

## Sculptor Tom Bass gave the St Vincent de Paul Society much more than a work of art.

**W**hen Tom Bass died earlier this year, his legacy to Australia was rich and deep. One of the country's leading sculptors, Bass left a body of evocative public works that enrich the communities in which they stand – wondrous, large sculptures distinctive in their abstract style.

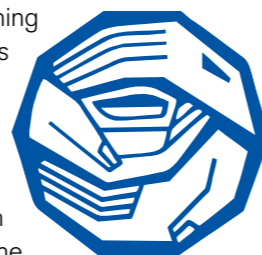
# A TRIBUTE TOM

But he left, too, something else, something smaller ... the St Vincent de Paul Society's beloved logo, one of the most recognised emblems of charity in Australia. Tom Bass was all about emblems. Indeed, he called himself a totem maker; expressing ideas through sculptural form. Well-known works include *Ethos* which stands in the Canberra's city centre, representing the spirit of community, and his massive 23-metre *Lintel Sculpture* above the entrance to the National Library of Australia. Also, *The Student* at the main gates of the University of Sydney, *The Arts and the Sciences* in the niches of its Great Hall, and the *P & O Fountain* in Hunter Street.

Yet, tellingly, Bass regarded his 1967 design of our logo as one of his most important works.

The artist's first work for the Catholic Church was early in his career in 1953 when his copper Crucifix was placed at Canisius College in Pymble, followed by works for churches in Warren and Ashbury.

But it was his iconic works for the St Augustine's Church in Yass for which he carried a particular passion, created as they were in the context of a warm and intellectually stimulating relationship with the then young Archbishop Guilford Young. The two men discussed theology and artistic



representation throughout the creation of the commission, prompting Bass to say later that the experience had "an air of legend and fable about it unlike anything I have ever known before". His glorious figures of Christ and the crucifixion were finally joined, almost 50 years later, by his low relief of Saint Augustine in 2004.

Bass's interest in the Church in the 1960s was strong. He later left it, having found, he said, the God within and no longer needed an external structure. However, he attended Vatican II in Rome and returned to Australia inspired by the changes he foresaw. He was involved with the Society at Ingelburn, where he spoke with such enthusiasm and passion that the then President asked him to consider assisting the

# TO ARTIST BASS

Society in its renewal, by updating its image with a logo to replace the image of St Vincent de Paul that had been used for more than a century.

Drawing on Christ's words that "A cup of water given in my name is given unto me" Bass began designing. "To me the Society was all about Christ's injunction, so that's what I did: the design consists of three hands and a cup," he said later. "One hand is reaching out with the cup, another is receiving it, and the third – the one with the wound – is Christ's hand blessing the transaction.

"I regard this as one of the really important things I've done. It began very simply, from participating with those few laymen. It's like a memorial to that time in my life and to my having belonged to that group."

The logo is, of course, now used Australia-wide. It is instantly recognisable and symbolises not only charity, but faith and our interconnectedness. It literally serves as a beacon to the thousands of people, disadvantaged and marginalised, seeking assistance. It also speaks of love. Throughout life, wherever

he went, Bass would meet this image, on collection bins and Centres. "It's just everywhere," he once said, noting his surprise at even coming across it in Turkey.

Bass' other religious works include: *Edmund Rice*, St Patrick's College, in Goulburn; *St Ignatious*, Riverview; the *High Altar* and *Our Lady Archetype of the Church*, Saint Mary's Cathedral, Hobart; *Votive Figure of the Sacred Heart*, Sancta Sophia College, University of Sydney; *Saint Luke Icon*, St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney; *Crucifix*, Royal Military College, Duntroon; *Votive Figure*, St Aloysius College, Adelaide; *Sculptured Altar*, St Joseph's Church, Neutral Bay – relocated to St Vincent's Church, Redfern; *Our Lady and Christ the Priest*, Catholic Seminary, Manly; *Mary Immaculate*, Bossley Park Catholic Church; *Our Lady of Sorrows and Magdalene Foundress*, Cannosian Hospital Brisbane; *Saint Paul*, Aurora College, Moss Vale; *Ascension*, Nanarup; *Votive Reredos Cross*, St Finbar's Church, Glenbrook; and *St Peter Julian Eymard*, St Patrick's Church, Melbourne.

Later in his career, Bass established the Tom Bass Sculpture School and in a lovely piece of

synergy one of its artists recently completed another work for the Society, a relief sculpture that sits in a small mud chapel on the Jim de Silva farm at Nowra, with the inscription "All I ask of you is love".

Tom Bass gave the Society much more than a work of art; he gave it a precious symbol that transcends language or experience, capturing our contract with those we serve in its simple lines. He packaged up our spirit, and in so doing, his spirit lives on entwined with ours. ■

**For more information on Tom Bass visit [www.tombass.org.au](http://www.tombass.org.au)**

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St Paul the Sillmaker, St Augustine's Church, Yass,

*Ethos*, which stands in Canberra's city centre