

A creative hub in the hills

Burrinja Cultural Centre, Upwey

The Dandenong Ranges on the outskirts of Melbourne have long held a strong attraction for artists of all persuasions. From the impressionist painters Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts, to Fred Williams and Lin Onus, many artists have not only set up their easels amongst the dense ferns and tall mountain ash trees, but call the 'hills' their home. Nestled among the foothills of the Dandenongs, a 45 min drive from the city centre, Burrinja Cultural Centre serves this creative community today with a wide range of exhibitions, theatre, music, dance, studio creative arts and workshops.

With several exhibition spaces, workshop and artist studio spaces Burrinja offers an ever-changing program for arts practitioners and visitors alike. A state-of-the art 400 –seat theatre and a licenced café make Burrinja a thriving hub of community and touring shows, and an ideal destination for tourists and day-visitors to the hills.

Supporting community projects and nurturing local arts is integral to Burrinja's mission of Building Community through Arts', a mantra that was born out of community arts and protest in the late 1990's that led to the foundation of Burrinja as a cultural centre. Independent, yet with support of Yarra Ranges Council, the organisation draws on this tradition of community activism and supports a wide range of local community cultural events and annual festivals including Belgrave Lantern Parade, End-of-the-Line Festival, and the Dandenong Ranges Open Studios to name a few.

The annual Dandenong Ranges Open Studios weekend is now in its fourteenth year, and has become known across the region as a showcase of emerging, mid-career and professional artists across all mediums in their own hills studios, as well as presenting their work each year in the Open Studios group exhibition at Burrinja Gallery. The connection of local environment, social engagement and community activism is also reflected in the *Burrinja Climate Change Biennale*, an award exhibition dedicated to creative responses to environmental change.

While Burrinja Gallery presents a changing program of exhibitions by local artists, curated and touring exhibitions, Indigenous art and culture feature strongly in its program. This is in part due to Burrinja's heritage, which was given its name in homage to Koorie artist and local resident Lin Onus, a strong supporter of an arts centre in the ranges. 'Burrinja' means 'star' and was Lin's Yorta Yorta name. It is reflected in Burrinja's logo.

The focus on Indigenous programming and education is manifested also in its collection, the Neil McLeod Gift Collection of Aboriginal and Pacific art which Burrinja houses and manages on behalf of its owner, Yarra Ranges Council. The collection was donated by local artist, photographer and field collector Neil McLeod to council in 2001 and comprises a range of Aboriginal paintings, barks and drawings from the Kimberley, Central Australia and West Arnhem Land, including a large collection of works by the various members of the Nganjmirra family.

One work from the collection by artist Jonathon Kumintjarra Brown has been the inspiration for a national touring exhibition Burrinja is finalising with the support of state and national government

funding. *Black Mist Burnt Country* commemorates the 60th anniversary of the British atomic tests at Maralinga and launches a three year national tour in September this year.

While small and uniquely situated, the collection further features a number of rare post-colonial artefacts from Papua New Guinea, in particular from the Tolai in New Britain and Malangan carvings and masks from New Ireland.

Burrinja is presenting a regular program of exhibitions and public programs of Aboriginal art, and has over the years formed relationships with communities as far as Ali Curung, Tennant Creek and the Northern Territory. Information and cross-cultural education form part of the exhibition program at Burrinja.

Burrinja's cultural and exhibition programming including its engaging showcases of local artists are well recognised, and are reflected in winning the 2010 & 2013 Best Small Museum Award of Museum Australia (Victoria).

Burrinja is always worth visiting – whether it is to explore the current exhibitions, drop in and talk with some of the resident studio artists, rummage around in the excellent arts shop with inspiring creations made by local artists and Indigenous communities, or simply to enjoy great coffee and wine in the warmth of an embracing cultural centre in the beautiful Dandenong Ranges!

Open: Tuesday to Sunday 10.00am – 4.00pm

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