

GOMBOC in fine form

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Ron Gomboc's prodigious creative output as one of the State's top sculptors and promoters of the visual arts can be explained partly by the fact that he works almost as fast as he talks.

Over the past year or so, the 62-year-old artist has maintained a hectic schedule which has included major new works for Sculpture by the Sea in Bondi and Cottesloe, big private commissions in South Hedland, Broken Hill, Perth and Oman, and exhibitions in China, Japan and France.

Gomboc's passion and enthusiasm spills over in a cascade of words as he talks about the annual survey exhibition of WA sculpture in the grounds of his 4.5ha gallery and sculpture park in Middle Swan.

He has just come indoors to dodge the rain while doing the rounds of the park to affix catalogue numbers to more than 100 works on show over the next three weeks.

He is hoping for some fine weather for the Sunday opening of the exhibition, which features 75 artists and puts students from Swan TAFE and Curtin and Edith Cowan universities alongside established WA sculptors and two Japanese artists in residence.

Gomboc and his wife Terrie were pioneers of sorts when they opened the Gomboc Gallery Sculpture Park in 1982 and began holding their annual sculpture surveys as well as monthly exhibitions.

The survey is the only one of its kind in WA, continuing a 26-year tradition of helping launch the careers of many WA practitioners.

"It is great seeing some artists



Standing tall: People by Koichi Ogino, artist-in-residence at Gomboc Gallery Sculpture Park.

who were students going on to take part in major exhibitions like Sculpture by the Sea," Gomboc says.

"One of the driving forces for us out here is that, being a sculptor myself, there was very little if anything happening for sculpture in WA. I never envisaged running a sculpture park as such but when we built the gallery and studio I thought there was also the opportunity to showcase other friends and artists."

He says maintaining one of the oldest privately run galleries in the State has been difficult in a city with little passion for collecting sculpture, "the poor relation of the visual arts".

Things have improved more recently, though, with the rise of corporate commissions, the popularity of Sculpture by the Sea and more baby-boomer retirees buying works for their tree-change and sea-change properties.

The Slovenian-born Gomboc came to Australia when he was 13 and took up an apprenticeship in his father's woodworking business before studying sculpture and printmaking at Perth Technical

College. After a 35-year career, his international profile has been boosted of late, thanks partly to his 2007 solo exhibition at a Paris gallery associated with leading French sculptor and former French rugby captain Jean-Pierre Rives, who has exhibited at Sculpture by the Sea and enjoyed a residency of his own with the Gombocs.

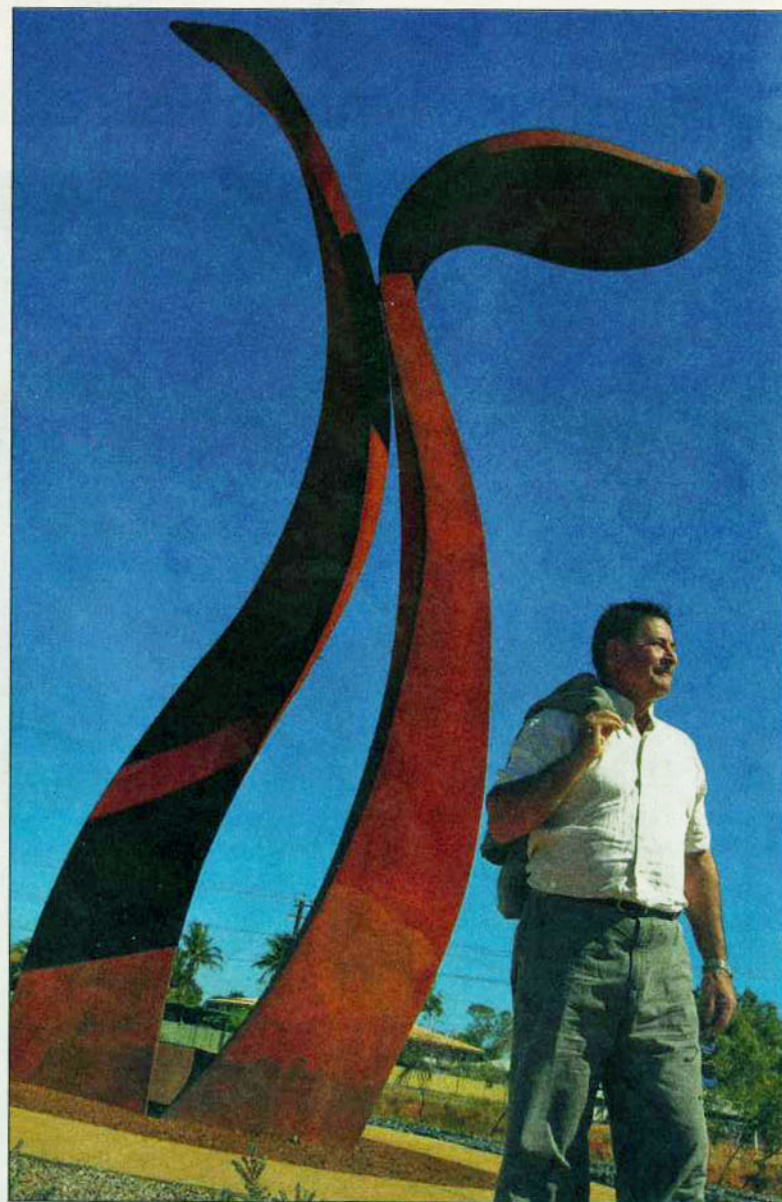
The Paris show led to the sale of a 3m-tall sculpture to an Oman aluminium company, along with 2500 maquettes of that design to give as corporate gifts.

Through his gallery, Gomboc has engaged in a series of international cultural exchanges, including three visiting Shanghai University academics last year and current artists-in-residence Isamu Fujimoto and Koichi Ogino.

In turn, Gomboc created two large works for a sculpture park in Beijing last year and spent time as artist-in-residence at Asago Museum and Sculpture Park in Japan.

His immense workload shows no sign of easing. Last month, he installed a 12m rust-red iron sculpture in South Hedland for Fortescue Metals Group to commemorate five people killed at its Pilbara operations. At the end of this month he heads to Thailand to work with American sculptor Peter Woytuk at his bronze foundry before preparing for another exhibition with Rives in Paris in September, followed by his next entry for Sculpture by the Sea in Bondi.

The 2009 Sculpture Survey runs at the Gomboc Gallery Sculpture Park, James Road, Middle Swan, from Sunday to June 28.



Epic scale: Ron Gomboc with his sculpture Northern Spirits in South Hedland.