

Mining town casts its memories in bronze

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By SHEILA BROWNE

A SYDNEY foundry is to set in bronze today a dramatic sculpture of a miner, made for the people of Moura, Queensland, to commemorate their two tragic mining disasters - in 1975, when 13 men died, and July last year, when 11 men were killed.

The work, sculpted by Sydney artist Diana Webber in clay, is "a very powerful reminder of two disasters that nearly destroyed the soul of a town", says sculptor Victor Cusack, who will set the work in bronze at his fine art foundry at Terrey Hills in Sydney's north.

The statue, worth \$45,000, is being financed by donations and the sale of identical miniature sculptures at \$1000 each.

The town's miners each donated \$250 towards the work, to be placed in the main street of the town.

"We asked the miners if they wanted a sculpture showing perhaps a family in grief," Cusack said.

"They said: 'No way. We don't want to see our wives and children in tears in the main street. It's got to be a simple sculpture of a working man, and that's it'."

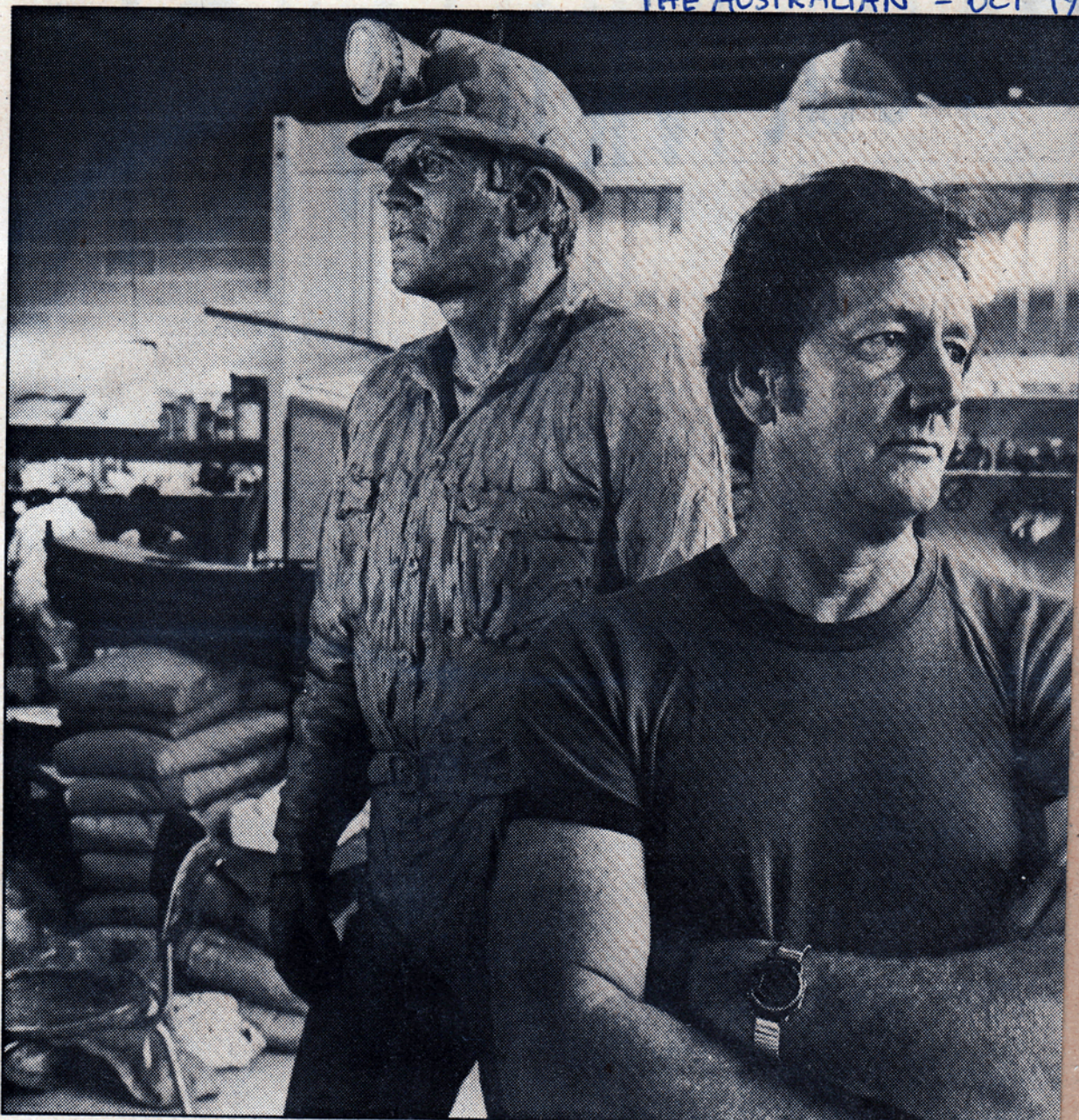
Cusack says support for sculpture in Australia has traditionally been very poor, but now people are becoming increasingly aware that it "portrays ideas and feelings in a realistic three-dimensional way that no other art form can".

"It's not just something flat," he said.

"I like what I make to be touched, looked at from different angles, even for kids to play on it."

Cusack says the Bicentenary - with its spin-off industry of plaques, monuments and busts - is giving Australian sculpture a much-needed boost.

It has prompted many councils throughout the country to examine their histories and commission



Sculptor Victor Cusack and Diana Webber's clay figure of a miner . . . 'powerful reminder of disaster

bronze monuments to celebrate them.

"Support for sculpture in Australia has been abysmal.

"In America or Europe nine out of 10 middle-class homes have at least one piece of sculpture.

"In Australia it's one out of 10 if you're lucky.

"Maybe it's our Anglo-Saxon heritage. Most of what we do see here is in the homes of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds."

Cusack's foundry is one of a handful in Australia devoted solely to art sculpture.

He is involved in creating at

least eight bronze works for the Bicentenary.

They include a plaque of Governor Arthur Phillip, to be placed on a block of granite to form a \$15,000 monument in the northern Sydney suburb of St Ives - an area Governor Phillip explored extensively in April 1788.

Other works celebrations include depicting a governor Phillip's being built for Shire Council in a monument architect Fran to be placed in Sydney.