

ANDRE STEYL — TRIBUTE

Statement by Minister for Culture and the Arts

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Culture and the Arts) [1.09 pm]: I wish to inform the house that the Denmark community and arts sector recently lost a remarkable man in Andre Steyl. Despite being mostly paralysed from his shoulders to fingertips, having survived childhood polio, Andre Steyl's life was always going to be different, and he became an artist. He made his home in the great southern region in 1978, having left South Africa because of the political environment at the time. He reported that prior to arriving, he looked up Denmark in an encyclopedia and it said it was cold and bleak but had the tallest trees and widest range of wildflowers in Australia, possibly the world, and he thought, "Okay, I'll go there."

He was among the first wave of "bloody hippies" to move to the district. At the time, Denmark was centred on the timber industry, which was at odds with the "greenie" lifestyle that he had been hoping to lead, so he and his family mostly kept to themselves out in the bush and came into town only once a fortnight to get supplies. As Andre said, the locals thought he was weird, but he embraced it and became "peculiar" even. His family soon moved into town, and he used his passion for the arts to become a part of the community.

Andre helped form the Denmark Arts Council, a peak body to support the burgeoning arts and crafts groups in the community. One of his first initiatives in the early 1980s was the International Clown Convention, which urged people to embrace their inner clown and transformed Denmark into a "clown town". As Andre put it, it gave people the liberty to be a clown, to try something new and to laugh at themselves. He was also an integral part of the establishment of the Denmark Arts Markets. Modelled on Fremantle Markets, it brought the local community and small businesses together and cemented Denmark as an inspired community for the creative arts.

According to my notes, Andre said, "I couldn't find a box to fit into, so I created my own; it became the Denmark Arts Council, which still exists. Forty years later, my box has become my town." Denmark Arts has since thrived, creating the annual Brave New Works and Festival of Voice—two impressive regional arts events that are a testament to the community that Andre helped to build.

Andre encouraged a generation of regional artists and arts workers to believe in themselves and the power of the arts. He was a big personality and was persistent in using the arts to radically change Denmark for the better. He was a painter, a film lover and a visionary. He was a "bloody hippie" and a "bloody treasure", and he will be sorely missed.