

MAKING ART PUBLIC

A behind-the-scenes look at the Brisbane company that helped to create QAGOMA's beloved *tow row* 2016 by artist Judy Watson – among other substantial public artworks around the world – has recently appeared on the small screen in the form of a two-season documentary, writes **Louise Martin-Chew**.

For thousands of years, large statues have been commissioned by wealthy patrons. Now, public art and architectural projects are commissioned by developers, governments and city councils, as well as individuals. Its purpose may be functional — for wayfinding or creating a space — or it may be a way to share the stories of a place or community.

Established in Brisbane in 1993, UAP (Urban Art Projects) has since become a proactive driver of large-scale public art, working in partnership with artists to realise their ideas. More recently, UAP has partnered with QAGOMA as the major sponsor of 'Gerhard Richter: The Life of Images' and will be working closely with the Gallery over the next three years.

Under the leadership of brothers Daniel and Matthew Tobin, the company collaborates with artists, architects, designers and developers

to design, build, fabricate and install artworks. Most importantly, it seeks out opportunities for artists to take their work out of the gallery into the public arena. The works made by UAP rival the sizeable monuments of the past, and arguably exceed them in complexity.

The six-part documentary titled *Big Art* (2015), developed by Wild Bear Entertainment, revealed UAP's vision as it followed the conception, design, creation, installation and launch of six big artworks. Brave in its exposure of stories, both inside and outside UAP, the series took viewers into the studio and to reveal the unique journey toward construction of each work, including the often unseen processes, the problems that need to be solved along the way, and the bespoke nature of each project. The mammoth scale of most of the works and their one-off nature often requires significant engineering and extension of UAP's in-house

skills. The documentary also exposed the dynamic between the brothers, with Daniel's focus on the international reach of the business and Matt's risk management.

A second series, called *Making Marvels*, was released in August 2017 on Foxtel Arts, and features UAP's international studios in Shanghai and New York. The artworks featured were works in progress at the time, and the artist profiles are often poignant. The first episode traces the making of a sculpture that records the Noongar people's memories of their first contact with Europeans arriving by ship. *First Contact* 2016, the first public sculpture created by Indigenous artist Laurel Nannup, is an aluminium bird five metres tall, which stands in a canoe at Perth's Elizabeth Quay development, its wings outstretched as sails. The bird's beak represents a flag, while the head and neck form the mast.



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Also featured in *Making Marvels* are the stairs designed by Frank Gehry for the University of Technology Sydney, which was Gehry's first Australian building. UAP worked closely with Gehry Partners to create the crumpled, mirrored, internal staircase. The episode journeys through the design and development of this complex architectural feature.

A memorial park in Abu Dhabi is the site of a major work by UK artist Idris Khan, marking the deaths of United Arab Emirates soldiers. Located within the Wahat Al Karama ('Oasis of Dignity'), it features a cluster of 31 monumental aluminium tablets, two of which stand 23 metres high. Within its sensitive grouping is an acknowledgment of the reliance on unity. Florentijn Hofman's giant, playful octopus strikes a different note in the Yantian district of Shenzhen, China. Sited in the recreational centre of a mixed-use development called One City, the octopus is the central feature of the park. Big enough to crawl through its tunnel-shaped tentacles,

it creates a place for people to connect and engage within a beautiful 'seascape'.

Brisbane also features in the documentary series with the sculpture commission for the main entrance of GOMA. Artist Judy Watson's concept for *tow row* 2016 was the successful entry in the Queensland Indigenous Artist Public Art Commission (QIAPAC), and her collaborator, Leecee Carmichael, whose Indigenous string-making and knotting techniques are informed by her Stradbroke Island heritage, was integral to the project. The work was installed for GOMA's tenth anniversary in early December 2016.

The final episode of *Making Marvels* looks at the development of a significant commission for the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria by artist Emily Floyd. *Jackalope* 2017, an otherworldly figure in black aluminium, uses scale to impose a new artistic vision on a quiet landscape — the seven-metre-tall work sits outside Melbourne-based property developer Louis Li's boutique Jackalope Hotel.

Making Marvels extends and builds on the vision of the earlier *Big Art* series, offering rare insights into the unique challenges of making large-scale artworks. It documents the manifestation of the artist's vision, and gives us a sense of how the ambition of two brothers from Brisbane has changed the way in which we create and experience our cities.

Louise Martin-Chew is a freelance writer. Her current projects include a biography of artist Fiona Foley.

Making Marvels is available on Foxtel Arts from August 2017.

Emily Floyd's *Jackalope* 2017 / Photograph: Sharyn Cairns / Image courtesy: UAP

Opposite

Judy Watson and GOMA's beloved *tow row* 2016 / Photograph: Mark Sherwood