

CREATING A CELESTIAL LIFEFORM



Words Ben Kelly
Photographs Lana Adams

South Australian artist Peter Syndicas aimed for celestial heights when designing an ambitious one-tonne bronze sculpture for the new Burnside Village development, and the final product is out of this world.

Nearly 30 years ago, Peter Syndicas was sitting around a campfire, when he was struck by a lightning bolt of inspiration that changed his life forever. In the small tree branch that he was using to roast marshmallows, Peter saw an abstract human form. "I saw this shape, and I could never look at a tree in the same way again; I began seeing figurative forms everywhere. If it wasn't for that enlightening moment, I may not have found art," says Peter.

After what he refers to as his *Close Encounters* moment, Peter became consumed with the shapes of twigs and trees; an obsession that eventually saw him transition from his day job in advertising, to full-time sculptor.

"I began collecting twigs crazily and then, I started replicating them," says the Prospect-based artist.

"My wife Sinead and I were living in Melbourne at the time, and I began creating shapes out of chicken wire. It got to the scale where these shapes were scraping the ceiling of our apartment; I'm grateful that my better half didn't leave me at that stage," Peter laughs.

The artist has since become renowned for his bronze and stone forms, each sculpture born from the likeness of a twig that he's collected on walks through parks and on camping trips. "When I look at twigs, I don't see a twig – I see a human form in a pose and often, they're akin to dancers," says Peter.

Over close to three decades, Peter has tirelessly honed his craft to create artworks that have been exhibited in prestigious Australian galleries. He's created work for clients including Eos by SkyCity and the luxury Singapore resort Marina Bay Sands.



Above Artist Peter Syndicas with the one-tonne, 11-metre-long *Celestial Lifeform*, hanging in the newly-developed Burnside Village. *Photograph Ben Kelly.*
Opposite page, top The giant sculpture is modelled on the shape of a twig Peter had collected in the Flinders Ranges. **Opposite page, below** The bronze jigsaw puzzle coming together in the workshop of Iguana Creative, whose passionate team took on a significant engineering challenge.

However, it's his latest sculpture, the ambitious 11-metre-long *Celestial Lifeform*, that is seeing his work soar to bold new heights. The sculpture is a jewel in the crown of the newly redeveloped Burnside Village, which now features a total of five sculptures that have been created by South Australian artists.

The opportunity for the five artists was created by not-for-profit arts enterprise Guildhouse Professional Services. Peter was humbled to be chosen to create work alongside fellow artists Silvio Apponyi, Jason Sims, Gray Hawk and Caleb Shea.

"If it wasn't for Guildhouse, I may have never had a chance to create a piece of work at this mammoth scale. They were key to bringing this artistic project to fruition," says Peter.

Given the soaring void of the ceiling where the sculpture would be located, Peter's first step was to come up with the title of *Celestial Lifeform*.

"As soon as I had that name, I looked at my collection of twigs, and I knew exactly which shape to use. It's a twig from the Flinders Ranges and that became the hero; I had the form," says Peter. People see different things in my sculpture, but I see a figurative male form flying through the sky. To me it is reminiscent of Michelangelo's painting *Creation of Adam*, where

