

# THE STRAITS TIMES

SE Life!  
HD **Beached art**  
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WC 2,266 words  
PD 14 March 2014  
SN The Straits Times  
SC STIMES  
LA English  
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Perth's seaside sculpture festival is just a short flight away

It is just a five-hour flight away from Singapore, but Perth's hosting of a beachside sculpture festival is giving an arty twist to the sleepy town Singaporeans think they know very well.

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Cottesloe Beach, a strip of sandy paradise in a western suburb of the Australian city, is now dotted with some 74 sculptures by Australian and international artists.

These include a gigantic 33,000-litre wine carrier made of reflective PVC, pairs of cast-glass feet perched on rocks, a flower made of stainless steel that sways in the **wind** and an installation of 8,000 red and yellow mini flags.

Visitors - all 220,000 of them for the three-week Sculpture By The Sea on till March 24 - are encouraged to touch and interact with most of the sculptures.

They include Australian artist Geoffrey Drake-Brockman's **Solar** Jayne, a **solar**-activated cast marble body mould of dancer Jayne Smeulders of the West Australian Ballet, which pirouettes prettily when visitors press a button; and Belgian-born Perth-based artist Annette Thas' Wave 1, a sculpture of blonde Barbie dolls lying tangled on an aluminium-shaped wave, under which beachgoers catch some shade.

There is also American artist Peter Lundberg's Adam And Eve sculpture of cast bronze, looking very much like contemporary monkey bars.

Each visitor "works" on the sculpture, says Mr Scott Brandon Smith, 52, a helper at Sculpture By The Sea. "Each human contact polishes rough bronze, revealing a smooth surface underneath," he explains.

The annual non-profit sculpture festival is in its 10th year in Perth. Former corporate lawyer David Handley founded the festival on Sydney's Bondi Beach in 1997 and the Perth version followed in 2005.

The Australian first mooted the idea when he visited an outdoor sculpture **park**, set among 13th-century ruins near the town of Klatovy, while living in Prague in the early 1990s.

Mr Handley, 48, who now runs the festival full-time, says: "I love the idea of large community arts events, such as listening to a symphony under the stars or to opera in the **park**."

The idea took shape when friends suggested he take a stroll on Sydney's Bondi Beach, where he saw "natural plinth after natural plinth, upon which sculptures of all descriptions could be installed", he adds.

Only sculptures could stand the test of the elements, says Mr Handley. Paintings, for example, would be a liability in the **wind**, rain and, particularly in Australia's case, the blazing sun.

The first Sculpture By The Sea on Bondi Beach was a one-day exhibition staffed entirely by volunteers, produced with just A\$11,000.

It now costs more than A\$1 million (S\$1.1 million) to run each show in Sydney and Perth - the Perth edition this year costs A\$1.6 million.

Sponsors cover half the total cost of running the show and the rest comes from government grants, private donors, commission from the sale of sculptures and public donations.

In 2009, Sculpture By The Sea went to Aarhus in Denmark, under the patronage of Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary of Denmark. About 400,000 visitors viewed the 60 sculptures there.

Princess Mary, a Hobart native, reportedly took her prince to a Sculpture By The Sea exhibition in Sydney on their first date, so the story goes.

There might not be a similar royal fairy tale for Singapore, but Mr Handley says he has been approached by Singaporeans, whom he declines to name, to take the event here.

But there are no plans to take the sculpture show to the republic at present, says Mr Handley.

"I am not sure if the coast of Singapore is right for the show and as it is very expensive, we need the site to be suitable."

The venue has to be close enough to a city for visiting artists to transport their sculptures to, but still have a mid-sized beach, says Mr Handley.

Perth's Cottesloe Beach has a 2km stretch of beach that is "just right" to place the sculptures.

"If the beach is too long or huge, it swallows the sculptures," he explains.

The beauty of setting visual art in an accessible beachside location is very special, says Mr Handley.

"It engages everyone, from serious art-lovers and collectors to people who do not normally visit galleries but have come to enjoy the exhibition year to year, basking in the sun, sea and sand."

Money is also pumped in to tighten security after an incident in Perth two years ago where vandals destroyed a sculpture by Chinese artist Chen Wen Ling. The culprits were later caught by police and were sentenced to communitybased orders.

Mr Handley hopes that the show will push the country further as a destination for art and culture.

