

Canberra artist weaves the flag for his hero

By Ron Cerabona

Canberra artist Benjamin Shine has his own very personal connection to the inauguration of Barack Obama tomorrow.

His portrait of the new president, *Changing States*, made from a retired American flag woven through mesh fabric, will be on display at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York from Inauguration Day.

A selection of products inspired by the artwork, including T-shirts, posters and jigsaw puzzles, were also created and will be sold at the museum.

Shine, 30, said an "amazing chain of events" led to this unique opportunity.

"I was in the US at the end of October and everything was kicking off with the election."

Watching the campaign unfold, he said, "You wanted to know what was going to happen."

On his way back to Australia, he was at an airport when one of the debates between Mr Obama and Republican candidate John McCain took place, and "everyone was glued to the television".

"Obama blew me away. He was a very impressive candidate - how he conducted himself, the effect he's had on the nation."

Inspired, Shine, whose previous portrait subjects include former British prime minister Baroness Margaret Thatcher - done, aptly enough, in iron - and Everest pioneer Sir Edmund Hillary, decided to create a portrait of Mr Obama.

"So many people are doing portraits of him... you want to show people how you would approach the subject. At the time, there was no particular reason to do it other than that."

He bought the flag in New York and started working on the portrait when he returned to Canberra during the run-up to the election.

"I had the radio on and was three-quarters of the way through it when he actually won. It was really nice to be working on it when it happened."

While he was in New York, Shine had visited the Museum of Arts and Design where he saw an exhibition, *Second Lives*, with artworks made of objects such as plastic cutlery.

"I thought, this would fit into what they're doing right now."

He sent pictures to the museum, which had received Obama-related applications from many people.

But it liked his work and two weeks ago he sent it over.

The art is on loan to the museum until mid-February.

Shine is in discussions with the Royal Academy of Art in London to



FLAGGED: Benjamin Shine with his portrait of Barack Obama, made from a disused American flag, that will go on display at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York.

exhibit the work in London in June and said he was "open to offers" for other exhibition opportunities.

He intends to keep it, Shine, who studied fashion design in Surrey and

London, moved to Canberra from England two years ago with his girlfriend, Canberran Danielle Stone.

Among his other projects are Cordz, which won Top Creative Toy

last year in Britain and has made \$5 million worth of sales to retailers in the US.

He is also working on other portraits, but he can't reveal too

much about them, except to say, "One is a royal figure."