

# Down to business: sign right here, Sydney

Artists create brand new pieces to vie for a \$150,000 prize, writes **Clare Morgan**.

PURISTS may blanch at the idea of an artwork featuring the names or logos of more than 450 companies, but with \$150,000 up for grabs for the winner, who's worried about artistic niceties?

Touted as Australia's richest art prize, the Signature of Sydney project aims to capture the essence of Sydney, and that includes its shiny commercial hide.

The brainchild of the art collectors Benjamin Jung and Karsten Knorr, the prize is funded largely by businesses that have each parted with \$2000, and for that their name or logo will appear somewhere in the winning artwork.

The big corporate guns are there, including AGL, Philips, St George Bank and Telstra. There are also plenty of smaller organisations, ranging from Bar Italia to Glebe Dental Group to the Master Plumbers Association of NSW.

The resulting artworks are as intriguing as they are varied: a jumble of thongs and sandals stamped with logos; a gaggle of swimming costumes with branding on their backsides; a big lipstick kiss blowing out logos; an Aboriginal-looking work made up of company names.

Last weekend, the judges, including Judith Blackall from the Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacqueline Clayton from the College of Fine Arts' School of Design Studies, Claire Armstrong,



So Sydney ... founder Benjamin Jung and Arthur Chan look through the entries. Photo: Steven Siewert

the editor-at-large of *Art & Australia* magazine, and gallery director Connie Dietzschold, selected 50 works from the more than 120 "concepts" received.

The public can vote on the 50 when they go on display from October 7 at Domayne. And no, it's not the famous Sydney park but the Harvey Norman-owned furniture emporium in Alexandria.

Once the votes are tallied, 20 finalists will be asked to produce a full artwork and the winner will be chosen by a jury that includes Art Gallery of NSW curator Tony Bond and the NSW Tourism Minister, Sandra Nori.

Jung, who arrived from

Germany four years ago and liked Sydney so much he made it his home, says he wanted to capture the true essence of Sydney in a way that combined the city's art, lifestyle, architecture and commerce.

And there was also the small matter of getting businesses involved in art.

"I think everyone should promote the arts. It doesn't matter what you do," he says. "Art can be difficult for people, the language isn't always easy."

He notes that some businesses have embraced the idea as a way to show themselves as supporting the arts, but says he has tried to

ensure the project isn't used simply as a business tool.

"People love to come on board, because \$2000 is nothing from a marketing perspective. But we tried to find out if they were passionate about the arts and about Sydney. We didn't want it just to be a branding exercise."

As for all those logos, Jung points out the idea is not new. In the 19th century, an image of a futuristic Sydney was created featuring the names of many of the city's then businesses. Prints of that image still hang in offices around the city, including at the University Club in Phillip Street.

As for the 2006 crop, Jung says:



Ahead ... detail of a 19th-century work picturing a future Sydney.

"I think it's diverse enough. What's missing a little bit is completely abstract pieces, but I think the art scene in Australia isn't as abstract as it could be."

"There are 20 to 25 pieces that I think are really high-calibre. But it's all very subjective. Art is a bit like wine: a cheap bottle of wine can taste as good to some people as a really expensive one. This isn't a beauty contest or a pop event. Everyone brings their own sensibilities to it when they vote."

The winner of the \$150,000 will be announced in December. The runner-up will receive \$20,000 and third prize is worth \$10,000.

The final 20 works will be auctioned, with the artists receiving half the proceeds and the rest going to the Make-A-Wish foundation. All the businesses that took part will receive a print of the winning work.

See the 50 semifinalists at [www.signatureofsydney.com.au](http://www.signatureofsydney.com.au).