

WILD AT DARGAN



At Dargan we are at the junction of the traditional country of the Wiradjuri peoples to the west, the Darug peoples to the east and the Gundungurra peoples to the south, enabling the Wild Mountain Collective to embrace the creative artists of the Blue Mountains—to the Lithgow area and north along the Bells Line of Road through Bilpin.

THE WILD MOUNTAIN COLLECTIVE of artists, thinkers, musicians, sculptors, social scientists and others in the Greater Blue Mountains is a project of the Blue Mountains Creative Arts Network (BMCAN).

Our aim is to explore and celebrate the ‘wild’ and our sense of interconnectness with nature and one another; to engage with a philosophy of regenerative living and an attitude of ‘interbeing’ with all things; and to learn from more than 60,000 years of First Nations cultural history.

The idea for *Encountering the Wild* evolved spontaneously during casual conversation at a gathering on a sunny Blue



Mountains deck. Initially it wasn’t imagined as a multi-arts festival—it could just as well have become simply a group show in a town gallery. But once conceived, the theme of *Encountering the Wild* gained its own momentum and as though a demonstration of the butterfly effect, the project blossomed into a pop-up group exhibition contained within a mini multi-arts festival.

And it came about that Aboriginal archaeologist Wayne Brennan would give the keynote talk on the role of art in Aboriginal culture and the rock art of the Greater Blue Mountains. There would be musical performances by Maizy Coombes, violin improvisations accompanied by a



Opposite page:
Pam Vaughan,
Landscape 2

This page
Rhonda Castle,
Genesse Flock

dance performance by Dark Elixir, the delicate sounds of Gigi Ray and Georgia Webb from Humumbra, and the full-throated sounds of the five-piece Future State band led by Stuart Cam and vocalist Ally Oliver. Photographer Brad Diedrich and film maker Ryan Jasper Walsh helped record our festivity.

Reverberation, Simon Hearn's suspended installation, provided a proscenium arch to the performance area, playfully responding to the unforgiving acoustics in the concrete and steel building. The arrangement of found objects in resonating formations suggested fundamental structure at a microcosmic scale.



Above:
Panoramic image of event with Humumbra duo and Simon Hearn's sculpture above

Left: Archaeologist Wayne Brennan



Wayne Brennan

When our thoughts had turned to a venue, we were immediately drawn to Mark O’Carrigan’s complex of café and gallery at Monkey Creek, Dargan. While the basement below Gallery H could not really be called an exhibition space, or even a room, it did have one intriguing quality. With its long open side, industrial finishes and rugged bush setting at the top of an ancient gorge, it was wild!

With sweeping vistas across Monkey Creek to Hartley, this site celebrates designer and builder Mark O’Carrigan’s innovative sculpture-like buildings, inspired by the caves of Monkey Creek, constructed specifically for living in a fire zone. This place provided the opportunity for bringing people from the well-trodden galleries and music venues of the Upper Blue Mountains, centred on Katoomba, Leura and Blackheath, across to the wild side.

