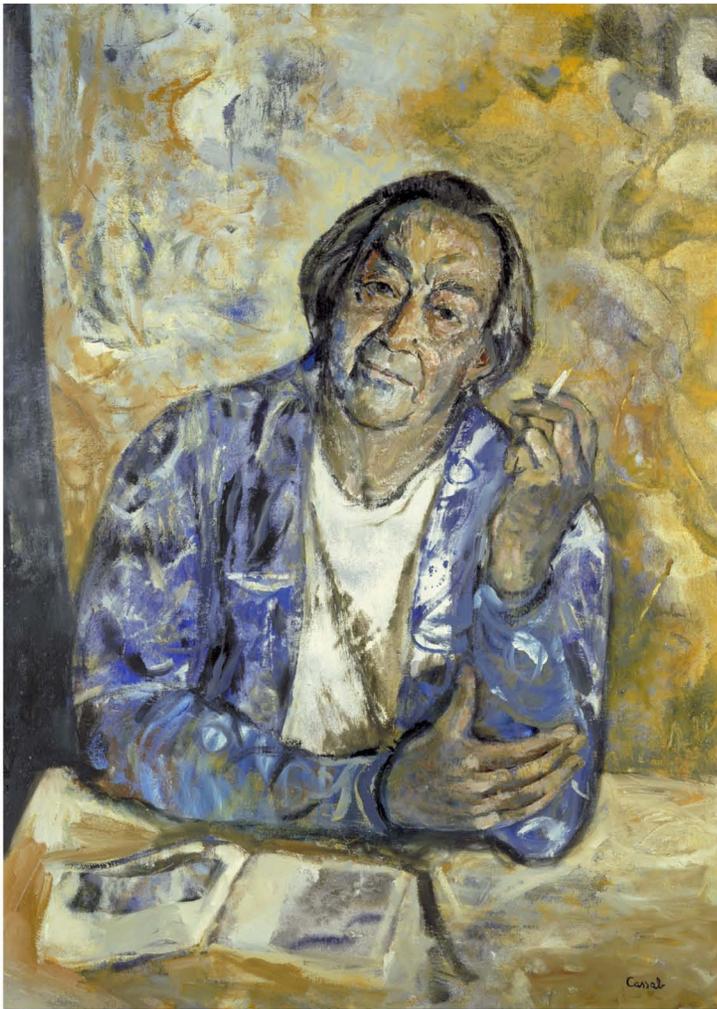


# Artists'

## PORTRAITS



Selected and introduced by  
**GEOFFREY DUTTON**

**Artists' Portraits**, selected and  
introduced by Geoffrey Dutton

THIS BOOK presents a selection from interviews with Australian artists, mostly from the Hazel de Berg Oral History collection in the National Library of Australia. The artists, none of them still living, range from Kathleen O'Connor born in 1876 to George Baldessin who was killed in an accident at the age of thirty-nine in 1978.

The artists speak for themselves as no one else could, with modesty but authority, humour without bitterness, and about their attitudes to art, technique and the artistic climate of the times. Many of them express a passionate admiration for certain teachers, such as Julian Ashton, George Bell and Dattilo Rubbo. Those who are Australian-born mostly long to go overseas, and it is usually Paris that means the most to them. Others, who were born elsewhere, are revealing about the contrasts for an artist between their home country and Australia.

The attitudes to Australia itself are extraordinarily varied, from Russell Drysdale who does not find the outback lonely, Clifton Pugh who keeps a wild patch of nature only a short drive from Melbourne, Ian Fairweather who paints in his primitive hut on Bribie Island, to Francis Lyburner who prefers people and animals as subjects. There are also interviews with several important but neglected artists, such as Vida Lahey and Constance Stokes.

Notes by the interviewers about the artists often precede the interviews and are highly evocative sketches in themselves.



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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Artists' portraits.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0 642 10579 0.

1. Artists — Australia — Interviews. 2. Art, Modern — 20th century — Australia. 3. Sculpture, Modern — 20th century — Australia. I. Dutton, Geoffrey, 1922– . II. National Library of Australia.

709.94

Publications Manager: Margaret Chalker

Editor: Carol Miller

Designer: Michael Pugh

Printed by Brown Prior Anderson, Melbourne

## Foreword

In this book, Geoffrey Dutton has drawn on the Oral History collection of the National Library of Australia to present his selection from interviews with Australian artists. Dutton's volume, which represents twenty-six artists, is intended to complement *Self Portraits*, published by the Library in 1991, in which the novelist David Foster edited a selection of interviews with fifteen writers.

David Foster based his selection on the archive of Hazel de Berg recordings which provides the rich foundation of the present day Oral History collection. That collection has been developed by the National Library as part of its ongoing commitment to document Australian life and achievement as a major service for and on behalf of the wider community of Australians. Geoffrey Dutton too, has tapped the resources of the de Berg collection in addition to other recordings held by the Library including his own extended interview with Sir Russell Drysdale originally prepared in 1963 as source material for Dutton's biography of that artist. Like Foster, he presents a sensitive reading of each of his subjects who otherwise live for later generations through their finished work in galleries and other public places. Dutton's informative and urbane introduction leads us into the body of the work where the artists speak for themselves with varying degrees of modesty, authority, humour and sometimes reticence.

*Artists' Portraits* is published by the National Library of Australia with the assistance of its Morris West Trust Fund to bring to a wider audience materials from the Library's rich archival collections of Australiana.

Warren Horton  
*Director-General*

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## Introduction

Here are twenty-six Australian artists, none of them living except in their work, talking about themselves and what they have drawn, painted, or sculpted.

What matters most, of course, is their work, but how wonderful to have their words as well, to hear or read them talking about their usually precarious careers! And having fought their own battles to define their talents, they often then had to struggle with public indifference, or open hostility, to new art. Most of them were poor as well. No matter, says Donald Friend, 'We had a marvellous bloody time ... plenty of laughter!'

The tapes from which these interviews are taken were mostly recorded by Hazel de Berg, who began these recordings in 1957 on her own initiative; at first her aim was merely to tape poets reading their work and then commenting on it. From this humble beginning she went on to record nearly 1300 interviews with writers, artists, musicians and many other talented people. Fortunately the National Library also had a pioneering interest in oral history and took Hazel de Berg under its wing; they were to work together for twenty-seven years.

Hazel de Berg had a gentle and modest personality and an outstanding ability to establish a trust with those she interviewed, so they would talk to her without becoming self-conscious. It is obvious that most of the artists assembled here enjoyed the opportunity to speak about themselves and their work. 'You see, I like to talk about what I know,' says Kate O'Connor. Michael Kmit is delighted: 'But what can a man like me speak of with most pleasure? Of myself! Alright.' Francis Lyburner ends by being surprised at himself: 'I expected this recording to be over in a few minutes, but it is in great depth.'

It is often the sort of depth you wouldn't find in formal art criticism. For example, Russell Drysdale talking about shearers and the outback characters he loved, and of how he was never lonely in the desert. Or Grace

Cossington Smith saying with such verve: 'My chief interest ... has always been colour, but not flat crude colour ... it has to shine; light must be in it.' Or Ian Fairweather commenting on his preference for working on several paintings at once: 'I like to have them on my wall cooking, and in time they grow by themselves.'

And then there are the little details that bring the artist to life, as Grace Cossington Smith suddenly hearing her cuckoo clock chiming: 'Will that come in? Oh how nice!'

It seems to be a popular misconception that artists are inarticulate, that they can only communicate with their brush or their chisel. This is of course not only an error but a travesty; artists vary in articulacy as much as any other group of people. And some of them—one has only to think of Michelangelo or Blake—have had formidable gifts as writers.

Although words are not the artist's medium, very few of them in this book have any difficulty in talking about their lives. It is of course more difficult for them to talk about their work.

The areas of form and feeling in which artists move, and their relation to each other, are different from those in which writers are involved. As Margo Lewers says, 'I think really it's most difficult to talk about one's work and how one works; well, it is hard to describe the exact way because a lot of it is emotional and is a feeling, and you just can't put it into words.'

Jon Molvig, at one stage, gets quite desperate and says, 'Actually, I believe that a painter shouldn't talk at all ... The more he can explain his painting, the more literary he becomes in his painting, because painting is a language of its own ... it is a visual language in which you can only say something that cannot be said in another language.'

But this uneasiness is also true of writers, many of whom think it a kind of bad luck to talk about their work, past or present. There it is, the poem or the novel, and that's what they want you to read. It's a different language, just as Molvig's painting is a language of its own. And oddly enough, given that some artists and art critics are hostile to 'literary' painting, while others are in favour, the same argument has gone on in literature itself. W.B. Yeats (whose father and brother were artists) remembered that when he was young, 'The revolt against the literary element in painting was accompanied by a similar revolt in poetry.' He went on strongly to defend 'the literary element' and show how it was mixed up with morality. 'I now see that the literary element in painting, the moral element in poetry are the means whereby the two arts are accepted into the social order and become a part of life, and not things of the study and the exhibition.'<sup>1</sup>

Books involve artists with the worlds of ideas and action. Ian Fairweather was profoundly influenced by the books of China as well as by its calligraphy. Michael Kmit speaks of the basic questions he asks himself as an

artist, and how he has been helped to an understanding of them by Sartre, Rilke, Kafka and Camus. Russell Drysdale's deep meditations on the Australian outback and deserts were constantly enriched by his voracious reading of the journals of the Australian explorers and naturalists.

There are many ways of categorising painters and paintings, some more profitable than others. One revealing division is that between the paintings that ask questions and those which make simple statements. It is the difference, say, between Piero della Francesca's 'The Flagellation of Christ' and Van Gogh's 'Boats at Saintes-Maries'. The painters assembled in this book, however fluent with words and conversant with ideas, in their work mostly concentrate on pure statement. Russell Drysdale is the first great Australian painter of questions, joined here by Mølvig and Baldessin and occasionally Fairweather, Strachan and Pugh; Michael Kmit brings to Australia a mystical, religious quality from his East-European birthplace.

The first three decades of the twentieth century in Australian art were spent in attempting to solve technical problems of presenting a subject rather than hinting at those further mysteries that cannot be solved. The purest and most successful examples are in the work of Grace Cossington Smith and Lloyd Rees, or the nude drawings of Thea Proctor, the landscapes of Roland Wakelin, the still-life compositions of Vida Lahey. Metaphysical, surrealist or Dada art did not begin to grow in Australian soil until the 1940s. Since then, at least half of the best Australian paintings ask questions.

The interviews transcribed in this book are of course not only about the problems and process of being an artist and working in paint or clay. They also allow the artists to talk about their lives and their progress to professionalism. A few important patterns emerge beyond the considerable interest of the actual biographical element. For instance, a remarkable number of the artists I have chosen for this book were born or went to work in Queensland; this is a reflection of the whole collection, not of my own selection.

Certain artists emerge as central, often for many years, to the artistic activity in various cities: Vida Lahey and Daphne Mayo in Brisbane, Thea Proctor in Sydney. Again and again artists of very different types express their gratitude to the same teachers: George Bell in Melbourne, Julian Ashton and Dattilo Rubbo in Sydney, Godfrey Rivers in Brisbane.

The difficulties arising from Australia's remoteness from the great centres of culture have been much worse for artists than for writers. For many years in Australia in the twentieth century Tolstoy's books could be bought in bookshops; Cézanne's paintings were not even available in reproductions. All the Australian artists in this collection longed to go to Europe, which nearly all of them regarded as the home of art. In almost all the interviews there is a joyous liberation and intoxication at arriving in France or Italy. At eighty-nine Kathleen O'Connor is still close to her youth when she first went to

Paris: 'I never wanted to paint in England anymore afterwards ... everything you saw taught you something.' When Daphne Mayo won the British Royal Academy's most prestigious prize and went to Italy, 'that was really the beginning of my life'. Vida Lahey went to France for the first time after World War I and 'Paris absolutely intoxicated me'. For Constance Stokes, training in Paris under André Lhote was 'a revelation'. Russell Drysdale studied at the Grande Chaumière under Othon Friesz.

These pilgrimages made up for the deprivation of new ideas suffered by artists in Australia. All the ferment that followed the Impressionists in France took many years to reach Australia. It is somewhat startling to look at the birth dates of some of the artists in this collection. Thea Proctor was born in 1879, the same year as Paul Klee, and ten years after Matisse. She was lucky enough to arrive in London not long before the Durand-Ruel exhibition of Impressionism which was soon followed by Roger Fry's various highly controversial exhibitions of Post-Impressionists. Kathleen O'Connor was born even earlier, in 1876. As she says in her interview, when she got to Paris the French Impressionists were still alive. Vida Lahey was born in 1882, a year after Picasso, and two years before Modigliani. Grace Cossington Smith was born in 1892, a year before Miró. Daphne Mayo and Lloyd Rees were both born in 1895, three years before Henry Moore. Those two great teachers, Dattilo Rubbo and George Bell, were born respectively in 1870 and 1878. And so on.

It is interesting that William Frater, who was born in Edinburgh in 1890, was startled as a lad of sixteen to see Van Goghs and Gauguins in a gallery in Glasgow. He says that Renoir used to exhibit regularly in Glasgow where they could also see examples of German Expressionism. Scotland sounds to have been much more open to new art than England.