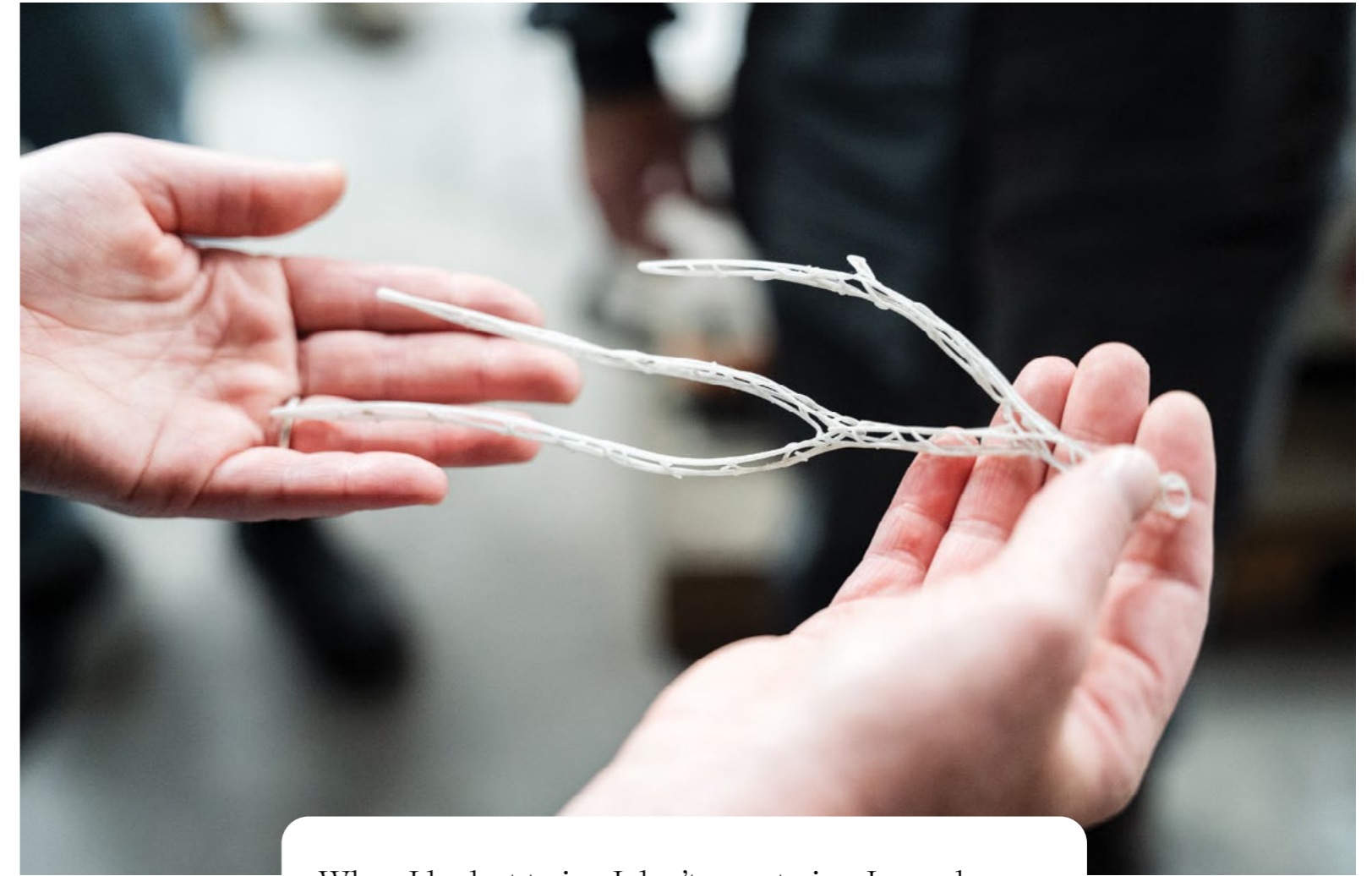
God is stretched out, reaching to Adam. I love it when other people can see the abstract figure."

Creating such a large sculpture in heavy bronze posed a significant design and engineering challenge. Peter came up with an idea to use rods to create a skeletal shape. But even then, he greatly underestimated how heavy the final sculpture would be – just under one tonne.

"My sculptures are normally solid forms. It was my wife who gave me an idea for the skeletal form inspired by our lampshades at home. I made a maquette out of stainless steel to test the theory and realised the concept could work," says Peter.

Celestial Lifeform was fabricated in bronze by Iguana Creative, whose previous work includes Rundle Mall's stainless-steel *Pigeon* by Paul Sloan. Peter is currently working to determine if the Burnside Village piece is the largest suspended bronze sculpture in the world.

"I'm yet to find anything that surpasses its length. It's no wonder nobody else has tried to achieve this, it was so complex to build. I can't speak highly enough of Iguana Creative. They're just brilliant fabricators, and this is potentially a world first," he says. During fabrication in the Iguana Creative workshop, there



When I look at twigs, I don't see a twig – I see a human form in a pose and often, they're akin to dancers



I'm yet to find anything that surpasses its length. It's no wonder nobody else has tried to achieve this, it was so complex to build

were up to six people working on the piece at any one time. To prevent the bronze from cracking, the rods needed to be heated before bending. Suspension cable points also had to be carefully engineered and extensively tested.

"The Iguana team became quite absorbed in the project. Everyone in the factory became excited as the form began to take shape. Welding it together was like a jigsaw puzzle – tedious work over a long period of time – and I'm grateful that they were so passionate about it," says Peter.