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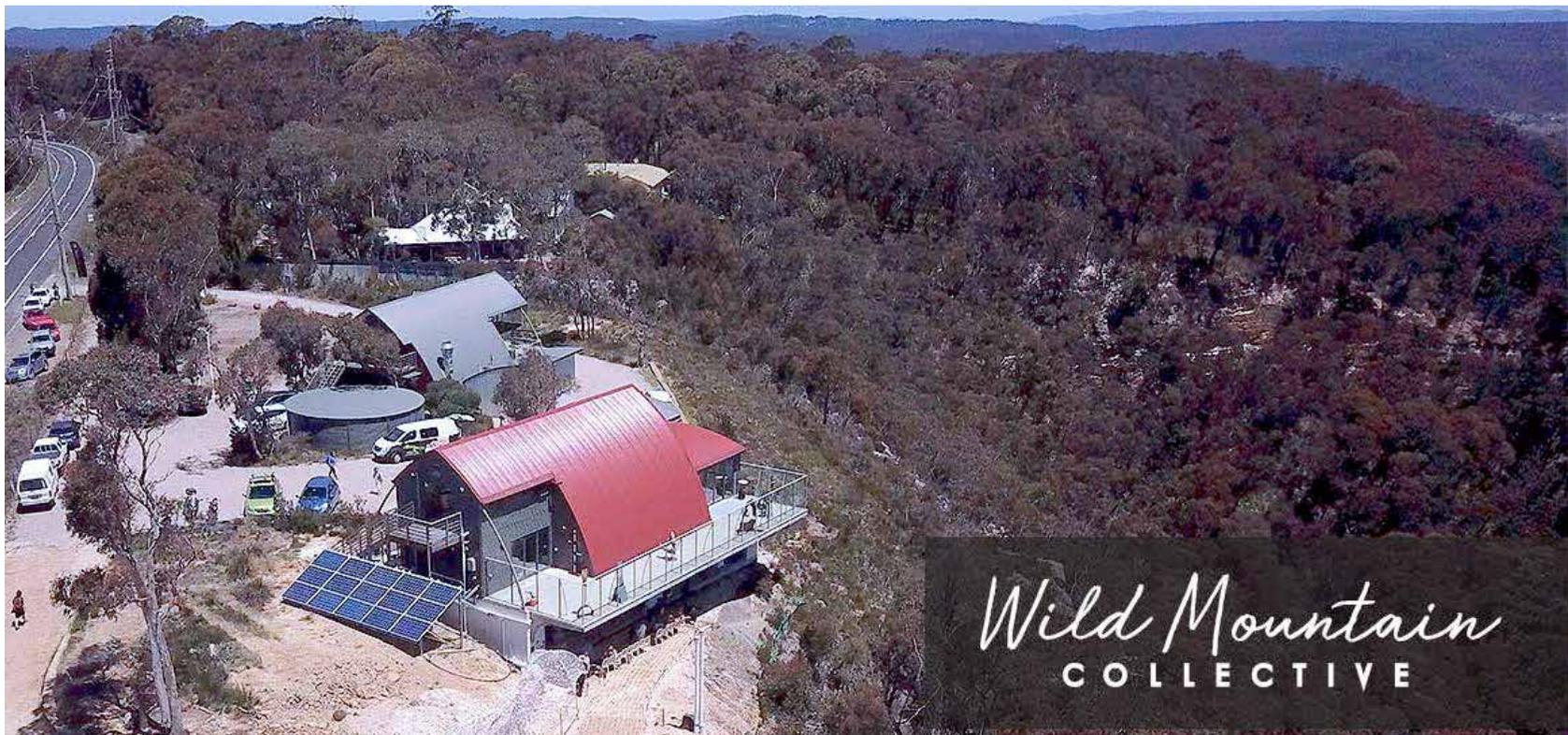


The Inspiration of Aboriginal Culture

The Blue Mountains World Heritage area of six national parks, which includes the Blue Mountains National Park, the Wollemi National Park and the Gardens of Stone, is very rugged. It is this very ruggedness that has allowed many of the sacred sites and rock art sites to survive relatively untouched by European culture, despite being only about two hours from the centre of Sydney, Australia's largest city. Archaeologists like Wayne Brennan

work with NSW Parks and Wildlife and use helicopters to explore, map and preserve these sites.

Wayne described the key elements of Aboriginal culture and the way in which rock art has played a fundamental role in how Aboriginal people recorded the activities of their Creation Ancestors and the totems of their songlines that criss-cross Australia. What is significant about Aboriginal culture for the Wild Mountain Collective is the way it



uses the arts through ceremony involving dance, music, song and painting along the sacred sites of the songlines to deeply embed eco-consciousness in Aboriginal culture over its long history. This history reaches back through significant climate change to the Ice Age and the mega fauna of Australia at that time, and continues to this day.

The songlines not only provide Aboriginal people with their identification with a particular country and a totem, for which they have a sacred responsibility to the Creation Ancestors, but the songlines contain detailed knowledge about the behaviour of animals and plants in the different weather cycles along that songline, essential for human survival. For Aboriginal people, the arts of the sacred ceremonies continually curate the land and keep its creative energies alive for all to benefit. It is a world view that dissolves the linear time of Western historicity, for the Creation Ancestors are both past and ever present, hinting at an embodied world view that embraces the space-time continuum revealed in Einstein's theory of relativity.

Modern technological civilisation teeters on the edge of an existential crisis caused by climate change and widespread species extinction. This crisis was set in train through human population growth and resource exploitation since the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, resting on the foundation of the Western

philosophical tradition that creates a radical separation between mind and matter; man and nature.

In response to this crisis, we are being called to learn from the First Nations peoples of our world about a new way of thinking about our relationship to the natural world, of which we are part. This way is called eco-consciousness by many and is celebrated as the idea of 'interbeing' by the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh. It is also part of the eco-theology movement in the revisioning of the Genesis (1:26-28) world view of Christianity and Judaism from one of our human right, being created in God's image, to dominate and exploit nature, to one of human responsibility for stewardship of nature, in recognition of the inextricable relatedness of all life forms. The world is thus transformed from a use-value orientation to a sense of sacred relationship.