For the early decades of the twentieth century, before the development of good colour reproductions and slides, travel was essential to any Australian wanting to be an artist. Kathleen (usually called Kate) O'Connor was born in New Zealand and spent most of her life in France, which is perhaps why Bernard Smith does not mention her in his monumental *Australian Painting*. Yet there is no doubt of her Australian orientation, however much she rebelled against it. She came to Perth at the age of fifteen when her father, C.Y. O'Connor, was appointed Engineer-in-Chief of Western Australia. O'Connor was a man of extraordinary talents and wide interests. Amongst many other achievements, he designed Fremantle harbour and was responsible for the water pipeline to Coolgardie. Yet he became so depressed by petty attacks on him and his work that in 1902 he rode his horse into the sea and shot himself.

Kate studied art under James Linton in Perth, where she exhibited, before working as a decorator in Sydney. She went to England with her

mother and sister in 1905 and studied art in London. She was a young woman of independent intellect and striking style; people said she could have stepped out of a Manet painting. She went back to Perth in 1909 for her sister's wedding, but soon returned to Paris where she exhibited successfully for many years and made friends with many eminent painters of the time. Not only that, she got sustenance from sitting in the same café as an artist like Modigliani. She painted people in the parks, still lifes and portraits in soft colours but with strong form and a vibrant technique. She spent 1927 in Australia and worked as a decorative designer in Sydney, but had soon had enough. Perth was worse than Sydney. 'I'll die if I stay here,' she said as she headed back for Paris.<sup>2</sup>

She lost her studio during the war and returned to Perth in 1948. Over the next two years she held a number of exhibitions. But she became bored with life in Perth and left for France in 1950, only to find that her old life in Paris was not possible for her any more. She finally returned to Perth in 1955 and lived the rest of her life there. It was a compromise that never really made her happy, even though she won prizes, had exhibitions in other states and was praised by many critics.

She was an old lady of eighty-nine when interviewed by Hazel de Berg, and her years are evident in the level and tone of her voice. But there is still plenty of spirit in her words; there is something brave but sad in this interview.

Thea Proctor was eighty-two at the time of her interview. She is in perfect control, her voice is elegant and assured, and one has no difficulty in imagining her as de Berg saw her, 'so straight and fresh'. The freshness comes through when her voice lifts as she remembers that 'we were absolutely excited' by first seeing the French Impressionists. Proctor was twenty-four when she went to London to study art, after initial training with Julian Ashton at his Sydney Art School. She stayed away for eighteen years and was closely associated with Ashton's star pupil, George Lambert. She showed her work in many exhibitions in England and Europe, and by the time she returned to Sydney she had the confidence and knowledge to rout mediocrity and encourage new ideas in Australian art. 'Thea Proctor was always up in arms for the women painters,' said Grace Cossington Smith.<sup>3</sup> When that reactionary die-hard J.S. MacDonald (later Director of the National Gallery of Victoria) wrote in one of his columns that there had never been a good woman artist, Proctor's response was to take up a petition for his immediate dismissal.

Proctor and George Lambert founded the Contemporary Group so that young and new artists could have a forum; she was a champion of Margaret Preston, Roy de Maistre and Roland Wakelin. With the background of her own superb skills in drawing, printmaking and design she had an enormous impact on every aspect of art in Sydney. On her death in 1966 James Gleeson called her Sydney's 'taste maker'.<sup>4</sup>

At the very beginning of her interview Proctor says that it is an overwhelming love of beauty that causes someone to become an artist. No one would use such a phrase nowadays, but the word 'beauty' occurs again and again when other artists mention Proctor in their interviews. She was herself, as Treania Smith says, 'this beautiful creature'. Leon Gellert, poet and editor of *Art in Australia* and *The Home* (a remarkable magazine, published in the 1920s, which had superb cover illustrations often by Thea Proctor or Margaret Preston), wrote of Proctor's marvellous presence and her clothes. 'She rarely followed the dress fashions of the moment, preferring to design her own creations. And they were stunning!'<sup>5</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s there was more exciting and innovative work done in Australia by women artists than by men. The impact of these artists was not only in their own work, however, but in their energy and unconventionality as teachers and taste-makers. Bernard Smith, not on the whole inclined to take women painters as seriously as men, writes: 'The introduction of post-impressionism to the country owed much to women: Norah Simpson, Grace Cossington Smith, Thea Proctor, Margaret Preston, Isabel Tweddle, Dorrit Black, Ada Plante, Aletta Lewis, Vida Lahey and Mildred Lovett, to name only the more prominent. Indeed, the contribution of women to post-impressionism in Australia appears to have been corporately greater than that of men; and in individual achievement in every way comparable.'<sup>6</sup> This of course did not mean that women artists were taken seriously by male reviewers. Typical of the attitude of the times is the heading to a review of an exhibition of Vida Lahey's paintings in the *Bulletin* of 1923: 'Another lady's little show'.<sup>7</sup>

In some cases, where families were even moderately well off, it was perhaps easier for a woman to become an artist than for a man. There was not the pressure on women to embark on a trade or profession, and parents were often happy for a daughter to spend a few years at art school.

Vida Lahey had no financial advantage; her father was a small arrowroot farmer in Queensland, but he had the sensitivity and imagination to encourage his daughter's talents. She also had an uncle who, almost by chance, offered to send her to the National Gallery of Victoria Art School. Although she spent some vital years in England and Europe, Brisbane was the firm centre of her life and she had a profound influence on art in Queensland. Her achievements (assisted by Daphne Mayo) with the Queensland Art Fund and the Queensland Art Library cover several decades. When she was nearly sixty she was telling Queenslanders truths about art and life such as: 'this violence and discord [in art and music] is not a mere aberration by artists in search of novelty, but a result of world conditions, a groundswell of the emotions.'<sup>8</sup>

Her own work was more harmonious, more restrained, concerned with light, tonality, the relation of colour to form. She did not choose to develop

the concern with the human figure at work that was so remarkable in a painting she did when she was twenty-nine, 'Monday Morning'. This was a major achievement in Australian art. Incidentally, 'Monday Morning', which shows two women working at the laundry-tub, underwent some major compositional changes, showing how seriously Vida Lahey took this painting.

She says some very interesting things about 'Monday Morning', 'the first important picture that I ever sold.' Her voice on the tape is exactly like herself, quiet, modest, unmistakably Queensland, with a little tremor, a half affectionate laugh, when she recalls how her father loved wildflowers.

When Roland Wakelin was twenty-five he settled in Sydney and enrolled at Dattilo Rubbo's school. Among his fellow-students were Grace Cossington Smith, Norah Simpson and Roy de Maistre. From that small circle modern art in Australia was born. Talking to de Berg in his seventy-fifth year, Wakelin can still remember vividly that the eighteen-year-old Norah Simpson had just come back from London and Paris, full of talk about the latest developments in art, together with photographs and reproductions. 'From then on I became interested in the moderns, at that time Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh.' As Lloyd Rees says in his tape, 'Wakelin and de Maistre must be accredited as the foundation members of the first contemporary movement in Australia.'

Wakelin exhibited with Cossington Smith and de Maistre before 1920 and in 1925 after he returned from working in London. He gives a vivid idea of how tough it was to be a modern artist in Australia in those days. For instance, he relates how Howard Ashton, the reactionary but influential (he was Julian's son) critic of the *Sun*, wrote: 'Mr Wakelin has been abroad and sat at the feet of Paul Cézanne. Now, Paul Cézanne was a bourgeois soul who should have been a pork butcher but took to painting because he thought it would be easier.'

Wakelin is one of the many artists grateful to George Lambert and Thea Proctor for their support and help in exhibiting. Another supporter, who he simply calls Mrs A.T. Anderson, was the very talented writer Ethel Anderson. In 1931 she made her house at Turramurra over to an important exhibition of the work of Wakelin, Cossington Smith and others. Anderson was a powerful antidote to people like Howard Ashton, and she was called 'a real inspiration to the artists of the new movement, whose battles she was fighting.'

The interview with Ian Fairweather needs to be heard as well as read, with his diffident, English voice, his sentences full of pauses, and the charm that immediately comes through. But in the few pages of transcript, simple as the little Post Office on Bribie Island in which he talked to de Berg, there are flashes of pure Fairweather which indicate a little of what makes him an artist so much admired by other artists. 'Painting to me is quite a mystery, and I really don't know how I do it, but just work at it ... Painting to me is

something of a tightrope act; it is between representation and the other thing—whatever that is. It is difficult to keep one's balance.'

Fairweather of course lived a life more extraordinary than any other artist in this book, or indeed most artists. A large book like Murray Bail's on Fairweather is needed in order to get to know something about him.

Adelaide Perry was born in the Victorian country town of Beechworth and studied at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School where she won the Travelling Scholarship in 1920. After five years in London and Paris she joined her family in Sydney where she remained, teaching and painting, for the rest of her life. Her paintings, low-key, agreeable and well executed in a mild Post-Impressionist style are typical of those encouraged by Thea Proctor and George Lambert and the Contemporary Group which they founded. She taught art with Julian Ashton and then for over thirty years at the Presbyterian Ladies College in Sydney. She knew and admired Thea Proctor and Margaret Preston, although she was not brilliant like them. But, behind the scenes, she was an excellent influence in Sydney, and she encouraged her students to look freshly and deeply at nature.

Grace Cossington Smith's voice at seventy-three is of course that of an old lady, but it is firm, humorous and meditative rather than headlong. This comes out in her lingering vowels, in the way she says 'pinks and whi-i-i-tes' or 'gre-eye-eyes', and the long, dark vowel in 'large' is rounded and slow. She is yet another to praise her teacher, Dattilo Rubbo, and to acknowledge the encouragement she was given by Thea Proctor. Her support in life came from her close-knit family; her father was sufficiently well off to build her an attractive studio with a peaked roof under a big gum tree in their Turramurra garden.

It was not until 1940 that, thanks to the lobbying of Ethel Anderson, the Art Gallery of New South Wales became the first public institution to own a work of Cossington Smith's, 'Wildflowers'; even so, the Trustees don't deserve much credit, as they didn't buy it but accepted it as a gift. It was not until 1960 that they actually bought 'The Sock-Knitter', one of the icons of Australian art. One of her most important works, 'The Bridge in Curve', was rejected by the Society of Artists in 1930, remained unsold (at fifty guineas) in the Contemporary Group's exhibition in 1943, and was finally bought by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1967.

In the last twenty years Cossington Smith's stature has grown until she is now accepted as one of the major figures in Australian art. Her quiet, domestic life, exemplified by the luminous mosaic of brush work in the paintings of rooms, windows, doors, furniture and clothes, did not by any means keep her artistically inside the house. There are the remarkable early paintings, low-key, realist, of crowds in streets. Then, of all the artists who painted the growth of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, she is far and away the most exciting, the one who brings out both the bravura of the curves and the

solidity of the foundations. Then there are flowers, the subtleties of still life and some of the most unusual paintings ever done of the Australian bush, such as 'The Gully'.

Weaver Hawkins was a wandering Londoner who came to Australia with his family at the age of forty-two in 1935. He was a minor but genuine artist who over forty years did a great deal to help artists and the cause of modern art in Sydney.

I have included several pages of transcript from the tape he made with Hazel de Berg in which, in his modest voice, Hawkins gives one of the most moving and memorable accounts of the anguish and bravery of a soldier in World War I. It is amazing that anyone who had suffered such terrible wounds could have managed to become an artist.

Hawkins had been an art student and had always wanted to be a creative artist. Now it seemed, with the damage to his hands, arms and shoulders that he would never have the use of them again. A brilliant orthopaedic surgeon, however, performed twenty-four operations on him over two years which gave him back the partial use of his left hand and arm, and the use of his right arm but not the hand. With extraordinary courage and determination he taught himself to paint with his left hand, and went back to art school at Camberwell; Frank Medworth and David Jones were amongst his fellow-students.

Hawkins' sufferings led to serenity, not torment, in his work. Alan McCulloch thought that Hawkins' serenity was also 'the legacy of the happy family life the artist enjoyed'.<sup>10</sup> As Daniel Thomas (former Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia) said to Hazel de Berg after she had made the recording with Hawkins, 'We could learn a lot from him. He is wise.'

Daphne Mayo was tiny, only just five feet tall, and the strength of mind that gave her the strength of body to become a sculptor shows in her firm, though ladylike rather than bossy, voice. 'I am a maker of images,' she says, 'a sculptor.' No messing about.

After studying drawing and modelling in Brisbane and Sydney, Mayo went to London in 1919 to enrol in the Royal Academy Sculpture School only to find that women were excluded. However, she managed to get in by taking her application herself to the Academy Council. During her three years there, she won the bronze, silver and gold medals, and finally the Stott Travelling Scholarship to Rome, where, as she says, her life really began.

After returning to Brisbane in 1925 she was offered the commission, by the Brisbane City Council, to carve the 54-foot long tympanum on the new City Hall. The fee, £5750, was the highest that had ever been paid in Australia to a woman artist.

