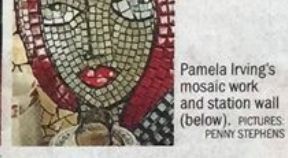
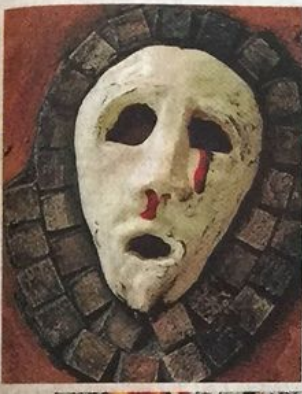
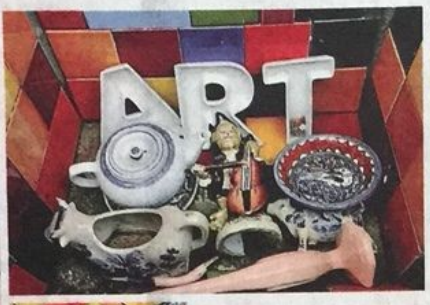


# MELBOURNELIFE

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## Station's pieces de resistance

Mosaic artist Pamela Irving has transformed an eyesore into a work of art, writes Kate Nancarrow.



Pamela Irving's mosaic work and station wall (below). PICTURES: PENNY STEPHENS

**T**HE population of Patterson, near Bentleigh, has just risen by 650 and the new faces on the block are staring down the graffiti taggers who make the local station one of the most repeatedly defaced in Melbourne.

These 650 grinning, glowering and gleeful mosaic faces have been created, collected and installed by artist Pamela Irving, whose studio is about 100 metres west of the station, in a three-year project to cover its 65 metres of walkways and underpasses.

Irving was partially motivated to tackle a graffiti problem but also by a desire to connect and beautify her neighbourhood. Her passion is to make Patterson a "mosaic environment" spreading along every wall.

And to those who think Patterson is beyond the cultural pale, she says it's time mushrooming Melbourne broadened its horizons. "You can't have urban sprawl without cultural sprawl."

Inspired by the ancient mosaic traditions of Italy and India and the contemporary work of Isaiah Zagar, whose mad mosaics now beautify Philadelphia's once-bleak neighbourhoods, Irving has opened the door to local schools and kindergartens, as well as local and international mosaic groups. "I wasn't very prescriptive; I just said: do a face or portrait."

The faces are both varied and distinctive and include beautiful black-and-white self-portraits from four-year-olds at Bentleigh West kindergarten alongside an almost photographically accurate mosaic of a woman in the West Indies created by her sister in Bentleigh.

In February, Irving was keynote speaker at the Society of American Mosaic Artists in Austin, Texas, and, while detailing her other mosaic work, which includes a three-year project for Luna Park, as well as a huge private commission in smalti (a traditional mosaic made from richly coloured



glass), she mentioned the Patterson project. "I just said 'if you want to send a face, please do so'."

Since then, 75 faces have arrived from America, including a realistic-looking President Barack Obama who will now be keeping an eye on the good folk of Patterson.

Irving says this outpouring shows both the accessibility of mosaic as an art form and the response people have to community-building ideas. She estimates 750 people have been involved, including former local MP Rob Hudson who encouraged her to apply for an Arts Victoria grant, Metro Trains and Vic Track who supported community "ownership" of the area, and adhesives firm Bostik.

While many created, others just donated. "I've had boxes and boxes of china from deceased estates and people come in and say 'this was my mother's favourite mug, please include it in the mosaic.'"

Installation will be finished soon and, after three years, Irving will return to her other work. Trained as a sculptor — it's her bronze dog Larry LaTrobe that graces the City Square — Irving moved to mosaics when her two children were babies and the frequent interruptions made sculpting hard. Then, a decade ago, she began painting more and now devotes half a week to painting and half a week to mosaics, with themes and characters enduring and overlapping. An exhibition of her paintings now at Eltham's Light Factory Gallery, entitled *Dreaming With Open Eyes*, features painted versions of mosaic characters she's included at Luna Park. She says the characters in her work travel with her and now 650 have joined the journey.

Pamela Irving's exhibition runs until July 24 at the Light Factory Gallery, 21 Brougham Street, Eltham.

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View a photo gallery online