

Huge Jiujiang response to six down under artists

'Wild Dogs from Down Under' recently returned from an artistic cultural exchange in Baw Baw's sister city of Jiujiang, China.

Members of the Baw Baw Shire based group, Kerrie Warren, Leonie Ryan, Eileen Harrison, Jenny Murray-Jones, Laurie Collins and Gary Miles, said they were overwhelmed by the welcome and excitement of the Jiujiang people and their government.

The group was in Jiujiang with their touring exhibition titled "Gippsland", which over the past 12 months has been exhibited at the West Gippsland Arts Centre, Meeniyan Gallery, Burinja Gallery and in Melbourne.

The artists also spent several days after the exhibition absorbing Jiujiang's culture in preparation for their upcoming exhibition at Sale Regional Gallery in January. "The exhibition 'Gippsland' saw an incredible audience of genuinely interested people," said

artist Kerrie Warren. "Many locals visited including uni students, artists, young and old all came through and happily chatted to us in Chinese Mandarin with only occasional English. It was an incredible experience and the works of art did what they were created for - they crossed all language barriers."

The artists and exhibition featured on the front page of five newspapers and were interviewed for television twice during their stay. They also signed hundreds of catalogues and were photographed thousands of times.

"Apparently the 'Wild Dogs from Down Under' affected the whole city of Jiujiang (4.7 million people) as they were ringing in to the newspaper, radio and television stations to learn more about us," said Ms Warren.

The artists had little time to relax after flying into China, going straight to work setting up 'Gippsland' in Mr Cen Qi's Gallery. Even during installation of the exhibi-

tion, local residents poured through the door to see the artworks and meet the artists with assistance of interpreters from the Jiujiang Municipal People's Government.

The Wild Dog artists and Baw Baw Shire Council delegation were officially welcomed at a formal reception by Vice Mayor Li Wei on the night of their arrival in Jiujiang. All agreed it was a very special night, with the artists introduced to Jiujiang artists, government officials and interpreters.

Austrade senior trade commissioner Christopher Wright also flew in especially from Shanghai along with other Austrade officials to be a part of the ceremony and meet the artists.

The following night saw another formal reception ceremony hosted by Mayor of Jiujiang Ms Wang Ping.

"This was quite an experience where everyone got to taste the amazing cuisine on gold plates," said Ms Warren. "Ms

Wang Ping was warm, positive and welcoming, promising to visit Baw Baw Shire in the near future with a delegation of artists."

The only negative experience from the exhibition was that Laurie Collins' work was not released by Shanghai Customs in time and as a result didn't make it to the exhibition.

Following the exhibition, the artists were thrilled to meet Hong Kang min master artist at the Buddhist Factory, famous traditional Chinese painter Fu Meiyong, famous master potter Jun-Feng Yin, contemporary oil painter Mr Xu and a calligraphy artist.

Mr Meiyong and the calligraphy artist both created special works to present to the artists as gifts.

The artists then painted and explored the Yangtze River, wandered around the lotus flowers in the lake, enjoyed traditional music and dance, travelled to the famous Mt Lushan and were hosted as special guests at a variety of dinner parties where they learnt more about the Chinese people, cuisine and customs.

"The Wild Dog artists have jumped many hurdles and climbed many walls to reach this destination and play their part in a cultural exchange to their sister city in China - an exchange which was embraced completely by the people of Jiujiang," said Ms Warren.

"In such a short space of time, the artists and their partners made many dear friends and they look forward to meeting them again when they visit us here in Baw Baw and express their own feelings about 'their place' through art."

For further information on 'Wild Dogs from Down Under', visit www.wilddogsdownunder.com.



Meeting famous traditional Chinese painter Mr Fu Meiyong (third from left) and his wife Mrs Fu Meiyong (second from right) are members of "Wild Dogs from Down Under" including Eileen Harrison, Leonie Ryan, Marian Collins, Kerrie Warren, Gary Miles and Jenny Murray-Jones.



Local artist Kerrie Warren and Baw Baw Shire chief executive Glenn Patterson discuss art with Jiujiang Mayor Ms Wang Ping.



At a formal reception to welcome "Wild Dogs from Down Under" for their "Gippsland" exhibition in Jiujiang, China are (from left) Baw Baw Shire Mayor David Balfour, Jiujiang Mayor Ms Wang Ping and Baw Baw Shire CEO Glenn Patterson.