Mini FJ's silver ball to shine again

The mini Silver Ball as it was in 2005 when the multi-media installation was unveiled at the back of the Fletcher Jones factory in Warrnambool. (Image supplied by Brenda O'Connor).

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color:#A02F2F;"] A [/dropcap] miniature, but otherwise almost perfect replica of the iconic Fletcher Jones Silver Ball in Warrnambool is poised to be brought out of storage and re-assembled for the first time in almost nine years.

The three-metre tall replica was built in 2005 as part of an interactive art project managed by the Melbourne-based arts company, Experimenta, and funded through a $34,000 grant from

the then Bracks State Government.

Experimenta worked over three months with local artists, community groups and young film makers to create the silver ball installation, which was unveiled during a weekend event staged at the back of the Fletcher Jones factory, off Lava St.

At that time, three flaps on the side of the ball dropped down to reveal television sets (of the old-fashioned, big-bummed variety) that broadcast a series of short films made by the young film makers about the Fletcher Jones story and site.

The keeper of the sphere: Murray Adams with the deconstructed ball in a farm shed at Wangoom.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] T [/dropcap]he ball has not been seen in public since and is now stored in a farm shed at Wangoom under the watchful eye of artist, machine operator and welder **Murray "Muzz" Adams** who was one of the artists involved in its creation. The other artists included **Tamara Sharp, Kate Gage, Carolyn Rundell** and **Nathan Nicholson**.

"It is a fully engineered piece of work with a fibreglass skin fitted over a steel framework," Murray explained.

Just like the real Silver Ball water tower, the miniature version was built to withstand Warrnambool's famous winds (up to 90kph, at least) and the three orange, steel legs form a sturdy tripod inside the sphere to ensure it will never topple off its perch and roll away.

"It really is quite durable and can take a bit of a beating," Murray said.

Plans are afoot to re-assemble the ball, which is currently detached from its legs and base, for the F-Project Cinema's Silver Ball Screening Project scheduled for early May.

"We are planning to locate it at the back of the post office, in the carpark end of Ozone Walk," said F-Project President **Emma Charlton**.

One of the three flaps on the ball that opened to reveal a television on which local films about Fletcher Jones were screened.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color:#A02F2F"] T [/dropcap]he replica ball will again be used to screen films made by locals, although the obsolete TV sets will be replaced by more modern technology. It is also hoped to revive an another part of the original installation, which saw a person either pedal a bicycle or operate a manual sewing machine to provide power for the flaps to open and reveal the screens.

"We won't know what is to be screened in the ball until (the films) are submitted at the end of March, but we're also thinking of reviving the films which were initially made as a part of this previous project," Emma said.

The theme of the Silver Ball Screening Festival is 'Keeping the ball in the air' and has already inspired some quirky interpretations.

Some of the ideas, Emma said, included animated bugs collecting the silver ball, a documentary about social services in Warrnambool (therefore keeping the metaphorical

ball in the air), and a narrative including the water tower tumbling down Lava St in an Indiana Jones-style action film (god forbid!).

[box type="bio"] **The Silver Ball Screening Project on May 9-10 is part of the Hidden Histories Laneway Festival, and is supported by the F Project, Regional Arts Victoria, Warrnambool City Council and Warrnambool Art Gallery. Bluestone Magazine is part of a grassroots movement to save the best of the Fletcher Jones factory site and gardens from being lost through neglect. You can read more about the campaign here and join the Facebook group here.**[/box]

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