

Welcome to
• The Mungindi Sculpture Trail •



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

This project was funded by the Australian Government under
the Murray–Darling Basin Economic Development Program.

OVERVIEW

Welcome to The Mungindi Sculpture Trail, a 2.5km open-air art gallery that uniquely crosses the Queensland/New South Wales border in two spots.

The walk, featuring 10 raw and rustic sculptures by award-winning artist Tony 'Nicko' McMillan, who tragically died at 54 years of age, delivers a new perspective on art and nature.

Nicko was a gentle giant with sparkling eyes and a huge heart luminescent with love.

You always found him in his shed, where his agile hands turned trash into treasure.

His friendly voice rumbled with joy when he talked about the found objects in his enormous scrap heap collection. "I bring them back to life with a new purpose. I give them a second chance."

To celebrate a rich life lived with honour, generosity and grace, his widow Katherine McMillan donated Nicko's remaining sculptures to the Mungindi community - the town he loved intensely and with enduring loyalty.

Working in collaboration with the Mungindi Progress Association and the Moree Plains Shire Council, the Balonne Shire Council utilised funding from the Murray-Darling Basin Economic Development Program to pay tribute to Nicko and showcase the sculptures for everyone's enjoyment.

The McMillan family hope the Mungindi Sculpture Trail gives you a glimpse of life on these black soil plains.

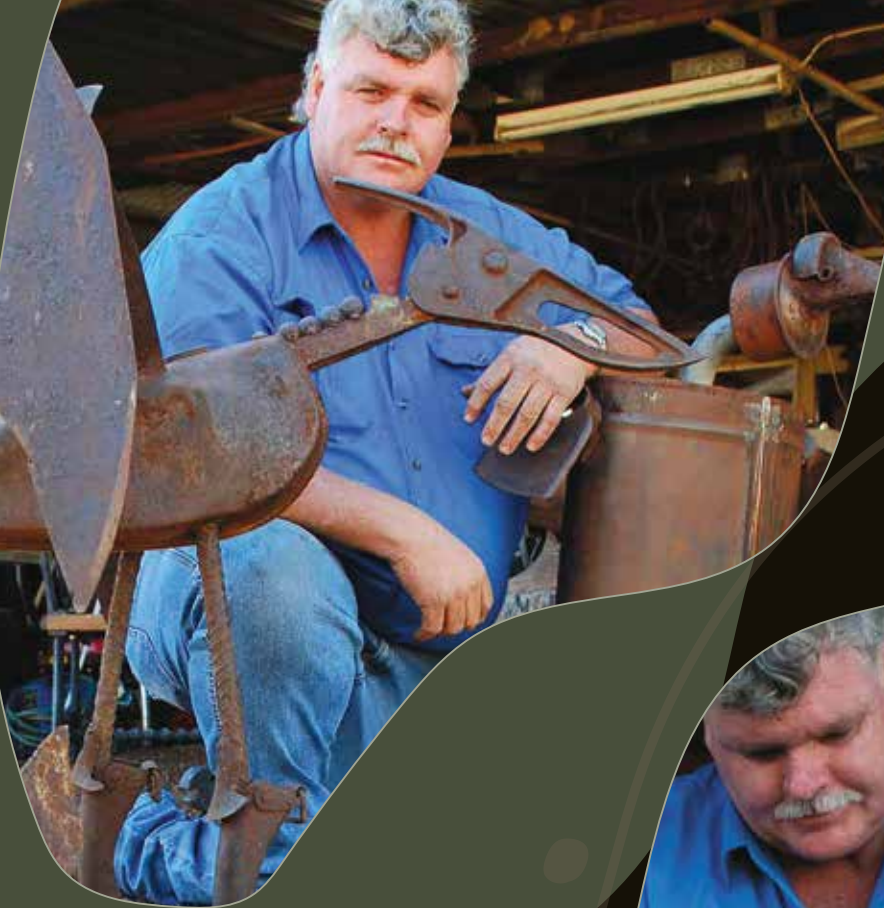
Each sculpture is accompanied by interpretative signage and a brief video by Nicko's family explaining the story behind the piece.

Nicko's legacy is one of hope. That no matter where we live, we can all find our way to build something from nothing.

