

# ARTS & CULTURE

weekender.

## Feeling part of a beautiful reaction

Here's an exhibition that offers an invitation with a plus-one to your inner self, JO BEVAN writes.

**T**HE main gallery space at Maitland Regional Art Gallery has one big, long wall. And Dani Marti has created one work to fill it.

It's all yellow, and stretches more than 11 metres.

Made of several panels, installed by Marti to flow seamlessly, the wall sculpture titled *Oh Canola!* is made of almost 10,000 circular reflectors, the kind used along roads, but customised in yellow.

Marti also had the reflectors made without the usual back-coating, so as to enhance the movement of light, literally through the artwork, creating "the effect of shimmering".

The reflectors are no longer seen as individual discs, he says, "because when you move around the reflections keep on moving, they flow into each other".

It's a "kinetic" experience.

Barcelona-born Marti, who lives in Cessnock and frequently exhibits in Europe, says the show emerged after a driving trip in South Australia two years ago.

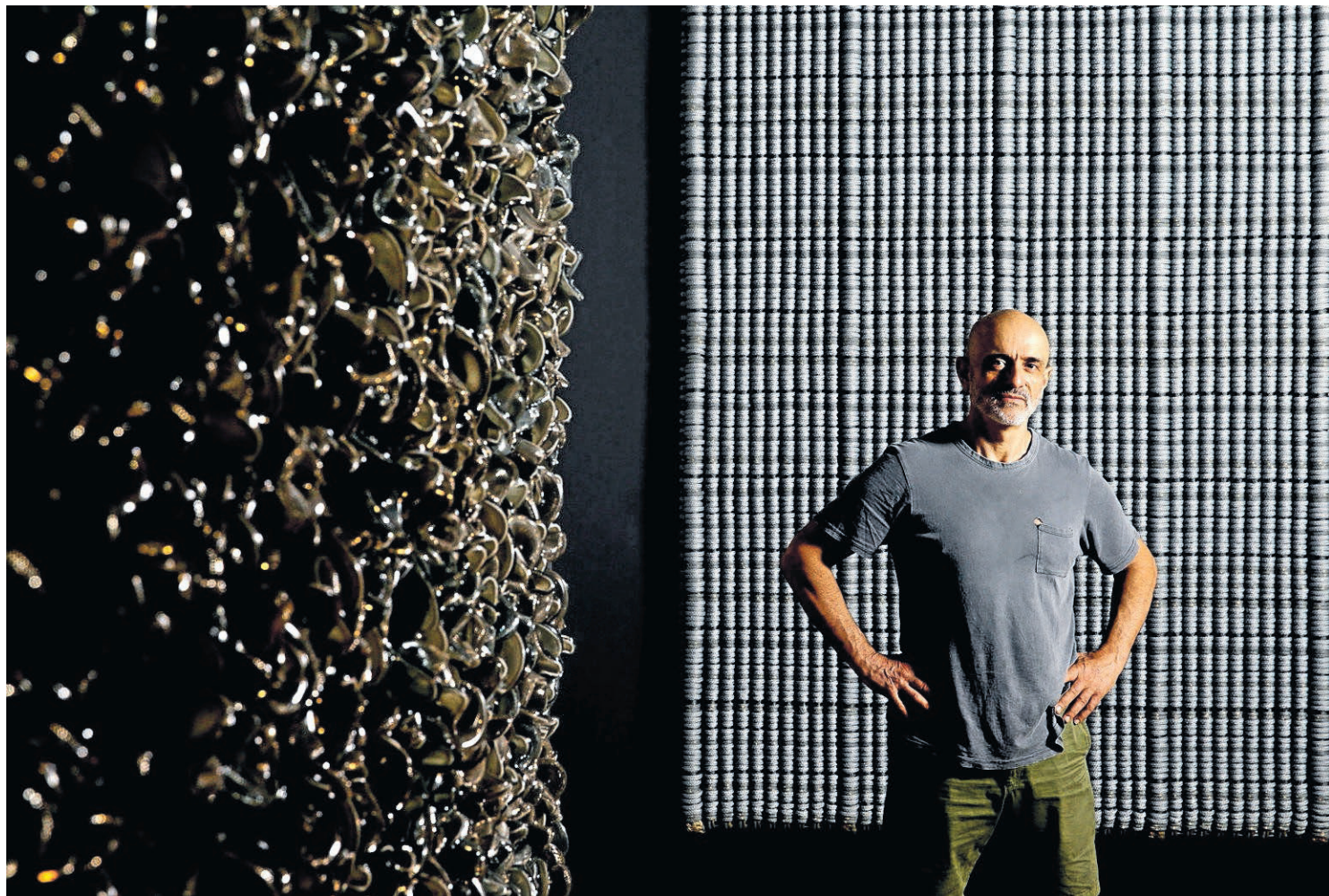
"I came across this field of canola," he says. "There was this incredible field of yellow against an incredible bright blue, it was such a moment of pure abstraction.

"The whole show is about immersing yourself in reflection, the psychology of surface. It's portrait of the land, or my reading of the land."