He says: "People think that Australia is full of beaches, kangaroos and some good sports teams, but I hope that this event is part of an evolving Australia that will give it a more sophisticated, cultural beach image."

Sun-loving Australians, meanwhile, are all for frolicking by the sculptures.

Says housewife Laura West, 39, who was visiting the beach for a swim: "It is great to play by the beach with all these beautiful sculptures and it is interesting to see some people ducking under sculptures for shade or viewing it as a curator would, with a critical, sharp eye."

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The writer's trip was sponsored by Sculpture By The Sea and Tourism Western Australia.

#### SCULPTURE HIGHLIGHTS

Top photogenic picks at this year's Sculpture By The Sea:

Bulk Carrier

By Norton Flavel, 43, Australia

Reflective PVC, epoxy resin, 400cm by 1,500cm by 1,500cm

This heavily photographed sculpture is Flavel's ode to living large, Aussie-style.

"Australia has a lot of resources and we have invented many ways of carting them around," he says.

His work, shaped like a jumbo wine carrier, pays homage to his fellow countrymen's love for wine.

"It has become a humorous object," he says, noting that he has watched visitors attempting to capture the giant bag in their camera frame and children pressing their ears against the PVC, imagining they could hear the sound a whale makes.

Flavel, who was born in Sydney and now lives in Western Australia, says managing such a huge sculpture was a challenge.

"Finding space to build and move the sculpture around was difficult so, in the end, I put it on a friend's tennis court. He probably did not play tennis for a good while."

Oushi Zokei 3 Twist Hearts

By Keizo Ushio, 62, Japan

Green granite, natural stone, 205cm by 100cm by 80cm

This is the Japanese sculptor's 10th time exhibiting at Cottesloe and his work has been watched by mathematicians due to his precise rendering of Mobius bands, a one-sided continuous strip formed by twisting a long narrow tape and joining the ends.

The work - made of granite and stone to withstand the sun and **wind** at the Australian beach - traces the "shape of mathematics", says Ushio, who has been sculpting for 45 years, since his schooldays, playing with plastic, wood and steel after class.

He says: "Many people think mathematics is just about numbers or symbols, but it can inspire very simple and clean designs - so, to me, it is mathematical art."

Red Center

By Carl Billingsley, 70, USA

About 8,000 red and yellow survey flags, 48cm by 3,000cm diameter

On holidays Down Under, American artist Billingsley watched the colours of Australia, captivated.

"Even overland, looking down from a plane, the landscape colours of yellow and red were impressive," he says.

On three trips to Australia, he visited Uluru and Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, situated in the geographic centre of Australia, commonly dubbed the "Red Centre".

Inspired by the hues he saw, he designed the piece with them in mind: red flags in the centre and a splattering of yellow and red surrounding them.

The use of flags also plays some tricks on the eye, says Billingsley, who is a professor of sculpture at East Carolina University in the United States. Based on a plan, his work took just one day to put up on Cottesloe, with help from volunteers from Sculpture By The Sea and his 10-year-old grandson.

He says: "When all these colours on the flags move in the **wind** and blur in the sun, they seem orange to the eye, which is an accurate depiction of the country's colours."

## NEW RESTAURANTS SETTING PERTH DINING SCENE ABUZZ

The dining scene in Perth is slowly heating up. Early next year, the city's A\$2.6-**billion** (S\$3-**billion**) Elizabeth Quay project, with a split-level promenade packed with cafes and restaurants, will debut next to the Swan River.

Life!Weekend notes five new restaurants that have opened in the past year in the city.

Silks

The Perth counterpart of Melbourne's popular Silks restaurant. It serves fine Cantonese dim sum dishes, alongside views of the city and Swan River, in the city's spiffy casino and **hotel** complex.

The dishes are created under the eye of chef de cuisine Pat Cheong from **Hong Kong** whose dumpling dishes are the stars, such as the Steamed Lobster And Caviar Dumplings (A\$28), Sea Cucumber And Shallots Dumpling (A\$22) and Steamed "Shanghai Style" Crab Meat Dumplings (A\$22).

The restaurant has three degustation menus (A\$128 to A\$276 a person), with dishes such as Double Boiled Silky Chicken With Abalone, Steamed WA Lobster With Minced Garlic, and the Barbeque Pork Glazed With Jarrah Honey And Roasted Crispy Pork Belly.

