

# Rock art

The experience of one Western Australian painter suggests the mining industry is increasingly whetting its appetite for art. By **Charlotte Dudley**

The paintings of Fremantle landscape artist Angela Rossen adorn the walls of corporate mining headquarters and managing directors' offices. With images ranging from intense Pilbara sunsets and Indian Ocean marine life to towering industrial structures and hard-at-work miners, Rossen's paintings capture the spirit of Australia's mining sector and the remote regions to which it plays host.

Lending her artistic talent to industry through a series of commissions for resource clients, Rossen said she was excited to be so involved in the "big adventure" that was the nation's mining sector.

A graduate of Perth's Curtin University visual art school, Rossen works out of a studio near Fremantle but travels widely to other parts of the state.

On top of her non-commissioned work and regular exhibitions, the artist has completed mining-themed works for the likes of diamond plays, petroleum companies and gold miners. She was recently the artist in residence at Rio Tinto's HiSmelt operation south of Perth.

In the early 1980s Rossen was invited by

friends to undertake an art project at a North West gold mining operation. It was this experience that planted the seed for a strong appreciation of the region's landscape and led to further travels and resource company commissions.

Likening today's resource explorers to the old-world explorers of days gone by, Rossen said she was keen to be involved in the narrative of the mining industry and was honoured by the rare access her mining art had allowed her.

"Whether you're making paintings, writing poems or making movies, it's the record of our collaborative efforts and of all the exciting things that we do," she told *Australia's Mining Monthly*. "And here in WA, what's happening in the resource sector is exciting. People are out there developing better and cleverer management of resources, exploring and finding mineral wealth. In a way it's exciting like the adventures of Vasco da Gama."

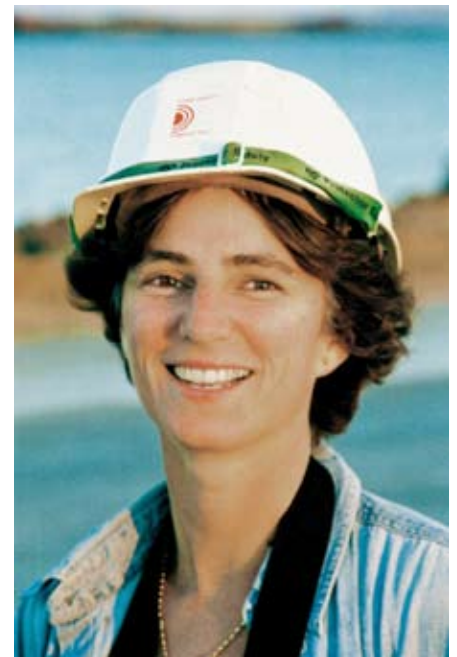
In many ways Rossen said she had the advantage over the likes of mining consultants as her work brought her into contact with everyone onsite, from the managing director and geologists, to the junior offsidiers and cleaners.

"It involves so many different people, that's the amazing thing. It's not just top management in their offices in Perth, it's everybody on the site," she said. "It gives me a very privileged position where I'm exposed to everybody onsite and I hear their version of it, and what I discover is that people are very engaged with what they're doing and they're very proud of it."

When it comes to her corporate commissioned works, Rossen follows up initial discussions with mine management with a comprehensive site tour where she aims to get as many different views of the site as is possible.

She stressed the importance of exploring all aspects of the operation, observing the site at different times of the day and night, and talking with as many site workers as possible. Rossen then returns to the client with sketches, photos, proposals and further ideas.

While there is a definite rush to be had in climbing industrial structures and riding in jumbos, Rossen said the most important part of the commissioning process was consultation and collaboration with the



Fremantle artist Angela Rossen has been depicting WA's resource sector since the 1980s.

client, a consideration made clear after one early corporate artistic misadventure.

"[The commissioning company] are very much a part of the process. I don't arrive and present a painting fait accompli. I made that mistake once earlier on. I painted a most extraordinary conveyor belt structure and I was really happy with the painting and when I showed it to them, they said 'oh that's being decommissioned'."

Rossen also takes the opportunity of being onsite to offer informal drawing classes to mine staff, something she said provided a rare creative outlet in what was generally a rough, ready and production-driven environment.

"The response is extraordinary," she said. "I think that people need to have creative moments to animate their lives. Creativity is not just something artists do, we all do it. Every time you cook a meal you're being creative, every time you read a story to your kids you're being creative."

"Now when you're onsite sometimes you lose connection with that aspect of yourself because you don't give yourself the credit for all those creative things that you do in the course of your daily work. And drawing is

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often so outside of what people are ordinarily doing that they'll go 'I can't draw a straight line but I'll come along anyway, I don't care.'

In addition to giving miners something different to do onsite outside of their working roles, Rossen said the classes were designed to encourage participants to think visually and look at their environment with new eyes.

"They don't all have to become artists, it's about enriching your life," she said. "It's like going to the opera and feeling inspired."

Artistic inspiration may seem hard to find in an industrial setting such as a minesite but Rossen, who nominated beauty as her key inspiration, believed the secret of discovering beauty was in looking with an unbiased eye.

"I went down to HiSmelt the other morning just before dawn and I watched the sun come up on the other side of the shed that holds the reduction vessel," she said. "Now alongside, three huge towers soared into the sky and the safety night lights were still on and the sky was blazing golden colour behind. It was like the reduction vessel had set fire to the sky and it was just fabulous."

Not only is Rossen's work a great compliment to, and acknowledgement of, the mining industry, it is also another way of further engaging the community with the resource sector. She said that as well as inspiring others, her work aimed to document the human



Angela Rossen says resource company art commissions, such as this one for Rio Tinto's Dampier salt mining operations, are a way of engaging the community with the mining sector.

experience, of which mining is a part.

"I think that art is a record of human stories and all of the things that we do together," Rossen said. "We build houses, we have

children, we explore the oceans and find new continents. We do all sorts of amazing things because we're incredible creatures and art records that, it always has." **AMM**

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