Years later she could still recall the terror of that first climb of 60 feet to the scaffold, clutching the contractor's hand, for she was so short-sighted that

she had worn glasses since childhood. The entire work was carved *in situ*, and to watch Daphne Mayo at work became an attraction for visiting celebrities.<sup>11</sup>

Actually this work was not as hard as some others. She said that the only disadvantage she ever found as a woman sculptor was the physical difficulty of handling the heavy medium of clay and plaster. 'I have always had to be my own carpenter, as well as cast my own works once they were finished, because there have not been the craftsmen here who could do it for me.'<sup>12</sup>

Her most beautiful work was in her figures, classic in their strength but moulded with a full knowledge of modern masters such as Rodin and Maillol. 'The Return of the Prodigal Son', amazingly fluent and mature for a student, won the Royal Academy gold award and was formally presented to the Queensland Art Gallery in 1985 by Lloyd Rees. Earlier Rees spoke of a bust of John Young 'which I consider to be one of the finest bronze portraits ever done in Australia. I am proud to add that my own head was also recorded by her in bronze at this time' [i.e. 1940].<sup>13</sup>

Mayo was the prime mover and organiser of the Queensland Art Fund which brought exhibitions to Queensland, and with Vida Lahey was tireless in her efforts to make Queenslanders aware of modern art. She was the driving force behind the Queensland Art Gallery's decision to buy William Dobell's 'The Cypriot'. She was so determined that Brisbane's reactionaries would not undermine the purchase that she went to Sydney herself with the cheque for £100, and brought the picture back to Brisbane.

After she moved to Sydney she completed one of her greatest achievements, the two bronze doors of the Mitchell Library depicting Aboriginal figures. Mayo's are the finest of the panels, by five artists, that were commenced in 1939 and opened for use in 1940. The doors were presented by Sir William Dixon as a memorial to David Scott Mitchell. Apart from their technical brilliance, the sympathy and simplicity of these portraits, totally unsentimental, of Australia's original inhabitants before the injuries of white contact, make them some of the most remarkable works of Australian sculpture. And although thousands walk by them, they are amongst the least known.

Lloyd Rees is yet another of the Brisbane artists in this collection, brought up on the river flats of St Lucia where the University of Queensland now stands. Neither the recording nor the interview are amongst the best, but the indomitable character of Rees comes through in full force.

Rees, of course, left Brisbane for Sydney, and he gives a glowing tribute to Sydney Ure Smith, who in so many ways did more for Australian art, architecture and design, both old and modern, than anyone else of the 1920s and 1930s.

'The only thing that I feel very strongly about is this: that the artist is a commander.' It is an odd word to use, but what he goes on to say is that an

artist must be a commander of his material, he must control and mould it. As his own work at different stages shows, Rees means more than that an artist should be sure of his technique. There was nothing cold or mechanical about Lloyd Rees. As he puts it himself, discussing one of his paintings, 'The Evening Star': 'I have no memory of the actual process of painting because I believe that the spirit of creativity leads to complete forgetfulness of the manner in which it was expressed.'<sup>14</sup>

Most of the Australian artists in this collection who were born in the 1880s or 1890s shared a common excitement and liberation when they went to Paris. The same is true of the East European-born artist Michael Kmit.

Alison Rehfisch is one of the many Australian women painters who, until quite recently, have been shamefully neglected. It is encouraging that in the Sotheby's sale of November 1991, at a time of deep depression in the art market, three out of the four Rehfisch paintings on offer were sold at good prices.

She is yet another painter to acknowledge her debt to that enthusiastic teacher of new ideas, Dattilo Rubbo. At the school with her was another painter, George Duncan, who became her husband. Later, they often had exhibitions together, their work sharing Post-Impressionist ideals; for many years he was Director of the David Jones Art Gallery in Sydney.

In the middle of her tape Rehfisch gives an excellent account of how the true artist tries to get behind the object while at the same time holding the image of the work in the mind. In her modest way, she is touching on the same theme that was all-important to Cézanne. 'Now the theme to develop is that—whatever our temperament or power in the presence of nature may be—we must render the image of what we see, forgetting everything that existed before us. Which, I believe, must permit the artist to give his entire personality, whether great or small.'<sup>15</sup>

Treania Smith, yet another Brisbane-born artist who made her life in Sydney, is of more importance in the history of Australian art for her involvement in the Macquarie Galleries than for her own painting. Nevertheless, she was an accomplished and very well-trained artist, and her landscapes have a quality of delicate tonality that was appreciated by other artists. Roland Wakelin, for example, was very fond of a Tasmanian landscape by her which he owned until the end of his life.

It was Roland Wakelin who noticed a landscape of Smith's that was hung for the Wynne Prize, and recommended her to John Young, who gave her her first show, at the Macquarie. Albeit Sydney-oriented, the Macquarie was one of the most influential private galleries in the history of Australian art. It was founded by John Young and Basil Burdett in 1925; Treania Smith became proprietor in 1939. With Lucy Swanton, who had been a senior partner since 1935, and Mary Turner, the 'Macquarie ladies' were loved, feared and sometimes smiled at (see Donald Friend's interview) by generations of

Australian artists and collectors. Robert Hughes can remember being one of those who would queue all night outside the door of the Macquarie before an opening, often on behalf of some more affluent collector.

Treania Smith's tape is one of the best of Hazel de Berg's recordings; she does not seem in the least to mind talking into the microphone. However, as de Berg's notes indicate, it was by no means as easy as it sounds. Smith has some wonderful stories to tell of artists like Rupert Bunny and Ian Fairweather. The relationship of the high-bourgeois, very correct Macquarie ladies with the ragged but courtly Fairweather in his hut on Bribie Island must be one of the strangest in the history of art.

Douglas Annand (another Queenslander!) was one of those who benefited from the unusual and surprising fact that drawing was taught in Queensland primary state schools in the early 1900s. Annand was one of the many Australian artists who began in the often depressing world of commercial art and the much more lively scene of advertising. Among the artists who worked at Sydney Ure Smith and Harry Julius' advertising agency in Sydney were Lloyd Rees, Roland Wakelin, John Passmore and George Lawrence. Ure Smith took notice of Annand, who was freelancing, and in 1935 gave him an important commission to create a cover for his magazine *The Home*. The full-colour covers for *The Home* were consistently brilliant, executed by artists like Thea Proctor, George Lambert, Loudon Sainthill and, most frequently of all, Margaret Preston.

The superb quality of Annand's drawings and his unerring sense of colour are everywhere apparent in the book of his drawings and paintings which Sydney Ure Smith edited and published in 1944; it is an elegant book, despite wartime restrictions on paper.

Sir Colin Anderson, one of the directors of the Peninsula and Orient Line, noticed Annand's work in *The Home*, and this led to many commissions, including huge murals in two Peninsula and Orient ships, the *Orcades* and *Oronsay*. Annand talks very interestingly about his long involvement in various forms of public art, including the art direction of Australian pavilions in several international exhibitions. Annand was eclectic in his tastes, and had a deep commitment to Asia, not only carrying out various commissions there but travelling in many Asian countries and studying their arts and crafts. As with those who live in and work in the arts of those countries, Annand saw no boundaries between art and craft, high and low art, simply common bonds of taste and design.

Both in his approach and what he has to say, Annand's is one of the most appealing of de Berg's interviews.

Looking at the highly sophisticated painting of Constance Stokes it comes as a surprise to hear her say that she was born and brought up in rural simplicity, in the midst of the pale heat of the Wimmera district of Victoria, a

landscape made unforgettable by Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan. It was not what Stokes wanted to paint.

As with several other Australian artists (among them Grace Crowley and Dorrit Black), her real introduction to modern art came from studying with André Lhote in Paris. Stokes says she became more aware of colour than anything else in Paris, but her work reflects Lhote's teaching about solid form, about the power of geometrical sections and what was known as Dynamic Symmetry.

Although she does not make a fuss about it in her interview, it is clear how difficult it was for a married woman with children to find time to paint. Most of those immensely talented Australian women artists of the first decades of the twentieth century were unmarried: Kate O'Connor, Vida Lahey, Daphne Mayo, Grace Cossington Smith, Thea Proctor; or married without children like Margaret Preston. Another artist, known to many of these women as friend and teacher, Frances Hodgkins, once said 'Art ... absorbs your whole life and being. Few women can do it successfully. It requires enormous vitality. That is my conception of genius—vitality!'<sup>16</sup>

Stokes says 'I had my children, three children, but I kept painting, hail, rain or shine!' No wonder she was able to exhibit only two or three paintings a year.

Like Drysdale, she learned a lot about technique from George Bell, particularly the attainment of a rich glow from working with many layers of paint and glazing.

In 1953 Stokes was represented in an exhibition organised by the British Council at the New Burlington Galleries in London; the other artists were William Dobell, Russell Drysdale, Sidney Nolan, Lloyd Rees, Donald Friend, Justin O'Brien, Jean Bellette, Arthur Boyd, Frank Hinder and Godfrey Miller. It was the first exhibition giving a broad view of modern Australian art to be shown in London. The art critic of the *Times* took a rather condescending view of the paintings, typical of most British attitudes towards any of the Australian arts of the time, but he did approve of Stokes' 'The Girl in Red Tights'. A year before her death, looking back on that exhibition, Stokes was not keen to be identified with the nationalism of many of her co-exhibitors. 'I didn't enjoy their work. It was too rustic. I was not interested in "Australiana". I wanted to produce something international.'<sup>17</sup>

Margo Lewers, born two years after Stokes, would have agreed; she always painted in an abstract style. She was the daughter of an artist, and the sister of Carl Plate, painter and director of the Notanda Gallery. Her husband was the sculptor Gerald Lewers, and on a trip to England together in 1933 they were impressed with the work of Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson, and on their return helped spread knowledge of these and other modern artists.

Lewers also shared the difficulties of Constance Stokes of being a wife and mother as well as an artist; like Stokes, she was able to paint only two or three works a year until her daughters went to boarding school.

William E. Pidgeon used to sign his cartoons 'WEP' and his tape is full of interest as he talks about his work with various newspapers. He did not have any serious art training, but with natural aptitude and dedication turned himself into a successful portrait painter as well as one of Australia's best-known cartoonists. He won the Archibald Prize twice. He was also a very talented book illustrator, most famous for his drawings for Nino Culotta's bestseller *They're a Weird Mob*.

Michael Kmit was born in the Ukraine, and when he was able to travel, avidly discovered the treasures of Western European art. He was most influenced by the Byzantine frescos and mosaics of Ravenna, although, as Robert Hughes long ago pointed out, Kmit's paintings were lacking in the Byzantine conviction—'They went down well with a public that wanted the smile of the Cheshire cat without the cat.'<sup>18</sup>

Kmit came to Australia in 1949 as an assisted migrant. He had to work as a labourer for some time and could only paint at night. Eventually his work came to the attention of Paul Haefliger and the Sydney Group. His formal structures, allied to a powerful and fresh use of colour appealed to Australians and he won many prizes in the 1950s and 1960s.

Kmit's accented voice is at times hard to follow, but there is an amusing charm in his old-fashioned gallantry with Hazel de Berg at the beginning and end of the interview.

I recorded the interview with Russell Drysdale printed here over several days, or rather very early mornings, in November 1963, for my book on Drysdale which was published in 1964. For one usually so disinclined to talk about himself, Drysdale's interview is very revealing. He speaks with fervour about his influences, technique and ideals as a painter; George Bell's excellence as a teacher; the joy of Paris and youth; his difficulty in painting and distrust of facility; his love of the outback and the fact that although there may be loneliness in his paintings, he himself never feels lonely in the outback.

What is not so often emphasised is that Drysdale is the great humanist of Australian painting. He put the figures into the Australian landscape. His response to human beings was always generous and eclectic; he never minded what colour or shape they came in. They were individuals to him, more than figures in a landscape, though that is the essence of a lot of his greatest work. This enthusiasm comes through vividly in the tapes, for both white and black Australians. No other artist has remotely approached Drysdale's range of acquaintance and depth of understanding of the people of Australia, from the Bass Strait islands to Broome, from Mullengandra to Coen. And he did not

forget those close to him; one of his most tender but intelligent portraits is that of his daughter Lynne, and the several portraits of Donald Friend sparkle with Friend's witty character.

The dignity and mystery of black Australians particularly appealed to him and challenged his resources as an artist. He went from lanky stockmen with enigmatic faces to a near-abstract fusion with fire and darkness in that extraordinary masterpiece 'The Rainmaker'.

Noel Counihan talks in short, downbeat sentences with a plain, direct Australian voice. From the various interviews recorded with him I have selected part of that taped with Mark Cranfield. It is of great biographical interest, and it also takes in a practitioner of another of the arts, literature.

It is a humorous, slightly rueful account of the journey Counihan and the novelist Judah Waten made through New South Wales and Queensland in the mid-1930s. They were both very short of money and had the bright idea of going on a round of country towns (in which, in 1936, Brisbane might be included). Judah would make contact with the local newspaper and maybe write something for it, find out who were the local celebrities, and then Noel would draw their portraits. They would get out of Melbourne, satisfy a restless need to wander and, with luck, make enough money to survive on. They were both communists, but this did not in the least inhibit them from fraternising with the local capitalists. They even got to work on Senator Charles Hardy, self-proclaimed Fascist and reactionary leader of the Wagga farmers who were threatening to march on Sydney to unseat the Premier, Jack Lang. They also interviewed, and Counihan drew a portrait of, Sir James Duhig, Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane.

Although Counihan was always a committed socialist-realist, and propaganda often dulled the edge of his work, his strongest talent lay in portraiture, based on his technical excellence and his very Australian directness and ability to get on with all sorts of people.