Please take the time to enjoy the trail and further explore the region Nicko loved, and the community full of people he called family and friends.

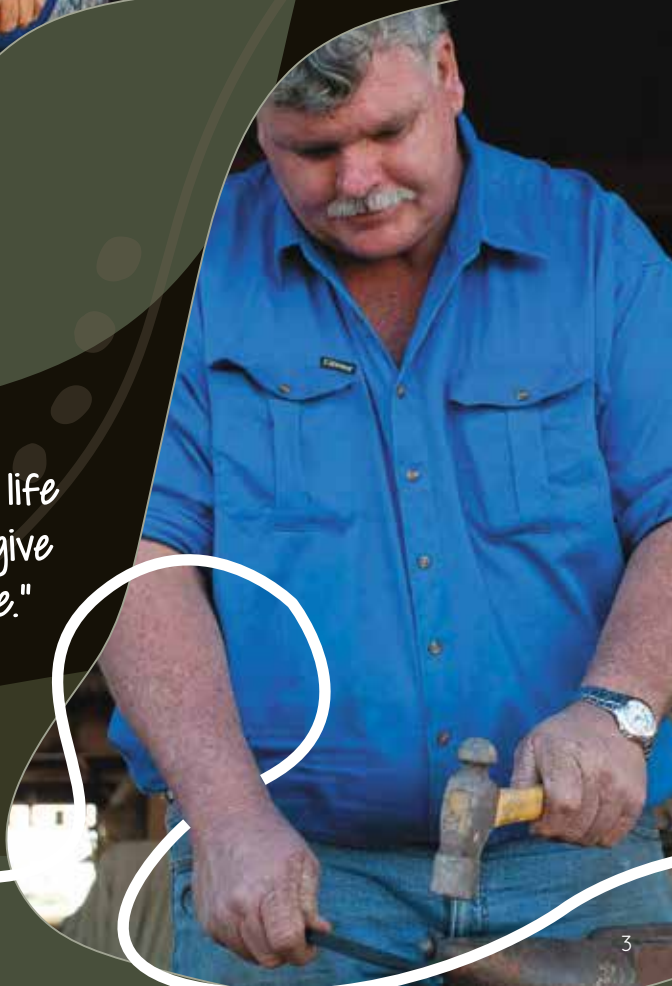
This project was proudly supported by:





" I bring them back to life
with a new purpose. I give
them a second chance."

- Tony 'Nicko' McMillan



INDIVIDUAL SCULPTURE



KANGAROO - DON'T SHOOT

Nicko's sculptures consistently won at the prestigious Mungindi Art Show.

In 2003 'Don't Shoot' caught the eye of the internationally exhibited Sydney artist and judge Michael Downs.

"It was the standout object. No matter where you were standing, the bloody thing was looking at you."

Mr Downs said the work utilised agricultural castoffs inventively and appropriately.

"It's a comical and ironic comment that Tony used things that were invented to 'tame' the land to describe something wild and pre-settlement."

Mr Downs said art that makes you smile first, and then reflect, is art that will keep its value to the public.



ANTMAN - REUSE, REPAIR, REBUILD

The inspiration for these recycled assemblage sculptures came from Nicko growing up as the third youngest of 11 children.

"I've been recycling all my life," he'd laugh. It was a tough but happy childhood in Mungindi.

In those early years, Nicko had a cold relationship with his father and gravitated towards his mother who was caring, resourceful and creative.

Nicko promised his mother he would never drink or smoke. A promise he kept faithfully despite a youth spent going to the pub to source work in the local shearing sheds.

Nicko's art often paid homage to his hometown.

Antman, created from old motorbike and car parts, is a tribute to Nicko's friendship with longtime local greenkeeper Paul Jarnett.





TURKEY - A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Art reflected life with Nicko's artistic endeavours evolving as his life did.

While working in the local shearing sheds, he used what he found to make wooden furniture.

Later, when sheep left the local landscape, he became a builder and discovered a new wealth of found objects that inspired his journey into sculpture.

Pianos moved for building renovations found their way into artworks like this Turkey.

In 1980 at the age of 18, Nicko met Katherine, who came to town for a three-week holiday and never left.

As their children Tony Jnr, Trinity and Byron grew, Nicko included them in the sculpting process.

