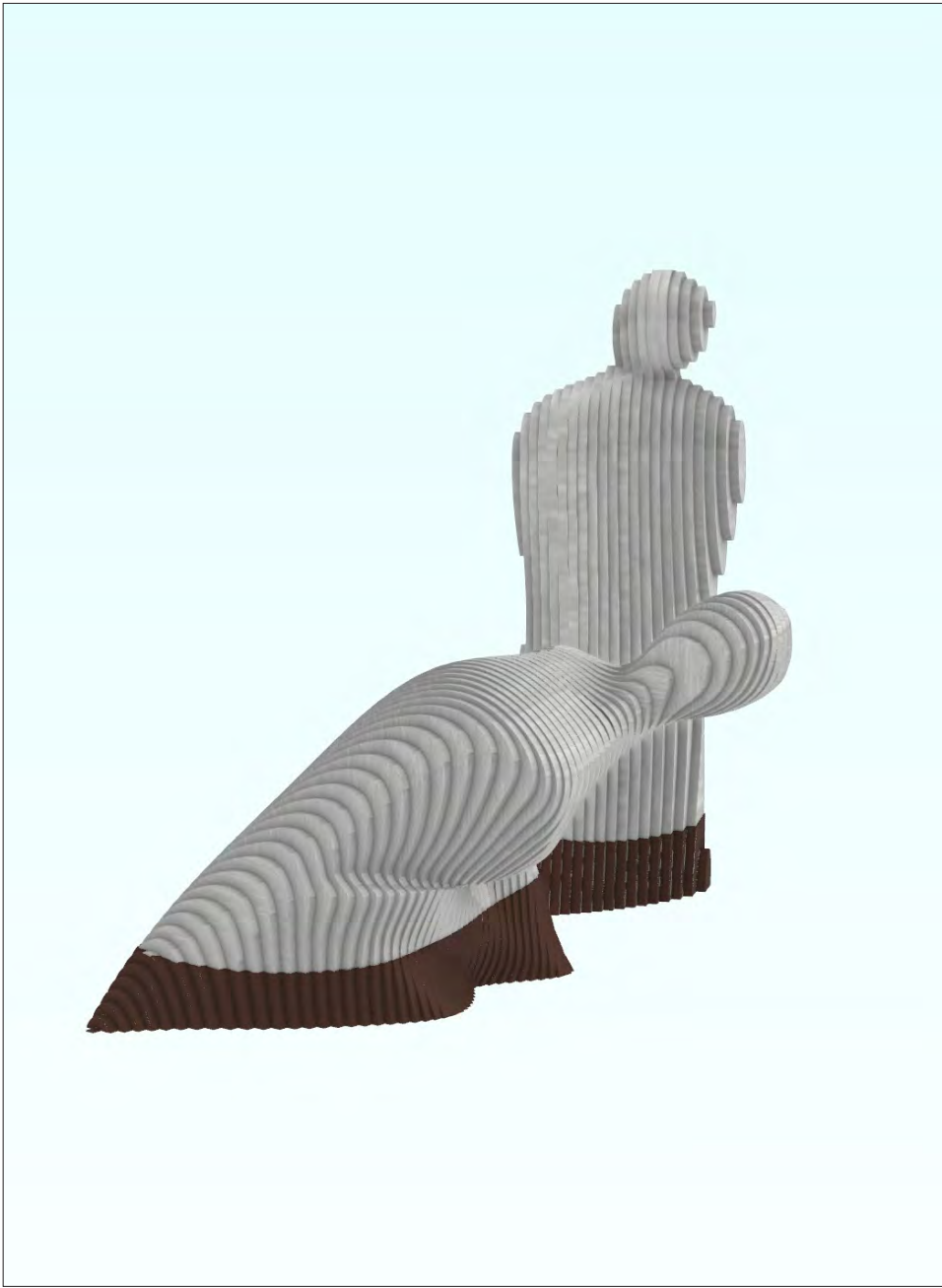
Please see attached document showing detailed locations for each of the sculptures and the artwork sign.