Donald Friend's voice is just right for the man and for what he has to say; you can immediately sense his worldly humour, his wit, his intelligence, his capacity for friendship. You can hear him chuckling with zest at the absurdities and incongruities of the world, his voice rich in its variations of tone and vowel length. Finally, beyond the humour, there is his total commitment to his work and his ideals of art.

Anyone who has had the good fortune to read Donald Friend's personal, and so far unpublished, diaries, most of which are in the National Library of Australia, will know how uninhibited he was, and also how well he used words; the superb drawings are only half the story. Friend was the author of several books of high literary quality, and like his friend Drysdale he was a passionate if selective reader. He often could not abide what was fashionable, in both art and literature.

Because I was interviewing him for my book about the development of modern art (and, to some extent, literature) in Sydney he speaks with especial emphasis on Sydney. But that is how he would have spoken anyway; Melbourne did not appeal to him, any more than it did to Kenneth Slessor.

The printed text can convey only a part of the enthusiasm with which he speaks of being a young artist in Sydney, the lack of money that somehow never made for austerity, the arguments between artists despite fundamental tolerance of different styles, the hatred of pomposity and cant.

Not for a moment on the tape does he sound like an old, sick man who was to die within five years, in 1989.

Friend is rather too severe on Francis Lyburner, whom he describes as a minor draftsman and a painter of charming little pictures. While not a major artist, Lyburner was more than a minor draftsman; in fact, he was one of the most talented in the history of Australian art. As he says in his interview, Lyburner agrees with Ingres that drawing is the probity of art, a belief also shared by Friend. Barry Humphries, writing an introduction to an exhibition of Lyburner's drawings and paintings at the Johnstone Gallery in Brisbane, said: 'It is no coincidence that English collectors of Pascin, Guys, and Klimt, also own a Lyburner. As a draughtsman he is in that seductive and exclusive tradition.'<sup>19</sup>

Humphries also admired Lyburner's use of colour. There is indeed more to his paintings than charm. Some of them, such as 'Sprawling Woman' or 'Seated Man with his Dog' are almost brutal in the way their colour moulds form to make a strong statement. His reputation went into decline after his death in 1972, but soon recovered. When he was alive he was often called a 'romantic', a Sydney misconception of romanticism brilliantly demolished by the young Robert Hughes in *The Art of Australia*. Even the charm was misleading. In fact, Lyburner's drawings in particular have a classic firmness of form with a Post-Impressionist immediacy and disregard of the neat, particularly when his subjects are animals and the nude. As with Constance Stokes he is not interested in being an Australian artist, and his childhood in Queensland seems to have cured him of wanting to look again at the Australian landscape. But his brilliant beach drawings are immediately evocative of Sydney and its style.

David Strachan was much more of a genuine romantic. Like Drysdale and Sali Herman, he studied in Melbourne under George Bell but later moved to Sydney, not liking the feuds of the art world in Melbourne. When Strachan left Bell, the teacher said, 'Well, Acid Drop, I haven't taught you a thing.'

The acid in Strachan, amusingly apparent to anyone who knew him, never eats into the dreamy calm of his gentle paintings. In Keats' poem 'The Fall of Hyperion—A Dream', the veiled shadow by a mysterious shrine says to Keats the dreamer:

The poet and the dreamer are distinct,  
 Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.  
 The one pours out a balm upon the world,  
 The other vexes it.

However corrosive Strachan could be in private, his paintings never vex, they always 'pour out a balm upon the world'.

The best description of Strachan is in the poet Alister Kershaw's autobiographical *HeyDays*, which conveys his sense of humour and what fun he could be in company, as well as his 'blithe indifference to cults, fashions and theories in the arts and in life'.<sup>20</sup> Together in Paris they participated in *Accent and Hazard*, a book of deep colour engravings by Strachan, based on Kershaw's poems, which were reproduced in Kershaw's autograph. It is a very rare book, fit to place alongside the 'beautiful books made by Rouault and Picasso and Bonnard and many many others' to which Strachan refers in his interview. It is certainly one of the most beautiful books ever produced by an Australian.

Hazel de Berg remarks on the way Strachan's voice 'seems to go up at the end of each sentence—not quite like an Australian voice'; he replies that he supposes it is because he lived for so long in France. But it was always characteristic of him, and Kershaw refers to 'the peculiar wailing voice which he habitually employed when preparing to make one of his merciless jabs'.<sup>21</sup>

When Jon Molvig died in 1970 at the age of forty-seven Australia lost one of its most powerful younger artists. He was born in Newcastle; his father was a Norwegian steel worker; his mother died when he was two years old, and he was, in his own words, 'farmed out to relatives'.<sup>22</sup> During the war Molvig served as a gunner in the army, and after the peace took advantage of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS) to study art in Sydney. By enabling working class young people to go to universities and colleges the CRTS was one of the most important influences in the history of culture in Australia. For example, fellow-students of Molvig's at the East Sydney Tech (as it was always called) and its annexe in Strathfield included Robert Klippel, Tom Bass, Guy Warren, John Rigby and Tony Tuckson. Molvig was always a wild individualist, but he had a lifetime respect for the skills he learned at Strathfield and the Tech, particularly in relation to painting and drawing the human figure.

Hazel de Berg had a lot of trouble in getting Molvig to talk to her, but eventually did three interviews with him. He was in any case a difficult character, but part of the trouble was that, in his own words, 'I believe that a painter shouldn't talk at all, because what he believes today, what may be true to him today, he must change tomorrow.' This was a strong conviction of Molvig's. He put the necessity for change somewhat more forcibly in a newspaper interview with Gordon Rintoul: 'I believe that every subject should have a different approach or even a different medium, a different

technique, because I think that the subject demands a certain way of doing it to make it more expressive. You can't paint a tulip like a bull's behind.<sup>23</sup>

Molvig was attacked by some critics for the volatility of his work, but in fact he was in sympathy with what has always been going on in the arts, something that can be called modernity, or the modernism that Norman Lindsay feared and deplored. As J.K. Huysmans said in the 1880s: '*A temps nouveaux, procédés neufs*' ('new times, new ways'). At the same time, Molvig was very aware that the artist should not only make it new but make it solid, being wary of modernity as fashion. Baudelaire, in 'The Painter of Modern Life', put it succinctly: 'Modernity is that which is ephemeral, fugitive, contingent upon the occasion; it is half of art, whose other half is the eternal and unchangeable.'<sup>24</sup>

With considerable independence of mind, not to say courage, Molvig settled in Brisbane. He said to Laurie Thomas in 1964: 'You work better in a climate and place that suits you ... I think Brisbane offered more scope because it was virtually untouched before I came here. Perhaps not untouched, but it was much more provincial than it is now ... it offered a virgin field.'<sup>25</sup> Vida Lahey and Daphne Mayo might not have agreed. But, after all, Lahey was born in 1882, Mayo in 1895 and Molvig in 1923. Time and again one has to remember that Australia was a distant province for many years denied contact not only with works of art but even with reproductions.

Clifton Pugh's interview printed here is only part of a very long recording made with Barbara Blackman. Pugh speaks on the tape exactly as he did in life, in a thin, often high voice, given to long laughs and musing 'No-o-o's. He is always self-conscious, sometimes mock-modest, sometimes uninhibitedly arrogant, pleasingly open in his likes and dislikes. He was prone to ramble, and Barbara Blackman lets him go on much too long. As Lawrence Daws, who had known Pugh since they were at art school in Melbourne together, once said to me; 'Clif takes a lot of time to stumble towards a conclusion.'

Pugh is good at talking about the vividness of certain impressions, such as his first viewing of Nolan's work, or Arthur Boyd's early, haunting painting of a man in a wheelchair, 'Progression'. He is also good when describing how an artist's vision is always capable of expansion, as in his reaction to the treatment of the Australian landscape in Nolan's 'Ned Kelly' series. His ruthlessness comes through, without apology, in his account of swapping a painting with Fred Williams.

Pugh's deep love and understanding of the Australian countryside and its flora and fauna was exemplified in his home 'Dunmoochin' (dreadful pun!), where he and Marlene, his companion and favourite model, later his wife, built a rambling house on an area of bush near Cottles Bridge, about forty kilometres north-east of the centre of Melbourne. For more than forty years,

Pugh continued to rebuild and add to the house. The bush and its animals and birds remained untouched; the source of many of his best paintings.

The most tragic loss in the history of modern Australian art is the death in a car accident of George Baldessin at the age of thirty-nine. His original talent, imaginative yet strict, flowered as unmistakeably in sculpture as in drawing, printmaking and painting. He was also a very successful teacher, especially of printmaking.

His first love was Italy, where he studied under Marino Marini at the Academy of Fine Arts in Milan. Hazel de Berg's interview was recorded in 1965, so he makes no mention that Paris and its people became a great source of inspiration for him in the last decade of his life. He was especially fascinated by the whores of Montmartre in their fur coats, and some of his finest works are of them, executed with a dazzling virtuosity of technique.

Baldessin's shy and prickly manner, disguising a great capacity for understanding and kindness, comes through both in the interview and in de Berg's notes about him.

Beauty, the embattled theme of all the artists in this book, has to be constantly redefined in art. Baldessin is eloquent when he talks of his work being accused of ugliness. His defence of himself is based on the relation between beauty and order, with no fear of ugliness.

Over sixty years separate the birth dates of Kate O'Connor, the earliest-born in this book, and George Baldessin, the latest. The working years of the twenty-six artists in this book, roughly the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, were the times of two great battles. The first was to make Australians aware of modern art; the second was to offer them an art of their own country. Whether the artists themselves are more inclined to be conservative or radical, their voices are all eloquent on the need both to teach and to create.



Hazel de Berg was so modest that she edited herself right out of her tapes. Anyone who was interviewed by her will remember that her engaging personality made it a pleasure to talk to her. Some traces of this personality emerge, unmistakeably, from the fragmentary comments she made afterwards about some of her interviews. These also give some very useful glimpses into the character of those whose voices she had recorded. Where available, I have included the comments by all interviewers with each interview. As with the transcripts themselves, I have 'edited' these for reasons of space. The full interviews are available from the National Library.

Geoffrey Dutton

## Notes

- 1 W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs*, transcribed and edited by Denis Donoghue. London: Macmillan, 1975, p. 179.
- 2 P.A.E. Hutchings and Julie Lewis, *Kathleen O'Connor, Artist in Exile*. Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987, p. 61.
- 3 Quoted in Janine Burke, 'Thea Proctor', *Imprint*, no. 4, 1977, p. [8].
- 4 James Gleeson, 'The death of a taste maker', *Sun Herald*, 7 August 1966, p. 76.
- 5 Leon Gellert, 'A gracious lady has left us ...', *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 August 1966, p. 61.
- 6 Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting 1788–1960*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 198.
- 7 'Another lady's little show', *Bulletin*, 31 May 1923, p. 34.
- 8 Vida Lahey, *Art for All*. Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1940.
- 9 'The new movement in art. Exhibition at Turramurra', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 November 1931, p. 4.
- 10 Alan McCulloch, 'Salute to a versatile pioneer', *Herald*, 1 December 1977, p. 36.
- 11 Judith McKay, *Daphne Mayo, Sculptor*. St Lucia, Qld: University Art Museum, University of Queensland, 1981, p. 9.
- 12 Susan Davies, 'The big dream of Miss Daphne Mayo', *Sunday Mail*, 18 June 1972, p. 14.
- 13 Lloyd Rees, 'Daphne Mayo: a tribute', in Judith McKay, op. cit., p. 4.
- 14 Lloyd Rees with Renée Free, *Lloyd Rees: An Artist Remembers*. Sydney: Craftsman House, 1987, p. 51.
- 15 John Rewald, *Paul Cézanne, Letters*. London: Bruno Cassirer, 1941, p. 251.
- 16 Hutchings and Lewis, op. cit., p. 41.
- 17 Louise Bellamy, 'Alone, in the right way', *The Age*, 12 June 1990, p. 14.
- 18 Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1966, p. 205.
- 19 Barry Humphries, invitation to an exhibition 'Paintings by Francis Lyburner' at the Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane, 1977.
- 20 Alister Kershaw, *HeyDays*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1991, p. 43.
- 21 Ibid. pp. 42–3.
- 22 Betty Churcher, *Molvig: The Lost Antipodean*. Ringwood, Vic.: Allen Lane and Penguin Books, 1984, p. 10.
- 23 Gordon Rintoul, 'Molvig revisited', *Australian*, 7 July 1931, p. 8.
- 24 Charles Baudelaire, *My Heart Laid Bare, and Other Prose Writings*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1950, p. 37.
- 25 Quoted in Churcher, op. cit., p. 71.

