

Five Photographers Arrive in the Wollombi Valley for the Sculpture Festival

Long Exposure brings together five NSW photographers with nothing in common except an open brief, a historic valley, and the state's most celebrated regional sculpture festival as their backdrop.

WOLLOMBI VALLEY, NSW — As the Wollombi Valley Sculpture Festival opens its gates on 12 September 2026, five NSW photographers will disperse across the valley — not as official documentarians, but as artists given time, space and an entirely open brief to respond to what they find.

Long Exposure, a Photographer in Residence program initiated by Visit Wollombi in partnership with the Wollombi Valley Sculpture Festival, has selected five visiting photographers to join the program across the festival's three weekends and two midweek periods in September 2026. Each will stay in the valley, each has seen the others' work, and none of them have spoken.

They arrive from different parts of NSW — different geographies, different practices, different reasons for being here. The only thing they share is the brief: use the festival, the historic village of Wollombi, the valley and where they're staying as raw material. What they do with it is entirely their own.

The Festival as Catalyst

The Wollombi Valley Sculpture Festival — themed 'Contemporary Sculpture in an Historic Setting' — is one of regional NSW's most celebrated cultural events. Under the patronage of Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of NSW, the 2026 festival presents over 180 works by leading Australian and international sculptors across a curated trail weaving through the historic villages of Wollombi and Laguna. Six indoor galleries in heritage buildings, a prize pool of over \$80,000, and a program of midweek events — artist talks, guided tours, workshops, community gatherings — designed to invite visitors to linger longer in the valley.

For the Long Exposure photographers, the festival midweek is the most interesting time. The sculptures are still in place. The queues are gone. The artists who made the work are often still on site — installing, adjusting, talking — rather than performing for a crowd.

"The Wollombi Valley Sculpture Festival celebrates the connection between creativity, landscape and community," says Festival Executive Director Sheena Duncan. "We are proud to provide a platform for artists while welcoming visitors to discover the unique beauty and character of the Wollombi Valley."

The Five Photographers

The five visiting photographers come from across NSW, each with a distinct body of work and a different relationship to photography as a practice. Long Exposure made a deliberate choice to select people whose approaches have almost nothing in

common — the intention being that the valley and festival produce five genuinely different responses rather than a single shared record.

They are Matt Weddis (@mattweddis · mattweddis.com), Blake Chaney (@blakechaneyphoto · blakechaneyphotography.com), Christine Sweeney (@christinesweeneyart · christinesweeneyart.com.au), Brydie Piaf (@brydiepiaf · brydiepiaf.com) and Zee Merven (@zeemerven). Their existing work is publicly available and tells its own story. The work they make here will be different.

None have been given a roadmap. Some arrive open to whatever the days bring. The program is not directing the outcome — it is creating the conditions.

“I photograph this valley because it is unique. Long Exposure is my way of finding out what five other serious photographers see when they look at the same place.”

— Euan Wilcox, Long Exposure / Visit Wollombi / @wollombivalley

A Valley That Opened Its Doors

Long Exposure is hosted across three valley properties, each of which joined the program for the same reason — belief in what the arts bring to this community.

Little Valley Summerhouse (littlevalleyfarm.com.au) — an architecturally designed, off-grid small farm retreat in the Wollombi Valley, initiated by program founder Euan Wilcox — hosts the program’s primary residency. Somewhere Unique (somewhereunique.com.au) — eco-certified luxury couples retreats in the Wollombi bush — and Hollybrook (hollybrookhuntermvalley.com) — a renovated heritage farmhouse and bush cabin property on 100 acres at Sweetmans Creek, 5km from Wollombi — joined without being asked. They read the brief and offered to host visiting photographers across the festival weekends.

It is the kind of thing that happens in communities where the arts are taken seriously.