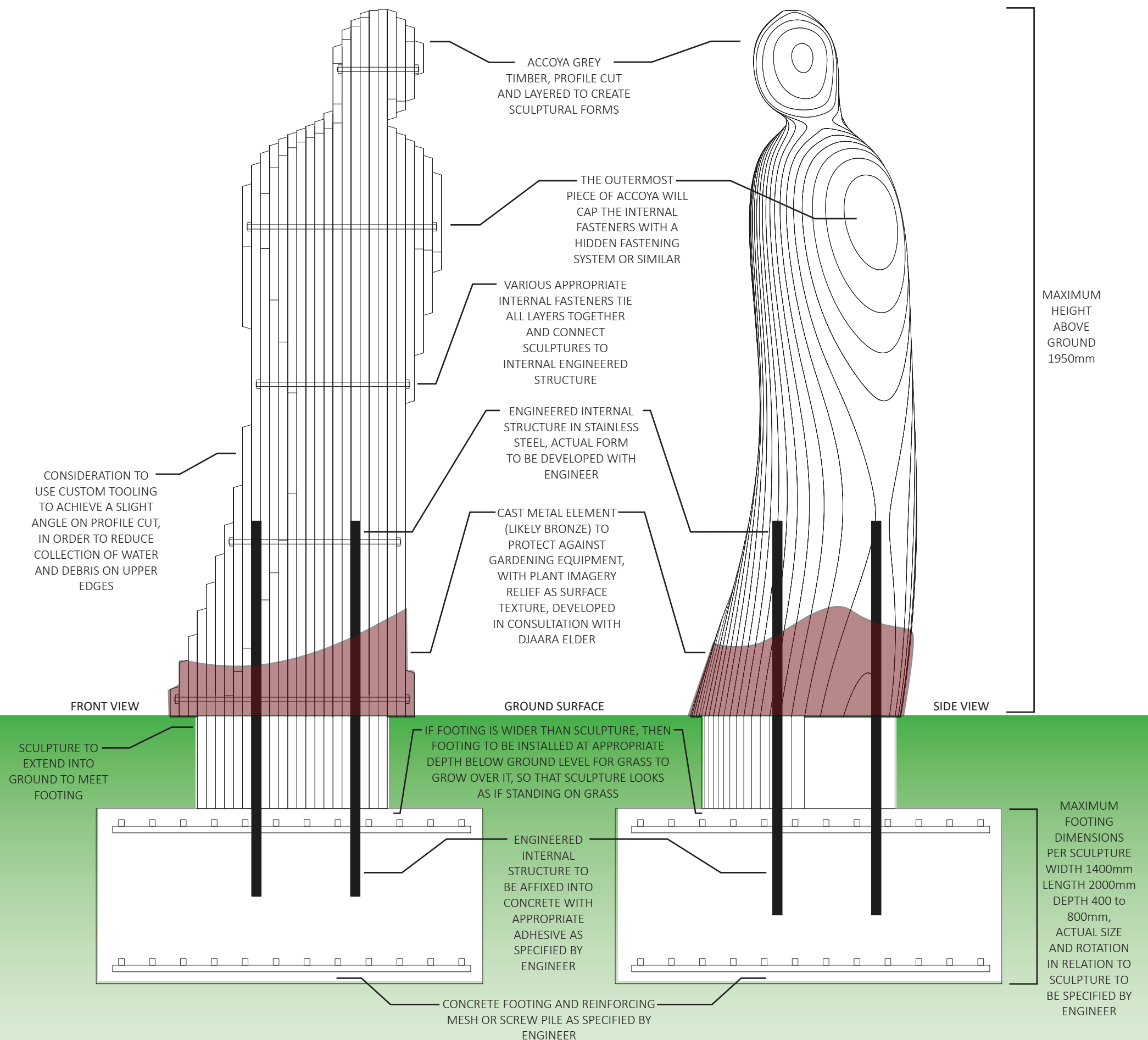
(Images are indicative artist impressions of proposed artwork, final forms in development)



SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

The below images give a sense of the way in which the sculptural surfaces will change dynamically and dramatically as the viewer walks around them, or as lighting conditions change throughout the day.



