

# value in public art commissions

\$100,000) foisted on the developer by the state government's public art policy, Citimark would do it again, voluntarily.

Right now, Morrow is commissioning the company's next public art piece, for the Evolution apartment project, at the corner of North Quay and Tank Street.

However not all art is always appropriate.

Artists such as Sydney-based Jenny Turpin are circumspect about mandating public art. It's not always a good idea if the result is not a quality product, she says.

Turpin is one of Australia's best know public artists, creating works with values from \$100,000 to almost \$2 million, usually in collaboration with Michaelie Crawford.

But she has also had a turn on the other side of the fence, advising on commissioning public works for companies such as Multiplex and co-ordinating delivery of the works.

Like Humphries, Turpin emphasises the complexity of bringing works to completion. The earlier the art is considered, the better because usually the work needs to integrate with the construction and design process.

"Typically it takes 12 months from concept to completion," she says "and that's almost record time.

"It's very much like producing a small-scale building."

Above all, the works need to be of high quality.

"Art has the power to activate the imagination and the conscience of a society... and the soul really. It has



Tamworth's terrazzo... developers commissioned artist David Humphries to create something special to differentiate their estate.

a funny sort of intangible role of providing a soul for a city. It's hard to define what that means."

"It's better to have nothing than a poor quality work. We shouldn't have hard and fast obligations. I think the artworks should emerge in an environment that will provide something of excellence and quality. I don't think there should be too many artworks [of poorer quality] because the public gets put off."

Turpin also says the best public art is contextual, not something simply "shopped" from existing works, which, whatever their merits,

may not have the strong relationship to the work's eventual context.

Turpin's work, Tied to Tide on the water at Pyrmont in Sydney, created with Crawford, is a powerful example of context.

Constructed right over the water on a jetty, the 50 metre long kinetic work is composed of building fabrics typical of the area, such as hardwood planks and ladders. It is partly submerged in the harbour and constantly moves, or doesn't move, depending on the shifts in the tide, waves and wind. It is like an "artistic barometer", Turpin says.

Another work, Tank, at Museum Station in Sydney, (also in collaboration with Crawford) aims to bring a smooth respite in the city rush by reworking the old display windows at the Mark Foys building, to create "glistening, constantly moving images reminiscent of light reflecting and refracting through water at the bottom of a pool".

Turpin says public art has the power to create a sense of pride in a city or region. "It can create a strong identity for a city or a place," become a focus of recognition and a tourist destination, she says.

But Jack Bryce says it can take a while before the value of a major public art work starts to be fully appreciated; for instance, the abstract Alexander Calder sculpture commissioned by architect Harry Seidler for Australia Square in Sydney.

"At the time it was a bit brave but now it's seen as paid off, and you almost can't imagine these buildings without them," Bryce says.

Peter Hirst partner in the Seidler practice, says that if it was sold on the open market today the huge metal structure would sell for vastly more profit than the building, based on original outlay costs.

But even the public artworks by the most famous artists can reach their use-by date, or at least their move-by date.

In 2003, the owners of Australia Square, GPT and DB RREEF, decided to sell the huge tapestry commissioned by Seidler from architecture guru Le Corbusier, and it was snapped up at auction by architect Andre Porebski for about \$50,000.

Hirst says Seidler, who passed away last year, didn't mind a bit. A similar fate awaits the Seidler-commissioned tapestry at Sydney's MLC building, designed by Joseph Albers, as the building foyer is due for a makeover after 30-odd years.

That's just the way it is, explains Hirst.

"Hotels get revamped every six years; galleries change their art works around."