

Regional Arts Fund

Community Grant

Case study:

Illuminating Culture and Country



Twilight Celebration at the 2018 Lake Bolac Eel Festival. Photographer: John Tadjigiri

Project Summary

Two large, robust, illuminated sculptures of iconic birds of the Victorian Volcanic Plains, and a large, suspended, illuminated Kuyang (short-finned eel) were created by Natimuk artist Dave Jones and Indigenous master weaver Bronwyn Razem for the 2018 Lake Bolac Eel Festival. The sculptures were brought to life at the 2018 festival with music, dance and storytelling, exploring the festival theme of “Care for Country, Care for Culture, Care for Community”. A youth orchestra and community choir joined Indigenous dancers to lead this ceremony, welcoming the sculptures to Country.

Community Benefits

The cooperation between all the people involved in planning and creating the birds has expanded existing networks, strengthened cultural connections, and introduced new people to the “Eel Festival Family”. Lake Bolac College students who helped with the welding or weaving learnt new skills from master craftspeople. Festival audience members who engaged with the Weaving Circle during the festival not only learnt a new skill, but gained an opportunity for quiet contemplation, reflection and discussion facilitated by the act of working together on a creative task. This was greatly enhanced by the contributions of both Aunty Bronwyn and Aunty Beverly Hand, a Kabi Kabi elder and community leader from SE Queensland.

George Porter, Principal of Lake Bolac College, said that “The Brolga and Emu arts project was an incredible way of engaging students, their families and the entire school community in Aboriginal Language and Culture. This art based, hands-on approach captured students’ interest and helped them connect with the land, nature, local language and culture.”



Australian Government

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Project Start Date	02/01/2018
Project End Date	31/05/2018
Project Location	Lake Bolac
Federal Electorate	Wannon
No. Audience	600
No. Participants	68
Project Beneficiary	General Community
Main Art Form	Cross Art Form
No. Artists Paid	8
No. Artists Unpaid	56
No. Arts Worker Paid	2
No. Arts Worker Unpaid	2

Public Outcome

Illuminating Culture and Country was a highlight for the audience, as well as an engaging and memorable experience for all participants.

The new music piece by young composers, Holly Caldwell and Gene Holland, was performed by the Festival Youth Orchestra and the Festival Choir. This music introduced the cultural component of the Twilight Celebration where the beautiful brolga and emu were welcomed, and the electric eels illuminated the lake.

The brolga and emu have become ambassadors for the Festival, and have since toured to both the Ararat Gallery and Aunty Bronwyn’s Torquay Ashmore Arts Studio during the Surf Coast Arts Trail.

Festival Benefits

The Illuminating Culture and Country project contributed hugely to the overall success and impact of the 2018 Lake Bolac Eel Festival. It helped the festival achieve their aim to develop the Festival as a significant gathering place for people who care for the environment and respect Aboriginal cultural heritage. It also assisted in fostering reconciliation, mutual respect and understanding between Indigenous and non Indigenous peoples.

The 2018 Festival was the recipient of a highly regarded HART Award presented by Reconciliation Victoria and Victorian Local Governance Association for community engagement in “Helping Achieve Reconciliation Together”



Weaving brolga feathers. Photographer: Una Allender



Choir and Orchestra performing at the 2018 Lake Bolac Eel Festival. Photographer: John Tadjigiri