

Robert Smith art collection launched

A COLLECTION with around 600 works of art, and thousands of books, photos and periodicals, was launched in Wonthaggi last week.

The Robert Smith Art Collection was launched at the old Wonthaggi Post Office, with a brilliant documentary 'Speaking of Art the Bob Smith Collection' with interviews with the collector himself and local artist Wendy Crellin.

The art collection, including works from Australian and international artists, is estimated to be worth \$1.25 million and was generously donated to the Bass Coast Shire Council last year.

The collection has been catalogued and includes a high-definition scanning of each print and photograph to preserve the history.

The works span from the 16th century up to the millennium and includes many works on paper, paintings, sculptures and ceramics.

There is also a range of general reference books on art and artists to specialised art and music books and encyclopaedias.

Cr Julian Brown officially thanked Robert Smith for the donation at the launch on Friday afternoon.

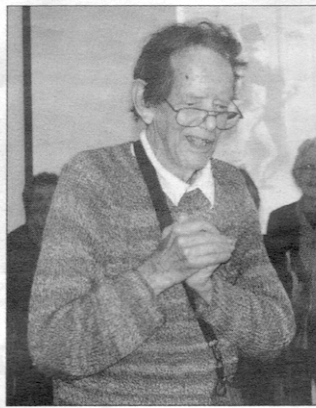
A selection of the works were shown on the projection screens to give everyone an idea of the "depth and breadth" of the art collection, Cr Brown said.

Cr Brown said it's a unique collection and the council appreciates his experience and authority as a cultural historian.

"It is an extraordinarily generous loan that council highly respects and plans to share with the community under your guidance."

Mr Smith was the assistant art director at the Western Australian Art Museum and was responsible for establishing the first arts course at Flinders University.

He began collecting art in 1948 when he bought two Counihan silkscreen prints for five shillings each.



Robert Smith spoke of his art collection at the launch on Friday afternoon at the old Wonthaggi Post Office. mm315017

Since May, he's called Wonthaggi home.

Mr Smith said he had an idea early this year to have something which preserves and carries forward into the future.

He took a copy of Australian social realist painter Noel Counihan's catalogue of prints and got them put together with a gold covering.

Mr Smith suggested it be brought out once a year to remind the community of the artists that had been in Wonthaggi and down the mines.

While officially launched on Friday, the art collection is yet to find a home.

So, when can we actually see it?

IT WAS fantastic to see so many people turn out for the launch of the Robert Smith Art Collection.

But there were no artworks or books. The collection is still being hidden away because the Bass Coast Shire Council doesn't have any room for it.

Visitors got a sneak peek through a documentary. There was also a presentation of the artworks projected onto two screens as Robert Smith spoke of his collection.

The works will be displayed in the foyer at the Wonthaggi Union Community Arts Centre on a rotating basis.

But the council's going to have to wait until the refurbishment works at the centre are

completed before the artworks can be displayed.

There are around 600 artworks and thousands of books and magazines. That's a lot of rotating.

According to a press release on the launch, "council is currently investigating how the art works and documentary will be made available for public viewing in the future."

The council could house them in a regional gallery, if it had one.

Although it doesn't look like it's going to get one soon – as 'regional gallery' failed to make it onto the council's wish list in its 'Advocacy Strategy' for the 2018 State Government budget and State Election thereafter.