

Kelly's cattle prod

NEWS

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NICE work if you can get it, and Melbourne-bred John Kelly has the first invitation for an Australian artist to show at the Musee d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain (MAMAC) in Nice, France.

But there is a hitch. How to get his five-tonne, 8m *Cow up a Tree* sculpture from the Hague to the prestige gallery by the Mediterranean for the six-month show?

It would cost \$20,000 for a special truck and a crane to get *Cow up a Tree* — an international coup for Kelly when it was displayed in Melbourne's Docklands, the Hague and Glastonbury simultaneously this year — to Nice for installation.

The museum approached the Australia Council for sponsorship because the work "will raise awareness of Australian art generally". But the council's visual arts board knocked it back.

"They gave no reason," says Kelly, who has enjoyed global recognition in his 20-year career.

"I understand the Australia Council can't support every artistic opportunity, but it's not supposed to embarrass or damage the reputation of Australian artists abroad.

"However, the end result of this process is it has embarrassed itself and MAMAC, and possibly damaged my reputation. How do I explain to the MAMAC why the body set up to support Australian artists internationally won't help?"



Reputation: artist John Kelly.

Kelly says it is now up to the museum to proceed with the exhibition or not.

"I may be able to raise the money another way. However, the invitation was conditional on finding support for the transportation," he says from Britain. "In the past the British have been far more supportive of these sculptures than the Australia Council . . .

"One might ask, should the British be asked to promote Australian culture again? Especially a sculpture that deals specifically with Australian history."

Kelly's cow sculptures refer to fellow Australian artist William Dobell, who during World War II was commissioned to sculpt papier mache cows as decoys to confuse Japanese bombers.

Council executive director (arts development) Ben Strout says it is not reconsidering. "If the museum wants to appeal . . . it can. But we have heard nothing back," he says.



An udder place: John Kelly's *Cow up a Tree* sculpture at Docklands.

Strout says the Australia council spent \$7 million on international activity, "but it doesn't mean we can support every artist at every museum".

Cow up a Tree came to MAMAC's attention when it was

one of 50 works invited to Paris from around the world for the millennium celebrations.

"The director realised the work was again available and quickly invited it to be exhibited at MAMAC," Kelly says.