**Artists'**  
PORTRAITS





Kathleen O'Connor  
1876–1968

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Perth, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 95

*Recorded in her home in West Perth, 28 May 1965. I had heard a lot about Kathleen O'Connor. How she had lived most of her life in France—and finally old but not aged—had come back to Perth. The door was open—low ceilings—cushions and drapes on old furniture and every inch of the walls covered in pictures. She came to the door wearing a hat and gloves and smiling.*

*I quickly set up the recorder and began to record. She had recently had a show in Adelaide and she wanted to talk about it all the time. I did not suggest playing it back—I don't think she wanted to hear it.*

*She brought out a bottle of wine and some fruit cake and settled down. She showed me the studio room where she still painted and said, 'It's so cold—I can't paint for long.'*

*Then we looked at all the pictures and I said I would go. 'Can't you stay for a while?' she said. So I stayed and missed the car that was to call for me.*

*There is a crispness about her and nothing for her to fit it against—not in Perth—and probably no longer in France.*

*It was raining when I came out and I covered the tapes and the recorder with my coat and walked a long way to some lights on the main street. It was very beautiful in that strange town with the rain and the trees.*



Kathleen Letitia O'Connor I was born, and always called Kate by my family. They always called me Kate, but abroad they always called me Kathleen, you see, so I've got used to that afterwards—not being called Kate. When I was a small child, yes, I was always interested in things like—oh, colours and things that other children didn't like so much, you know, and then I used to try to sketch and my father was always encouraging me to be an artist. He liked the idea of my doing it, you see, and I had a brother who was very clever at drawing cats and things like that, and he would have been quite good if he'd gone on but he never seemed to want to, but I always did want to be an artist, you see, from the beginning, I think. I always tried to do things, you know, try to paint and try to draw and tried to do things of that sort, and all that kind of thing—always, ever since I was quite young.

Of course, when I got to Paris I was—well, you couldn't help learning, you see, you just learnt without any trouble at all, everything you saw taught you something. At that time all the big French Impressionists were still alive, you see, when I got there first, and I was very much influenced by the French school. That is what they say in this exhibition, that I really am not what you call a very very modern painter. I'm not an abstract painter at all, really and truly I've been influenced by the French Impressionists, and that's what I've really shown, although I've done things that are done in a perhaps more

modern way. I've used a palette knife a lot and I've been very free with what I do, you see, but I still get the impression of something and not entirely the—I see it from an Impressionist point of view, everything, you see, more or less you know. They say I have a very good idea of form and that I don't lose the form when I get these impressions of things. The form is very distinct in it. I've always had a good idea of form. I suppose it is something to do with my father being a rather clever engineer and that kind of thing. I've always had a very definite idea of what forms of things are, you know, I don't know why, it just happens to be like that.

Oh yes, I think that I really and truly soak myself in art and artists and that kind of thing, and I find it very difficult to be really very good at talking about anything else, I'm afraid I'm a little bit of an egotist in that way, that I'm rather bored with most conversation, you see, because most people avoid things that they like to talk about. You see, I like to talk about what I know, more or less. But people don't want you to talk too much about what you know, they want you to be interested in a hundred and one other things. I suppose artists have got that way, you see, especially in Paris where you meet artists, where they are always—well, talking shop all the time. We talk too much shop, you see!

Before I went over to Paris, I used to try to be a painter here, you see, and I used to go to the technical school.

I went to an English school for a time, and then afterwards I went over to Paris, and I never wanted to paint in England anymore afterwards.

I don't paint things out of my head, my impression of something is what I see, nearly always what I see I paint. I do not pretend to make things up out of my head, no, I don't think I do that. I've always had a feeling that I want to do something that I could see, but in my own way, you see, how I saw it, and that is why I was so much influenced by the French Impressionists, because I felt just a feeling that they were trying to get the impression they saw, too. I didn't copy them at all, but I just was influenced by them, that was all, and I've always been ever since, really. I've always had a feeling that I've always been influenced by that school, all the different ones—there were so many of them, about a dozen of them, you see, all great masters, all of them. The French are the greatest painters, I think, still the greatest painters.

The things I painted out of doors in Paris, I couldn't possibly paint them twice just as I saw them that day, because the people never came again. I mean, they were just impressions of people I saw sitting about in the gardens, you see. I did them straight away. That was very direct, just sketches of people, nursemaids and babies and all those sort of people. I just did them at one sitting, you see, because they never came again, those same people, they never made the same group twice.

I like painting portraits better than anything else but there are very few people who really would bother to sit for portraits or even give the time up to sitting for portraits. There isn't much atmosphere in Perth for artists at the present moment, really.

Oh yes, I draw it all in first, you see. I draw it in first before I start to paint it with oil, yes. I make a charcoal sketch of the thing first, and make a study out of it before I start painting it. Oh yes, I don't do paintings right off like that. I make a good sketch of the person first, and the proportions of everything, before I start to paint with a brush or a palette knife.

I knew Vuillard better than most of the French artists and I knew Segonzac and I knew Fujita who was the Japanese who was very fashionable, very much in the vogue at the present moment or still is, and I saw Modigliani and all these things in cafés and little restaurants and that sort of thing. I saw them all, all the ones that were well known, I saw them in different places, cafés and things in the evening and all that. I didn't care if I spoke to many of them. If I didn't want to I could see them without saying anything to them. Just speaking to people doesn't amuse me at all, just to see them going about, you see, being in the atmosphere of art, that is what I mean, amongst lots of people painting. Of course we all painted all day and then we went to the sketch classes at night very often and did sketches from the nude, half-hour sketches; we did a lot of that. Most of the best artists went to those because they used to want to keep in practice, and nude figures, you couldn't always get them except in a big class like that. Every half an hour they would change, you see, different models. So that was a very good way of getting practice without any trouble.

I don't feel really very strong and well. I'm not very young anymore and of course you lose your energy a good bit, you see, when you are not young enough to do very much. Of course, I wouldn't want to live abroad now, not being able to walk about and do what I did before, but on the other hand, you feel a good deal out of things when you live here, you don't see as much, you see, you don't see much. Even London I like very much. London is a terrible thrill, I think. It is nothing to do with English or French, really, in that way. In London you see everything just as well as you would in Paris in the way of art galleries and national galleries and those places, there is so much to see in all these places like that. But here there is so little to see and so few artists that interest me very much really.

No, I didn't want to come, because I knew that I'd miss so much speaking French and hearing French, it had got into me, the French had, and so I felt that I'd much rather have been over there but I thought it was quite impossible to stay, with the different things—I had advice from my different families, nephews and nieces, they all advised me to come out. They all did, all the younger ones too said to come out here. I didn't want to come really,

very much, but I thought it was the best thing to do. I took what was the best thing to do, you see.

No, I feel that when you have lived so long abroad it is very difficult to change your ideas and your life and all that sort of thing, because I don't fit in with the people that I should, in a way.



# Thea Proctor

1879–1966

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1961

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 26

*Recorded in her home at Double Bay, Sydney, 25 September 1961. She looked so straight and fresh with a blue velvet ribbon in her hair. The first recording was no good so I went back. She had lots of drawings and was in the middle of painting a young girl who was staying with her. She came out to the car with me and we talked in the road for another half-hour. As I went home I remembered her saying that George Lambert's father and Whistler's father had both worked in Siberia on the railways.*



I think it is an overwhelming love of beauty which causes anyone to become an artist, an extra sensitiveness to line and colour, as musicians are sensitive to sounds. In artists and sculptors, it is called an aesthetic sense.

I myself have always seen line and form first, and I concentrated on drawing, but that was probably because we had not seen any of the modern French movements in painting, the Impressionists or the Post-Impressionists, in Australia. And we had only seen very dull academic painting, with the exception of one or two artists. Tom Roberts who had been in France and had become influenced by the Impressionists; without being able to call him an Impressionist, he had a freshness of colour that was very different from the painting of the Melbourne school or any painting in Sydney. Then, of course, there was Charles Conder who began here, and was a wonderful born colourist. I had seen a few paintings by Conder before I left for England, but there was really no exciting colour movement in Australia and nobody had any idea that it existed, because there were no reproductions in colour until, I think, about the end of the first decade of this century. Colour reproductions became more common, and then they improved enormously, until one got quite good reproductions at the beginning of the twenties when I returned to Australia.

But it was a most exciting experience to see the Durand-Ruel collection of Impressionists, when there was the Durand-Ruel exhibition in London. It was the first time that French Impressionists had come to England, and I went to the exhibition with a fellow student from Sydney, and it was a wonderful experience for both of us. We were absolutely excited by it, and the year after or two years after, we had the Post-Impressionists' exhibition in London, and that was another thrilling experience, too; but to me it was rather a shock, because I had been trained to draw the figure realistically, and of course, with the Gauguins, the form was very simplified, and it was quite a shock to me. But the colour was thrilling, the Van Goghs and all the other painters, and I suppose, unconsciously, if one keeps an open mind, one's taste changes, and I remember seeing, I think it was at the end of the First World

War, a reproduction of a Matisse and thinking how exciting it was, though the form was not at all representative.

Then I came to Australia in 1921 and it was quite a shock to me to see that Australian painting had not changed at all from the time I left in 1903, and the young painters seemed to be quite content to do imitations of Streeton and Gruner, and in London they were all experimenting, that was when the experimental time began in England, I think, the end of the First World War; England has always been behind France.

George Lambert and I—he had returned to Australia a year before me and he was shocked too at the lack of adventurousness in the younger painters here and shocked that they seemed content to go on doing imitations of other people's landscapes, and there was no figure work done at all. I remember one Society of Artists' exhibition, and the only figure painting in it was by me. There were a few painters, Grace Cossington Smith and Roland Wakelin and Roy de Maistre, who were experimenting here, and they used to get their pictures rejected from the Society of Artists, which was the best exhibition here, and so George Lambert suggested that we should form a little group and have a small exhibition, and invite the experimental ones. We called it the Contemporary Group and we had the first two shows in the Grosvenor Galleries, and after that we had them at Farmer's Art Gallery. We used to invite any of the younger people who did promising work. And the exhibition went on every year for about, I think, twenty-five years. It lately lapsed because several of the important members were away in Europe, and I don't think it is likely to continue.

After I left school, a boarding school in the country, I came to Sydney and I wanted to study art, so my family sent me to Julian Ashton's class and I was there for two years, working every day and all day. Then I left for a year or two and used to work on my own, and I used to go to an evening class; later on I went in the day time again, but I didn't paint in oils, I only worked in watercolours, and drew all the time.

Then when I went to England, I went to an art school and worked for a year, and I did some oil painting then. Then I had to earn my own living, and watercolour came more easily to me, so I didn't do any more oil painting. I worked a good deal with George Lambert and I used to pose to him quite a lot, because I lived very near his family and they were very great friends of mine, and he used to do family groups, and paint me with the family.

People have asked me how George Lambert painted. He painted directly from the model but generally, for a portrait, he did a sketch first or several sketches, sometimes they might only be in black and white but I have one myself, a full length sketch for a portrait of myself, life size. After he died, it was of course an enormous thing to keep in a private house, Mrs Lambert discovered that the head of it had been cut off, and the head is now in the

Brisbane Art Gallery. He apparently liked the head better than any other part. I was painted with a dog, a borzoi, and I have the sketch he did for it myself, a sketch in oils. It is really very like the—he kept to the composition absolutely and did the large one really from it.

Sometimes I paint from sketches and sometimes directly. I arrange a still life but often I think over it first and do compositions in pencil, and when I do a figure composition, of course, I do quite a lot of drawings, putting the figures together to make a good design.

I suppose really the most stimulating thing I have found in working is drawing quick sketches from a nude figure. That I find quite thrilling, quarter of an hour poses; there is something that forces you to concentrate, and I think you do your best work, it is more alive and you express yourself, I think. You are not conscious of anything but trying to get a shape down in simple lines.

I think the thing that makes me want to paint now is a harmony of colour. I see an exciting combination of colours and then I want to add to them and make a good design, and balance the colours, and try to do a watercolour that looks fresh and effortless.



Vida Lahey  
1882-1968

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Brisbane, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 152

*Recorded in her home in Brisbane, 26 November 1965. I had been trying to make this appointment for four years. Now that I was finishing the artists recordings it was now or never. Daphne Mayo, the sculptor already recorded, is her friend and she had spoken with her. When I rang the Queensland Art Gallery to make the appointment, unthinkingly I said, 'If it's convenient for her I'll come up and record Kathleen and Leonard Shillam at the same time' (they had been overseas on previous visits). Of course, by the time the story got to Vida Lahey it looked as if the two sculptors would be left out if she didn't record. This was unthinkable to her gentle nature, so she agreed.*

*Kathleen met me at the airport at 9 a.m. and we went straight to the Gallery. You would have thought it was a retrospective exhibition. Everyone at the Gallery, the Director, the attendants, the girls, were all involved. 'Did you know she wrote a book on Queensland Art?' Laurie said.*

*'Read it last night,' I said.*

*'You're not to have tea here,' the girls said, 'she has asked you for morning tea.' It was the supreme triumph.*

*I left my raincoat at the Gallery and went off to a series of 'good lucks' in the brilliant Queensland sunshine. It was gloriously hot. 'She is a real lady,' Kathleen Morris [a friend of Hazel's who often accompanied her on interviewing trips] said to me on the way out. She is too—but it didn't take many minutes to realise she is a real person—like all true artists. She showed us around the house made completely of wood—unpainted. 'The windows,' she said, 'have looked on other scenes.' I thought she meant the view had changed with progress. 'My father and brother built it in the country—they cut the timber into the right sizes. When we left up there it seemed a pity to leave it so we brought it down.' It is quite a modern house with the partition between the living room and the kitchen only going about two thirds up. All the walls and floors are made of wood.*

*Vida Lahey is slight and quite intense. 'Everything I think about art, is in the book,' she said, 'I don't know what you want to record me for.'*

*'I don't want what you think about other people,' I said, 'just if you liked to draw as a child—and how you paint—did you like flowers when you were little?'*

*'My father,' she said, 'was a great lover of flowers—wildflowers of course.'*

*By this time the recorder was set up so she began. It's such a gentle recording and with her pictures (which are in most state galleries) you will see her as I saw her that morning in a blue dress with her hands clutching her knees saying how she went to London to make a 'little centre' for her brothers to come to during the war.*



This is Vida Lahey. I was born in Pimpama a small place in the south-east of Queensland. My father was an arrowroot farmer. We had a very simple home

and lived a very simple life, but I suppose unconsciously I was interested in any type of art, really. I often think that my father—I really owed a good deal of that to my father because, although he wasn't a practitioner of any sort he just loved nature and loved wildflowers and all that type of thing. I was interested in trying to do things. I remember that after a flood there was a good deal of nice clay on the bank of the creek, and I got some of this clay and tried to make a head of it, and also, at the little country school I went to, they had—I might say there were very few pictures or anything of that sort in country life in those days, and I was a monitress, and among the papers that had been sent to the school was some sort of catalogue of some type of prints that they would send out for the school, and they were just absolutely simple black and white drawings, outlines, and really there was nothing very special about them except their simplicity, and I think there must have been a type of design about them. Well, I just loved this and I used to take every opportunity of going to the cupboard where this was, and when I was supposed to be getting out the books and doing all these sorts of things, I've forgotten what they were, to have a look at this, and just pored over it.

