

# Copper look at NY city



**Taking Liberty:** printmaker Marco Luccio with his Statue of Liberty work that he sketched direct on to a copper plate during a challenging 10-week stint sketching New York.

Picture: MANUELA CIFRA

## ■ VISUAL ART

Mischa Merz

**W**HEN printmaker Marco Luccio first sunk his teeth into the Big Apple he thought he'd bitten much more than he could chew.

"It was really overwhelming," he says, "For the first 10 days I actually doubted I could do anything worthwhile."

"There were so many different angles and rooftops and shapes and windows and people's legs, so many different things in the same view."

But he wasn't going to let it beat him. Italian-born Luccio has tackled big cities before — first Melbourne and Sydney, then Florence and Paris — to critical acclaim. He's had his moments with architectural icons such as the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame and Il Duomo in Florence.

Exploring the urban environment has been at the core of his artistic practice since he graduated from RMIT in 1992.

He nearly always does his work on site, using a physically demanding method of

## ■ MARCO LUCCIO — CITYSCAPES OF NEW YORK

**When:** Steps Gallery, 62 Lygon St, Carlton South, Until April 27, Mon to Sun 10-5pm. [www.marcoluccio.com](http://www.marcoluccio.com)

scratching marks straight on to the copper plate to make his expressive drypoints.

"New York is the reason I make city images," he says.

Luckily for him, he and his wife, artist Debra Luccio, had 10 weeks in New York and more than 42 copper plates and countless sketchbooks to work out how to respond to the ultimate metropolis. And the results of his efforts will be displayed next month.

Marco went head-to-head with the landmarks of 20th century capitalism — the Empire State Building, Chrysler Building, Flatiron Building, Grand Central Station and the city's striking bridges connecting the island of Manhattan to Brooklyn and Queens.

"I remember the first morning getting up on

the rooftop of where we were staying and the city was just so big and unpredictable. There was just so much information. I thought I better start something.

"With my first drawing I was struggling to fit everything into a double-page sketchbook and it was taking so long I had to find a different way of drawing. I actually discovered a new shorthand for myself.

"I found myself doing the same scene over and over, trying to find a language for it. My eyes were hanging out of my head, there was just so much there."

Aside from the sheer scale of the city, there were other obstacles.

He couldn't even take toilet breaks at the top of the Empire State Building or he would have had to pay again to resume his spot. He also had to cope with a security guard who felt the need to commentate on the progress of the drawing.

"I always had swarms of people around me. At one stage kids were almost sitting on my shoulders and one guy even held the sketchbook for me so it wouldn't blow away. I found it one of the most engaging places for me, but it was quite an intense invasion," he says.

# When little things mean a lot

## ■ SCULPTURE

Harbant Gill

**L**ISTENING to stories is a highlight of Damian Meehan's career as a sculptor.

He weaves these tales into the details of ceramic portraits he creates for clients, most wanting them as gifts for loved ones.

One portrait of a man in a blue boat, with a watch and goggles next to him, tells a story of brotherly love.

It was a 50th birthday present from a man to the brother he had wronged during a fishing trip when they were young.

"The two brothers went fishing one day and, having fished for a while, they started bantering, with feigned attempts to dislodge each other from the boat," Meehan says.

The man who commissioned the portrait threw his brother's watch overboard and, when the



**Mini me:** Damian Meehan with himself. Picture: MANUELA CIFRA

brother asked for the goggles to retrieve the watch, the man threw them in the opposite direction, Meehan says.

When their mother confronted the pair about the loss, the man blamed his brother.

Decades later, the guilty brother gave back the long-lost watch

and goggles in a portrait. Meehan says it was greeted with laughter and tears and now sits in the brother's beach house.

When a QC's wife wanted her husband captured in wig and gown, Meehan put a lawbook in his right hand. Behind him he placed a case of fine wine labelled

"in vino veritas" (in wine there's truth), "because he loved a drink".

A man who fancied himself as the latest in jazz drummers got his wish fulfilled when his wife asked Meehan to put him in the hot seat.

One 75-year-old wanted to stand next to his army-decorated father, who had long been dead. Meehan was moved.

"The way this man has respected and loved his father is beautiful," he says. "I always find it amazing what has happened to people in their lives."

"What I try to do is capture the energy of the person. I like decorating people's lives with their stories."

Meehan, who has been sculpting friends and family since he was 21, only recently caved in to pressure to create the first portrait of himself — and perhaps the last.

"I like doing other people more than me," he says.

# Sista She crosses age divide

## ■ MUSIC

Sally Bennett

**C**ULTURES clash and generations collide in a hip hop performance drawn from a melting pot of community groups.

Candy Bowers and Sarah Ward, of Sista She rapping fame, are on board to create a show that brings together some of Melbourne's oldest and youngest migrants.

Senior citizens from European and Asian countries and young Africans still finding their feet are part of *Citz*, to be staged mid-year at Footscray Community Arts Centre.

It is one of 34 projects blossoming across Victoria and funded through a \$1 million VicHealth scheme to promote mental health.

Bowers says the hip hop show — a blend of spoken word, song, acting and rapping — will draw on the life stories of those taking part.

And though most performers will come from the younger talent pool, older citizens are contributing through poetry, writing and music.



**Diverse:** Candy Bowers, of Sista She, has created a show that brings together some of Melbourne's oldest and youngest migrants.

"I don't think either of these groups understood that they have this major connection," Bowers says.

"There are a lot of similarities between these older citizens and what they've come through, to these young people from Somalia and Sudan who are trying to do the same thing."

"The stories of migration are really an untapped resource. These people, this diversity, is the face of Australia and I hope it will begin to reflect across our artistic landscape."

Other projects to win funding from the Community Arts Participation Scheme include theatre, dance, song, circus, puppetry and visual arts.

Each year about 7000 people are actively involved and a further 30,000 attend performances.

VicHealth CEO Todd Harper says the scheme, which has been running since 1999, has transformed lives.

"When people participate in the arts, mental health and wellbeing is improved and mental distress is decreased."

"Research shows that when people are involved in creative activity, many end up with more friends and a more positive outlook on life."

"In the long term, communities flourish," Harper says.