



CITY OF MELBOURNE



## ***Faultline*** **by Kelly Fliedner**

On the southern bank of the Yarra River, between the Sandridge and Southbank Pedestrian Bridges, there is (what seems to be) an old wooden jetty broken into two pieces. One half of it sits on the concrete pavement of the shore and the other half, following the projected line of the first, rests detached in the water. Both sections of the jetty, though disconnected from each other, cross the bank of the river at the same slightly angled intersection. Past these two wooden pieces, and within the same projected line extending further up the bank, there is a pink granite path that leads across the walkway through the open precinct to a large square area of the same pink granite pavement intersected by lines of embedded sandstone, creating an unassuming and completely permeable framework or blueprint for those walking from Southbank Promenade to the city streets beyond. On Google Maps, the two wooden structures are called 'Broken Pier' and this, as well as the submerged granite and sandstone, are what remains of Hossein Valamanesh's sculptural work [Faultline](#) (1996). Here, it lives on in the public consciousness of the city as unattributed remnants of a piece of public art that previously was, feigning a history that reaches further than its mid-1990s genesis whilst creating a meeting spot for a multitude of tourists, commuters and residents that frequent this small verge of the city.

Originally *Faultline* was made up of this wooden jetty, embedded granite, and a collection of large sandstone walls in various states of decay, built around a bronze boat tipped on an angle that formed a large fountain. Totalling a space of approximately 70 square meters, the large sandstone sculpture was a mock ruin in the middle of a commuter passage of the developing retail and entertainment district of Southbank.

The mid-90s was a moment of great transformation for Southbank. From the 1980s, when the area was a collection of old factories, warehouses and wharves scattered along a grassy riverbank, city planners, developers, government institutions and private corporations staked their claims. In a short period of time, Southbank, a small parcel of land tucked between the river and South Melbourne, would become home to the city's first residential skyscrapers, improved homes for cultural institutions like the Arts Centre, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and the Melbourne Convention Centre as well as the newly developed Crown Casino that opened in 1997. As with all moments of municipal revitalisation, in wake of this feverish development, much was lost: most of the area's historic buildings were torn down; the open grass banks of the Yarra were concreted over; and, Robin Boyd's significant monument [Southgate Fountain](#) (1960) was destroyed to make way for Hamer Hall.



The newly-erected but decidedly decrepit *Faultline* jostled amongst all of this *new*—standing as a monument to ruin in the epicentre for Melbourne’s ravenous urban renewal project. Memory, destruction and survival—all ongoing themes in Valamanesh’s practice—were here embodied in the work of *Faultline*, waving a flag of rumination for ‘collapse’, ‘fragmentation’ and ‘evocation’ in a landscape shouting ‘regeneration’, ‘revitalisation’, ‘rejuvenation’. The work was a kind of monument to monuments, gesturing to the common language of public art that thinks about space as conceived in relation to history and how sculpture has the capacity to affect our historical consciousness—perhaps willing us, the audience, to ruminate on the history of place and space.

Unfortunately as soon as the ‘ruin’ of *Faultline* was installed, it attracted the attention of those willing to *ruin* it further. It suffered sustained attacks from vandals and vagrants and taxi drivers alike who graffitied and defaced its walls and stole components of the bronze boat: perhaps in defiance of, or as a signal of work yet to do, *vis-a-vis* the ongoing Southbank gentrification project. Compounded by the continued rapid change of the landscape of Riverside Quay and Southbank Promenade, Council staff in collaboration with Valamanesh finally decided to partly decommission the work, leaving the wooden jetty and pink granite while removing the remaining bronze boat and sandstone walls. In place of the boat and walls, sandstone was embedded in the pavement as a blueprint of where the walls once resided.

A blueprint of what once was, *Faultline* as it exists today, is an act of revelation. What is left behind is a ghostly reminder of the impermanence of our public landscape where the weight of their materials often belies their transitory reality. Yet the work becomes a space for the audience to project or reanimate their understanding of site, space and history.

Through the elemental remains of the sandstone, and the past that it encases, we are reminded of this shared space as a continued and evolving project and whatever its common, shared and collaborative forces and energies are. We can try to understand or appreciate its unfathomable presence within time, as we stand next to its exhumed vestige, but it is ruined nonetheless—the object itself becomes a space for reanimating our affinity with history whilst recognising the momentary nature of monumentality. What remains now, the blueprint embedded within the surface of Southbank is a tool for us to meditate on the history of the site and a way for us to visualise both absence and presence.

It is a sculptural ghost that haunts a new space of consideration, of rethinking the relationship between material and memory. As you look at the surface of the sculpture and realise that it is of the ground, and that the ground is an index of history, you can create connections between your way of being in this space, in the present, and the distinct way that someone hundreds of years ago may have inhabited the same space. For thousands of years, in all our distinct ways, we have occupied, and then no longer occupied, this space of the earth. Here is a space for you to attempt to connect with these exceptional unknown and unknowable realities, histories and ruins.



***Faultline***

Hossein Valamanesh, 1996

Riverside Quay, Southbank

Photo: Patrick Rodriguez

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