Where: Great Eastern Highway, Burswood WA 6100, open at noon for lunch and 6pm for dinner daily

Info: Call +61-8-9362-7551

#### Sushia Izakaya & Bar

This Perth branch of the Sydney restaurant has now become the brand's flagship.

The first restaurant in Sydney was a "concept store" to test if Australians would take to fusion Japanese food, says **operations** manager Preston Cheung, 36. He expects to expand to four more joints in the next two years in Perth, including one with a takeaway section.

The menu changes quarterly and the restaurant has plans to hold sake masterclasses. Try the Hamachi Carpaccio (A\$18), thin slices of kingfish with yuzu gelée and the tart tang of pesto; the Teppanyaki Prawns (A\$33), black tiger prawns with yuzu truffle, served on its own barbecue; and the Oyster Trio (A\$14 to A\$18), done how you would like it, with ikura salsa, ponzu or fried in nori.

Sushia also has a sizeable drinks menu, created by London-based mixologist Leroy Rawlins. His fusion creations include the Tusurai Martini (A\$18), a cocktail of cucumber with Belvedere vodka, chilli and pineapple; and the Sake Kiss (A\$18), Beefeater gin with lychee, raspberry, sake and rose water.

Where: Brookfield Place, Basement Laneway, 125 St Georges Terrace, open noon to 11pm (Mondays to Thursdays), noon to midnight (Fridays), 6pm to midnight (Saturdays), closed on Sundays

Info: Call +61-8-9322-7771 or go to [www.sushia.com.au](http://www.sushia.com.au)

#### Bread In Common

This cafe and bakery in a grungy warehouse in Perth's port city of Fremantle is the result of an alliance between the owners of landmark Perth restaurants such as Balthazar, Duende Tapas Bar, Il Lido and Gordon Street Garage and **property** giant Adrian Fini.

Its sandwiches are made on its wood-fired organic flour bread: Try the Smoked Ham, Cheese, Chutney and Radicchio (A\$12) or the Chocolate, Ricotta, Honey and Cinnamon (A\$14). Sharing platters (A\$9 to A\$26) are packed with anything from mushrooms, venison sausage, chargrilled swordfish to lamb ribs.

Where: 43 Pakenham Street, Fremantle, open 10am to 10pm (Sundays to Thursdays), 10am till late (Fridays and Saturdays)

Info: Call +61-8-9336-1032 or go to [www.breadincommon.com.au](http://www.breadincommon.com.au)

#### Pinchos

Named after the Spanish verb "pinchar", which means "to pierce", this hole-in-the-wall tapas-style bar serves snacks pierced with cocktail sticks.

The Pintxos Anchoa (A\$3) is a dish of ortiz anchovy, egg, pimiento and fig or onion jam, while the Pintxos Chorizo Con Miel (A\$2) has sausage, honey and cheese.

Chef-owner Justin Bell, 44, keeps the menu affordable, with the most expensive items being the fish, vegetarian or meat mixed boards (A\$30 each).

Where: 749 Newcastle Street, Leederville, open 11.30am to 9pm (Mondays), 11.30am to 10pm (Tuesdays to Saturdays), 11.30am to 9pm (Sundays)

Info: Call +61-8-9228-3008

#### Miss Kitty's Saloon

This joint serves hearty Canadian-American cuisine, such as Grilled Fremantle Octopus (A\$23.80), served with chorizo and peach salad; Fried Pickle (A\$8.80) with house cured ham and chilli mayo; and Crispy Pork Ribs (A\$22.80) with hot sauce and blue cheese yogurt.

Calling itself "beautiful with a bit of dirt", this restaurant has timber **board** walls, a vintage piano and chandeliers.

Where: 882 Beaufort Street, open 5.30pm to midnight (Tuesdays to Saturdays), closed on Sundays and Mondays

Info: Call +61-8-9272-6669 or e-mail [dirt@misskittyssaloon.com.au](mailto:dirt@misskittyssaloon.com.au)

**ART** Sand attractions: There's Many A Slip 'Twixt The Cup (above) And The Lip by Ken Unsworth, Bulk Carrier by Norton Flavel, Oushi Zokei 3 Twist Hearts by Keizo Ushio and Red Center by Carl Billingsley. -- PHOTOS: J. SENG, C. YEE

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**AN** Document STIMES0020140314ea3e0002a