

With 7 January 2013 marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Commonwealth of Australia, the Embassy of Bosnia and Herzegovina set out to commemorate this occasion in recognition of the exceptionally strong and friendly ties between the two countries. The Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina, H.E. Dr. Damir Arnaut, embarked upon this initiative with a view that Australia's generosity to Bosnia and Herzegovina and its people, at a time when we most needed it, merited not only a celebration, but a lasting memento.

The combination of this background, the occasion, and our common values called for a truly multifaceted tribute – one that would amalgamate attributes that are unique to each of our two countries, as well as those that we so proudly share. The question on how to accomplish precisely this was answered shortly after the Ambassador met Mr. Adis Fejzić, a Bosnia and Herzegovina born and Sarajevo Academy of Fine Arts trained artist, who now lives and creates in Brisbane. In addition to his artistic renown, Mr. Fejzić's academic pursuits uniquely positioned him to immortalise visions of Australia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with their shared multicultural values. His proposal, moreover, literally entailed setting them in stone.

Namely, Mr. Fejzić's studies focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina's most recognisable symbol – the *Stećak* ('*steh-chuck*') – a mediaeval sepulchral stone sculpture, innately multifaceted and intriguing, yet a uniquely Bosnia and Herzegovina phenomenon at many levels: sculptural, historical, sociological, and anthropological. As such, *Stećak* combines figurative and symbolic forms and verses within a sole stone sculpture. At the same time, *Stećak* connects the opposites of visual and spiritual significance of the raw, rough stone with the elements that have been transformed by the human hand; it is a fusion where primordial and 'primitive' are intertwined with developed and advanced sculptural practices, blending together in a harmonious way. Architecture, sculpture and amulet are overlapping, merging into one. *Stećaks*, or 'stone sleepers' as the Bosnia and Herzegovina poet Mak Dizdar called them, are witnesses of Bosnia and Herzegovina's long history of multiculturalism and tolerance.

Respecting its multileveled content as a timeless stone sculpture potential, Mr. Fejzić aims to explain and revive this somewhat neglected art by bringing it into focus of the 21<sup>st</sup> century sculpture aesthetics. The revival of the art of *stećak* does not entail replicating or mere interpreting of the original art and its intrinsic features; rather, it involves application of the traditional principles while creating new and different contents. This gift thus represents 'a summary' of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Australia – artistically expressed through depictions carved in the Australian sandstone. The most significant depiction is the one that the artist calls *Abraham's Seal* – comprising of the Star of David, a cross, and a crescent – appearing as one and representing the multicultural and multi-religious Bosnia and Herzegovina. Connection to Australia is further emphasised with the traditional Bosnian spheres constellated in the form of the Southern Cross. *Stećak* is Bosnia and Herzegovina's cultural heritage, a symbol of its history and its multicultural essence. It represents a society where anyone, regardless of religion or ethnicity, could belong, making it a particularly appropriate gift from one such society to another, from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Australia. *Stećak* thus remains Bosnia and Herzegovina's foundational stone, and it is a privilege and an honour to share it with Australia on this occasion, turning it into an additional symbol of celebration of all that unites our two countries and their peoples.

