

CRITICAL VIEW
Chris Beck
revisits some of
Melbourne's
landmarks to
determine the
success of their
creators' vision.



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T C M K

Legend of Fire mural

LOCATION Eastern Hill Fire Station, corner of Gisborne and Albert streets, East Melbourne.

ARTISTS Designer and director Harold Freedman, master tiler Tony Barese, Joe Attard and David Jack.

FEATURE The artistry and large scale of the mosaic.

HISTORY The mural, commissioned by the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade, was started in 1980 and completed in 1982.

VERDICT of social historian Andrew Lemon

Harold Freedman's art gallery was always the street and public places, and his topics were monumental tributes to that world, football, trains, trams, planes and racehorses. His fire mosaic mural was the most consciously arty of all his works, but it is not hard to decipher. His inspiration is, as usual, the unsung hero, in this case, the fireman, while his superhero muscular god brings the curse and gift of fire to earth. This mural never really was in fashion, so it's never had to suffer the indignity of looking dated. There was always something of the 1950s book illustration in Harold's style, even in his later works, so if it can just cling to its heroic slab of wall for a few more years it may start to be noticed and even loved.



There is a cracking tale to tell on the facade of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade headquarters in East Melbourne. It's an epic spanning centuries, so it takes up about four storeys. The Legend of Fire is part romance, fantasy, horror, drama and, according to the huge mosaic, not much comedy. Characters include the wayward Phaeton, who rode his chariot too close to Earth and started a tragic blaze, raising the ire of Zeus, the most powerful god of them all. A carefully placed bolt of lightning, and the reckless driver was toast. Prometheus put his heart before his head and stole fire from mighty Zeus to warm the hearts and minds of cave dwellers. Zeus soothed feelings of disrespect by killing and punishing. That's where Pandora came in. She created a fair bit of havoc after being sent by Zeus to Earth, succumbing to curiosity and opening that little box of miseries. Her relationship to fire rates a big mention in the glowing scenes. The mural, made up of 250,000 glass tiles, has a religious tone, with Zeus sitting atop scenes of sufferers, heroes and villains. Mosaic is almost indestructible, so if the station burns down there will be a reminder.