As the new Director of the National Gallery of Australia, Nick Mitzevich, has said, the role of artists has been of 'shape-shifters' in challenging our world views, and bringing into consciousness a deeper, more poetic experience of our world. The Wild Mountain Collective embraces this idea. We work together as a loose community through a policy of co-creation of a range of events and activities. We too follow Mitzevich's philosophy: 'Money follows good ideas. You have to have the conviction and the confidence and the resilience to keep advancing those ideas. It's



about purposefulness and connecting and harnessing a collective achievement.’

The Exhibition

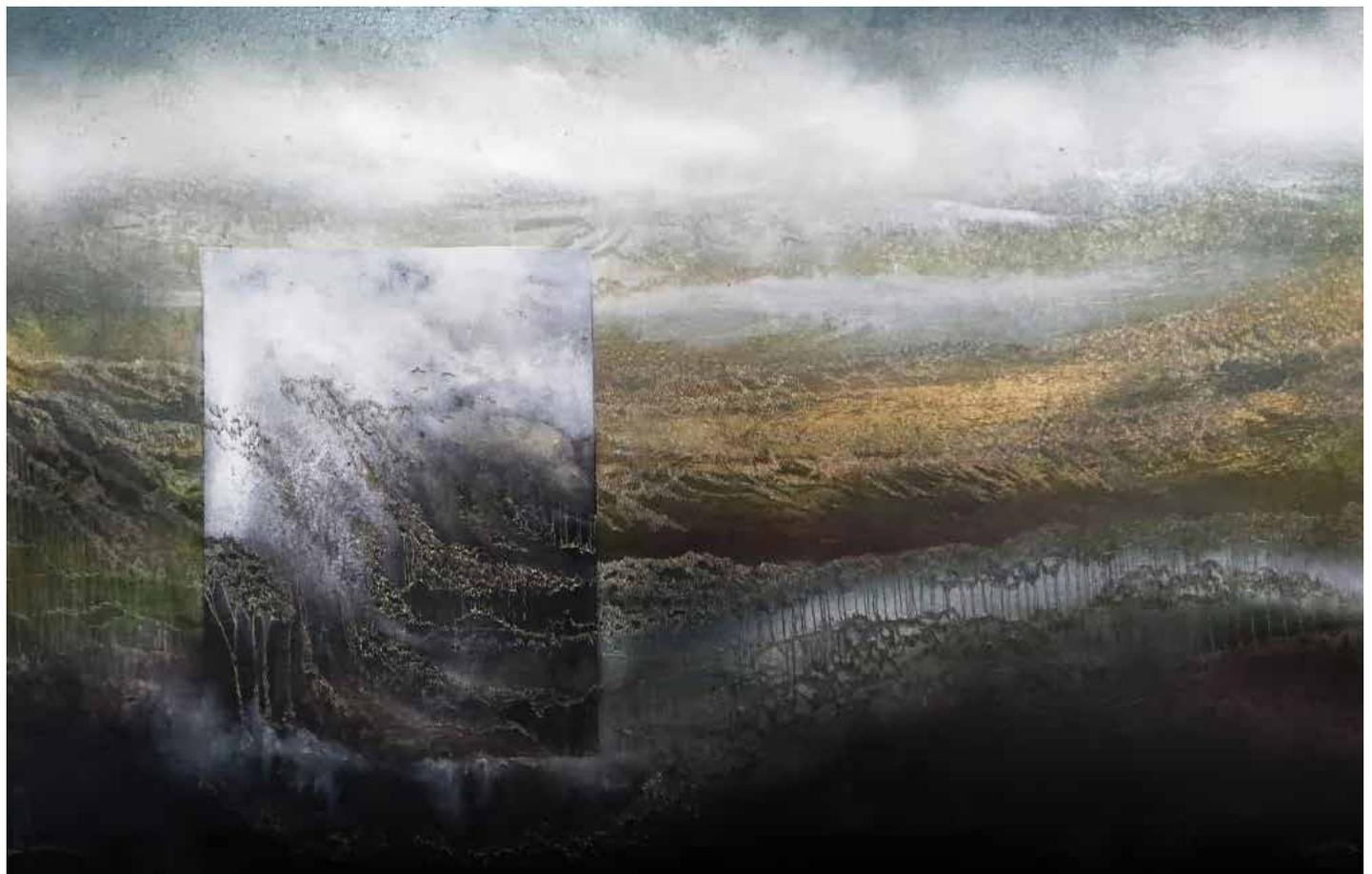
Encountering the Wild as an event embraced the theme of ‘wild’ process from concept to completion. By incorporating organic values of spontaneity, inclusiveness and growth, it became almost a curatorial interpretation of the wild—an ecosystem of creativity and collaboration.

