

## Media release – Update on Wanjina Watchers protest events

### BOXING IN THE WANJINA SPIRITS

### PROTEST IN KATOOMBA – THE CITY OF ART CENSORSHIP



On Friday 15 July, the DreamRaiser project artists built a box around the *Wanjina Watchers in the Whispering Stone* sculpture by Benedikt Osvath, in protest against local council censorship.

Another event is planned for Friday 5 August, also in front of ModroGorje Gallery at 71 Lurline Street, Katoomba, Blue Mountains.

You are invited to join us in our ongoing struggle against the shameful and irresponsible conduct by local bureaucrats, who sprang into action because the image on the stone upset some Aborigines.

Vesna Tenodi, the ModroGorje gallery owner, said: “The DreamRaiser project events are our artistic protest against the decision by the local council to dictate what artists can create. The bureaucrats manipulated planning laws and used the heritage listing of the house and the “stone’s visual prominence” as an excuse to enforce censorship. This is a worrying outcome for every artist and free thinker in Australia.

“We have a number of events planned both in Australia and overseas, and we’ll keep exploring pre-Aboriginal prehistoric Australian cave art. The images we use were not created by Aboriginal people, but are from an earlier time, and Aborigines found them when they arrived. That makes those claims to ownership of images, ideas and symbols quite ridiculous.

“During our court case, the council came up with an archaeologist, who in effect said that telling the truth is “bad manners”. Being an archaeologist myself, with a degree in prehistory, I could not see the connection between archaeology and Australian modern art in 21<sup>st</sup> century Katoomba. That “archaeological expert” was of the opinion that all of us archaeologists must pretend not to know what we know, not to see what we see, and hide the truth about Australian prehistory, because it upsets some Aborigines.

“Another worrying thing was a statement from Gordon Smith, an Aborigine from the Kimberley region, who was reported as saying that nothing short of the sculpture’s destruction would be satisfactory to his tribe despite the court’s ruling. This shows the same mentality as was the case when our sculpture was repeatedly vandalised in 2010 and as with the death threats we received, when the local Aborigines were alleging that they were acting on “orders” from Donny Woolagoodja, from the Kimberley.

In response to calls from listeners who are objecting to this kill-and-destroy mentality as well as art censorship, a 2GB talk-back radio presenter in Sydney commented on air that Aborigines seem to be no better than the Taliban.

“We are very happy with the response from the general public last Friday. During our event, a great number of local residents and tourists stopped to offer their support and encouragement, and apologised for what the local bureaucrats are doing.

“The locals were saying it is a great shame for Katoomba and the Blue Mountains, but they never had a say nor were they asked for their opinion. They said that instead of “City of Art”, Katoomba should be renamed “City of Art Censorship”. And we fully agree.