

Avatar's Abode
Meher Road
Woombye 4559
Queensland

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Historical & Cultural Research & Writing

Significance Assessment

AVATAR'S ABODE



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STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Avatar's Abode and its collections meet several of the established criteria for assessing significance. These criteria are determined by the ICOMOS Burra Charter and endorsed by the Queensland Government.

Avatar's Abode is highly significant as the first Eastern spiritual centre and community in Queensland developed by westerners. It was the first of a wave of such centres and communities that developed throughout Australia during the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting a change in the religious demography of Queensland (**CRITERION A: the place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of Queensland's history**).

Avatar's Abode was established after the longest Australian stay (and last overseas visit) of an Indian figure, Meher Baba (1894-1969), who was well-known overseas. It is strongly associated with Meher Baba and Modernist poet Francis Brabazon - an early figure in the Heide Circle, which produced many of Australia's most notable artists in the 1940s and 1950s (**CRITERION H: the place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group, or organisation of importance in Queensland's history**).

The property is one of the four main world 'places of pilgrimage' for followers of Meher Baba. It has accommodated numerous visitors from all over the globe for over sixty years (**CRITERION G: the place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons**).

The 'Baba Square' precinct has been maintained exceptionally intact. Most aspects and furnishings remain *in situ*. It contains features (e.g. 'Baba's Room') that are unique for their time. The centre is one of the few expressions of Heide Circle objectives in architectural form anywhere in Australia (**CRITERION B: the place demonstrates rare, uncommon, or endangered aspects of Queensland's cultural heritage**).

Avatar's Abode has aesthetic and landmark significance. It is a picturesque blend of buildings, gardens, and remnant woodlands with diverse views of the Sunshine Coast. It retains a flora and fauna sanctuary featuring endangered native species (**CRITERION E the place is important because of its aesthetic significance**).

Avatar's Abode preserves buildings associated with Meher Baba and Brabazon, and large collections of books, documents, paintings, posters, audio-visual materials, music, photographs, and other materials dating from the 1890s onwards.

These collections are of research significance for several topics:

1. The life and works of Francis Brabazon,
2. The life and works of Meher Baba.
3. The life and works of Baron von Frankenberg.
4. The earliest development of Western Sufism in Australia
5. Early Australian Modernism
6. Early Australian Primitivism and Surrealism
7. Australian attitudes to Asian culture and spirituality pre-1966
8. Australian treatment of German citizens during World War II.
9. Eastern/ New Religious Movements within Australia 1920s – 1980s.
10. The Psychedelic Art Movement in Australia.
11. 1960s-1970s counterculture
12. Alternative communities
13. Countercultural/ religious festivities (Avatar's Abode Anniversary).
14. Australian music 1960s-1970s.

Avatar's Abode's collections are older and larger than those of any other religious centre in the Caboolture and Sunshine Coast regions, containing in some cases tens of thousands of items.¹ Most are well-provenanced and meticulously filed and preserved. Their potential for future research is substantial **(CRITERION C: the place has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Queensland's history).**

Some of the books, music, and relics in the collections are extremely rare, unusual or unique. They reflect the multicultural interests of the owners, which was decades ahead of their time. The collections reflect a long history of input from early Australian Sufism, India, the USA, and other sources **(CRITERION B: the place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of Queensland's cultural heritage).**

Currently there are only a dozen museums and collections within Australia that could be characterised as focussed primarily on religious history or religious artefacts. Avatar's Abode is one of very few places in Australia that preserves and displays physical 'sacred relics', some of which are almost a century old. It is possibly the only site in Australia preserving some of the physical remains of an Eastern spiritual figure **(CRITERION B: the place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of Queensland's cultural heritage).**

¹ Ray Kerkhove, 2018, *Spiritual Heritage of the Sunshine Coast: A report to Sunshine Coast Council on religious architecture, art, and archival records of the region* Keperra: Ray Kerkhove, pp. 8, 32.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Archives Committee should consider nominating Avatar's Abode for the *Queensland Heritage Register*
<https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/heritage/register/changes>.
- The Archives Committee should consider nominating Avatar's Abode for the *National Trust Heritage Awards* (Queensland).
<https://nationaltrustqld.org.au/what-we-do/heritage-awards>
- The Archives Committee should consider nominating Avatar's Abode for as a *National Trust Heritage Place* <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/places/nominating-heritage-place>
- Little in the collection currently demonstrates the involvement of Meher Baba, Brabazon, Frankenberg or Baba followers in the broader community or major cultural trends, although their involvement was significant. The Archives Committee should actively seek more contextual items, information and documents illustrating these aspects.
- Currently most archival materials relating to major cultural activities and inter-personal connections in the wider community are retained in personal collections. Avatar's Abode's Archive Committee should develop a policy of encouraging persons within (or associated with) the Meher Baba community to donate items that demonstrate their cultural and other activities in the broader community.
- Avatar's Abode has very large and diverse collections, some of which require specialist knowledge to adequately interpret and evaluate. The consultant recommends AA consider contracting experts to fully analyse the following:
 - Library/ book collection
 - Music collection
 - Art collection

This is a summary only from the report. For a complete copy of this Significance Assessment email request to:

Archives Committee Convenor

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