

Sea of mongrels in festival parade

By AGRON LATIFI

There's a bear in there but it's lost its head.

Literally.

But the finished product is a sea of mongrels which will take centre stage at the Viva La Gong festival parade on November 10.

The *Metamorphic Mongrels* project developed by artist Mai Nguyen-Long has seen members of the Coniston Men's Shed wrap, build, paint and create more than 100 Metamorphic

Mongrels that will highlight the annual cultural festival in Wollongong.

For artist Nguyen-Long the project is about hidden and multiple identities as well as how people judge a book by its cover.

"I want people to get an initial sense of joy from seeing these strange quirky creatures but when they find out about the process and realising that there was a bear in there that actually lost its head on the way and then was constructed into this whole new object ...

it's sort of like things are never quite as what we might think or as they seem and I like that because I think that reflects how life is ... it's full of surprises," she said.

The Tasmania-born artist's father is Vietnamese and her mother is anglo-Irish fourth generation Australian.

Her early years were spent in Papua New Guinea and then in the Philippines for 10 years before stints in Vietnam and China.

This upbringing has shaped Nguyen-Long's outlook on

this project.

"It's about the whole mixed up, crazy chaotic life we all live these days," she said.

"The beauty of chaos and the complexity of difference."

Wollongong City Council cultural development co-ordinator Megan McKell said the project was made possible thanks to funding from Festival Australia.

"Everyone involved has had a great time and I can't wait to see the sea of mongrels at the Viva La Gong parade," she said.



Quirky: Felipe Azabal, Mai Nguyen-Long, Stephen Richards, Agostinho Rodrigues and mongrels. Picture: KEN ROBERTSON