RAZORBACK - AGAINST THE ODDS

Art was self-expression that developed self-worth for Nicko McMillan.

Nicko's father never thought he would amount to much.

In later years, recognition of Nicko's art, along with his growing building business, saw his father develop a new respect for Nicko, and they became good mates.

Nicko was determined to build his own happy and loving home.

Searching local machinery dumps and stock routes for farm junk and creating sculptures became a shared family adventure.

Razorback, created out of army surplus pieces, was made for Byron as a family joke.

Nicko was incredibly proud to go into business with his two sons.



PENGUIN - OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Nicko completed grade 10 but could not read or write.

Katherine urged him to study literacy through TAFE, but Nicko couldn't write well enough to fill out the form.

Nicko overcame the obstacles with his incredible capacity to memorise anything he heard verbally.

That ability saw him regularly perform in local theatre productions.

Unable to read instruction manuals, he could still fix anything because he could feel how it worked. "It just comes to me as a picture, and I know where the pieces go."

His art was also intrinsic. This award-winning Penguin was almost a Ned Kelly sculpture.

However, Nicko's vision for the pieces saw the Penguin come to life, and Ned Kelly remained uncompleted.



RED & BLUE BROLGAS - NO EXPENSE SPARED

The dancing brolgas are one of the most expensive pieces of sculpture Nicko ever made.

The brolgas came from parts of a Mercedes Benz that crashed in Mungindi.

Nicko's son Tony Jnr was hoping to rebuild the Mercedes for himself before he discovered the bonnet had become part of the new sculpture.

Tony Jnr ended up helping in the process and these brolgas hold a special place in his heart as he remembers a time working by his father's side.

When brolgas pair up with a mate, they stay together for life.



CHINAMAN - ART TAKES TIME

Nicko loved the stories from the colonial days and used them as inspiration.

Mungindi, like so many regional towns, had a rich history of Chinese migrants creating market gardens to supply the region with fresh produce.

Nicko's sculptures evolved at their own pace without the pressure of deadlines.

He was always looking for the right piece. "I'd wait because I had a plan. I could see it in my mind. It had to be right. If you only half do it, it only looks half done."

Nicko would say, "Sometimes good things can take some thinking."



PTERODACTYL - CAFÉ & COMMISSIONS

For a time, Nicko's sculptures had an outlet in a local café generating sales and commissions.

The McMillans had bought the Café Deluxe which was run by Katherine and her daughter Trinity.

The café became a popular gallery for Nicko's work and a place where Katherine's favourite sculpture, the Pterodactyl, always received attention.

Perched on top of the fridge, the Pterodactyl's wings would flap whenever the door was opened making it look real.

Katherine enjoyed those years in the café but said it was tough with the district suffering from drought, and in 2006 they sold to pursue other options.



BLACK COCKATOO - WINNING WILDLIFE

Nicko was a man of nature and would spend hours listening, observing and appreciating the local wildlife.

Most of all, he loved birds, and they became a focus of his work.

Like seeing shapes in the clouds, Nicko saw the potential in discarded junk, transforming it into a new life.

"I will see a piece that looks like a bird's beak and just start building from there."

The black cockatoo is a unique and rare bird only sighted infrequently.

Locals rejoice when they hear their distinctive call because they believe they bring rain.

TURTLE - THE GIFT OF HOPE

The McMillan family always planned to build a museum in Mungindi to showcase Nicko's sculptures and to preserve the pieces of local history they had unearthed over the years.

Unfortunately, Nicko passed away at 54 years of age before realising those dreams.

The final piece in the sculpture trail is the Turtle. It is the definition of practical art.

Nicko created the piece when Katherine asked for an umbrella stand.

In his endearing and genuine approach to life, Nicko used the request to create a sculpture that has brought joy to so many and also held quite a few umbrellas.

Nicko's legacy is one of hope. That no matter where we live, we can all find our way to build something from nothing.



SCULPTURES

1. Mungindi Photo Frame
2. Kangaroo
3. Antman
4. Turkey
5. Razorback
6. Penguin
7. Red & Blue Brolgas
8. Chinaman
9. Pterodactyl
10. Black Cockatoo
11. Turtle