Marti also created "reflector works" in pink and in grey, but in these he has melted and shaped the discs into organic forms.

The dark works indicate the stone and concrete urban world, and the pink works were inspired by a visit to a salt lake in Victoria.

Marti called this cluster of works *Almost Square*, with variations in sub-titles to differ-



**SENSORIAL:** "The whole show is about immersing yourself in reflection," says Cessnock artist Dani Marti. **Picture:** Jonathan Carroll

entiate. Their 2.5m x 2.6m sizing is a hat-tip reference to the ethos of minimalism.

"Square is such an important measurement in minimalism," he says.

Many of the works' titles are in Catalan or sub-titled in Catalan, to reduce the imposition of the predetermined.

"What I'm trying to do, it's not narrative, it's just sensorial experience," he says.

"Just experience it for what it is, it's within yourself, the viewer.

"When you walk in it's like *bam, bam*. Feel that gutsy interaction with the work. There's no need for big long essays to understand because it's just reaction to beauty, to surface.

"I want people to feel like they can almost walk into that materiality."

Marti's connection to Barcelona is prevalent, with three wall sculptures made of thick rope knotted in repeated patterns, knots he learnt as a child making macrame.

He also enjoyed stitching tapestries when he was young, but then "puberty kicked in" and he stopped.

While he was working as a trade commissioner for the Catalan Government, Marti's creative urges took on a revival when he

made factory visits, seeing ropes and plastics manufactured-slash-crafted.

It led him away from traditional painting and towards the creation of imagery with industrial components.

"I call these sometimes paintings, for me they're almost paintings," Marti says.

Positioned opposite the light-filled *Oh Canola!* are the two darkest works in the show.

Made of melted food containers - "Tupperware and takeaways" - they convey an energy of turmoil.

One relates to a conversation with his sister about astrology - "it's beyond us, it's just happening, everything is explained".

The other emanated from feelings he had on the passing of his mother in recent times, when he was unable to travel back to Barcelona.

It also embraces memories of medical specimen slides - "bits of the body" - that his father, a doctor, had at home.

"As a child they were very seductive images," Marti says.

"This work has a lot of depth, there's cavities and caves, like torn muscle, torn viscera. There's a sense of aggression within

the surface."

Marti has made non-representational portraiture in past works, and also video artworks which explore vulnerability, intimacy and sexuality.

Now he seeks "the soul of the landscape".

"The key is respect and surrendering both to the portraiture of people and the landscape," he says.

"To be present."

The only work in this exhibit named as a portrait, *Nude (after Teresa)*, is an experiential representation. About one of his closest friends, a Catalan fashion designer, the curvy hanging sculpture is made of ostrich feathers, an entire crate-load worth \$US9500.

The only, mildly, figurative work is a gargoyle. Situated up a mezzanine, "witnessing the whole experience".

"It's embracing, cocooning, at the same time almost menacing," Marti says.

A bit like an audience. Marti puts out the welcome mat: "I leave enough space for people to project themselves and for different readings."

**Oh Canola! s at Maitland Regional Art Gallery until May 29**

## Newy West block party on Sunday

**O**N SUNDAY, March 13, the first Newy West Block Fest will take over town. Doors open at 3pm.

The free event, supported by City of Newcastle and Hunter Writers Centre, has been in the making since September last year.

Local musicians Kodi Twiner and Monique Humphries and writer Alex Morris have been collaborating to bring together local acts and artists, performing within four different venues: The Rogue Scholar, Jam's Karaoke, Playstate Curate and the courtyard that Jams and The Rogue share.

The wheelchair-accessible courtyard will feature vegan South American food from Kumache Kitchen, African fashion from AfriB Creations and The Colour Bug and indoor plants from Green Sista Plant Co.

The jam-packed lineup throughout the day at all the venues includes Tibetan throat singing, a large brass band, several solo acts, a DJ, hula hooping, projection typography art, Brazilian drumming and more.

The organisers are hoping that the event will bring together a range of people in the Newcastle community, celebrating art, music, food and multiculturalism after months of COVID lockdowns.

Community members have a chance to participate as well. Rapper Dawn Laird will perform while also hosting an open mic at 5pm at Jams Karaoke. Performers are invited to sign up in advance.

"Midtown block parties are something special," says Andrew Coughlan of Jam's Karaoke. "One moment you might feel as though you're sitting in a laneway in Berlin

enjoying an outdoor brass band and some delicious beers, the next minute you're watching art unfold in front of your eyes in a new gallery space and maybe later in the evening you could find yourself inside an English Brew Pub embracing new friends on the dance floor or feeling warm and fuzzy in a dimly lit Izakaya.

"There are so many great moments born at these block parties. We are very proud to be part of this incredibly talented community and can't wait to open up this special part of Newcastle to the public again this Sunday."

New creative space Playstate Curate is also involved, with live music and art celebrated at the alcohol-free venue.

**@Her\_Art\_Open, @RhinoMilkProductions and @VexelCreations on Instagram**



**DRUMMING IT UP:** Samba Frog and friends will be at the block party.