

WHERE ART MEETS SCIENCE



RON WALKER



KIMBRA



SIR GUSTAV NOSSAL



ASHER KEDDIE



BRIAN SCHMIDT



BAZ LURHMAN

DEVELOPING OUR CITY \ A new project aims to cement Melbourne as a city of knowledge, writes JO DAVY



Future vision: Eddie Kutner (above), founder of Wonderment Walks Victoria.

Portrait of success: The 30/30 Project by Vincent Fantauzzo features 30 projects painted in 30 days. (SUPPLIED)

Art and science are traditionally pitted against one another, but not for much longer if Melbourne businessman Eddie Kutner has anything to say about it.

His organisation, Wonderment Walks Victoria (WWV), aims to demystify knowledge-based industries through the creation of open-air galleries along Melbourne's historical, architectural and cultural walking routes.

This month, WWV is giving the city a taste of what's to come with an exhibition of original works by John Olsen and Vincent Fantauzzo at Federation Square.

Kutner hopes the pieces, commissioned especially for the project, will go some way to explaining exactly what they are trying to achieve.

"When you mention Melbourne, everybody will say, 'Oh, what a great city', and they're all aware of our host of international sporting events ... our historic buildings, our good food and wine, our iconic streets and laneways," Kutner says.

"[But] Melbourne is also internationally recognised as a knowledge city ... and that's not always top of mind."

WWV will commission various artists to create pieces that combine arts, sciences, mathematics and innovation, and install them along heavily trafficked routes between the city's best-known galleries, museums and educational institutions.

Kutner hopes the installations will give the public an opportunity to simply "come across" objects that will "excite, inspire and educate". He says routes could stretch from Southbank's arts precinct all the way to the academic precinct at the northern end of the city.

The launch exhibition opened on February 3 at Federation Square's Yarra Gallery and features the first commissioned wonderments: *Frogs* by John Olsen and the *30/30* portrait project by Vincent Fantauzzo.

Olsen's *Frogs* are immense bronze-cast sculptures

created to draw attention to the role frogs play as a bio-indicators of our environment.

"[Frogs] need clean air, they need clean water, they need good habitats, and I guess the point is, so do we," says Kutner, though he's quick to dismiss any connection to the debate on climate change.

Art and science also merge in Fantauzzo's *30/30 Project*. The acclaimed portrait artist painted 30 Australians in 30 days, each subject a success in their chosen field. Portraits include research biologist Sir Gus Nossal and film director Baz Lurhman and most are accompanied by a filmed interview with the subject on what they think makes a great city.

Frogs and the *30/30 Project* will be on display until February 28, after which Kutner hopes they can be permanently installed along one of the city's walking routes. There are plans to roll out two to three "wonderments" in 2014, with a view to establishing between 30 and 40 installations around Melbourne in the long term.

Committees will be established to commission artists, curate works and negotiate site tenures with city councils and private landowners.

To succeed, WWV must secure the support of some of Melbourne's most influential cultural institutions, as well as help from state and local governments.

Melbourne City Council has yet to formally endorse WWV, but councillor Jackie Watts, who is chair of the Knowledge City portfolio, says the initiative has her full support. "The whole knowledge sphere revolves around engagement with the public," she says.

"The old ways don't hold any more ... this is getting people excited about the new science and the new arts in a way that is accessible and stimulating."

Kutner says he has received enthusiastic responses from Arts Victoria and Tourism Victoria and points out there is no reason why the idea couldn't expand beyond

the parameters of the CBD. "To get traction, I think you need to be in a heavily trafficked area, but it could work for regional areas as well as suburbs or even new housing estates."

As the founder and executive director of inner-city property developers Central Equity Group, Kutner has already put his stamp on the landscape of Melbourne through the development of more than 70 residential buildings in and around the CBD. But he is adamant there is no crossover between Central Equity and the WWV initiative.

"I'm getting support from my co-directors in my business life – without them it would be very difficult ... but this has nothing to do with property development."

The WWV board, chaired by Kutner, is made up of Melbourne business identities Peter Yates, Leon Kempler and lawyer Carolyn Reynolds.

At this stage, Kutner is funding the project himself and, while he says he's not looking for a handout from the state or arts organisations, support from private enterprises could be an option.

"Corporate Australia are building on our streets and it's not unreasonable to think that some people or some institutions might want to give something back to the city."

There are a lot of details to flesh out before Melbourne can expect its first permanent wonderment to be unveiled, but Kutner says their vision is for the long-term. "This is not just a project for today, but for our children and our grandchildren."

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» The Wonderment Walk Exhibition will be on display at Yarra Gallery, Federation Square until February 28.

» www.wondermentwalk.org.au