

## **'Meet, Meld, Merge': Art Bringing a Community Together: the 'Toil Art' Project, in Yea, north-eastern Victoria.**

In Yea there used to be a saying that people passing through just stopped for a 'Pee and a Pie'. Times have certainly changed and Yea is now a true tourist destination with its great food, wine, rural hospitality, historic buildings and beautiful scenic walks including the Yea Wetlands.

A recent, unique, community art project, *Toil Art*, focuses on the much utilised facilities of the Yea Public Toilets; with the aim of people now stopping for a 'Wee and a See!' The concept for the project began at the 'Meet, Meld Merge' forum run by Berry St with the support of the Cultural Development Network, in September 2006. On this day, participants were asked to brainstorm a new project for their community, and the first idea for 'Toil Art' was born.

Local community arts worker, artists, potters and volunteers of all ages and abilities have since been working together to create amazing clay artworks for the external walls of the local conveniences. The project is nearing completion and receiving much praise from locals and tourists alike. The southern wall features a large clay damselfly, created using the ancient clay processes of Raku firing. The damselfly artwork depicts the rare, vulnerable, *Hemiphysalis Mirabilis* that is considered a living fossil and still found around Yea.

Beneath the Raku art insect is a clay river that incorporates many artworks representing the flora and fauna of local rivers and wetlands. Elements of this river were created at a local community event known as Womindjeka Day - meaning welcome in the indigenous language of the Taungurung people. This day saw aboriginal elders; their descendants and other community members sitting quietly together beneath ancient gum trees in the Yea Wetlands as they created amazing artworks using nothing more than nature's own resources.

The eastern wall of *Toil Art* is innovative and unique; featuring four artworks; it has provided exciting challenges to new comers, professional suppliers, experienced potters and artists. This wall draws together many elements of the community; it features a river created by the local Cub-Scouts Pack, and three leaves. The first leaf represents the history of the Yea community; the second leaf showcases Murrindindi businesses and tourism and the third leaf features local artists and potters.

The artworks on the eastern wall combine many creative techniques. There are decal images that are picture perfect and capture the Cub-Scouts as they create a river that features imprints of words that highlight what being a Cub-Scout means to them. The history leaf is factual and creative; the contributing artists utilised their skills to capture images of days gone by. Photographic images, caught in clay by the use of decals, provide an emotive, true and accurate reflection of local history.

The business and tourism leaf is not only an artwork but also provides the means to promote Yea and the Shire of Murrindindi. This artwork leaf shows images of mouth watering gourmet food, wine, berries, trout fishing, areas to visit and explore. This leaf promotes tourism through art.

The third leaf is a wonderful celebration of the community art processes of '*Toil Art*'. In this area of the sculpture artists, who have never worked with clay before, have produced wonderful images. People who had never touched clay or worked in the art industry have experienced the excitement of creating amazing contributions for the clay mural. The creation of this leaf provided people with the confidence to explore and discover their creative potential. This leaf combines hand built clay artworks, photographic images, digital art and many various artistic representations. This leaf demonstrates that people with varying degrees of experience can learn new skills and work together to create amazing and professional artistic results.

The whole process of creating *Toil Art* has enabled people of all ages, backgrounds and experiences to be brought together. This project is further enhanced and strengthened by the fact that it is so strongly supported by many organisations. The project has been backed by the Murrindindi Shire Council, Berry Street, Department of Justice, Yea Pottery Studio, local artists and potters, Yea Cub-Scouts, Yea Historical Society, Yea Business and Tourism, Upper Goulburn Food Wine and Culture Group, Youth R.A.P.T. (Rural Arts Project Team), Yea Community Shed, Yea Community House, U.F.O (Unfinished objects), organisers

of Womindjeka Day, Yea Quilters, Yea Primary and Yea High Schools, Yea Sacred Heart Primary School, Yea Wetlands Committee of Management, U3A - University of the Third Age, Rosebank Nursing Home, Murrindindi Construction, Marmalades Restaurant, Potters Equipment Pty Ltd, Fire & Clay – Wesley Mission and the Decal Specialists. Without the support and encouragement of these organisations, community groups, businesses and individuals the project would not have been the outstanding successes that it has become.

**Toil Art** is a project that could be replicated in other communities. It must be highlighted that if your community wishes to emulate the successes of this type of project you cannot succeed without the assistance and support of organisations such as Murrindindi Shire Council, Berry Street and Yea Pottery Studio. Financial contributions are available through sources such as The Department of Justice -Anti Graffiti Funding. If you are seeking support for art based projects it helps if you utilise organisations that encourage and understand the processes and intricacies of community art projects.

**Toil Art** has given participants the scope and time to explore the project thus enabling the resulting artworks to evolve and grow as the volunteers determine. This has ensured that the resulting expressions, and the processes utilised to create them, are a true artistic reflection of the community it represents and celebrates. This project values and embraces participants' contributions, ideas and creative aspirations.

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