



Photos: Lindsay Moller



In 2014, when the Hello Koalas Sculpture Trail was being developed by Margret Meagher from Arts and Health Australia, the idea for a "Dancing Koala" was ever present, given the community's strong engagement with dance.

Many artistic submissions were received, but the design concept of a "Dancing Koala" seemed elusive.

A year ago, Margret invited local artist and legendary dance teacher Franchesca O'Donnell to create the Trail's "Dancing Koala".

Over the next 12 months, Franchesca worked on designs and invited local blacksmith/artist Wayne Lewis to join her on this adventure. They proved a formidable team. Both are highly talented, self-effacing about their talents and amazingly perceptive in how to turn dream into reality.

"I feel honoured to be part of the 'Hello Koalas family and this outstanding artistic drawcard for tourism on the Mid North Coast. It has not only promoted many talented local artists, but injected an excitement to explore the beauty of this part of the coast," said Franchesca.

"I often get random photos of families with the Hello Koalas sculptures I have created, and it's a constant reminder of the great pleasure it brings to so many locals and travellers.

"Spending months bringing these koalas to life, they become part of your family. Lola is a real character, and creating her made me smile every day!

"I have to admit when Margret asked me to paint a 'Ballerina Koala', sparks went off with thoughts of sequins and feathers and an 'over the top glam-a-koala'... pretty sure this was

not what she actually had in mind, but as always we are given fabulous support and encouragement to simply 'create'.

"After bringing to life three previous Hello Koalas (Kalido, PK Sparkles, Retro Rita), I wanted to make a fun character that epitomises all the glamour and extravagance of a ballerina, while at the same time using new techniques that pushed past my previous mosaic and painting skills.

"My first challenge was the 3D half tutu and tiara. This could not have come to life without the skills of Wayne Lewis. It's very special to collaborate with someone who can see your vision and has the skills and eye to make it come to life and add their own creative twist."

The tutu had to be sturdy, yet delicate, as I had originally planned to cover it with mesh and mosaic. When I picked up the raw tutu, my plan changed, as it really called for delicate copper wire, beading and feathers.

"At the time, I had just completed a large peacock mosaic installation, so my head was still filled with jewel colours and delicate feathers, which became the theme for Lola's painted leotard and the colours and feathers on her beaded 3D tutu and jewelled tiara."

Franchesca O'Donnell studied Design at Sydney College of the Arts, graduating top of the year. She followed a pathway to the international dance world, as a teacher, examiner, adjudicator and Fellow of the British Ballet Organization.

"My highlight has been the gift of connecting

with literally thousands of students and sharing my passion for dance. I am delighted to still be in contact with many of these young people, who have had great success in their chosen fields and as parents, are making the world a better place.

"Creativity has always been a huge part of who I am and how I think and function on a daily basis. I LOVE the challenge of a new project, brain storming ideas with others and the opportunity to create 'magic'.

"Over the last ten years my passion for visual art has been my main focus. Launching 'Out There Design and Mosaic' in Beechwood in 2007 opened up a new world of opportunities to create, meet interesting people, further my art and business education, teach, travel and work with the community.

"The opportunities have been prolific and so different. I am currently working with a woman in Sydney to illustrate her children's book and I often work with my youngest son, Tim, who is the resident choreographer for the Milwaukee Ballet Company to design the costumes for his newest ballet.

"Locally I am in the planning stages of a new mosaic installation for private clients and the Kempsey International Women's Day committee for a mosaic wall at Riverside Park, whilst still enjoying teaching ballet to children at Port

Macquarie Performing Arts and mosaic classes to adults."

Wayne Lewis has been working with steel for over 40 years. "I was interested in forging steel from the age of 11. I would ride my pushy from Wauchope to Beechwood to watch the local smithy at the forge, whose name was Lyle Shoemsmith!"

Wayne was a founding member of the Artist Blacksmith Association in the '90s in Laurieton and in 2000, he launched his own business, Iron Fist Forge (www.facebook.com/ironfistforge).

"In my work I do varied things ... repairing farm implements, making hand tools, fabricating practical pieces like balustrades, security grilles, fireplace sets, gates, and creating sculptures and contemporary artworks."

"I always admire other artists that use steel to express their creativity and when Franchesca asked me to collaborate with her on this project, I jumped at the chance."

DIARY DATES:

Lady Lola takes up residence at the Glasshouse Arts and Visitor Centre in March and will be Queen of the Hello Koalas Festival, over the June Long Weekend, 7 - 11 June 2018.

More Info: www.hellokoalas.com
www.facebook.com/hellokoalas1

E: info@hellokoalas.com **Ph:** 0416 641 482