

OPEN THE DOOR

A photograph of a room with peeling green paint and a large oval mirror hanging in the center. The mirror reflects a window with a view of a landscape. The room has a wooden floor and a decorative border on the wall.

Brigita Ozolins & Dean Stevenson

The Ladies Cottage Willow Court New Norfolk 29 March-3 May 2026

OPEN THE DOOR

This installation is a site-specific response to the long history of women who were psychiatric patients in the Ladies Cottage at New Norfolk's Willow Court. It is a first-time collaboration between visual artist Brigita Ozolins and composer Dean Stevenson, combining text, mirrors and audio installed throughout the two-story historic building.

OPEN THE DOOR is inspired by that fact that inpatient admission to the Cottage required only two signatures, but release required eight. It reflects on the obvious challenge this policy must have presented to residents.

Who looks outside dreams

Who looks inside awakes

Originally built in 1868, the cottage was fenced off from the rest of the Willow Court complex, some sources reporting it was surrounded by a moat-like trench called a haha wall which kept patients in but allowed them to see out. The cottage provided accommodation in private rooms for women from privileged backgrounds who were diagnosed with conditions such as hysteria, melancholia, epilepsy, disobedience and impure thoughts. Treatment featured outdated and often cruel medical procedures such as ice-water baths, but the ladies were also occupied with sewing, needlepoint, cleaning, cooking and, surprisingly, animal therapy with llamas and rabbits.

OPEN THE DOOR aims to show that despite the challenges faced by the residents of the Ladies Cottage, many were not powerless and had an inner strength that enabled them to open the door to a life beyond Willow Court.

CARL JUNG

Credited with founding analytic psychology, Jung gave us the terms introvert and extravert, synchronicity, archetype and the collective unconscious.

His statement, *Who looks outside dreams, who looks inside awakes*, captures a sense of an internal world and an external world, of the opposing states of dreaming and awakening. It advocates looking inward to understand the true nature of our identity, which Jung claims is accompanied by a shadow self, that part of ourselves that remains in darkness and we may find difficult to acknowledge.

In the Ladies Cottage, residents may have looked to the outside world, dreaming of life beyond the confines of their rooms, but their focus was internal, on healing their inner selves and, if Jung is right, awakening to an understanding of the complex nature of the self.

ARCHITECTURE

The sense of outside versus inside is reinforced by the architecture of the Ladies Cottage which has a symmetrical T-shaped design, dominated by its grand central staircase. All the rooms are sited on the perimeter of the building, evoking the idea of living on the threshold between two worlds. There is protection and respite from the outside, but a constant reminder of living on the inside.

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

The song Solitude, by composer John Metcalfe, provided Brigita with the inspiration for the writing on the wall. The lyrics evoke the most basic experiences of being human: *I breathe, I weep, I see, I dream, I feel, I bleed... open the door...*

MIRRORS

In art, mirrors are especially associated with women and the purity of the Virgin Mary. In psychiatry, two-way mirrors have been used to observe the behaviour of patients. Brigita has used mirrors because of their power to disorient and their many symbolic meanings which include self-awareness, truth, wisdom, introspection and deception. Mirrors can also represent portals that transport the viewer into the past, the future, or alternative worlds and states of being.

SOUND

Sound is invisible and is experienced inside us – we are unable to point to it. In the Ladies Cottage, sound, as with many other emotions, could have dominated the interior life of anyone admitted there. Sound, in this case music, can become a wanting. A want for solace, a want for release and perhaps a want for purpose or towards the end: survival.

Inspired by the piano on the porch of the ladies Cottage and with the knowledge that there were several pianos within the Willow Court precinct, Dean has made a music that is nourishing whilst also holding the idea of a dream state – a place where one can witness the Ladies Cottage but also free oneself from its reality.

Brigita Ozolins and Dean Stevenson

WITH THANKS TO

The Sisters, Betul & Defne Madakbas
Dane and the renovation team
John Metcalfe for the use of song lyrics
The Tasmanian Government