

Arts

Mid-city statement

The evolution of a major new sculpture

New York-based Australian sculptor James Angus has been home a fair bit of late, designing a giant work that will sit as a centrepiece at Sydney's almost completed office tower at 1 Bligh Street, writes **Katrina Strickland**.

James Angus is stumped when asked to list the public sculptures around the world that he most loves. The Perth-raised, New York-based artist is no stranger to public art commissions; the orange blob that sits at the entrance to the National Portrait Gallery is his, as is the chain of steel and painted fibreglass ellipsoids that line part of Melbourne's EastLink freeway.

"There are quite a few sculptures out there but none that keeps me awake at night," he finally says.

After further thought he mentions the Alexander Calder piece at Sydney's Australia Square, an abstract steel sculpture commissioned in the 1960s by the building's architect, Harry Seidler.

"A good result is if you have something that ticks over in your head every now and again without being obnoxious," he says.

Just ask Ron Robertson-Swann, whose 1978 abstract yellow steel sculpture, *Vault*, was moved from Melbourne's former city square to Batman Park and eventually the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art after years of being rudely tagged the *Yellow Peril*.

Or Ken Unsworth, whose *Stones Against the Sky* at Sydney's Kings Cross is often dubbed — in a most unkind way — "the poo sticks".

Angus knows all about the difficulty of the challenge. Creating public sculptures that stand the test of time is hard enough; creating works that resonate with the public to the extent that they become landmarks in themselves, loved by children and office workers alike, used as meeting points, has a much higher degree of difficulty.

For more than a year he been working on a sculpture which is to be a public centrepiece of a new commercial office tower at 1 Bligh Street, Sydney.

The building, designed by Architectus, built by Grocon and co-owned by Dexis Property Group, Dexis Wholesale Property Fund and



Reflecting the warmth of sunrise and sunset . . . the James Angus sculpture for 1 Bligh Street, Sydney.

Chbus Property, is due to open next May. Its owners hope the aluminium sculpture becomes a meeting place and talking point, and to that end undertook an international search to find the right artist for the job.

Angus beat an impressive field,

experienced anything like it". Each of the short-listed artists was paid a fee to work their ideas into proper drawings and Angus spent many hours talking to the architects about their concept for the building and the sculpture's role within it. The tower

facade of the building, its colour palette reflects the warmth of sunrise and sunset.

At one point it was going to be black and grey, at another shades of green, but Angus says he wanted it to chime in with the sandstone buildings in the precinct, "as if it's picked up a strand of their DNA."

Angus, who was given a survey at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art in 2006 — rarity for an artist of his age, has been living in New York for the past four years.

Of significance in choosing him for the job is the sense that he looks on track to enjoy a promising career. Says Ray Brown, project director at Architectus: "It would be great if, as his career grows, the sculpture becomes more well-known."

The ultimate accolade would, of course, be if city workers came to use the line: "Meet you at the Angus."

Time will tell.



The ultimate accolade for James Angus (pictured) would, of course, be if city workers came to use the line: 'Meet you at the Angus.'

including Jenny Holzer, Josiah McElheny, Roxy Paine, Tobias Rehberger and Franz West. At 40 he was the youngest among them, and the only Australian.

Art consultant Barbara Flynn, who worked with the building owners to choose the artist, says she "never

will feature a lot of glass and light, with a view to giving it a very ethereal quality.

With that in mind, Angus says his sculpture is meant to provide a "material and organic" counterpoint, or anchor. Designed to cast shadows through the foyer and across the

the country's most popular theatre and opera directors, the affable Kiwi — who is known among other things for wearing different coloured socks on each foot — is preparing to open the musical *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* on Broadway next March. He is also working on a musical version of the film *An Officer and a Gentleman*, which is expected to premiere in Australia next year.

MTC chairman Derek Young said yesterday that the board would conduct an international search for a new artistic director and chief executive, who it hopes to appoint within the first quarter of 2011, with a view to them programming the 2012 season and beyond.

