

# Fires influence environmental art

Gippsland artwork will be showcased at Parliament House, Melbourne when touring group exhibition "Fields of View" is launched on Friday, February 5.

Artists Leonie Ryan of Nilma North, Kerrie Warren of Crossover, Peter Biram of Gembrook and Ursula and Werner Theinert of Callignee will present their perspectives and perceptions about the environment using various genres in the exhibition.

The Black Saturday bushfires are a recurring theme and influence throughout almost 20 works and a video installation making up the exhibition.

The exhibition opening at Parliament House will be performed by Shadow Minister for the Arts Ted Baillieu. The event will also set the scene for Peter Biram to launch new arts movement "environmental expressionism".

Both Peter and Ursula are environmental expressionists, while Kerrie is an environmental abstract expressionist. Leonie is an installation artist and Werner creates digital prints of optical illusions.

Peter said environmental expressionism aims to open up dialogue about climate change.

He said the arts movement can explore land usage, water usage, bushfires and other climate change impacts.

The five artists started planning the "Fields of View" touring exhibition, which will visit Maffra, Warrambool and Dandenong, prior to the Black Saturday bushfires. However, the fires heavily influenced all five artists as they created works for the exhibition.

For Ursula and Werner, creating art was a way to express and heal after losing their studio, cars, garage, shed and almost their house and lives on Black Saturday.

The couple stayed to defend their property and said they experienced three occasions of genuine worry for their lives. With their hoses melted and house full of smoke, the couple will never forget the wall of flame and the exploding of gum trees and nearby homes.

Ursula said participating in the exhibition helped deal with emotions ranging from exhilaration to have survived to loss. "It really helped us comes to terms with all our emotions," said Ursula.

Leonie, Kerrie and Peter said Black Saturday had also impacted their works via different experiences of the day.

Leonie fought to save her studio and workshop from embers, Kerrie was forced to evacuate her home and Peter spent weeks on edge due to the constant threat of fires.

Leonie spent three hours defending her Western red cedar studio from

embers, made more difficult when hoses from the main tank couldn't reach it. She also had a solo exhibition at Jinks Creek Winery and Gallery in Tonimbuk at the time.

Leonie said there were "greater things at risk at this intense time" but was still relieved Jinks Creek survived after putting in months of preparation, dedication, expense and energy.

Kerrie said the fires and, more specifically, fire bugs naturally flowed into her artworks on a subconscious level.

Nearly blown off the road in her car as she evacuated, Kerrie said she faced a spiritual challenge after not executing her

plan to stay and defend.

Losing telephone contact for many hours to her home, Kerrie later learned the fire front came within three kilometres.

Brian said he and his family, like many in other Victorians in bushfire prone areas, felt constantly under siege by the fires.

"And it didn't stop after Black Saturday," said Brian who faced continuous precautionary evacuations.

He said the fires had taught him "how powerful nature really is".

The five artists are looking forward to sharing their individual visions, emotions and concepts about the environment and Black Saturday bush-

fires during the travelling exhibition.

Local residents wishing to attend the "Fields of View" launch and dine in Queen's Hall, Parliament House must RSVP prior to Monday, January 25.

Tickets are \$140 per person, which includes a three-course meal and wine. Those attending are asked to attend at 6pm for a 6.30pm start.

It is a fundraising event and the dress code is semi-formal. To RSVP, contact Member for Naracan Gary Blackwood on 5623 1960 or email [gary.blackwood@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:gary.blackwood@parliament.vic.gov.au) by Monday, January 25.



The environment and Black Saturday bushfires has inspired group exhibition "Fields of View" by Gippsland artists (from left) Peter Biram, Leonie Ryan, Kerrie Warren, Werner Theinert and Ursula Theinert.