

Gomboc Gallery's art of survival

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Ron Gomboc and his wife, Terrie, were pioneers of sorts when they opened the Gomboc Gallery Sculpture Park and held their first annual sculpture survey 30 years ago.

The month-long show on their sprawling Middle Swan property is the only one of its kind in WA, continuing a tradition of promoting sculpture and helping launch the careers of many WA artists.

The latest exhibition brings to nearly 2900 the number of local art-school students, established WA artists and distinguished international guests to have shown at Gomboc over the years.

It is an extraordinary figure, reflecting the couple's commitment and enthusiasm for the art form Gomboc first embraced nearly 40 years ago.

Gomboc says wryly that he and Terrie initially set up their gallery to generate an income to subsidise his own artistic endeavours when, in fact, the reverse has occurred.

Much of his artistic earnings have been ploughed back into running what is now a key cultural hub and facilitating three decades of international artistic exchanges. The Gombocs have helped many WA artists exhibit in Asia and have hosted residencies for artists from throughout Asia, Europe, the Pacific and the US.

There is barely a WA sculptor who has not used Gomboc's workshop and foundry and the couple also have helped support interstate artists associated with Sculpture by the Sea.

"Sculpture has been for a long time a poor relation in the arts," says Gomboc, pausing briefly from working on his next piece for Bondi's Sculpture by the Sea in October. "Similar to ballet, everyone knows it's there but nobody goes there," he laughs.

"To achieve what we have done, surviving over 30 years, it has been a challenge. It has been totally run on irregular income. For sculptors, living and surviving in WA becomes a really challenging situation because if you are not teaching, it is barely possible to survive from selling your sculptures. The bulk of sculptors, bar a few, really struggle to maintain their relationships because of the stress of their financial situation.

"How I have survived to keep my marriage, I don't know, because all that has happened here would not be possible without Terrie.

"Like a lot of galleries around Perth, we are not immune to the drought in the art market."

The latest Gomboc Gallery Sculpture Survey features 25 leading artists, local and international, alongside 44 students from Edith Cowan University, Curtin University, Polytechnic West and Central Institute of Technology.

This year's international guest artists include three from the United Arab Emirates, resulting from a Gomboc cultural exchange in Dubai earlier this year.

Gomboc's own career as a sculptor has flourished, with regular international exhibitions and commissions, including the design of the "Aussie Oscar" for the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Awards. A work purchased by the State Government from Sculpture by the Sea in March is soon to be installed along Kings Park Road near Dumas House.

"I have been very fortunate that I have been always too busy to question what I do," he says. "Everything is possible if you don't stop and think about it. All we are hoping to achieve is to have made a difference in the world of sculpture."

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