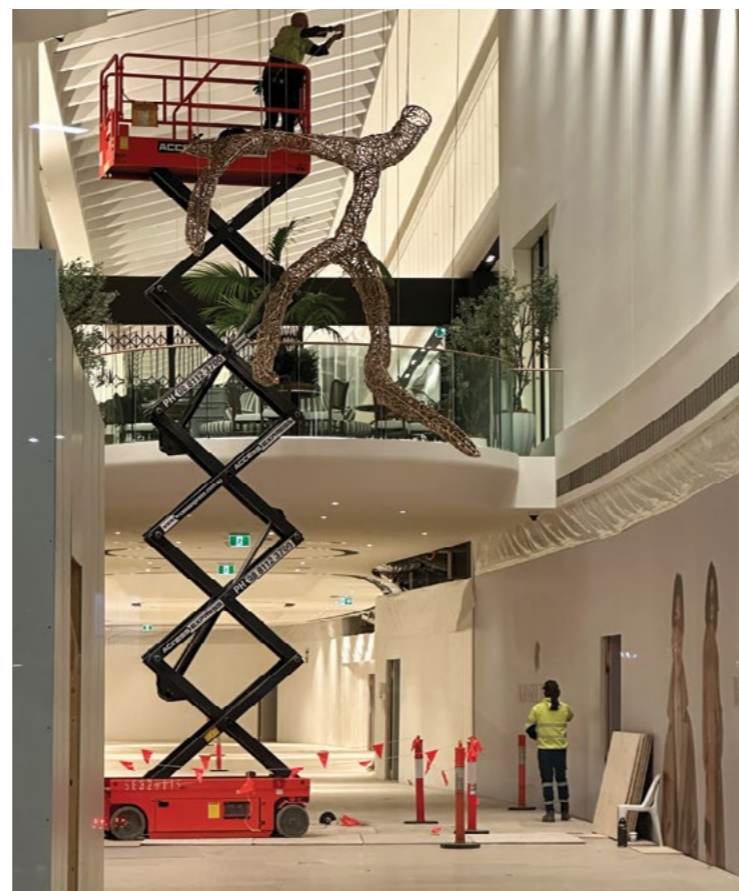
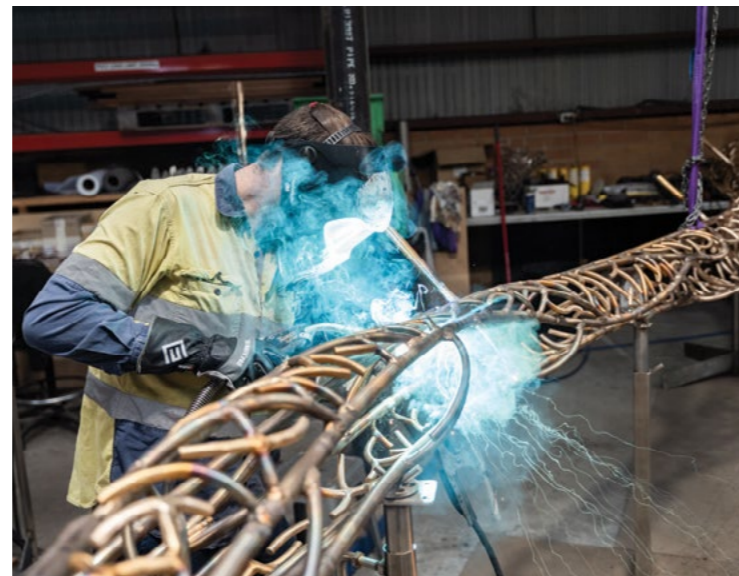
The sculpture is comprised of many miniature forms that resemble the overall shape. It also represents the fractal patterns of nature. "When you look at trees, segments of the tree are replicated in larger parts of the tree over and over again. I love art which incorporates that fractal design," says Peter.

Transporting the piece from the workshop to Burnside Village was a nerve-racking exercise, with *Celestial Lifeform* carefully wheeled through the doors and raised into position. "The light will play on the sculpture in a more pronounced way during summer, when the sun is directly overhead. It will reflect beams of light to create golden flares on the walls, and interesting shadows underneath," says Peter.

"Before it went up, I managed to stand alongside it, and it was wonderful to see it finally at its full size. Now I'm addicted and I want to do more sculptures of this scale."

Peter hopes that over many years to come, *Celestial Lifeform* will serve as a mesmerising point of reflection for generations of Burnside Village visitors, and its impact may even be recognised internationally.

"I'm hoping it will catch the imagination of people from around the world. I know that long after I'm gone, my bronze and stone sculptures will still exist somewhere in the world. It does have a sense of immortality and I can give it a lifetime guarantee for sure."



Top Bending and welding the sculpture's curved form was painstaking work. Above The proposal to enlist five artists to create bespoke sculptures for Burnside Village was facilitated by Guildhouse Professional Services.

BAROSSA VILLAGE BE SEEN EXHIBITION

CRAFT | DRAWING | MIXED MEDIA | PAINTING | PHOTOGRAPHY | SCULPTURE | TEXTILES

4-29 Aug
Mon-Fri 8:30 am - 4:30 pm
Barossa Village - Joy Rice Centre
14 Scholz Avenue, Nuriootpa, SA 5355

FREE

Unveiling Opening Event 7 Aug, 2:00 pm - 4:30 pm

Step into an exhibition that will shift your perspective. **BE SEEN** celebrates the untold stories, creativity, and resilience of our older community through bold, deeply personal works of art.

From intricate sculptures to fearless mixed media, each piece reveals the vibrant soul behind it, inviting you to pause, connect, and reflect.

This is more than an art show. It's a moving, immersive experience that reminds us what it means to truly see and be seen.



barossavillage.org | 8562 0300

howards[®]
storage world

The Ainer Specialist

HomeCo, Mile End | Railway Terrace, Mile End South | Ph: 8152 0400 | hsw.com.au

CON'S UPHOLSTERY & FURNITURE

Established 1983. Using traditional methods.

QUALITY IS NOT EXPENSIVE IT'S PRICELESS!

410-412 Goodwood Road, Cumberland Park, SA 5041
P: 8274 1044 | E: consupho@senet.com.au | W: consupholstery.com.au