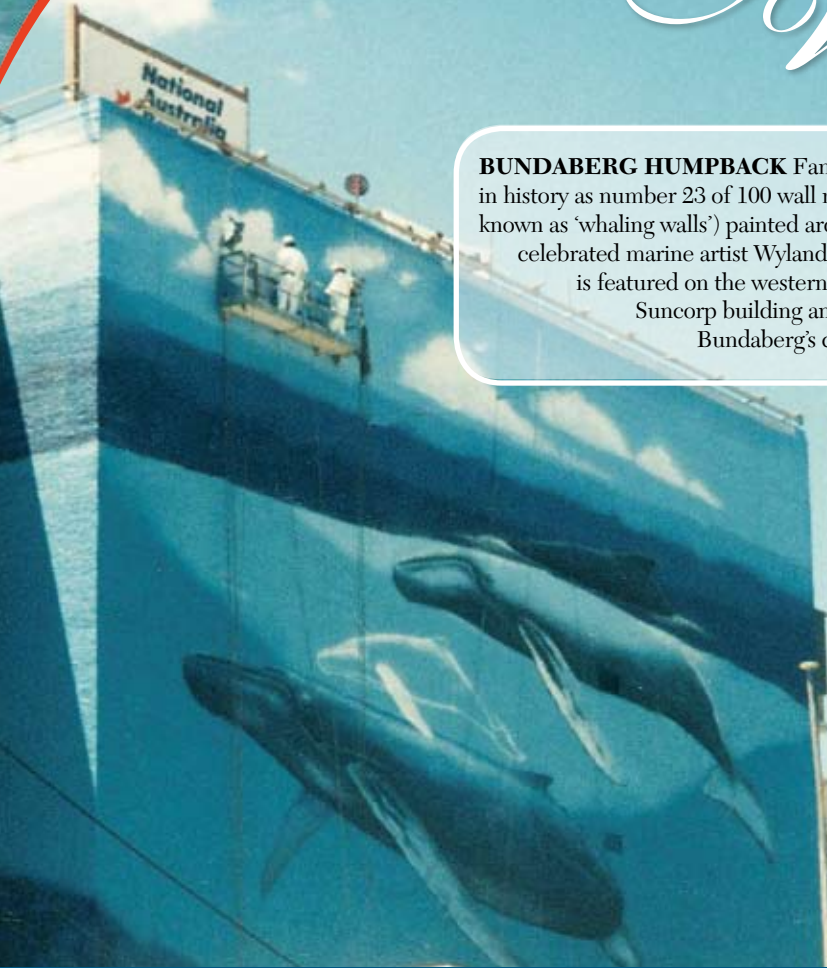


Wyland's Whaling Wall

BUNDABERG HUMPBACK Family will take its place in history as number 23 of 100 wall murals (affectionately known as 'whaling walls') painted around the world by celebrated marine artist Wyland. This six-storey mural is featured on the western wall of the former Suncorp building and has been a part of Bundaberg's cityscape for 17 years.





THE ORIGINS OF THE WALL

In 1988 Mr John Neilson of the Bundaberg District Tourism and Development Board visited Hawaii and was awestruck by a 20-storey Wyland whaling wall in Waikiki. Given the beauty of the mural, recent worldwide attention about the plight of the whales, and Bundaberg's developing whale-watch tourism, Mr Neilson felt a whaling wall in Bundaberg would be a great addition for reasons of environmental awareness, tourism, aesthetics, and civic pride.

"It was the warmest reception I have ever received... It seemed the entire community became involved in this project..."

On his return to Bundaberg, he obtained immediate support from the Board's Manager, Mr Paul Neville. They, along with many other dedicated people, including Bundaberg Tourist Officer Jo Crocker, worked tirelessly to organise the artist, sponsors, and celebrations on a very tight schedule. Wyland proved elusive, but through contacts made during Expo '88, he was finally tracked down and negotiations began on 25 July 1989.

While Wyland was in Australia during March/April 1990 visiting his friend, actress Linda Blair, Paul Neville invited them both to spend a few days on Lady Elliott Island. This they did, and while here they also inspected the proposed wall. Wyland dove off Lady Elliott Island every day and was so enamoured with the area that he extended his stay. The deal to paint the wall was cemented with a picnic at Bundaberg Airport just prior to Wyland's return to America.

INSPIRATION AND EXECUTION

Before Wyland arrived back in Bundaberg the wall had to be cleaned and treated to get rid of any moss or fungus, and most of the expansion joints had to be replaced. A local firm – Bundaberg Lacey – was chosen



to prepare the wall and paint the white undercoat, and to assist Wyland.

Wyland arrived in Bundaberg on Thursday 13 September 1990. He went diving off Barolin Rocks so he could get a clearer picture of the local coral reefs. These reefs are pictured at the base of the mural. As a result of his earlier dives off Lady Elliott Island, he was inspired to paint a mother whale with her calf and an escort whale, along with a loggerhead turtle he had swum with off the island.

