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‘Flying’ Kangaroos at Canberra Airport

Passengers arriving in Australia’s national capital might be a little surprised at being greeted by a mob of kangaroos beside the runway from today, thanks to the installation of a new artwork by sculptor Jeff Thomson.

“Roos” is the latest sculpture to be commissioned as part of Canberra Airport’s commitment to public art and the 14th major sculpture in the airport precinct.

"It's all part of our program to make Canberra Airport more than just a transport hub," said Canberra Airport owner and Executive Chairman Terry Snow.

"It's quite a striking work. We hope that it will be a conversation piece for our forthcoming international visitors," Mr Snow said.

Canberra Airport commissioned the work from Thomson after seeing a picture of a previous kangaroo sculpture by the New Zealand artist. It consists of two males and a female with a little joey tucked away, located adjacent to the main runway at the north of the airfield.

Uncannily lifelike from a distance, at three metres high the sculptures are much larger than real eastern grey kangaroos. But the simple forms belie the thousands of hours work Thomson spent in preparation and creating them.

“Over the years I have done lots of animals – horses, giraffes, elephants. But even though I’d made a kangaroo before, it was a challenge doing them on this scale,” he said, in Canberra this week to oversee the installation of his latest work.

Thomson started with watercolour paintings using reds and oranges, but then discovered red kangaroos were the wrong species for the Canberra region and had to literally go back to the drawing board and start over with greys.

“I spent a lot of time studying the animals; I had to look at them, meet them, take photographs of them, draw them from different angles,” Thomson said.

Crafted from recycled corrugated iron, up to 15 tones of grey have been used to add texture and get the look just right. The pieces of iron were moulded around a base armature and riveted into place. The lack of welding means the sculpture will not rust.

Thomson's work is well-known to locals in the national capital: he created the corrugated iron dairy cows that graze prominently on the lawns of the New Zealand High Commission in Canberra. He has been working predominantly in corrugated iron for almost 30 years and has been artist in residence at several major Australian festivals.

Thomson expects passengers to be amused when they see the giant kangaroos.

"There is nothing controversial about what they are. I hope people will find them amusing, talk about them, and come and look for them.

"I would say people will love them."

Images of the sculpture follow. Photos: Ginette Snow, Canberra Airport.

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