The Valley Itself

Wollombi Valley sits less than two hours from Sydney and 90 minutes from Newcastle. Its name comes from the Awabakal language, meaning ‘Meeting Place of the Waters.’ A community of around a thousand people, ringed by state forest and national park, with an extraordinary concentration of working artists, galleries and creative businesses — and a biennial sculpture festival that draws thousands of arts-focused visitors each September. Known to almost none of the six million people within easy reach.

That’s partly what Long Exposure is about. Not just the photographers who come, but the people who might follow them.

What Happens Next

The photographers will be in the valley across the festival period, 12–27 September 2026. Where possible, glimpses of the work as it unfolds may be shared through @visitwollombi — though some shoot film, and the work will arrive in its own time.

The finished bodies of work will be available in October 2026. Five photographers, five different responses to the same place — the work deserves to be seen properly, and we’re exploring the right home for it.

If you’re visiting the Wollombi Valley Sculpture Festival this September — bring your camera. This place rewards people who take their time.”

ABOUT LONG EXPOSURE

Long Exposure is a Photographer in Residence program initiated by Euan Wilcox for Visit Wollombi in partnership with the Wollombi Valley Sculpture Festival. It invites NSW photographers to spend time in the Wollombi Valley during the festival's September season — with an open brief, genuine access, and no prescribed outcome. The program is hosted across Little Valley Summerhouse, Somewhere Unique and Hollybrook. longexposure.netlify.app · [@visitwollombi](https://www.instagram.com/visitwollombi)

ABOUT VISIT WOLLOMBI

Visit Wollombi is the tourism organisation for the Wollombi Valley in the Hunter Region of NSW, representing a community of around a thousand residents with an extraordinary concentration of working artists, galleries, creative businesses and accommodation. Less than two hours from Sydney and 90 minutes from Newcastle. [visitwollombi.com.au](https://www.visitwollombi.com.au) · [@visitwollombi](https://www.instagram.com/visitwollombi)

ABOUT LITTLE VALLEY SUMMERHOUSE

Little Valley Summerhouse is an architect-designed, off-grid two-bedroom retreat set on a small working alpaca farm in the Wollombi Valley. Designed by architect Matt Elkan and crafted over two years by owner-builder Euan Wilcox, its only decoration is the work of artists who live in the valley. Adults only. [littlevalleyfarm.com.au](https://www.littlevalleyfarm.com.au) · [@littlevalleyfarm](https://www.instagram.com/littlevalleyfarm)

ABOUT SOMEWHERE UNIQUE

Somewhere Unique offers award-winning, eco-certified luxury couples retreats set in the Wollombi bush, minutes from the historic village. EcoCertified by Ecotourism Australia, TripAdvisor Hall of Fame. [somewhereunique.com.au](https://www.somewhereunique.com.au) · [@somewhere_unique](https://www.instagram.com/somewhere_unique)

ABOUT HOLLYBROOK

Hollybrook is a renovated heritage farmhouse and bush cabin property set on 100 acres at Sweetmans Creek, 5km from Wollombi. Multiple accommodation options from classic farmhouse to off-grid tiny cabins, catering for couples and groups. [hollybrookhuntervalley.com](https://www.hollybrookhuntervalley.com)

ABOUT THE WOLLOMBI VALLEY SCULPTURE FESTIVAL

The Wollombi Valley Sculpture Festival — Contemporary Sculpture in an Historic Setting — is one of regional NSW's most celebrated cultural events, established in 2002 and held biennially each September. Under the patronage of Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of NSW, the festival presents over 180 works by leading Australian and international sculptors across a curated trail through the historic villages of Wollombi and Laguna, with six indoor galleries in heritage buildings. Prize pool over \$80,000. Media contact: Sheena Duncan, Festival Executive Director — director@sculptureinthevineyards.com.au · 0434 132 688 · [sculptureinthevineyards.com.au](https://www.sculptureinthevineyards.com.au) · [@sculptureinthevineyards](https://www.instagram.com/sculptureinthevineyards)

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Program website: longexposure.netlify.app

Images: High resolution images available on request

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