

# Ballidu

## Brushstrokes

BY MELISSA VAISEY

**P**ainter Cynthia Ellis has spent the past two years travelling around regional WA after completing her first artist in residence program in the progressive town of Ballidu.

The Ballidu Contemporary Art Society first enticed Ms Ellis to the town in 1993, offering her three months of uninterrupted work time, a studio and accommodation in the town's historic 1928 bank building. There was also the opportunity to show her work in the Ballidu Lodge Art Gallery at the end of her stay.

Since becoming Ballidu's first artist-in-residence, Perth-based Ms Ellis has pursued the concept with vigour.

and the Ballidu Lodge Art Gallery has recently shown an exhibition of her work from this stay.

The abstract thick paint works, *New Works*, were a far cry from what visitors might expect at a country art show. But this is no ordinary country art centre.

Ballidu Contemporary Art Society president Pamella Tosta said the gallery was set up to showcase contemporary art that would not usually be seen in rural WA.

She said the concept was to broaden people's horizons and give them an opportunity to experience different types of art.

The gallery is fast becoming the focal point of the small

plan was to hold four exhibitions every year.

This goal has been achieved and the gallery has now also expanded to having an artist-in-residence every year, coordinating art camps, conducting art schools and has this year taken part in the Artist Regional Exchange program, involving artists from Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Ms Tosta said the Ballidu Contemporary Art Society was keen to progress its artist in residence program - one of the few offered in rural WA areas - and this was now attracting interest from one of Perth's leading art schools. The school was considering an artist placement program for graduates.

Ms Tosta said this would give the budding artists time and a location from which to launch their careers and put some of the theory they had learnt into practice in a low-pressure environment. "We are ideally set up to be able to participate in a program like this," she said.

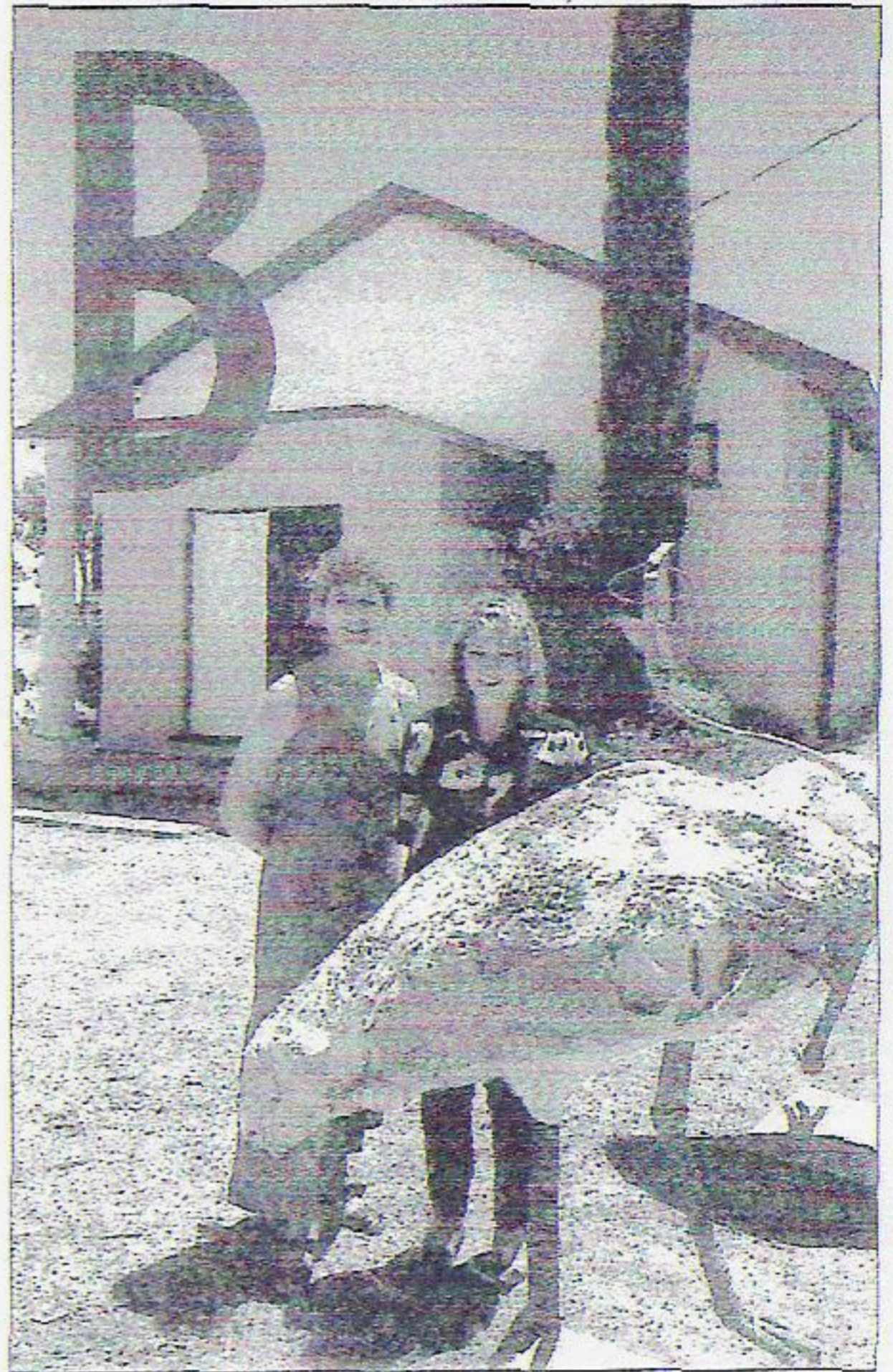
And Ms Tosta said it was not only the artists who benefited from artist in residency programs, the whole town could also get involved in something new.

"Ballidu is very accepting of the artists that come up here - mostly from Perth - and they are learning about art," she said.

"They like to observe what the artists are doing and then see the results of the work when it is exhibited at the end of their stay."

Art society member Nicky Hood said the town became invigorated when a new artist arrived for a residency and there was also an economic spin-off for when exhibitions were staged.

She said the local school students were always eager to have sessions with the visiting artists



Pamella Tosta and Nicky Hood show off Ballidu's eye-catching Lodge Art Gallery, which is running a very successful artist-in-residency program.



Ballidu Contemporary Art Society member Nicky Hood, left, and Pamella Tosta inspect one of the art works from the Ballidu Lodge Art Gallery's 1999 artist-in-residence Cynthia Ellis.

She has spent time in Kalgoorlie, Esperance and the South West undertaking similar programs and from mid-1998 has been almost full-time on the road in WA.

"This gives me a lot of freedom to travel to different towns and I can be spontaneous," she

town of Ballidu in more ways than one.

It is housed in the former Masonic temple, which has been painted in a multitude of fresh pastel shades that cannot be missed when driving around town and Ms Tosta said it was now a springboard for many