At any rate, later on when I went to boarding school at Southport, I had lessons in watercolour painting and my teacher, she really wasn't at all accomplished in that way but she did encourage me as much as possible.

I think I owed a good deal of this to my father, he had a very sensitive nature—he loved nature and he loved wildflowers. As an instance of this, later on when the family—as the family got older, the question arose as to the education, because you couldn't go very far in this small country school, so it was decided that my mother and the family which by then was a large one, should go to live in Brisbane and my father should come down every weekend to see us, you see. Well, in those days transport, of course, was extremely primitive and the only way my father had of coming to town was either to catch a coach at some unearthly hour on Saturday and come by coach which used to take five hours, or else he could ride down to the nearest railway station which was about twenty miles away—I'm not sure how far—and leave the horse there and come on by train. Well so often he used to, when he'd ridden all this distance, when he got home he'd have a little nosegay of wildflowers that he'd thought that we would like to see and he'd brought them down to us.

Well, after I left school, we were living in Brisbane by then, I went to the Technical College for lessons in whatever they gave, the drawing and painting, Godfrey Rivers was the principal, and of course it was a very small affair; I was there for some little time.

At any rate, it's rather curious, one of my uncles on his way to Melbourne happened to enter conversation with some gentleman in the train, and how it all came about I don't know, I suppose something was said

about art and he spoke of his little niece who was interested in art, and this man told him about the Melbourne Gallery and the possibility of going as a student there; so he came back fired with this idea and he was kind enough to make arrangements for me to go to it. In those days art training was extremely cheap, I might mention, because you could study at the Melbourne Gallery for I think it was two guineas for the year, I'm not sure now, it was very very little, and my first class return fare used to be £5 from here, so that meant that I stayed down there. I stayed for two years I think it was and then came home.

Well after I had been home a little while I felt I simply must have more tuition, and I was able to go again for another year. After that, when I returned home I opened classes in Brisbane, and taught in Brisbane for a number of years.

The next very big change that came into my life was owing to the war. Three of my brothers and a number of cousins had gone, and the family thought it would be a very good thing if I could go to London and, you know, be a sort of little centre when they had leave or there was anything the matter, I could be near and also I could be studying in the meantime.

Well that was what was done. I went to London in 1915. Of course in those happy days we imagined the war was going to last for six months or possibly a year, but of course one year after the other went by and of course I was able to study very little indeed, I was caught up in war work and I was doing that sort of thing until I found I couldn't do that any longer, and then I returned. After the war was over it was practically impossible to get back for quite a long while, because half the P & O fleet had been destroyed, if not more, and all the nurses and soldiers, of course, had priority and they were taken first, naturally; so you could go via America but it was fantastically costly and no one could say how much it would be, so at any rate it was arranged for me to stay until I could—as I couldn't leave for some time, and a very great friend of mine was coming to Europe for a trip, that I should wait and be with her for some time and then we could come back together.

Well owing to that—oh, in the meantime, there were a few months between, I went across to Paris which of course I hadn't seen before, and I had three months of absolute heaven because it was so marvellous; Paris absolutely intoxicated me with all the marvellous things to see and all the experiences connected with it. Well, I met my friend in Italy, I went down as far as Naples and we met there and then travelled up through Italy and France and back to England. Of course I was sketching and studying all the time. That was a wonderful experience. After that, I came home and took up teaching again.

Well I had an exhibition almost immediately I came home. They were naturally small and exhibitions were not often held in Brisbane in those days,

and of course I'd been away, I had no idea of the fantastic change in prices, and I was selling my pictures for two and three guineas and all this sort of thing. However, I started teaching again and then a friend of mine in Tasmania invited me to go down there, so I went down there and I worked down there for two years, thoroughly enjoying the wonderful scenery and the ability to paint such interesting and different things. After that I had an exhibition in Melbourne which was very successful, and since then I've been periodically having exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne and Brisbane, one after the other for a considerable number of years.

The friend I stayed with in Tasmania was formerly Mildred Lovett, well known in Tasmania and assistant at Julian Ashton's school for a number of years till her marriage.

In my first trip, when I was studying and sketching all the time, the three most important things that happened to me was the meeting with Frances Hodgkins, where I was in a five weeks' summer sketching class which she held at St Ives, and the other tremendous impact was Michelangelo and Rembrandt, who were so wonderful.

In my training down in Melbourne, of course naturally it was nothing but the figure, but my development was towards landscape painting. I was particularly interested in landscape painting, mostly to begin with I worked in oils but as the years went on, I became more interested in watercolours and as years went on I seemed to become more and more busy with still life and flower painting, having a particular affection for flowers. I am usually attracted, I think, by the arrangement and colour of the things that strike me, and I usually work when I am particularly thrilled with something I happen to see, but I certainly don't just follow that slavishly because as you progress you decide on changes, one thing affects the other and, you know, you have to keep allowing for differences to make things balance and to complete what seems most satisfactory to you.

I mentioned doing things from life to begin with, and in that connection it might be of interest to say that the first important picture that I ever sold was one called 'Monday Morning', which has some historical value perhaps because it was suggested by—it was in the washhouse with a couple doing the family washing. Well, to see one woman washing at the heavy tub with heavy clothes, and the other poking down the clothes in the copper is quite a novel sight nowadays, and the fact that I had to paint the picture strapped to the mangle made it a little bit perhaps more unique. Since then, of course, as I mentioned, I'm more occupied with landscape work and still life and flowers, and I could mention one large still life in watercolour that I painted some years ago. It had a big white vase, a beautiful colour and beautiful shape, with some lovely flowers in it really, I loved them very much indeed, and I had a small statuette with it. It was never successful though

there was quite a lot of it I quite liked; however, some time later I couldn't bear it any longer, and I washed out the whole of the statuette part and turned it into something nearer my heart's desire; that's one that stands out in my memory as rather an unusual one of my watercolours.

People often ask how long it takes me to do these pictures. Well of course, one naturally works at a very great pace when one is doing it from the flowers themselves, especially in a climate like we have in Queensland, but at the same time it takes very much longer than the initial struggle with it, and I couldn't say sometimes—I like to put them away for some time and have another look and so on, so it's hard to say how long they take. In fact I'm just working on one that I painted years ago!

Some little time ago, the trustees of the Queensland Gallery asked me to do a review of the Queensland art; it was in the centenary year and covered the century before it. I decided I would do what I could, because for one reason I had experienced the situation of art in Brisbane for a considerable number of years and understood—at least I hope I did—something of the conditions and trends. I tried to mention only such people or events as seemed to me to have had a definite influence on the future development.

I felt that I knew this because I had lived with it and knew so many of the people and how they developed and one thing or another. I'd been closely connected with the Technical College and the Art Society and the beginnings of a number of things, and personally knew the principal artists who had been working, such as Bill Grant and his wife with whom I was particularly friendly.

I think what strikes me most forcibly is the difference in the conditions of Queensland art nowadays from former times. For so long we were so very isolated and then later on we became, owing to the coming of exhibitions and one thing and another, more aware of what others were doing and all this sort of thing, but I think it is only just lately that something definitely influenced by Queensland has been apparent. The most recognisable, to me, is Roy Fluke.

Of course, art everywhere is tending to become more and more international, but whether that will continue to be so in the future is a question that can't yet be answered.



Roland Wakelin  
1887–1971

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1962

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 23

*Recorded at the Clune Galleries, Sydney, September 1962. I was interested to record him—as I was in them all—but so many people had mentioned him in their talk. We had a bit of trouble arranging the time—he forgot the first time—he was giving a lecture at the university. I found artists often forgot the time but I would ring up and say, 'I think we have an appointment for next week,' and name the same day and time. His recording was interesting and he asked, 'Shall I relate my talk to events around the times things happened?'*

*Afterwards we had coffee and other artists came in and he was charming.*



I was born in Greymouth, in New Zealand, a little village of about twelve hundred people, and went to school there. I think I always wanted to paint. I used to muck around with watercolours as a child, as most kids do, but I always wanted oil paints and these seemed to be difficult to get there.

However, one Friday night I think it was, my brother turned up with a set of oil paints, brushes and boards and so on, and on the Sunday I started to paint and I think I have been painting ever since.

Then I went to the technical school in Wellington, where Henri Bastin was the instructor, and I went through the antique and then into life, and so on, and used to spend weekends painting out of doors, working in a government job in the meantime. That went on until about 1912.

I had exhibited in the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts at the annual exhibition there.

In 1907, I think it was, I came to Sydney for a holiday with my brother; I had a brother living here. I liked it so much that I came back the next year for a holiday, that was in 1909 I suppose. Then I thought, I'm coming to Sydney for good, so in 1912 I left Wellington, on Friday 13 December—it sounds rather an unlucky day! So I came to Sydney and then I went to the Royal Art Society classes, under Dattilo Rubbo and Norman Carter, in those days; I worked there four nights a week, and Saturday afternoons in the painting class under Rubbo, which I enjoyed very much.

I managed to get a job in the government again here.

I was following more or less conventional lines then, and used to go out painting on Sundays, painting landscape. Geoff Townshend was quite a pal of mine in those days; we used to live in the same boarding house, and we used to go out together.

One Sunday I remember we bought the *Sunday Sun* on the way out, and in it was reproduced Marcel Duchamp's picture 'Nude Descending a Staircase', which was then being shown in the Armory Show at New York, and that was really my introduction to modern painting. [A reference to the

famous art exhibition held in 1913 which introduced modern art to America. Duchamp's painting was the focus of the controversy which the show provoked.]

Soon after that, which was in 1913 some time, Norah Simpson, a girl of eighteen, came back to Sydney from a trip abroad. She had been to London and studied under Spencer Gore, Harold Gilman and Charles Jenner, and she came back full of ideas about modern painting and what was being done over there now; she had also been over to Paris and seen something of it there, and she also brought back some of her own work and photographs and various reproductions which interested me very much.

From then on I became interested in the moderns, at that time Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and I looked up all I could about them, read all I could about them—it wasn't much in those days. There weren't many reproductions, certainly no colour reproductions. In this I was greatly encouraged by Dattilo Rubbo, and I can't speak highly enough of the help he was to me in those early days.

We don't hear much of Rubbo, perhaps, but he was a very great teacher and a man of liberal ideas. He encouraged me to keep on in the way I'd started, experimenting and so on. This didn't exactly please the council of the Royal Art Society, and there was one time they called a special meeting to see if this sort of business shouldn't be stopped. However, Rubbo was a very compelling character and he managed to persuade them that it was all right. So I was allowed to go on.

I didn't see much of de Maistre about this time; occasionally I used to see him. He was also interested in this sort of thing; also Grace Cossington Smith, who used to go to Rubbo's Tuesday classes, I think they were, in Rowe Street, where he had his own studio in those days. We became very enthusiastic about it all. All the other students thought we were nuts, but we kept on.

We used to exhibit our pictures—at least, we used to try to exhibit them but they were usually turned down. The first one I had exhibited was a picture of Farm Cove, with the old fruit stall that used to be there in those days; quite a big effort really, about 4 feet by 3 feet, I think. The picture is now in the possession of the Commonwealth Government. I submitted this to the Royal Art Society, and it was accepted. Not much was said about it; it was quite an impressionistic picture for those days, and they didn't seem to mind that one so much.

It wasn't until the next year—or a couple of years later, I think—it was 1917 when I submitted another picture of Berry's Bay, which is now in the Sydney Gallery, and that caused a bit of a hubbub; Rubbo being on the selection committee fought hard for it, and anyhow he got it in; both these two years Grace Cossington Smith also had pictures in. Then about that time

de Maistre came along one Sunday morning with Adrien Verbruggen, the son of the then director of the Conservatorium, and they'd evolved a scheme of the relation of colour with music, and they had a few little pictures they'd done on these lines; they had a scale and all this sort of thing.

So we got going on this then, and painted a lot of pictures and did whole yards of colour scales and one thing and another, and this finished up by us having an exhibition at Gayfield Shaw's gallery which I think was then the only gallery of that sort in Sydney. We were to give a lecture on the Friday night, I think it was, and explain all about it. De Maistre had done several interiors showing how this colour theory of his could be applied to interior decoration.

