Are they nuts?

Govt shells out $400,000 for seed in $23m art spend

By HANNAH DAVIES

IT HAS been hailed as "a great coup for Brisbane". But this giant seedpod cost taxpayers $400,000 as part of a $23 million State Government spending spree on artwork.

Ministers have been splashing out on paintings, sculptures, designer furniture and rugs since the introduction of the Art Built-In policy in 1999.

Major spending includes $430,000 on artwork for the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre, $1.7 million for Brisbane Magistrates Court and $2.6 million to decorate hospitals.

The aluminium seedpod sculpture, Drift, was bought for the entrance to State Government offices in Brisbane's Charlotte St.

A total of $1.3 million was spent on artwork for the building, with the sculpture the most expensive piece.

A spokeswoman for Arts Minister Rod Welford said the spending was necessary to create jobs for artists and "public art project managers".

But Taxpayers' Australia chief executive Tony Greco is outraged.

"Twenty-three million dollars is an awful lot of money to spend on artwork and I don't understand the need for it," Mr Greco said.

"What makes it even worse is that a lot of this money has been spent on making nice offices for politicians.

"It's outrageous for politicians to say they can't afford extra hospital beds or doctors when they are sitting among all this expensive artwork. It's time the Government got its priorities right."

Picture: MARK CRANITCH

WHY? The aluminium seedpod sculpture, Drift, graces the entrance to government offices in Charlotte St

The Art Built-In policy aims to make public spaces more attractive. Under the policy, 2 per cent of government projects costing more than $250,000 is spent on art and design.

"The question to be asked is: Do people want a city modelled on the concrete drabness of the old East Berlin or on a city that valued art such as Florence?" a spokeswoman for Mr Welford said.

When Drift was commissioned, then-Arts Minister Matt Foley described it as a "glowing example of Art Built-In's success".

Christine Harris, 37, from Annerley, in Brisbane's south, was not impressed when *The Sunday Mail* showed her the sculpture. "I can't think of a bigger waste of money."

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