

# Public Art at Vantage

## An Overview

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### Introduction

Developer driven public art often struggles to find the space for the artistic process within the well rehearsed property development routine.

It is not uncommon for Public Art Proposals for developments, authored by the project landscape architects, to provide strategies littered with motherhood statements about the positive effects of public art on urban environments. These may sound good, but the problem is that they may not actually engage with the artistic process. Artists can be alienated, if involved at all, and the eventual result is usually public domain paraphernalia, jazzed up and decorated design solutions that are wrongly classified as "public art".

For the developer a true engagement with the artistic process can be an unknown quantity, having a sense of danger, uncertainty, unknown cost and delay. But, for the brave and enlightened, a meaningful engagement with public art can prove a far more fruitful process and outcome.

At Landcom's residential subdivision, named Vantage, an early decision was made to engage meaningfully with the public art process over the long term development of the site. Collaborative practice and early engagement have become the defining features of this public art programme. Artists, landscape architects, public art consultants and the developer have all contributed to the public art vision. All parties have brought insights to, and taken lessons from, the art process. It is proving to be a positive venture - in terms of both the landscapes and artworks that are starting to be realised on-site and the more subtle personal/organisational benefits of having been actively involved in the process.

The integration of public art at Vantage is an ongoing process that continues to evolve as the relationships between the parties develop and as the site character shifts from a greenfield site to populated community. A key lesson is that the involvement of a project artist can bring a deeper engagement with place to the entire public domain design.

### Landcom

Vantage at Corlette Hill is a Landcom residential subdivision. Landcom is the New South Wales State Government developer and is responsible for implementing socially and environmentally responsible developments and subdivisions, both individually and in partnership with developers or other government agencies.

Landcom was formed to undertake and participate in residential, commercial, industrial and mixed development projects and to provide advice and services related to urban development to government agencies and others. Landcom is a State Government corporation and operates as a business. They play a significant role in providing a benchmark for socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development.

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### Vantage Development Process

The Landcom subdivision at Vantage is a staged release of residential housing lots. Landcom have developed the master plan and are in the process of providing the services and amenities such as roads, footpaths, parks and public open spaces.

A portion of the subdivision has been identified for medium density housing. However, for most of the estate Landcom will sell individual blocks of land to private purchasers to build free standing houses on. Those buying blocks will typically engage a private home building company to construct an off-the-shelf (new build) house in accordance with Landcom's design guidelines.

During the process of subdividing and selling the blocks Landcom will maintain the public spaces throughout the entire site. Once the completed subdivision has been sold, Landcom will hand the public space over to the local Council who will then take on the maintenance and management of the parks, verges, public art, walking trails, reserves and the like.

### The Site

Vantage is part of a 780 lot subdivision on 46 hectares of bushland. A key feature of the treatment of the public space throughout the site will be retention of areas of existing bushland where possible and the provision of extensive public open space.

Vantage is located in Corlette, approximately 3 km from the town centre of Nelson Bay. The site is in close proximity to Bagnalls Beach, on the shores of Port Stephens. Nelson Bay is a well known holiday area for nearby Newcastle (50mins away) as well as for Sydney (3 hours away). Given the area's proximity to the employment centre of Newcastle there has been a steady population growth over the past few decades. Most of the population lives in detached housing on suburban blocks.

### Time Scale and Staging

The timescale for the project directly relates to the rate of the land sales. The overall subdivision has been split into stages. The rate at which the stages are finished and released is dependent upon the rate of sale for the preceding stage. The effect that the current economic climate will have upon the sale of land in this particular area may influence the rate at which the project progresses.

The art and landscape master planning and the design of the public art/open space for Stage 1 commenced in 2006. Stage 1 of the development was released for sale to the market on 21 February 2009.

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### Artscape's Role

Public art consultancy, Artscape was engaged by Landcom at the preliminary stages of the landscape master plan process. Artscape, in consultation with the project's Landscape Architects, developed a public art strategy and a collaboration strategy to establish the framework for the integration of public art at the site. Artscape has since been engaged to manage the creative collaboration between Landscape Architects at Andrews.Neil Urban Design Group and artist Braddon Snape from concept design to detailed design documentation. As the art components move toward fabrication Artscape has provided management services to Landcom and is responsible for ensuring coordination between the Landscape Architects, Artist (engaged by Landcom) and Landcom.

