

Bundanon's Spring

The 1,100 hectare 'living arts centre' in the Shoalhaven is deepening its local roots and reaching out its tendrils. Expect a cultural flourishing this Spring.

by LYNELLE JOHNSON

With a new CEO, a major increase in Federal Government funding and new staff, Bundanon Trust is repositioning itself, both as a national arts institution and as one located in – and interacting with – a fast growing regional area.

Bundanon's artist-in-residence program has been active since 1997 and, as was always the intention of Arthur and Yvonne Boyd, plays an important part in the gift of over 1,100 hectares of Shoalhaven landscape, heritage buildings and the art collection they made to the nation in 1993. Australian and international artists who either apply and go through a selection process, or are invited by Bundanon, are hosted in purpose-built studios in breathtaking natural surrounds.

The program is probably Bundanon Trust's best kept secret.

"People are probably not aware of how many significant artists come here, people like Delia Falconer, JM Coetzee, Hossein and Angela Valamanesh and Marshall McGuire," said CEO Deborah Ely.

Ely was appointed in 2006, after eight years at Arts NSW, and put forward a proposal for increased funding to specifically to address areas such as enhancing the arts program, marketing, making the collection accessible and building a new website.

Bundanon can now deepen its relevance to creative arts practice and develop a program which will take a more multi-layered approach to the artist residencies as well as address public access challenges presented by the 'retreat' aspect of residencies.

Ely intends to resolve this by building a 'community' around Bundanon by making some aspects of the artist-in-residence program public, whether or not the interested audience can participate on site.

Bundanon's new website, due for completion around the end of the year, will have the capacity to take online bookings, make events at Bundanon available through podcast or vidcast, hold the progressively digitised collection of 3,000 works and make online curating possible.



Flametree founders, James Beck and Heidi Jones at work in the Bundanon grounds, 2006.

Bundanon's new multilayered approach to on-site events will also engage appropriate artists, writers, philosophers, scientists 'In Conversation' at Bundanon Homestead's Sunday open days and make recordings in broadcast quality.

This will be a boon for regionally based artists who tend to be isolated from this high end professional development — and provide a record of contemporary artists' thinking and work.

The first 'In Conversation', with Sydney Writers' Festival participant, Beirut-born Rawi Hage, was recorded in June. Held in the Boyd Homestead, it provided an intimacy not available at larger festivals. The crowd of thirty were able to question Hage on everything from living through the Lebanese Civil war to Persian Poetry.

"We've decided that if we do major events open to the public they will certainly arise from a residency," said Ely.

September – October

30 September

 The Running of the Sheep, **BOOROWA's** answer to Spain's Running of the Bulls. Street event with sheep leading a colourful parade. Tel 02 6385 3962

30 September – 31 January

 *East Coast Sculpture Show*
A fascinating survey of contemporary sculptures by Australian artists from the East Coast of Australia. Thursday Plantation near **BALLINA** Tel 02 6620 5147

2 – 7 October

 Grafton Artsfest 57 workshops in oils, watercolour, sculpture, textiles, glass, jewellery and more. **GRAFTON**
Tel 02 6643 1528 www.artsfestgrafton.com

5 October

 *The Memory of Water* Trapped by a snow-storm in the hours before their mother's funeral, three highly dysfunctional sisters endure a bickering, humorous and unsettling reunion. **GRIFFITH** Regional Theatre Tel 02 6962 8100



With its magnificent views (and access) to the Shoalhaven River, Bundanon includes large wildlife protection areas, a farm and the centrepiece, historic Bundanon Homestead, used by the Boyds as a home and retreat. The Homestead and Arthur's studio have been enhanced by purpose-built artist-in-residence studios in 1997, a Study and Research Centre to house the collection in 1998 and, in 1999, the opening of the Education Centre at the 'Riversdale' property. This Glen Murcutt, Wedny Lewin and Reg Lark designed building was recently named by Australian Architectural Review as the most influential Australian building of the last twenty five years.

The Flametree Festival, which will be held on 13 — 14 October this year, is now in its second year at Bundanon and it holds true to that ideal. Flametree Productions Inc was founded in 2006 when Artistic Directors James Beck and Heidi Jones were artists-in-residence at Bundanon. Flametree, which was named by *Limelight* magazine as the best Festival of 2006, has now broadened beyond the Bundanon events to festivals in the NSW North Coast and the Hunter Valley. A feature of the Flametree Festival is the residence period leading up to the festival where musicians of international standing work with the Shoalhaven Youth Orchestra (SYO) and other local musicians.

"What is already in place — and which we will further develop — is the laboratory model. Bundanon and Riversdale are good spaces for people of all disciplines to collaborate, to work with their peers developing projects."

The national significance of this contribution is also international dialogue; an initiative of Ely's which is probably a first in a regional area.

In September Bundanon is hosting a Shakespeare laboratory with members of London's Almeida — 'one of the world's great theatres' (*The Times*) and Sydney Theatre Company who will take two weeks out from the pressures of performance to look at the language of Shakespeare. They will be led by Michael Attenborough, former principal artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and current artistic director of Almeida; Cecily Berry, a voice coach and international authority on the language of Shakespeare and Robyn Nevin, Artistic Director of the STC.

Also in this year Bundanon is hosting an Indigenous Performance Lab — the first time something like this has been done for Indigenous performance in Australia. Recognised Indigenous leaders in the arts, such as Djon Mundine and Wesley Enoch are acting as cross-disciplinary mentors for a group of selected indigenous performers. "This will enable them to do cross disciplinary work outside scripted theatre to see what might open up for them," Ely said.

In a break-through model, Bundanon is also working with major festivals and the bigger international agencies to give key practitioners time together either in the lead up to the festival or in the down time. "We want to take the experience of participating in that festival further — it's not about creating a work but deepening the discussion." said Ely.

Expect an announcement later in the year.

"The visual and performance based arts companies we are in discussion with are telling us these artists really need that kind of nourishment. We not interested in doing something superficial but trying to add value and listen to what the artists want."

"We see the role of Bundanon as an accelerator for all the disciplines in the arts and all the other disciplines that the arts draw on — philosophy, religion, science, anything that informs the way artists respond to the world. And if we can make that rich resource accessible through events, collaborations and our website, to local people, to artists wherever they are, then Bundanon will occupy a very special place," said Ely. ■

Bundanon Trust was established by the Australian Government in 1993 to manage the Bundanon and Riversdale properties and art collection which were gifted to the nation by artist Arthurth Boyd and his wife, Yvonne, and develop Bundanon as a 'living arts centre' according to the principles agreed with the Boyds.

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October — November

5 — 7 October

 Wollumbin Dreaming Festival: **TYALGUM** Showground: Reconciliation, healing and sustainable lifestyles. Traditional dance, corroboree and senior Bundjalung Elders speaking Tel 02 6679 3777 www.wollumbindreaming.org

5 October — 18 November

 *Steve Kirby: Between Choice and Chance.* Working in his Old Mill studio in Keppel Street, Kirby creates energetic abstract paintings. **BATHURST** Regional Gallery Tel 02 6333 6555

6 October — 2 December

 Country Energy Art Prize for Landscape Painting, raising the profile of regional artists with a \$35,000 prize. Western Plains Cultural Centre **DUBBO** Tel 02 6801 4444 www.wpcddubbo.org.au

6 October

 Gourmet in the Glen Wine and Food festival. **GLEN INNES** Showground. www.gourmetintheglen.com.au