There was quite a lot of hostility at this meeting. We were all, of course, very nervous; it was the first time I had ever spoken in public. Julian Ashton was there, Henri Verbruggen, John Young; Sydney Ure Smith was in the chair. These people attacked it pretty strongly; Julian Ashton wouldn't have anything to do with it. Anyhow, that day at midday—Howard Ashton was then the art critic on the *Sun*—the *Sun* midday placard came out in large letters 'IS IT ART?' We went and bought the paper and here was about a column of, regular lashing into it. It finished up by saying it was elaborate and pretentious bosh.

Of course, we didn't sell any pictures in those days but we still kept on. I had to earn my living in other ways; by then I'd begun in the Smith and Julius organisation.

Anyhow, in 1922 we decided to go abroad and see some of these things for ourselves, so we set out in February 1922, my wife and I and our young son, aged about seven I think he was, and went to London, where I looked around to get some work to do in commercial art, and managed to get a bit to keep us going; John Young arrived in London also, a bit later. I might say that John Young was the first one to buy a picture of mine—John Young who afterwards started the Macquarie Galleries. I owe a lot to John Young for his support in those early days. He bought several little pictures. Of course, afterwards he bought quite a number. That meant a lot to me. John Young and I used to wander round galleries together. We went over to Paris together and saw whatever we could. There wasn't much in those days to be seen of painters like Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh—a couple in the Luxembourg, perhaps. We might strike a dealer somewhere around that had one or two, but not like it is now.

I came back, and I had a show at the Macquarie; I had the first show there, really. It was just starting, with John Young and Basil Burdett. That was in 1925, about February, I think—I'm not quite sure of that. This was a chance for Howard Ashton to have another go. He started off by saying, 'Mr Wakelin has been abroad and sat at the feet of Paul Cézanne. Now, Paul Cézanne was a bourgeois soul who should have been a pork butcher but took

to painting because he thought it would be easier.' And so he went on, and just wiped the show right off.

I sold a few pictures, not very many, and so things went on, and then, George Lambert had returned to Australia at this time, and Thea Proctor, and they were upset about the reception we were having. They'd come from abroad, and things weren't quite so cast iron over there, and they decided to have this show at the Grosvenor Gallery and to invite several of these younger painters who, they thought, were not getting a fair hearing, to exhibit with them there. So this show took place, and that was in 1926 I think. There was de Maistre, Grace Cossington Smith, John Moore, Adelaide Perry I think, Gruner even—people who were a bit more in the modern idiom than the usual painters around; and there was myself, of course.

This got a bit of a lambasting in the press, too. One critic said of me that he thought I had the Gladesville touch. However, they were pretty hard times; we didn't sell many pictures then.

So it went on, but later in the twenties reproductions were coming from abroad, large colour reproductions; people were coming back from abroad, and so on, and they started to get more used to the idea. It was somewhere in the late twenties that Mrs A.T. Anderson of Turramurra decided to hold a show of my work there. This was in the Depression days; it must have been a bit later. She gave up the whole of her house, shifted the furniture around all over the shop, and hung up every picture of mine she could find, and invited all the people she knew to come along and see it. A tremendous crowd turned up this Saturday afternoon.

I don't know, I suppose it had its effect—not that any pictures were sold or anything of that sort, but she was a great champion of my work at that time.

By about 1927, I think, things were getting better. In these early days I was greatly influenced by Cézanne and it was rather influencing my work too much, I thought, and I decided I'd have to say something for myself although I still felt that those principles of formal unity and construction in Cézanne were to be the basis of my work. So I perhaps got a bit more romantic after that and let myself go a bit on paintings of effects of light, shadow and so on, but still keeping the idea of the structural unity of the picture in mind.

Things began to get better and I think it was in 1935 that I had quite a successful exhibition, that is, financially. But still, I couldn't earn enough from painting to make a living from it. I always had to do other work; commercial art, which I didn't like much at all. That went on until the war came, having several exhibitions at the Macquarie Galleries. Then when the war came, commercial art fizzled out, and I had to think of something else. I managed to get into the drawing office of the Postmaster-General's Department, doing mechanical drawing, telephone communications and that

sort of thing, in order to release other people for the services. I stayed there for quite a time. I didn't mind that; it was better than the commercial art in a way, because it didn't have anything to do with art; it was mechanical, and it was either right or wrong and it wasn't a question of opinion.

That went on until I had a chance of going to Melbourne to relieve Alan Sumner, who was going abroad, and I went down there for a year to work in the National Gallery School. That really was my first serious effort at teaching.

When I came back to Sydney, I went to the Architectural School at the University of Sydney where the students have a course in art, along with Lloyd Rees, who had been there for some years in that capacity. I went in to take some of the work which was getting a bit too much for him. I've been there ever since, doing a couple of days a week perhaps.

Another thing I did was to go to what was then the Woollahra Art Centre, which Dora Sweetapple and some others set up in Woollahra there at St Brigid's, an old house; not only painting, there was drama and music and all sorts of activities going on there, which we carried on for some time. I did the painting classes. Then the Council suddenly decided to close it down, and that was a bit of a blow to Mrs Sweetapple.

Anyhow, Thea Proctor had had for years this studio in George Street which she sub-let to various artists, and at this time Jean Bellette had it, and she arranged with her for me to take the class there. That class I have been running ever since, for one night a week.

About my own methods of work: for many years I used to work directly from nature. I work very rapidly in that way. I find that I get a better result if I work quickly than if I ponder over it, that is on smallish things up to about 22 by 17 [inches], which is a favourite size of mine. Then for bigger things I would work from sketches, line and wash sketches usually, or perhaps just pencil notes.

I would start the bigger picture in the studio from notes I'd taken, and having got so far I'd perhaps go out and look at the subject again, and so on, not keeping exactly to things as I saw them but altering and adjusting and pushing things around till I got it into a design which I thought was constructive and complete; and so I worked on. Big pictures sometimes take a good deal longer, several weeks; in the meantime also doing rapid small pictures direct from nature.

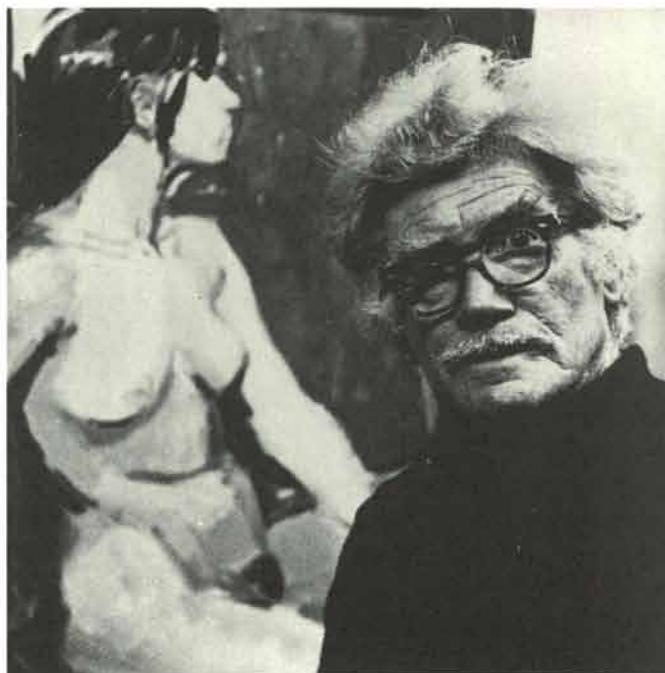
I usually see subjects when I'm walking along, perhaps it might be in a street or somewhere like that, and perhaps when there is a particular effect of light on it; that is, I've seen a subject which looked magnificent at one time, and I've gone back to it another day and it hasn't looked like anything at all. A lot depends on the effect of light, that is why when I am painting landscape I prefer a day when there are plenty of clouds rolling around so

that you get varying degrees of light, shadows cast across the landscape and that sort of thing.

Back in 1919, de Maistre and I both experimented with abstract painting. De Maistre, I think, perhaps carried this further than I did at the time, but after several experiments I decided that that wasn't exactly my line of country, that I needed something of the visual image in my work, and so although from time to time since I have done abstractions, I haven't exhibited them. I've done them more as an exercise because I think the abstract idea is very important from the view of constructive design.

In much of the work of the present day I find this constructive idea has rather gone by the board, and that, I think, is not very promising for the future of that kind of work. It's rather too haphazard and relies too much on chance, and doesn't bring forth the full creative powers of the artist.

I don't know how art will go in the future; that is a big thing to prophesy. This twentieth-century period has been one of great experiment. It has been one of specialisation, greatly; the Impressionists, for instance, specialised in light, Les Fauves in colour, the Cubists in form, the Surrealists in the subconscious, the Expressionists in human emotion, and now we have the action painters who depict really the action of painting the picture. Well, it seems that these have all to be brought together again by someone in the future. I think that that may indicate some idea of what form future art may take. We won't go back to that dreary academic painting of Victorian days, certainly not, but perhaps the visual image will come back again into art, perhaps in rather tenuous forms even.



William Frater  
1890–1974

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Melbourne, 1961

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 12

I was born in Scotland, 1890, in Edinburgh I was born really. At fifteen years of age I was sent to Glasgow for something to do. I went into a stained glass studio there at the age of fifteen, a friend of relatives. Automatically I had to go to the Glasgow School of Art.

Incidentally, that was in 1905, the Glasgow School of Art was an institution of international fame.

However, referring to myself as a painter, just at that time—of course, I was a junior at the school—there was quite an argument going on; our professors then were of the French classical school, you know, pupils of Ingres, David, but just a year or so after I arrived there, what we called in those days modern art had arrived. It may seem strange here in Australia talking about modern art way back in 1905, but that actually was the case.

Of course, as I said, I was a young student at that time. It was several years later when I became aware of many things. For instance, in one of the top life classes, we had a student there, Reid; his nephew was Alexander Reid, the dealer in Van Goghs, and in his windows in Glasgow I can remember quite well, in 1906 or 1907, we used to see coming up from our lodgings to the school, paintings that I know now were by Van Gogh and Gauguin. We considered them outlandishly foreign stuff.

At that time we had in Glasgow examples of German Expressionism, French Impressionism. Renoir exhibited there regularly; so you see this modern art that they speak of here didn't just arrive all of a sudden.

For personal reasons I arrived here in Australia in 1910, I was nineteen then, and myself and one or two others—several of them were killed at Verdun or Gallipoli, I'm about the only one of that bunch left—we were all enthusiasts for Manet, Renoir and so on, etc., etc. In fact too much so. I personally was expelled from the Victorian Artists' life class for being a bit of a nuisance. I can remember a romantic old chap called McCubbin, a dear old fellow, you know, they were all sentimental about him, bringing me out from this life class. At that time the Council of the Victorian Artists' Society went round the life class just as they did in the Royal Academy in the old days—we were working in many outmoded sorts of ways, really Rip van Winkle sort of thing; you can just imagine we fellows arguing amongst ourselves, all painting, by the way, in what McCubbin and the others thought was that 'slapdash modern nonsense', you see.

However, I went back after that, just for personal reasons again, I'd only been about a year here, I went back to the schools and of course, things had changed quite a bit there. The advanced students were going across to France and Belgium, and we ourselves went across. We were very well acquainted—I think in 1908, I remember going through later, about 1913, to see the Gauguin that Edinburgh had got in the National Gallery in 1908, so you see,

up in Scotland we knew all about this modern art in a general kind of way, long before they were at all interested in it down in London.

Anyhow, I arrived back here again in 1914, some months before the 1914 war broke out. Max Meldrum had come back here meanwhile, he had been abroad many years in France, and we had terrific arguments. Max would have nothing later than Manet, and the Impressionists he was not at all interested in. Really I think it was through my arguing and discussing with Max that was the beginning of what they called modern art here. Max was so dogmatic, you know, and his conception of tone was just black and white really, and this idea of tone as colour, later in the early twenties, when I became aware of Cézanne, tone became not just light and shade, but tone values had colour values as well, so that was the great discovery, really, that I personally made in the beginning, that was getting to know and understand Cézanne; that was 1922 or so, just after the return of the 1914 war fellows.

It went on from then. I was interested in Cézanne particularly. Another acquaintance of mine at that time was interested in Van Gogh. Really we weren't interested in any kind of revolution at all, we only realised that those artists were putting life back again into painting, they weren't trying to do something different. In the words of Cézanne they were trying to do the Louvre again, that is the thing the old masters were all interested in, doing it from nature. We were aware, of course, that certain others, young French artists, Braque and so forth, were experimenting with cubes, cones and cylinders—Kandinsky and all sorts, and German Expressionism—in fact way back in my school days we spoke of that heavy handed German Expressionism with derision. Of course it has become very popular of late.

I suppose about ten years after we started that, the floodgates opened, mainly through encouraging Nibbi, an Italian bookseller here, to bring out reproductions and books, all and sundry, of modern art.

I said at the time in a lecture, about '26 or '27, that I hoped that we hadn't started a new academy, and I'm afraid that it looks mighty like it today, that we really did. Strangely enough, I may be considered, I suppose, as the one who was responsible, here in Melbourne at any rate, for introducing modern art, and at present I'm inclined to talk students back to sanity in art, to point out to them that modern art as I understood it, and as I hope they will, was that work which really added to the work of the old masters, not something that threw them aside and did something totally different.