### Public Art Process So Far

- | Landcom undertook to provide public art as part of fostering a high quality and socially engaging public domain
  
- | Landcom brought the Landscape Architects at Andrews.Neil Urban Design Group and Artscape Public Art Consultants together to develop an integrated Landscape and Public Art Masterplan. The public art component of this process involved:
  - | Identification of public art opportunities and constraints
  
  - | Development of a central thematic strand to be interpreted by the art and design team across the site.

The thematic strand developed by Artscape was "tidal patterns". This articulated the way that, just as tides leave their patterns upon the sand, so too do natural and human forces leave their mark on the land. This theme has provided a way of bringing together the threads of the site's history in a poetic manner and of giving the artists and designers a point for conceptual 'play' during the design of elements across the site. The theme has also acted as a key linking mechanism between separate parts of the site.

"Tidal patterns" was developed to draw together various aspects of the site's character, including: the coastal environment character; the processes of land formation; the changing settlement patterns, from traditional Aboriginal life to today; the human interaction with the Port Stephens waterway, including early waterside communities, fishing and recreation

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- | Development of a Public Art Strategy that articulated the thematic strand; the public art opportunities and constraints; key sites suitable for public art integration; material/design guidelines. The Public Art Strategy formed the basis of the artist briefing documentation
- | Through discussions with Landcom it was determined that a creative collaboration between Artists and Landscape Architects, facilitated by the Art Consultants was to be implemented. Artscape developed a Collaboration Strategy to set the framework for the collaborative process. The strategy allowed a sustained exploration of the sense of place at the site to a deeper level than possible in singular stand alone commissions. The approach recognised the variety of insights and inputs that can be brought to a project by engaging with a variety of creative approaches.
- | The main project artist, Braddon Snape, was brought into the team
- | A collaborative process was embarked on for the design of the public spaces. The key participants in the collaborative design process were Braddon Snape and Andrews.Neil UDG's Landscape Architects. Some of the design elements were realised as art pieces and Braddon took more ownership of their development, whilst other elements tended more toward landscape architecture and so were developed further by Andrews.Neil. This was reflected in the contractual arrangements.

The key driver of the process was for the art and landscape to integrate and be thought of as a whole experience. A great deal of consideration was given to how the planned spaces will be experienced and their relationship to the entire site. The notion of tidal patterns was played with by Braddon Snape and the design team so that in some locations the landscape seems to reveal art elements, while at other locations the art seems to have been washed up by the tide onto the landscape. The resulting concepts display a subtle and nuanced relationship between art and site.

A number of collaborative design sessions were held. Participating were Artscape, Braddon Snape, Andrews.Neil UDG and Landcom's Development Manager. Landcom's Development Manager has a background in art and public art, and advocated from the estate masterplanning phase for the the establishment of an integrated public art process and contributed to the collaborative design sessions. The trust in the creative process by the Development Manger was a fundamental element of the public art process.

- | Part of the public art process entailed engaging with the Aboriginal history of the site. Aboriginal artist Mini Heath, a member of the local Worimi people, came onto the project team and he and Braddon Snape engaged in some early

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collaboration. More engagement with Mini Heath is planned for later in the project

- | All the artworks were documented in the landscape plans for submission to Council for the required approvals. This documentation process included input from other specialists, including engineers and safety by design consultants
- | Works have moved toward construction. Some components of the art and landscape collaboration have been installed on site. Others are documented and ready for fabrication by specialists under the guidance of Braddon Snape

The approach of engaging one main artist to work across the site, as you would a project landscape architect or engineer, has meant that a depth of project site specific knowledge has been developed by the artist which can be applied on future works at the site. This approach has allowed the relationships between the art and landscape team to deepen and grow, promoting better communication of ideas and concepts. Another element of the evolution of the art component will be the engagement of incoming residents in the public art process, so that they can become agents in shaping their new community.

The strong support of public art by Landcom has been essential to the results starting to be achieved at Vantage. The make up of the art and design team has also been integral to the success of the public art. The ability of the artist and landscape architects to communicate concepts and the building of a good working relationship has been core to the public art process. A personal understanding of the creative process by the development manager has provided the artistic process the time and support it needs to flourish.

### Web Links

Andrews.Neil Urban Design Group [www.andrewsneil.com.au](http://www.andrewsneil.com.au)

Artscape [www.artscapeconsulting.com.au](http://www.artscapeconsulting.com.au)

Braddon Snape [www.braddonsnape.com](http://www.braddonsnape.com)

Landcom [www.landcom.nsw.gov.au](http://www.landcom.nsw.gov.au)