



A large-scale artistic intervention – S2's Substation Wall is situated within the residential terrain of Balaclava, Victoria.

Michael Downes - Urban Angles Photography

The Substation (South Wall) ▲

Client/developer: Gradam Enterprises Pty Ltd

Architect: S2 design

Principal contractor: Sajacad Pty Ltd

Concrete contractor: Berlingeri Pty Ltd

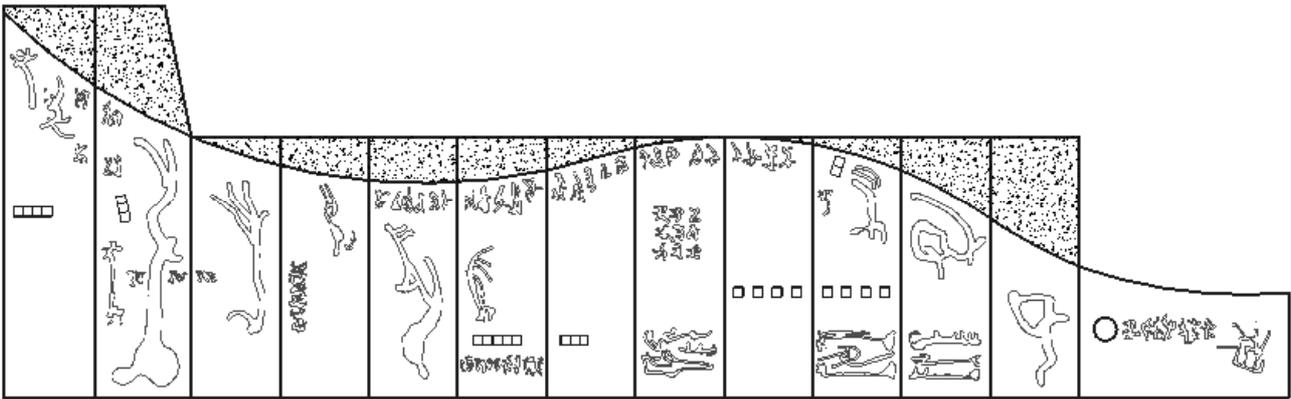
Article by: Abe McCarthy

Described as a large-scale artistic intervention, S2 design's Substation Wall is situated within the residential terrain of Balaclava, Victoria. It forms the southern boundary to a new residential development which integrates a heritage-significant 1920's electrical substation.

The community setting of Balaclava is one that is diverse socially, culturally and linguistically. The Wall responds to this diversity and intermingles with the brusque edginess of the local landscape.

S2 design's David M. Saunders says that "The fabrication of test-panels formed an integral part of the design-evolution and a refined production method. 150 to 175-mm-thick stack-cast tilt-up panels were poured on site, with ten of the thirteen panels having identical dimensions – maximising the benefits of the tilt-up technique." The wall is thirty metres long, and six metres high (nine metres at its highest point), with SL92 central mesh plus N12 bars at 400-mm centres (vertically) and single N16 edge-bars. A standard mix 32-MPa concrete with 70-mm slump was utilised.

The concept of translating complex shapes into sharp concrete relief arose from a collaborative junction between the artist and architect. The graphic elements were originally hand-drawn by the artist, Damon Kowarsky. These patterns were then transferred to digital files, and finally to formwork block-outs using laser-cutting technology. 40-mm Bluestone railway ballast is also embedded to create a unique and resourceful exposed-aggregate interface.



The Wall – concept design
S2 design

The large imprinted symbols are evocative of text, or perhaps hieroglyphics – coaxing personal interpretation and interactive discussion. An artistic narrative exists with each unique story developing through a viewer's own decoding. Whereas boundaries are typically prone to closing off communication, the Wall is intended to open communication at the urban-level. Random oculi are also embedded to offset the apparent scale of the panels with momentary transparency – like small eyes awaiting your interpretation of the inscribed 'text'.

The Wall economically responds to the brief's three major requirements. The first two being practical – privacy and structural support, with the wall being an integral component of the apartment-building's structure. The third functional criteria was responsiveness to the urban context. The Wall characterises the area as public space through the large-scale artistic intervention, effectively creating a unique sense of place.

The Wall is concrete in its essential qualities – strength, smoothness and durability – and characterises a sense of place and visual excitement. The possibility of play is created, not only through graphics, but also by its impact-friendly presence - ready to receive and rebound fast-moving balls.

The Substation Wall invigorates what was previously an incidental and purely utilitarian space into a new realm of shared space.

Randomly embedded glazing offsets the apparent scale of the tilt-up panels with momentary transparency – like small eyes awaiting your interpretation of the inscribed 'text'.

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