

# Speleo Art / Down Under

## 5<sup>th</sup> International Cave Art Exhibition

### *June MacLucas*

In January this year the 5<sup>th</sup> International Cave Art Exhibition, "Speleo Art / Down Under", took place as part of the 26<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the Australian Speleological Federation, held at Mount Gambier in the south eastern corner of South Australia. The Conference was held at the Mt. Gambier Race Course and the Speleo Art Exhibition was opened by world leading rock art specialist Robert Bednarik of Melbourne, Victoria.

Speleo Art / Down Under is modelled on the criteria of the International Society of Speleological Art (ISSA). The exhibition opening, plus gallery setup, has become an important social event for all who attend the conference. As well as attracting international and national Speleo artists, an invitation is extended to local well-known artists living in the local area of each conference.

In all, 14 artists took part. 6 were from overseas - Ceris Jones, Jane Foale and Robin Gray from Great Britain, Ian Ellis Chandler from Spain, Carolina Shrewsbury and Rosemary Balister both from the USA. Our Australian representatives include four Speleo artists - Eve Taylor from Yanchep National Park in Western Australia, Garry Smith the well-known caver and cave photographer from New South Wales, Geoff Aslin - caver, artist, writer and local historian of the Mount Gambier area and June MacLucas, artist and Speleo Art / Down Under coordinator from Adelaide, South Australia.

Without doubt the highlight of the exhibition were the five local artists from Mount Gambier who included three well-known limestone sculptors- Robert Miles, Dagny Strand, and Ivo Tadic, while artist Anne Miles presented two Water Colour paintings of fossilised shells and Kelvin Smibert displayed a large collection of ancient Aboriginal engravings reworked onto large sheets of fibre glass.

These images by Smibert included life-size replicas of Aboriginal petroglyphs from the early Holocene age found in local Paroong Cave. These petroglyphs (called Karake-style art) include circles with internal designs up to a metre in diameter, incised to depths of up to 40mm (Bednarik *et al* 2003:3). Smibert's work is interesting in that he works from photographs and carefully reworks the images life-size onto large sheets of fibre glass. This presentation offered a great opportunity for viewers to walk amongst the engravings, as all the twenty or more Aboriginal caves in the area are gated and locked, and require special permission to enter.

The Art Exhibition was highly successful exhibiting 97 pieces of art work. From this, 19 pieces of displayed works were sold with a further 13 sales made from the bargain table (works shown at previous Speleo/Art exhibitions). In all 32 artworks were sold.

As part of the conference it was organised for speleo artists to take part in local sculptor Ivo Tadic's very successful five hour limestone sculptural workshop. All participants were so involved in completing their work with the help of Ivo, that for several hours all were so engrossed that no one spoke a word. The final artistic and creative standard of our first attempt at sculpture was rewarded with the sale of two of the students' works and all who attended, including me, purchased several limestone blocks to work on at home at some later date.

At this stage the Speleo Art / Down Under Art Exhibitions will be put on hold, but arrangements are in place for several Art Workshops at the next 27<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference to be held at Sale in Victoria.