WITH PHIL BROWN

**Point the finger ... photographs of Sebastian Di Mauro's iconic *Chat* and *Drift* are in the show. Photographs** // Aperture Architectural Photography

# Visionary duo

## A show pays tribute to twin brothers who make many of the urban artworks that add colour and vibrance to our city

Public art doesn't just materialise, it has to be made somewhere. That process starts in the artist's mind and continues in the studio, but eventually, outside help is usually required. This is because public art is often large-scale and requires some heavy-duty industrial skills.

This is where Brisbane firm Urban Art Projects comes in. The art foundry, which has burgeoned into an international business, is a national leader in the field and a major force behind the proliferation of public art in this city. Without the work of Matthew and Daniel Tobin, who run the business, much of the art we see around town wouldn't exist.

This is all celebrated in the exhibition 15 Years of Urban Art Projects, now showing at QUT Art Museum. Curator Alison Kubler has selected a fascinating array of art, maquettes, illustrations, photos and text to tell the story of this firm from its humble beginnings in 1993 to the present when it apparently has more work on its hands than it can cope with.

The Tobin Brothers, identical twins, are both respected artists in their own right. But they also have strong business skills and work closely with architects, design firms, developers, government departments and artists. They now have more than 30 staff working at their Eagle Farm headquarters and it's here that some of our best known public art is born.

Without Urban Art Projects, artists such as Sebastian Di Mauro would probably find it impossible to bring a vision to fruition. Sebastian is well known for some large-scale works around town, notably *Chat*, the huge hands (one with extended finger pointing skywards and unkindly dubbed 'The Hopoate') in Eagle Street and another, *Drift*, in Charlotte Street. Both are now firmly part of the city scenery.

Also featured in this exhibition is Torres Strait Islander artist Dennis Nona, who is best known for his exquisite prints but has also experimented in bronze with outstanding results. His impressive, almost life-sized dugong sculptures are in demand internationally, and one work has been purchased by The British Museum in London. One appears in the show – a large, enchanting bronze dugong and calf seemingly swimming along the gallery floor.

Other artists featured include Michael Zavros (his bronze horse *The Waiting One* is hauntingly beautiful), Joe Furlonger, William Robinson, Judy Watson, Fiona Foley and other notables.

The company's national projects include the Walama Forecourt, which greets arrivals at Sydney International Airport, a collaboration with indigenous artists Judy Watson and Brook Andrew. The firm has also worked with London-based artist Nike Savvas on her installations *Transcendental* and *Cascade* for Deutsche Bank in Sydney's Norman Foster building and on Reconciliation Place in Canberra.

Urban Art Projects is an extraordinary local success story, and it's hard to see how Brisbane's public art boom, backed by the State Government, would have been possible without the Tobin brothers and their dedicated staff.

**15 Years of Urban Art Projects, until May 20 at QUT Art Museum, 2 George St, city. Tue-Fri, 10am-5pm; Wed, 10am-8pm; Sat & Sun, noon-4pm. Ph: 3864 5370. www.artmuseum.qut.com**