INDICATIVE MATERIALS AND FABRICATION**MATERIAL CHOICE**

I propose to create the artwork from Accoya timber, an acetic-acid (vinegar) treated pine that has excellent credentials for this project, including:

- **Longevity:** Accoya has excellent longevity, with a 50 year warranty in above-ground applications and 25 years below-ground.
- **Surface quality:** Accoya is very dimensionally stable, and therefore resists warping, allowing it to stay smooth for years. It is considered “barefoot friendly”, without splintering, and has been used for example as decking for the rebuild of the main tourist boardwalk in Noosa.
- **Flood suitability:** Accoya has a 25 year warranty in permanent underwater or underground applications. This should make it highly suitable for occasional flooding events that will occur at the site.
- **Sustainability:** Accoya is FSC certified and Cradle to Cradle (C2C) overall Gold certified, is the only construction material globally to achieve C2C Platinum certification for Material Health, and has a low carbon footprint. It is fully recyclable and compostable at end of life (though composting will take longer than other timber products due to its durability).
- **Safety to people and site:** Accoya is 100% non-toxic, with no risk of leaching chemical or synthetic compounds into the surrounds.
- **Maintenance:** Accoya requires minimal maintenance. When used as decking, a thorough annual clean with a stiff brush and water is recommended.

INTERNAL STRUCTURE

The internal structure, and any fasteners or other components, will be made from stainless steel, in order to be suitable for long-term outdoor installation in a flood-prone area. Stainless steel is a highly recycled and recyclable product with excellent longevity, durability, chemical and mechanical resistance.

SAFETY

All aspects of the design will be resolved to ensure that it is safe for all ages including children. This will include ensuring appropriate surface finish, minimising trip hazards, and ensuring that there are no issues with finger entrapment and so on.

MAINTENANCE

Accoya requires minimal maintenance. When used as decking, a thorough annual clean with a stiff brush and water is recommended. It may also require other cleaning throughout the year, using the same approach, particularly in permanently shaded locations.

REPAIRS

Graffiti: Advice received from the Accoya manufacturer is to leave it unsealed and deal with graffiti or gouging with gentle sanding (primarily because anti-graffiti coatings do not protect against gouging). We are testing this approach and also investigating possible anti-graffiti sealants, pending further testing.

Damaged components: It is envisaged that the proposed approach to the artwork’s fabrication and assembly will inherently facilitate replacement of individual damaged components if required.

HERITAGE VICTORIA REQUIREMENTS

The proposed artwork has been developed in response to the historical, scientific, social and aesthetic significance of the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens, and in particular the requirements that come with it being part of the Victorian Heritage Register. The proposed artwork provides a thoughtful response to the site, particularly through the historically appropriate use of timber and the way in which the figures engage with the significant landscape. The proposed sculptures directly relate to and interpret the gardens, with the sculptural figures appearing to engage with the garden's plants and sites, drawing attention to the Botanical Gardens as a continuing, living botanical collection of historic and cultural significance.

The proposed artwork is sympathetic to the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens, considering siting, bulk, form, scale, character, colour, texture, materiality, and installation methodology:

- The use of timber is historically appropriate and will sit well in relation to other heritage elements of the site including the nearby arbor.
- There should be minimal impact on roots given the individual nature of the artwork elements and the ability to place them as required to reduce impact.
- The proposed sculptures are aesthetically and formally light in weight, and therefore will not dominate. Instead, they will sit gently in conversation within the gardens.
- Due to the human scale of the sculptures, no key view lines are impacted between significant elements of the site.
- The sculptures are approximately human scale, and therefore do not reach the height of the nearby timber pergola/arbor.
- No landscaping is proposed to be introduced, as a key part of the proposed artwork is that the figures appear to be standing directly on the same ground/grass as visitors.

ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed artwork has been conceptualised to facilitate accessibility, particularly in terms of placement, surface treatment, and scale.

In particular, the sculptures will be located to maximise engagement. One will be adjacent to the path near the entry gate, which will allow wheelchair users or those with limited mobility to get close to the sculpture without needing to go on the grass. The artwork sign will be similarly located.

Achieving a smooth timber surface will also facilitate accessibility in allowing people to engage with the work through touch, particularly for those with low vision. People may wish to run their fingers over the surface of the sculptures to feel their sculptural form.

The approximately human scale of the sculptures may also increase accessibility, both conceptually and through their tactile nature. Though abstract, the recognisable human forms will feel familiar, accessible, and quiet, and may resonate for children or for individuals with differing experiences and sensitivities in public spaces. As well as running their fingers over the surface, visitors may wish to lean against the sculptures, make friends with them, or sit quietly with them as they enjoy the gardens.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The community engagement program has been multifaceted. I have held three formal community engagement sessions alongside initiatives delivered by Mount Alexander Shire Council which include an online presence for the project and online opportunities to provide feedback. There were also several collaborative social media posts which garnered significant traffic totalling 5876 engagements across platforms.

