**Media release**

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For interview: Helen Curtis 0413 560 413

**STOP THE SPACEMAN: Campaigners demand halt to artwork install amid undisclosed costs and lack of transparency**

**“Gift” with strings attached: City faces backlash over $250k-plus Spaceman install**

Arts advocacy group SaveTheKebab is demanding the City of Perth immediately halt the installation of *Boonji Spaceman*, a seven-metre-tall statue by American artist Brendan Murphy, amid serious concerns over hidden costs, governance failure and lack of transparency.

The controversial artwork was gifted to the City under an agreement with Cottesloe’s Gullotti Galleries, which represents the artist. It is due to be installed in the heritage Stirling Gardens adjacent to Council House, with an approved budget of $250,000.

The City says the artwork will be moved from Stirling Gardens when another site is identified, however no cost estimate or budget for this has been made public.

Save The Kebab spokesperson, arts sector leader Helen Curtis, said 24 questions were put to the Council in March probing the *Boonji Spaceman's* acquisition process, costs and cultural relevance. She said the Council's response reveals multiple failures in compliance with its governance framework.

"We are alarmed by the lack of due process that surrounds this significant public spend. The City has already committed a quarter of a million dollars to the first install. It's not acceptable that it is asking ratepayers to pay for it twice, whilst not committing any funds to maintaining the valuable artworks it already owns."

Gullotti Galleries quoted the City of Perth $171,580 to install the artwork in Stirling Gardens. In a breach of the City’s procurement policy, no alternative quotes were obtained, Council Minutes reveal that Gullotti Galleries requested the 'gift' be installed to coincide with a private exhibition of Brendan Murphy's work.

A recent Instagram post by Gullotti Galleries says *'the Boonji has landed'* and thanks Basil Zempilas, the former Mayor and current leader of the Liberal Party.

Zempilas put forward the Motion to accept the gift and install quote without challenge, despite the City's administration not providing the Council with any professional assessment of the *Boonji Spaceman's* relevance or scrutiny of the install quote.

A [YouTube video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqu6YLaXiRI) featuring an interview with Murphy shows that there are hundreds of versions of the artwork in existence. In the video, Murphy states that his purpose is 'to add zeros' to the price of his artworks.

"It is exasperating that public funds are being spent on an American artist to promote his work, while talented [local artists struggle to make ends meet](https://visualarts.net.au/news-opinion/2025/visual-artists-leaving-sector-new-report-confirms-urgent-need-action/). How is this a responsible use of public money?" Curtis asked.

*Boonji Spaceman* is due to be installed in the location where *Ore Obelisk*, designed by architect Paul Ritter in 1971 and known affectionately as “*The Kebab*”, stood for over 50 years. *Ore Obelisk* remains dismantled and in storage. Similarly, the *Arch* by Lorenna Grant — a bold, community-loved landmark in Northbridge — was removed due to rust damage, despite the artist offering a cost-effective plan for its repair.

Save the Kebab campaigner and curator Felicity Johnson echoed Curtis' concerns. “This isn’t only about taste. It's about the responsible investment of public funds in local art and artists that reflect *our* stories, not gimmicky imports. The *Boonji Spaceman*‘gift’ comes with a six-figure invoice, zero transparency, and very little thought."

#SaveTheKebab is calling for:

* An immediate pause on the Boonji Spaceman installation
* Relocating the *Boonji Spaceman* to a more appropriate site — not Perth’s oldest garden
* Full public disclosure of procurement processes, quotations, and project costs
* Restoration of Paul Ritter’s *Ore Obelisk* in Stirling Gardens
* Commissioning Lorenna Grant to remake the *Arch* in Northbridge

- Ends -

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