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NSW Tops the States for Street Art Experiences

Nine pieces of street and public art found across New South Wales have been named national finalists in the 2021 Australian Street Art Awards, nudging Queensland and Victoria out of the ‘top’ destinations that art-loving tourists should visit.

The Australian Street Art Awards, established in 2018, recognise destinations that are using outdoor art to attract visitors, boost their economy and engage their community.

Awards Director Liz Rivers said, “The Awards inform travellers about the magnificent array of publicly-accessible art that can be found in every corner of the country and the communities that have invested in these attractions because they’re keen to welcome visitors”.

She said smart communities promote their street and outdoor art as a unique landmark – an attraction that visitors can see in only place - and that makes their destination immediately identifiable, highly attractive and a drawcard for art-loving tourists.

The 2021 NSW finalists, in alphabetical order, are:

‘2 Kool 4 Skool’, Lightning Ridge

Finalist: Best External Mural

In the heart of Lightning Ridge visitors will find a vibrant mural of whimsical characters bursting with colour. Alongside the stylized emu heads for which the artist, John Murray, has become famous are handprints of dozens of local children who helped the artist paint the mural – an inclusion that has imbued the whole town with a sense of pride and ownership.

‘Chalk the Walk Newcastle 2021’

Finalist: Best Street Art Festival or Event

‘Chalk the Walk Newcastle 2021’ transformed the city’s centre in February last year, resulting in a \$546,000 boost to the local economy with more than 6,000 delighted visitors exploring the art over the 10-day activation. Artworks were installed across three key locations, including around the Visitor Information Centre, and could be explored as a trail or in conjunction with other ‘City of Newcastle New Annual Festival’ activities. The 3D chalk murals were vibrant, fun, interactive and creative, making a visual plea for visitors to play with them.

‘Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Mural’, Gunnedah

Finalist: Best Mega Mural AND Best Rural Art

The striking silo art depicting legendary Australian poet, Dorothea Mackellar, together with the second verse of her iconic poem, "My Country", is complemented by rural scenes of local wheat harvesting in the early 20th Century. The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society is keen to ensure that the strong ties between Dorothea's family, which once owned the local ‘Kurrumbede’ property, and the Gunnedah community are recognised and celebrated.

‘Memorial Plaza Interactive Murals’, Corowa

Finalist: Best Street Art Laneway

What started in 2019 when a local street artist worked with Corowa High School students to paint an enchanting little echidna peaking over a flowerbed has blossomed into an immersive street art laneway. That echidna has since been joined by an eye-catching Brushtail Possum, elusive Murray Cod, Red-capped Robin and others to create the Memorial Plaza Interactive Murals – a laneway and adjoining public space where visitors are encouraged to interact with the art while enjoying a coffee, a bite to eat or simply relaxing.

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‘Stanley – The Big Bird’, Lightning Ridge

Finalist: Best Landmark Sculpture

Standing sentinel on the southern edge of Lightning Ridge is 18-metre-tall steel ‘Stanley the Big Bird’, a whimsical sculpture by renowned outback artist John Murray. Stanley has become one of NSW’s most photographed icons. Emus hold a significant place in the lives of Aboriginal people and this one from scrap metal is the artist’s acknowledgement of this truth.

‘Un[contained] Arts Festival’, Kogarah

Finalist: Best Street Art Festival or Event

Bringing together large-scale installations with small discoverable artworks, Un[contained] included immersive activities involving performance, sound, light, and colour in the Kogarah CBD. The inaugural festival in 2021 challenged and expanded the idea of what art was by breaking free of the traditional gallery space and spilling onto the streets. Featuring more than 30 local and interstate artists, Un[contained] supported multiple event logistics companies and delivered millions of dollars’ worth of recognition and exposure to the NSW arts sector.

‘Urunga Mural’

Finalist: Best External Mural

The Urunga mural is a trompe l’oeil (trick of the eye) that brings the ‘old’ town back to life. Artist David Bromley is usually an illustrator and printmaker. He worked for the Sydney Morning Herald and The National Times before a 19-year stint in London. He has won numerous awards for his work including a Walkley and Gold Award in the World Press Cartoon in Sintra, Portugal.

‘Walgett Water Tower Mural’

Finalist: Best Mega Mural

The Jimmy Little Water Tower mural will ensure the legendary Indigenous musician's legacy lives on. Based on a photograph by John Elliott, artist Jenny McCracken brought the portrait to life. The background was designed by local Gamileroi artist Frank Wright and identifies Walgett, the rivers and local totems of the sand goanna, dragonfly and emu. If visitors look closely they can see Jimmy's wife reflected in his eyes.

“Investing in outdoor art as a visitor attraction is also clever economics as the art is typically less expensive to create than more traditional tourism attractions and the pay-off is handsome,” Ms Rivers said.

Arts tourists from within Australia are high value visitors – they stay 42.8% longer and spend 55.9% more when travelling than domestic tourists overall, according to an Australia Council for the Arts’ Domestic Art Tourism: Connecting the Country Report.

“Being shortlisted in the Awards further cements NSW’s reputation as THE state to tour for everyone who loves to discover visually stunning experiences,” Ms Rivers said.

The winners of all 11 categories will be announced on 4 March during an online celebration.

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