

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Walgett Shire Among Australia's Best Street Art Destinations**

**Three Walgett Shire public artworks have been named among the best public art experiences in the nation as part of the Australian Street Art Awards.**

Lightning Ridge's '2 Kool 4 Skool' mural has been shortlisted for the 2021 Best External Mural Award, while 'Stanley the Big Bird' has been named a finalist in the Best Landmark Sculpture category and the Walgett Water Tower Mural is up for the Best Mega Mural gong.

The Australian Street Art Awards, established in 2018, recognise destinations like Walgett Shire 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 one place - and that makes their destination immediately identifiable, highly attractive and a drawcard for art-loving tourists.

"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 Walgett Shire's reputation as an aspirational destination for everyone who loves to discover visually stunning experiences," Ms Rivers said.

With rigorous judging by tourism leaders, plus second-tier auditing and due diligence, this triple finalist success has the credence of the tourism sector.

Standing sentinel on the southern edge of Lightning Ridge is 18-metre-tall steel 'Stanley', an emu. This species of bird holds a significant place in the lives of Aboriginal people and this one from scrap metal is John Murray's acknowledgement of this truth.

John is also the force behind a vibrant mural of whimsical characters bursting with colour right in the heart of Lightning Ridge. Alongside the stylized emu heads for which the artist has become famous are handprints of dozens of local children – an inclusion that has imbued the whole town with a sense of pride and ownership.

The Jimmy Little Water Tower Mural, in Walgett, will ensure the musician legend's legacy lives on. Based on a photograph by John Elliott, artist Jenny McCracken from Zest Events International brought the portrait to life. The background has been designed by local Gamileroi artist Frank Wright and identifies Walgett, the rivers and local totems of the sand goanna, dragonfly and emu.

The judges said, "All these pieces are impressive – Stanley for his size, the inclusive way in which '2 Kool 4 Skool' evolved with assistance from children and that visitors who look closely at the Walgett water tower mural will see Jimmy Little's wife reflected in his eyes."

The winners in all 11 Australian Street Art Awards categories will be announced as part of an online celebration on 4 March.

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