In collaboration with Council I have delivered three community engagement workshops for the project. The first was an open drop-in session on Saturday 23rd of August. This was timed to capitalise on high Botanic Gardens use on Saturday mornings. Park users could drop in to hear about the artwork, discuss their thoughts on it, and also take part in a nature drawing exercise delivered by drawing facilitator Honor Bradbeer. We had conversations with approximately 60 visitors, with common feedback focusing on suitability of the site, that the project is welcome and of interest, that the sculptural concept was well received, and that community members were pleased that the founding women's story will be celebrated.

The second and third workshops were sign-up workshops inspired by the Castlemaine Art Museum founding women's interest in art and local wildflowers. The workshops offered a chance for participants to hear about the proposed artwork and to learn about and draw local plants. With guidance from Traditional Owner, artist and cultural educator Aunty Kerri Douglas, drawing guide Honor Bradbeer and artist Laura Woodward, participants learnt about local flora and Djaara culture while drawing flowers and plants at sites in the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens. Open to adults of all ages and all levels of ability with a maximum of 24 participants in each, the workshops were intended as a chance to hear about the proposed artwork and to spend quiet, considered time in nature, slowing down through the act of close observation, listening, and conversation. Engagement was positive and feedback about the workshops and the proposed artwork was enthusiastic.



PROJECT TEAM

Please see below the list of primary contributors to the project. In preparing this submission, I have aimed for all sub-contractors, consultants and suppliers to be based locally or within our region, and have sought to work with women wherever possible.

Laura Woodward

Role: Artist, Schematic and Detailed Design

Location: works from art studio in Castlemaine, lives in Faraday

Contribution: As well as being the project artist, I will undertake the schematic design and detailing in consultation with Like Butter and others as appropriate. I will also work with the relevant individuals and organisations to organise and deliver the community engagement elements of the project. I have significant project management experience in similar contexts, including liaising with numerous stakeholders, as well as design detailing experience, and am well placed to navigate the optimum ways to bring the work to fruition.

Like Butter Pty Ltd

Role: Fabrication

Location: Castlemaine

Contribution: I co-own the design and fabrication company Like Butter Pty Ltd with Jem Freeman, providing significant design and fabrication capacities to my artworks, including major commissions. Running since 2007, we relocated Like Butter to Castlemaine in 2019. My two largest public artworks were produced in collaboration with Like Butter. In both cases, it was our ability to work effectively and innovatively across and between different fields and with a range of experts and consultants, as well as our extensive in-house fabrication and design capabilities, that facilitated such unique outcomes. Like Butter has worked with Accoya timber before, and has extensive expertise in machining, finishing and sealing timbers and undertaking unique assembly processes. Undertaking fabrication in-house allows me to ensure that time-frames and budgets are met and that excellent project outcomes are delivered.

Susie Baldwin, RMG Engineers

Role: structural engineering, design and certification

Location: works from the RMG Bendigo offices, lives in Kyneton

Contribution: Susie is passionate about living and working in regional Victoria, and aligns structural designs with client needs, budget and buildability. She has regularly worked with Mount Alexander Shire Council for structural engineering requirements, and has recently assisted Macedon Ranges Shire Council with footing design and fixing details for timber sculptures that will be positioned along the Woodend to Riddells Creek Shared Trail Project.

Dumawul Corporation

Role: Community engagement activities, on country open discussion and plant knowledge

Location: Dumawul office is based in Bendigo and their work covers all Dja Dja Wurrung country

Contribution: Dumawul invites people to explore the richness of Djaara culture through a range of activities including tours, educational programs, and art. Within the context of this project, I have discussed with the Dumawul Corporation the possibility of a Djaara Aunty leading an open discussion around plant knowledge, at the same time as participants try their hand at observational drawings of the plants under discussion. In doing so, the workshops could be a wonderful opportunity for participants to hear Djaara perspectives on Djandak, expanding community knowledge and engagement and building dialogue.

Honor Bradbeer

Role: Drawing Guide

Location: lives and works in Sandon, just outside Newstead

Contribution: Honor is a practicing artist who works primarily with drawing, much of it focused on her experiences of raising her daughter in Sandon, including observational drawing of the local flora and fauna. She has over a decade of experience teaching drawing as the Head of Drawing for many years at LaTrobe College of Art and Design, Melbourne, gently guiding people of varying levels of experience as they explored the possibilities of drawing as a rich and ongoing practice. Her teaching experience, drawing skills and interpersonal approach are well suited to the proposed community engagement activities.

