

Hay's great feat of clay

IT has been two and a half years of problem-solving but artist Graham Hay is finally ready to display his latest work, *The Kiss*, at this year's Sculpture by the Sea, Cottesloe.

The two 2m-high towers are made from thousands of ceramic smartphones and were inspired by Hay's research into clay cuneiform tablets of the Middle East.

The clay artefacts date back 3500 to 4000 years and, much like today's iPhone, were a form of communication to record notes, gossip, memos, recipes, legends, literary works, prayers, poems and official documents.

"It's something we forgot but this smartphone technology is the same sort of size, just a bit more complicated than mud out of the ground," Hay said at his West Perth studio.

To suggest a conversation in the sculpture, the artist decided to include diagonally positioned faces onto the growing pillars of clay phones and overcame issues with weight, balance and firing in the kiln.

Solutions included threading

the phones onto 10mm marine-grade, stainless-steel rods and using washers to separate each iPhone.

"We have a lot of failures in ceramics," Hay, who has a Bachelor of Arts from ECU with honours degree from Curtin University, said.

"With painting, you just paint over it, but we make things and then we fire it and everything could just go wrong. It's seat of your pants stuff."

Hay said although many sculptures were literal and understood right away, *The Kiss* needed to be seen from all sides to fully understand.

"I have confidence in the audience's ability to unwrap the puzzle," he said.

"I love sculpture because it's real in the sense that you're not creating an illusion. These are real objects and you're interacting with them as real things.

"People spend so much time interacting with the world on a screen rather than going out."

Sculpture by the Sea, Cottesloe runs from March 6 to 23.

Tanya MacNaughton

Graham Hay with his work *The Kiss*.

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