

Victorian Women's Public Art Commission: Wonthaggi Miners' Women's Auxiliary

Call for Participants: Community Workshops led by artist Kay Abude

Bass Coast Shire Council is pleased to invite community members to participate in creative workshops as part of our Victorian Women's Public Art Commission, celebrating the trailblazing Wonthaggi Miners Women's Auxiliary.

Led by contemporary Australian artist Kay Abude, up to ten women are invited to take part in the creative development process of a permanent public artwork to be situated at The Union Theatre, Wonthaggi.

Workshops will take place over six sessions in January on site at The Union Theatre. Participants will be paid for their time, while learning new skills in art and design including collage, screen printing and sewing, and sharing and learning the stories of the Wonthaggi Miners Women's Auxiliary.

Kay Abude is known for her collaborative community-led art practice. The Wonthaggi & District Historical Society have supported the workshops by assisting Kay's research and providing photographs and histories of the Women's Auxiliary.



Members of the Wonthaggi Miners Women's Auxiliary, 1967. Photo: Wonthaggi & District Historical Society.



Kay Abude, *BE CREATIVE REMAIN PRECARIOUS*, 2023-24, workshop, The Showroom, London, UK.

Women in Wonthaggi and the broader region who have a personal connection to the Women's Auxiliary or The Union Theatre, are particularly encouraged to participate. The community workshops reflect the ethos of the Women's Auxiliary: shared knowledge, collective labour, and creative collaboration. Workshop participants will be paid an hourly wage for their time and contributions.

How to participate:

Women and girls over the age of 16 who can commit to all or most of the workshop sessions are encouraged to register their interest.

Public Forum: Thursday 8 January, 6pm – 8pm

The Union Theatre, Wonthaggi

Free, All Welcome

Workshop Dates:

- Saturday 10 Jan, 12.30-4.30pm
- Saturday 17 Jan, 12.30-4.30pm
- Sunday 18 Jan, 12.30-4.30pm
- Monday 19 Jan, 12.30-4.30pm
- Thursday 22 Jan, 12.30-4.30pm

Contact:

- To register your interest in the workshops, or for further information, please contact us on the details below by Monday 5 January 2026.

Rosemary Forde, Visual Art & Cultural Development Officer, Bass Coast Shire Council

visualart@basscoast.vic.gov.au

(03) 5671 2211

Can't participate in the workshops but still want to be involved?

- You're welcome to attend the free Public Forum on Thursday 8 January, 6-8pm at The Union Theatre, Wonthaggi.
- If you have photographs or mementoes of the Wonthaggi Miners' Women's Auxiliary, or information you'd like to share, feel free to reach out to the contact details above.

Background:

Bass Coast Shire Council is proud to announce the appointment of celebrated contemporary artist Kay Abude as the lead artist for a major new Public Art Commission for Wonthaggi, with the support of the Victorian Government through the Community Support Fund. The Commission honours the remarkable contributions of the Wonthaggi Miners' Women's Auxiliary—trailblazing women whose activism, leadership and community strength shaped Wonthaggi's identity and played a nationally significant role in advocacy for workers' rights, gender equality and social reform.

Following a competitive selection process, Abude was chosen for her deeply considered, community-led approach and her strong commitment to honouring local history. Working with Tilt Industrial Design, her proposal includes community workshops, a public forum, and collaborative design, culminating in a permanent public artwork for The Union Theatre Wonthaggi.

The concept draws inspiration from the “hem”—a metaphor for women's quiet strength, collective action, and the foundational support they provided during the 1934 miners' strike. Abude's design process will use archival photographs, historic texts, oral histories and community-generated concepts, creating artwork that is collectively made with the community, not simply for it. Her approach mirrors the legacy of the Women's Auxiliary—grounded in unity, resilience and shared purpose.



"The Wonthaggi Miners' Women's Auxiliary was the first women's organisation of its kind in any mining union worldwide—their legacy is profound. This commission will honour the collective actions of the Women's Auxiliary as a public portrait of their resilience and vision, situated at The Union Theatre, Wonthaggi, where they organised, met and reshaped conversations about women's rights and community wellbeing.

This commission holds special significance for me because it allows me to honour and amplify the histories of working women, while working alongside the Wonthaggi community to develop and create the public portrait."

—Kay Abude