Artists were given a free hand to interpret the theme of encountering the wild and allowed only a few weeks to prepare their works. This fostered a sense of compelling energy and inter-dependence and accordingly energized the event with their enthusiasm and creativity.

Given the broad scope of the event, it was fascinating to see the diversity of responses to the theme and the various interpretations that ‘wild’ can evoke. The pop-up exhibition represented over 30 artists with over 60 individual pieces. There was a notable emphasis on

Opposite page:
Caroline Wilde, *After the Embers*

This page:
Right: Henryk Topolnicki, *Darther Drying Wings*
Below: Penny Oates, *Call of the Wild*,
Grose Valley in Winter



sculpture, as well as photography, painting, digital art and installations.

Highlights were the works of textile artists Saskia Everingham, Lanny Mackenzie and Caroline Wilde. Their delicately crafted objects covered techniques ranging from traditional to contemporary. Collectively they offered inspiring ways of incorporating organic form and materials into works of beauty, utility and whimsy.

A pair of resident finches, temporarily displaced by the installation, occasionally fluttered into the impromptu gallery space. Their curiosity may have been stimulated by a cluster of major works which shared an avian theme, including Rhonda Castle's origami-inspired *Genesse Flock*, and Mark Hayne's delicately carved timber ensembles. Henryk Topolnicki's *Powerful Owl*, with its shimmering steel armour-like frame, hovered protectively over the scene, whilst his *Prayer Wheel* reminded us of other mountain wilds in the Himalayas.

Other artists, such as Simon Hearn, took an abstract view of 'the wild' in *Resonance* (opposite page). Sound and moving image artists Sean Botha and Jo Truman each provided subtle installations, located at strategic

locations around the site. Their phenomenological work explored the human experience of sound in the environment.

The eclectic exhibition resonated with an energy that was both sublime and chaotic. The event had the feel of a cultural experiment or perhaps a 'happening'.

In this collection of people, art, music and nature, the results of the creative experiment were obvious and joyful; creativity and collaboration is the universal solution. As with biological systems, the individual in isolation cannot survive. Diversity and inter-dependence in a group is key to sustainability. Participants had an opportunity to share their work and ideas with their peers, as well as a broad range of creatives and academics from other disciplines. This provided obvious advantages for audience exposure, but it also offered an antidote to the creative isolation experienced by many artists.

The following day the exhibition was dismantled and the resident finches returned to their nests in the rafters. Strong winds blew through Dargan, refreshing the basement space and it reverted to its primary function, giving silent support for the building.