There are few constraints on the type of person the board is looking for. Mr Young would not rule out following the Sydney Theatre

Company's lead and appointing a well-known actor to the role — Geoffrey Rush, Guy Pearce and Rachel Griffiths all have links to Victoria and have starred in MTC productions — and he acknowledges that such a move could be seen as a "silver bullet".

But nor would it necessarily go down that path. "We're not aggressively going after that solution but we're not excluding it either," he said. "We want as comprehensive a search as possible."

The challenges for Mr Phillips's successor include: developing an experimental program for the Lawler Studio, a 150-seat space within the MTC's new performing home which the company has not yet had the funds to fully exploit; taking the company offshore (it has not toured overseas for more than a decade);

and working out how to best use new media and technology.

Mr Phillips's programming has been criticised in some quarters as being too safe. But if it has sometimes been safe, it has also not broken the bank. He inherited a \$4 million deficit, but the MTC posted a surplus every year of his tenure other than last year, when it was hit with a series of one-off costs related to building construction. In lifting subscriber numbers from 12,000 to 21,000-plus, he and general manager Ann Tonks have also rid it of its historical financial instability.

Mr Young said the board was not looking for someone "edgier" but that if it ended up with a younger artistic director, which is likely, then "by definition they will have a different vision, and I expect it would be a little more edgy".

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About town

July 29 to August 5

Sydney

Bangarra Dance Theatre:

It's hard to believe Stephen Page's indigenous dance company is 21; it's gone so quickly. This tour, *Of Earth and Sky*, began in Brisbane and takes in Canberra, Adelaide, Wollongong and Melbourne after Sydney. It features two new works, one by resident choreographer Frances Rings and the other by 23-year-old Bangarra dancer Daniel Riley McKinley, whose piece riffs off the poetic *Cloud* series of photos taken his talented late relative, Michael Riley. At Sydney Opera House, ends August 28.



Melbourne

Melbourne Theatre Company:

David Williamson has been a cash cow for the state theatre companies for decades now. His plays don't always earn the praise of critics but audiences lap them up year in, year out. *Let the Sunshine* premiered at Sydney's Ensemble Theatre last year, marking a return to work for the playwright after a few years of self-imposed rest, and has since played to sell-out houses in Brisbane and some regional towns. This comedy about two couples with polarised politics who are forced to co-exist in Noosa when their children fall in love stars stage darlings Jacki Weaver and John Wood, and is directed by outgoing Queensland Theatre Company artistic director Michael Gow. At the Arts Centre, ends September 4.

Brisbane

Ryan Renshaw Gallery:

Rodney Glick's intricately carved and painted life-sized sculptures fuse images of everyday Western people and objects with Eastern ideology. This exhibition, the West Australian artist's first solo show in Queensland, comes hot on the heels of his inclusion in the 2010 Biennale of Sydney, which will finish up this weekend. His exhibition ends on August 14.



Adelaide

SALA Festival: This 13-year-old annual event celebrates the creations of more than 3000 living South Australian artists whose work will be dotted around the state's capital city and further afield for more than three weeks. Exhibitions will be held not just in galleries but also in unlikely spaces such as funeral parlours, pubs, wineries and car yards. Best of all it's free and spans everything from craft, painting, ceramics and photography to design, sculpture and digital media. Details at salafestival.com. The festival runs from July 30 to August 22.

Canberra

National Gallery of Australia:

Described as the first locally produced artist in Australia, Robert Dowling specialised in portraiture but also painted pastoral and social scenes, often with literary and religious references. Called *Robert Dowling: Tasmanian Son of Empire*, this travelling exhibition has already been in Launceston, where Dowling gave up his saddlery business in 1850 to become a portrait painter, and Geelong. Perhaps surprisingly, it is the first full retrospective on Dowling, who lived from 1827 to 1886. The exhibition ends October 3.

