

MEDIA RELEASE

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Improving lives and creating social change through sculpture

Blasting, 3D laser scanning and cutting, welding and other techniques utilised daily in WA's giant resources industry are being used by a South West sculptor to create new and exciting works of art.

And it is not just mining processes that Australind-based Alex Mickle is borrowing! He's also working with engineers – the latest being the aerospace kind – to create his work.

Mr Mickle, who has worked as a professional artist for more than 20 years, is driven by the belief that art, if used in the right way, is a social game-changer.

"I'm a big believer in using art for social change and using art to make people's lives better," he said. "Art can help people to be more active and to get out of bad habits. It can relieve the boredom in people's lives and open up new possibilities."

Mr Mickle is currently working on a number of projects that are good examples of how art can positively impact people's lives.

"My partner Nicole and I are working on a big sculpture project at Koombana Bay in Bunbury for the City of Bunbury which involves collaborating with a wide-ranging group of Noongar people to create a seven-metre-high sculpture about Noongar culture. This will be the first time there has been a public artwork in the Bunbury region that focuses on them. So it is really significant," Mr Mickle said.

"The project involves the use of 3D scanning and engineers to upscale the work. What's great about each of these projects is that the work we do and all the techniques and skills we learn help to inform the next work and so on."

Mr Mickle has created sculptures – including a 8.5 tonne artwork in the Pilbara – employing a wide range of heavy duty methods, such as using explosives in a process called "blast forming" to shape a steel plate for the sculpture.

"The FIVE project involved working with a group of mine workers in Paraburdoo, with DADAA, as part of the two-year project designed to address the stigma of mental health in regional communities. This particular project was aimed at FIFO workers and was designed to increase their sense of wellbeing and build peer-to-peer connection," he said.

"We got this group of workers together with engineers to create sculptures using mining techniques which they were already familiar with and used every day. The project helped to deal with some of the isolation and stress you can experience working remotely and taught them something new. This is great example of how art can be used to connect people and make their lives better."

Country Arts WA is supporting a two-year creative, technical and professional development program for Mr Mickle through its Regional Arts Legacy Grant (RALG) program, made possible by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and the Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development, under the State Government's \$24 million Creative Regions investment into arts and culture across WA.

Mr Mickle's RALG grant (\$48,750 over two years) has allowed the artist to further explore the boundaries of sculpture and work on the creation of 12 new medium scale artworks.

"The grant allows me to pursue my work in the way that I want to and to pursue the art that I'd like to create," he said.

"I'm about to start working with an aerospace engineer on a new project. It's a classic example of a mining engineer who used to be an aerospace engineer in the UK but had to change focus when he moved to Australia. There just aren't that many jobs for aerospace engineers over here."

"I met him in Paraburdoo and as it turns out, he always wanted to be an artist when he was a kid but his parent actively discouraged it. He worked on the FIFO workers project with us, somewhat reluctantly at first, but has since gone onto three or four subsequent projects."

"People do things in the name of art that they would never do for any other reason and there is something very fulfilling about that," Mr Mickle said.

Regional Arts Legacy Grants

Country Arts WA Executive Director Paul MacPhail said since its inception in 2015, the RALG program had injected more than \$2 million dollars into regional organisations and projects, creating employment opportunities and building capacity and vibrancy across regional WA.

"This initiative has had a significant and very positive impact on life in the regions, contributing to community vibrancy, liveability and cohesion as well as providing opportunities for involvement in local arts and cultural activities, employment and professional development for regional artists."

Mr MacPhail said RALG had benefited every region of WA with grants distributed to more than 30 individuals, arts organisations and projects from the Kimberley to Great Southern regions.

"There is a demonstrable need for continued and ongoing funding so we can continue to build on the great results achieved so far and further nurture the wealth of creativity within our regions."

Mr MacPhail said initiatives like RALG were made possible through the Royalties for Regions funded Creative Regions program of which Country Arts WA delivers Scheme Four on behalf of State Government, through the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

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