

Everything is illuminated

Local artist Kathryn Portelli has been awarded an 'Outstanding Contribution Award' by Regional Arts Australia for her involvement in the AFTER Black Saturday Memorial project.

The Regional Arts Australia Volunteer Awards aim to recognise, reward and encourage regionally-based arts and cultural volunteers who have made a substantial contribution to the arts in regional communities.

Kathryn's project produced a mosaic memorial for residents in the Redesdale area affected by the Black Saturday fires. The stunning artwork comprises 280 tiles, stretching 11 metres along the external wall of the Kyneton Town Hall.

Each tile has a eucalyptus shaped leaf cut-out into which has been set artefacts from the catastrophic fires.

Immediately after the fires' devastation, Kathryn conceived this fitting memorial, engaged fire-affected families in 'ownership' of their tile and brought the project to completion, on time, for the first anniversary.

Kathryn devoted 658 hours to the project – only 22% were funded. Her volunteer contribution was outstanding as she also supported her volunteer CFA husband and three children for the immediate six weeks of 'mopping up' after the bushfires, and provided peer support for grieving residents. For 12 months she coordinated 45 volunteers mosaicists and members of her association in Melbourne and interstate.

"There were 45 different volunteers that I brought together who contributed one or more tiles and it was thanks to Jean Gooch in Pipers Creek who hosted a group of us each week, which got the majority of the tiles completed" Kathryn said.

"It was a beautiful experience and I really enjoyed facilitating that". Kathryn said she accepts the award on behalf of all the volunteers who worked steadily to produce all of the tiles.

Kathryn is also now involved in a state-wide Regional Arts Victoria project. Illuminated by Fire is a project about the places we care about and the story and role of fire within those places.

The project aims to share stories, increase understanding and create astonishing art.

WORKSHOPS

A local mosaic workshop program will engage participants through a staged process beginning with the sharing and development of stories in relation to fire. Kathryn's chosen theme is the containment of ashes and the making of personalised vessels. Buildings in the region affected by fire will also be included in expressive artworks made by the artist.

"I call the sculptures 'ashes vessels'" Kathryn explained.

"Mine is about the fire at the end of life really, and the keeping of ashes".

Kathryn said the mosaic workshops are available for people to go along and up-skill and learn mosaic techniques, but also with a view to creating an ashes vessel.

One of the sculptures Kathryn is working on is an illuminated representation of the Market building in Piper Street which was burned out in 1995. The foundations will depict all the past uses of the building to the present, now returned to its original use as a market building.

An information session is planned for June 26 at 1pm at the Kyneton Community and Learning Centre and the workshops start the following week from 1 -4pm. Diane Barbeller will facilitate a journaling component which will develop visual art as part of the storytelling by the participants.

An exhibition of 10 workshop participants' vessels and seven of her own illuminated sculptures will be previewed in the brand new Kyneton and Community Learning Centre additions during the Daffodil and Arts Festival in September.

For further information contact the Kyneton Community and Learning Centre on 5422 3433 or Kathryn Portelli on 0407 887 498 or visit: www.kpmosaicwords.com/art4ashes.

Picture by Chris Fleming – Kathryn Portelli with a piece called 'US' and the mosaic memorial she helped create for the side of the Kyneton Town Hall.

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