

Removals are not 'erasing history' (letter)

History exists. It happened. All of it. We know pieces of it; we can even hold and handle bits of evidence of what once was. There are parts of our known history that we wish we could remove or change. But, sadly, history does not work that way. There is no "undo" button.

Public art often exists at an intersection of history. When it depicts a particular interpretation of historical people or events, it works both "with" and "within" history. The cool thing about public art is that, unlike history that is fixed in time, our built environment continues to evolve and change.

Sometimes, we grow out of the need for particular pieces of art, or we come to learn more about the subjects they depict, and decide they no longer deserve a place of veneration within our communities. When we remove public art, we are not "erasing history" — as erasing a thing that has already happened is impossible. In a beautiful way, we are creating history, adding to the layered narrative that already exists. We are defining the values of our own time, for future historians to know.

It's really a lovely dynamic, and one that deserves celebration, not fear. We can never "erase history." We can only add layers to it

Stephanie Townrow

Lancaster