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Sculptor's capital works a lasting tribute to talent

By Sally Pryor

Cultural Institutions Reporter

Renowned sculptor Tom Bass, whose soaring sculpture of the goddess *Ethos* has stood proudly in Civic Square since 1961, has died aged 93.

Bass was one of Australia's foremost public and civic sculptors, and created a number of large-scale commissions for public and private clients during his career.

Apart from the copper *Ethos*, which stands on a dish bearing a relief map of the city and holds up a bursting sun representing culture and enlightenment, Bass also created the *Lintel* sculpture above the entrance to the National Library, his largest civic work, and one of the largest copper fabricated sculptures in the world.

Library director-general Jan Fullerton spoke of the artist, and his library sculpture, with admiration yesterday.

"Bass visualised the library as the 'ark of knowledge' – with its 'honeycomb interior containing the residue of our culture, like honey'," she said.

Born in Lithgow, NSW, in 1916, Bass left school at 15 and travelled Australia as an itinerant worker during the Depression, until he pursued his dream of studying sculpture, graduating from the National Art School in 1948. A major retrospective of his work, spanning 60 years, was held at the Sydney Opera House in 2006.

He was made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to sculpture in 1988, and received an honorary doctorate in visual arts from the University of Sydney last year.



VALUED: Sculptor Tom Bass, above, and his statue *Ethos*, which stands in Civic Square.



Although he created several important pieces throughout his career, Bass was said to consider *Ethos* the most important of his civic works.

The sculpture's head is used in the logo for the Tom Bass Studio Sculpture School, founded in 1974.

ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanhope paid tribute to the artist yesterday, especially his enduring *Ethos*.

"It is a classic example of Tom Bass's totemic sculpture that celebrates pride and community," he said.

Three years ago, Bass wrote a poem, *Ethos Speaks*, based on the sculpture for the 90th anniversary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. There is now a bronze plaque inscribed with his poem at the foot of the sculpture.

He died in Sydney on February 26, and his funeral was yesterday.