

Monumental Queensland: Signposts on a Cultural Landscape

**By Lianne Gibson And Joanna Besley, St Lucia: UQP, 2004, 268 pages, paperback, .
Reviewed by Andrew Mason in the **April 2006** issue.**

Gibson and Besley's *Monumental Queensland* is a portmanteau of public art, depicting and examining iconic statues and monuments which reflect the culture and region of their residency. The artworks in the book are divided into ten categories with nomenclatures such as 'Pioneer Life', 'War', 'Commerce' and 'Leisure'. The full size bronze of rugby league football legend, Wally Lewis, is afforded a chapter of its own entitled 'Where's Wally?' This chapter also serves to explain the organisation of the book, and introduces the importance and usefulness of outdoor cultural heritage.

Queensland is a state where the majority of residents live outside the metropolitan area and this collection reflects the regional aspects of the art it discusses. The authors show how public art can grow out of a community, or can be injected into a community, in a way that grows into iconography or acceptance. While there is the inclusion of many statues and public art situated in Brisbane (particularly related to governance as one would expect from the state's capital) there are also regional examples of the same from towns like Warwick with a statue of prominent member of parliament TJ Byrnes and Goondiwindi's more abstract sandstone pillars depicting natural elements of water and rain. This focus on regionalism is significant as Queensland is, of course, the most decentralised of the Australian states, a situation which as Ross Fitzgerald (1985) argues has shaped the State's culture and society.

Local history informs the discussion of the monuments, as it does with the statue of the Indigenous man known as Jimmy Crow, who is said to have provided the inspiration for the naming of the township of Crow's Nest on the Great Dividing Range. There is also the memorial cairn of Kal-Ma-Kuta, the last of the Joondoburri Tribe, which was erected in Caboolture.

While the book will appeal broadly to those interested in stories of Australia, anyone who has walked the streets of Brisbane or travelled in regional Queensland and noted the local public artworks and monuments will want to flick through this book to see if their favourites are there. And while it may be impractical to think all could be included, there are a huge number that are mentioned or depicted: Rockhampton's Singing Ship, Leichhardt's Tree in Taroom, and many others. There's the story behind the icon, like the Sunshine Coast farmer who installed a 16 metre high fibreglass pineapple or the wall of objects created by Winton Opal Miner Arno Grotjahn, or even Kilcoy's emasculated Yowie. The Yowie is a Queensland version of the yeti. This representation of the creature was carved out of a single piece of timber; his prominent genitals providing much sport for locals until their mysterious disappearance at the hands of a chisel wielding fiend bent on peotomy.

The stories of pioneering women and men, of community celebration, leisure, sport and art, of war and hardship, of early white settlement and Aboriginal history are all reflected through the public works that Gibson and Besley train their eyes upon. Their interest in the history and aesthetics of the pieces they discuss is demonstrated with an infectious exuberance in their approach to all these works. From the formal representation to the abstract, from statues to murals, from the high art to the low, this monumental tome tells the stories of people and places that exemplify life in Queensland.