The mural is 100m by 80m and in excess of 1000 litres of paint was used. Wyland 'ghosted' the shapes on to the wall during the Saturday and Sunday, and on the Monday he started filling in the shapes. On one particularly windy day the Council had to erect parking barricades below the mural so cars would not be damaged by the paint carried on the wind from Wyland's spray gun. The painting was finished on Thursday 20 September after only five days, and only hours before the lighting and inauguration ceremony.

INAUGURATION

Parts of Bourbong Street were closed for this impromptu ceremony, which included music and speeches, before Wyland officially called for the lights to be turned on the mural. Both Wyland's website, and ceremony organiser Jo Crocker, estimate a crowd of over 5000. Wyland said of his wall, "It turned out even better than I'd hoped", and of his Bundaberg experience and the lighting ceremony, "It was the warmest reception I have ever received... It seemed the entire community became involved in this project...".

People on the street were asked to sign a giant card which was given to Wyland as a thank you. According to Jo Crocker, Wyland was 'so charming', understood any restrictions the project was under, and was a 'perfect gentleman' and 'lots of fun'.

The mural was officially dedicated on Friday 21 September by Mr John Neilson. From 11am there was an official signing ceremony, where Wyland signed his work, and the cutting of the ribbon. A special thank you party then followed for Wyland and the project's sponsors. It was held on the top floor and balcony of the Royal Hotel,



from where guests had a perfect view of the new whaling wall. Wyland left Bundaberg soon after, bound for Sydney where he was to paint his second, and only other, Australian whaling wall.

This massive project was sponsored by the Bundaberg District Tourism and Development Board, Australian Provincial Newspapers, National Australia Bank, Continental Airlines, Solver Paints (South Australia), and Mr John Santalucia, owner of the building. Many other local businesses also sponsored accommodation, clothing, meals, cars, scuba gear, and so on. Wyland did the painting at no charge.

Wyland's Story

"I've always had a connection to water." Wyland's life changed when, at the age of 14, he visited family in Laguna Beach, California and saw whales for the first time. He had discovered his destiny and motivation, and he vowed one day to move to the area.

Wyland grew up watching Jacques Cousteau documentaries and was enormously inspired and influenced by Cousteau and his work. He was prompted to research in libraries to learn more about whales and other marine creatures and the threats to their numbers. Wyland then became dedicated to educating the public about such issues and encouraging people to become involved in their conservation.

In 1993 Wyland founded the Wyland Foundation, a non-profit organization "...dedicated to promoting, protecting, and preserving the world's oceans, waterways, and marine life. The foundation encourages environmental awareness through education programs, public arts projects, and community events."

ART AND THE ARTISTIC PROCESS

Before painting his whaling walls, Wyland likes to dive or swim with the creatures he paints. He usually paints what he sees on his dives, and therefore the end result is as





Image courtesy of Wyland

much a surprise to Wyland as it is to those watching.

When asked how he can paint on such a large scale, Wyland says he uses his mind's eye. Physically he is up on the scaffolding close to the wall, but in his mind's eye he is standing down on the ground looking at the wall from a distance. He does not use grids or sketches and has also said that he uses himself as a reference. As he has swum with whales on numerous occasions, he has an idea of how many of his own body lengths to paint in order to get a life-size whale. It is estimated that over 1 billion people view a Wyland Whaling Wall annually. However, Wyland is not only renowned as a whaling wall mural artist. He also paints regular size paintings, sculpts, and has numerous collectors of his works.

100 WHALING WALLS IN 30 YEARS

Wyland painted his first whaling wall in Laguna Beach, California in 1981. He was originally only going to paint the one mural, as it was all he could afford at the time, but the public response to this mural was so great that Wyland set himself the goal of painting 100 murals throughout the world in 30 years (1981-2011). He has painted most of his murals in American cities, but has also completed whaling walls in Canada, Japan,

Australia, France, New Zealand, Mexico, Guam and the Republic of Palau.

His 33rd whaling wall, painted in 1992, gained him the Guinness World Record for the largest mural in the world. It was painted on the Long Beach Convention Centre in California and was 390m long by 32m high.

As of February 2007 Wyland has painted 95 whaling walls. Numbers 96 to 99 will be painted outside the US, including one in Abu Dhabi, and others proposed in Germany, South Africa, and England. He plans to paint his 100th wall in Beijing China in 2008, just prior to the Olympic Games.

HANDS ACROSS THE OCEANS

The painting of his 100th wall is set to involve children from around the world in a project called Hands Across the Oceans. Wyland will invite children from 191 United Nations member countries to participate. Each country will select 13 children who will join Wyland in Beijing in July 2008. These junior artists will paint marine life native to their own countries on the bottom portion of the wall while Wyland will paint whales and other marine life on the upper portion. The mural is to be around 4.5km long and will signify that water connects us all.

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Peta Browne

- Bundaberg Library