

ActewAGL celebrates 10th anniversary with electric sculpture

By Myles Peterson

ActewAGL celebrated its 10th anniversary by unveiling an enormous art installation in the foyer of its new building on Bunda Street last night.

Titled *The Journey*, the multi-piece sculpture was created by internationally renowned Canberra artist Robert Foster.

"I wanted to convey the sense that the viewer is moving through a forest of tall illuminated forms, with a feeling which is somewhere between ancient spirits and a hint of strange creatures from the future," Foster said.

The half-million-dollar installation consists of 37 heat-moulded acrylic shapes that thrust up from the ground floor of the ActewAGL building. Thousands of LED lights are embedded within the design, controlled by specially designed software to emit pre-programmed light shows. Motion detectors both inside the building and on the street outside allow the artwork to interact with visitors and passers-by.

Chairman John Mackay is proud of Actew's record of bringing impressive artworks to the people of Canberra, dating to the 1988 *Illuminacube* installation then sited at the corner of Ainslie Avenue and London Circuit. It is now sited on the other side of the Canberra Centre.

"We wanted to do something for the people of Canberra," Mr Mackay said. "We wanted something that would illuminate what is a fairly drab end of town. Something that would

make people proud of their city."

Australian National Gallery director Ronald Radford is a fan of the latest work. "Rob Foster is one of Australia's greatest exports," Mr Radford said.

Other Foster sculptures are exhibited at the National Gallery and Federal Parliament.

Foster's design was chosen from those of half a dozen popular and successful Australian artists and being Canberran was no guarantee of being selected. Raised in Bendigo, Victoria, Foster originally came to Canberra to study at ANU's School of Art where he specialised in silversmithing.

"I went overseas and spent a year or so in Italy, but I came back to Canberra in the end because it is a great city to work in," Foster said. "It doesn't have the distractions of a major city, but does have most of the facilities."

Foster was quite secretive about the process involved in creating the huge acrylic "teeth" that make up his sculpture, saying only, "It's a technique I developed years ago to make aluminum structures."

Creating the lighting effects was like "working on a blank canvas - I've programmed in different effects, different emotions, that will react to the time of day and the movement of people around it."

The Journey can be viewed during office hours with ActewAGL encouraging Canberrans to come into its foyer for a look. After hours it will remain visible and react to passers-by via motion detectors.



ART AND SCIENCE: ActewAGL chairman John Mackay, left, and the creator of *The Journey* artist Robert Foster with the newly installed work. Photo: RICHARD BRIGGS