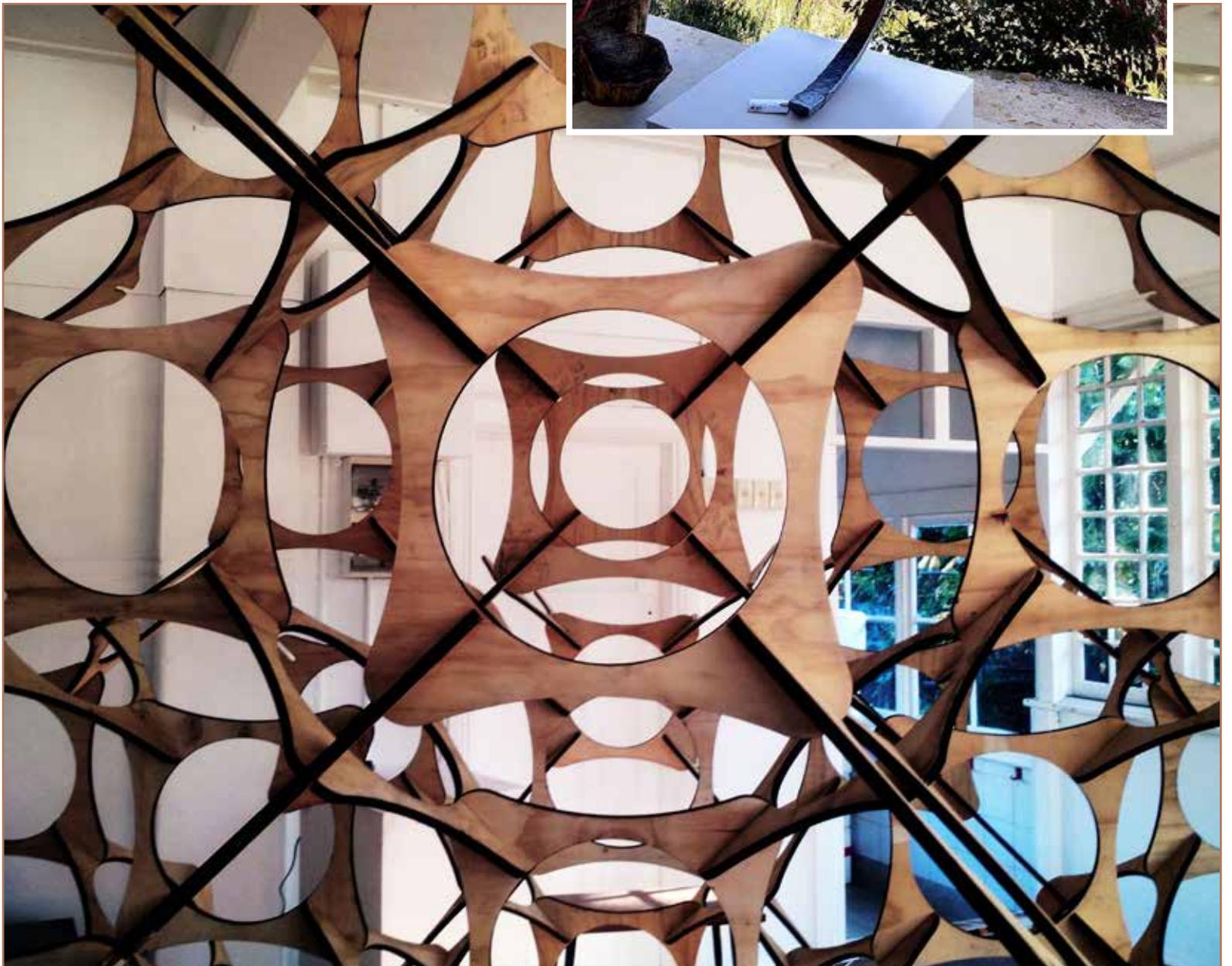
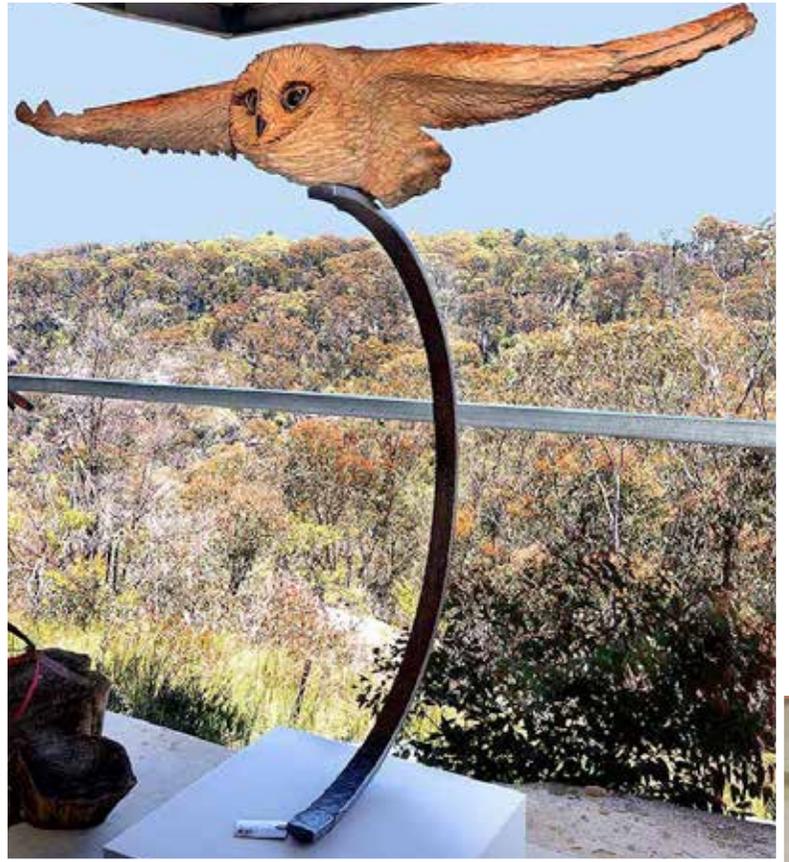
Opposite:

Top:
Mark Hayne, *Soaring Barn Owl*
Below: Simon Hearn, *Resonance*

This page:
Henryk Topolnicki, *Whimsy*

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A stylized signature or logo, possibly representing the artist or the collective, located in the bottom right corner of the page.