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New 'Muru' award celebrates Australian First Nations artists

Artist submissions for 2021 HIDDEN Rookwood Sculptures now open

Some good news for the Western Sydney arts scene: Rookwood General Cemetery's outdoor art exhibition, HIDDEN Rookwood Sculptures, returns in 2021, bigger than ever with 12 awards, including the \$2,000 Muru Award for Australian First Nations artists.

Dharug Strategic Management Group is offering a non-acquisitive \$2,000 award to a First Nations Australian artist exhibiting in HIDDEN. First Nations Australians have the oldest continuous cultures in the world, and as Rookwood Cemetery is located on Dharug land, this award acknowledges and supports ongoing connection to Country, community creativity, and culture.

Julie Clarke-Jones, Director of Dharug Strategic Management Group, will be joined by Raelene Billedo Locke, Director at Dharug Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation, and work in consultation with exhibition curator Kath Fries to select the winning sculpture, student work or short film.

"The award name 'Muru' is the Dharug word for pathways. We invite First Nations artists to reflect on metaphors and experiences of journeys, connections, and storytelling," said Julie Clarke-Jones.

"The connection we have to Rookwood and to the land is important to our people. There aren't many Dharug people that we know who haven't got somebody buried here," Clarke-Jones reflected, "Art is an integral part of our culture; it's an integral part of storytelling. It is the way we pass down our stories, our lore, our history and teach our future generations."

The iconic HIDDEN sculpture walk, which began in 2009, is a unique opportunity to engage the community with Rookwood's rich and diverse cultural landscape through the beauty of art. Today HIDDEN includes categories of Sculptures, Films and Students, providing the opportunity for an even wider range of artists to get involved.

In 2021, approximately 60 artworks will be selected including sculptures, short films and community submissions featuring a range of artistic approaches, materials, and forms.

Submissions should respond to the cemetery and engage with HIDDEN's themes of history, culture, remembrance, diversity, love, mourning, spirituality, cycles of life and the passage of time. In 2021, Rookwood is looking to incorporate a broad span of works ranging from celebratory pieces that are big, bright and colourful, engaging interactive installations, through to contemplative, intimate and thought-provoking works.

Curator Dr Kath Fries encourages emerging, mid-career and established artists, filmmakers, student and community groups to submit their creative concepts for consideration. Fries is a Sydney-based curator and artist, who works extensively in Western Sydney on site-responsive projects. She is committed to nurturing opportunities for emerging artists and community groups.

"2020 was a very difficult year for our arts communities," said Fries, "I'm excited to again be curating this expansive exhibition which will allow visitors to engage with creative arts in this unique place so integral to Australian history."

"Rookwood Cemetery is an ideal setting for artists to present works with layered narratives while honouring the site's diverse cultural history. I'm interested in talking to artists about their ideas for works spanning all types of creative responses to the cemetery, from sensory engagements with

tactile, audio and kinetic elements, to ritualised remembrances, reflections on beliefs and values, as well as personal stories of memory and loss," said Fries. "I'm delighted that HIDDEN is partnering with the Dharug Strategic Management Group this year on the inaugural Muru Award. I'm looking forward to working with First Nations artists to share their perspectives of connective pathways into relationships with Country, family, history, continuity, and culture here on Dharug land."

For more information or to apply, visit www.hiddeninrookwood.com.au

HIDDEN Rookwood Sculptures will run from 4 September to 4 October 2021.



Crow Dance at Rookwood Cemetery (2020) by Jannawi Clan Dancers Jumikah Donovan and Dubs Yunupingu

Rookwood General Cemetery is responsible for the management and longevity of Rookwood Cemetery. We maintain 430 unique interment grounds, historic and modern memorial areas, culturally specific gardens, three beautiful chapels and a state-of-the-art function centre. To further meet needs of families, we customise interment practices to respect different religious and cultural beliefs.

Rookwood is also one of the largest green spaces in Greater Sydney; making it the ideal setting to explore. HIDDEN, along with events such as tours, workshops, and open days; provide unique opportunities for the community to engage with the historic site.

Media enquiries, interview, and high-res photos:

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