I think that is about all that you would want to hear me say. What followed from that is everyone's knowledge.

Speaking very very personally again, my own approach to painting always has been and I'm afraid until the end always will be, my first impression always, is an impression from nature, what I would call perhaps coordinating and correlating my impressions from nature in terms of the

medium I'm working in, paint. That I'm afraid is all I can say about that, that we must look to nature always, in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. As Goethe, I think, said to his students long long ago, 'There is nothing beyond natural phenomena'.

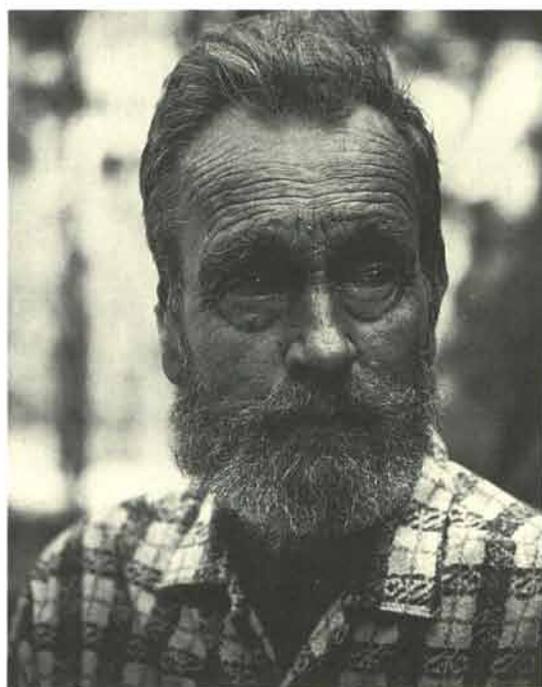
Philosophy, of course, is an important part of the artist. We can't deny that. Personally, I have always contended that natural religion was the true religion. Natural religion has been my religion. The art of painting is part of it. Of course, I know quite well that they say, 'Oh, copying nature!' but as I say to young people these days, all things are a representation of something. Even those people who are painting metaphysical ideas, they are representing some kind of mental idea, so that to talk about representation with a sneer, as they often do today, doesn't mean a thing. But nature is eternal, and I hope that if our work is alive in centuries to come, it will be known and understood and appreciated among folks then as it was in my day.

When I set out for the country to paint a landscape, one might ask just what is it that determines me to paint a particular scene before me. Well, in this country which has become my own country for this last fifty years or so, there is scarcely a part of this huge continent that doesn't excite me, and whether I have brushes or not I feel that I want to paint the thing. I've said many times that in Australia, we have a country that is so suitable for painting that I often say that had those great French artists, Cézanne, Pissarro, etc., lived in Australia, they could have done much better work still, because we here have landscape that—oh, it's halfway painted already, it excites me so much that one just sits down to paint. Of course, you can't just paint emotion, there is analysis. When I sit down before this glorious landscape, I know that it is impossible to paint the thing as it is, no one ever attempts to, no one ever could paint the thing as it is, one has to analyse it in the terms of oil paint that I'm handling. There is an orchestration of warm colours, an orchestration of cold colours, but when I say warm colours and cold colours I don't just mean warm colours out of the paint box, I mean the tones, the colour values that belong to nature. I group them into order of warm ones and cold ones, just as a composer of music would do. Then the light and dark, of course, as well as warm and cold, and I relate one group within itself, warm pale colours and warm dark colours, and the cold ones are pale and dark; and then I go on analysing, looking and searching and analysing, and after about three hours I've dirtied all my brushes, exhausted my eyesight, and I'm finished.

I bring the work home and sometimes I don't want to do anything to it; other times I'm not satisfied, quite often I'm not. I'll work perhaps half the following week on that particular work. I might feel that I want to do a big thing of this. Occasionally I take a big canvas out and more often than not, I

do a bigger one inside from that small one, say about 24 by 20 [inches] the small one; big ones are 36 by 48.

As far as method is concerned, I really have no method other than what I've just said: observation and analysis, of course in the terms of the medium we're using, that is, in my particular case, oil paint.



Ian Fairweather  
1891–1974

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Bribie Island, Queensland, 1963 and 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape nos deB 1 and deB 153

This is Ian Fairweather. (Oh dear!) I started painting quite young. I used to paint in oils to begin with, but I got into a state of lead poisoning and had a lot of trouble with my finger so I gave up painting in oils and I have never painted with them since. I always paint now in gouache.

After World War I I went to the Slade School to study art. I was there for about three years. (I don't know that I have anything else to say.)

I used to sketch from nature a good deal but I don't do that now at all. Things gradually develop. I like to have them hanging on my wall cooking, and in time they grow by themselves.

Painting to me is quite a mystery, and I really don't know how I do it, but just work at it, that is about the only thing.

I use any colour I can get at the local hardware store, mostly I use powder colour, and I mix it with polyvinyl acetate.

I live in my studio, and any time an idea crops up I try to paint it, no matter whether it is in the middle of the night or what time.

I take a very long time over my paintings, I'm afraid.

When I first came here there were about ten acres of pine trees round the place and I built my hut in the middle of them, but the bushfires have cut them all down, and now I am afraid there are just a few round the house.

Painting to me is something of a tightrope act; it is between representation and the other thing—whatever that is. It is difficult to keep one's balance.



[After this brief interview with Fairweather in 1963, Hazel de Berg returned in 1965 to record a second and hopefully longer interview with this reclusive and self-effacing artist.]

*Recorded in the Post Office, Bribie Island, 26 November 1965. This is his second (and still small) recording. There is a bridge across the Bribie from the mainland now and it's much quicker. I asked at the Post Office if I might record Mr Fairweather there as, of course, there isn't any electricity in his hut. If ever I wished I owned a portable it was then because Fairweather was strange there and the kindly woman kept coming in. We hadn't let him know we were coming and I was filled with apprehension. Kathleen Morris (who is a sincere Catholic) was praying.*

*In the time since I had recorded him [in 1963] he had written to me a couple of times and had been away on a trip to India. He didn't tell anyone he was coming back and after a while Laurie Thomas, the Director of the Gallery, had gone out and put a wire fence around his two huts to keep people away. I was sure he wouldn't remember my face again but on the first occasion I visited him I took a bag of oranges. I thought he might associate me with oranges so I took another bag.*

*The forbidding wire was all around the hut and we stood outside. He just came out and put out his hands. 'It was as if he were waiting,' Kathleen said. We told him what we wanted and we walked together up the path to the car. He was in stockinged feet. The pine trees which had been his friends were mostly gone but his eyes shone blue and bright and the silence was acceptable to us.*

*In the car I explained to him about the Post Office. He was quite agreeable. When we arrived at the Post Office he insisted on carrying in the tape recorder. 'You are the woman,' he said.*

*He himself plugged in the recorder and then waited. He is quite tall and slight, dignified beyond description.*

*We went well till he said he came back to Australia and started work. This should have gone on but seemed to be interrupted. Anyway, it's not bad—the thing that really affects him is people—the vibration of people. In summer it is his worst time—because there are so many—this I gathered in the car because now he was more relaxed.*

*I got out of the car at the top of the path through the bush under the bent-over arch of a huge tree trunk and he just left.*

*This recording with the other bit is as much as I could get—the thing is words are not necessary with Fairweather, he has his own communication. We all felt very peaceful in the car and Kathleen was crying.*

*On the road back a whole flock of green budgerigars suddenly rose off the road and sat like leaves on a dead tree—far away we could see the Glass Mountains. At the airport we found we still had three-quarters of an hour till the plane left, so like all good Queenslanders we drank it away.*

*Whether from exhaustion or the beer, I don't know, but I slept all the way to Sydney.*



This is Ian Fairweather speaking. I was born in the Bridge of Allan in Scotland, which is near Stirling. My father was a doctor in India at that time, and when I was six months old the family went to India and left me with some aunts in Scotland. I didn't see them again until I was ten years old, that is my father and my mother. They came back then and settled in London and I was schooled in London for some time. And then they went over to Jersey and settled in Jersey, Channel Islands, and I went to school there. I don't know what my interests were there particularly; I was very keen on collecting birds' eggs and did a lot of climbing. There are wonderful cliffs all round the island and I had some great adventures collecting sea birds' eggs.

When I left school I went into the army, I got my commission just before the outbreak of the 1914–18 war. I went over with the first batch to

Belgium. We were taken prisoner during the retreat, and I spent four and a half years in Germany as a prisoner of war. I did manage to escape one or two times but I never unfortunately got over the frontier.

After the war I resigned my commission and went to the Slade School of Art with the idea of making a career as an artist. However, I was unable to do enough work in London to make a living and finally I had to emigrate to Canada and from there to China and from there down to Australia. That's about all I can think of.

Whilst in London I used to find all my subjects to paint in the back streets and in the East End, and in China of course there was a good deal more of the same sort of thing. I was always happy in those sort of places.

On the way from China down to Australia I stayed in Bali, and coming from there to the west coast of Australia was a tremendous contrast. After lush Bali, the desert country looked terrible, and I took a dislike to Australia and I tried to get away as quick as I could. I went back to China and from there to the Philippines where I stayed for quite a while. About that time the war came on, the Second World War, and I went first of all to Hong Kong to try and join up with an English regiment and finally I got to India where I got a job with the army looking after prisoners of war in India, and when the war was over I came back to Australia and started work.

Well my way of working used to be to carry around a small sketch book and make studies from various things I saw. But in time I got interested in only a few subjects and I didn't want to go around looking for any more subjects; the problem was to do the one subject, and so practically it boiled down to that. By one subject I mean people, that is to say, not in a particular sense but generally speaking.

I don't know what I can say about influences that affected me, there have been so many. I suppose it all began with Cézanne and oh, there have been so many others. I've been affected by all of them, I've been rather like a weathercock.

Well, I think all these influences really, like Chinese and Buddhism and one thing and another like that, they're all outside and they don't have much effect on one's idea about painting, I don't think.

Most of my work is done very slowly. I'm not what you'd call a rapid painter at all and I do a lot of alterations, I'm very seldom satisfied with what I do.

At the moment I'm back on the old problem, and that's about all. I'm doing a lot of work.



Adelaide Perry  
1891–1973

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 157

*Recorded in her home in Hunters Hill, Sydney, 29 December 1965. Adelaide Perry is a traditionalist and with her conviction and friendliness has a tremendous dignity. As well as a painter she has been a teacher all her life—till she retired from teaching three years ago. Her final appointment (which she had for many years) was at Presbyterian Ladies College, Croydon. 'I loved it there,' she said, 'and still get letters from the girls.'*

*We took a while to begin as we admired the lovely water views. The house is between the Lane Cove River and the Parramatta River. Sydney has the most unexpected riverscapes. 'It never gets boring,' she said, 'there's so much beauty.'*

*In a way Adelaide Perry enjoyed making this recording. 'I'd like it to go on record,' she said, 'that I think the only real painting is from the subject—anything else could be false.'*

*There is a bit of nostalgia in this recording. 'Art exhibitions today have no dignity,' she said, 'and they should have.'*

*Mentions a picture called 'Portrait of Richard'. 'If you have the time one day,' she said, 'call in and I'll do a sketch of you—but I don't suppose you have much time.' On the tape she mentions the present day 'hurry' and how it contrasts with her method of working.*

*Adelaide Perry has great strength of character—unhurried and steadfast in a hurrying, changing age. There is something, I thought, as I sipped my beautifully served cup of tea beside the lovely flower paintings on the wall, in taking your time.*



This is Adelaide Perry, born in Beechworth, Victoria, but I don't remember it. My father died and my mother moved to Melbourne with her family. Later I went to school there, a little private school down at Brighton Beach, and later she married again and went to New Zealand, to Dunedin, and I did a little art at school, the ordinary things of those days, and later I went to Melbourne to the National Gallery School where I picked up a travelling scholarship and went to London. I was there for about five years, London and Paris. I went to the Academy schools, and then I came back, found my family had settled in Sydney, and I got a job teaching.

I went to England to discover that I knew nothing whatever about drawing. I had an appreciation of art but no idea of art in the sense of drawing or painting. I came under the influence of Charles Sims, Walter Sickert and Gerald Kelly and Ernest Jackson, and they taught me all the art that I know.

Back in Australia I taught privately and then at the Sydney Art School for about four years, then I started my own class in Bridge Street and later down in Pitt Street near the Quay, and then we had to get out of that because the war came. The students scattered everywhere, and later I got another

small studio in Royal Chambers in Castlereagh Street and then I decided to put in full time at the Presbyterian Ladies College at Croydon, and I did that until about three years ago.

Julian Ashton was principal of the Sydney Art School; it was his school, but in my time, although he taught, his eyesight was extremely bad and it was more in the nature of encouragement. He did encourage the students to work. Henry Gibbons did the night classes and I did the day classes.

In teaching I've always tried to make them see what there is to draw or paint, and they must understand what they are going to do before they attempt anything at all, but that is the difficult part. It's very hard to make them understand what to see, what to feel, that they must get weight and balance and feeling in their work.

I encouraged them to work from the real object, in the traditional manner, and base their work on that of the old masters as much as possible.

I started painting out of doors directly from something that I could see, and tried to get, even in those days, what I felt about them. Sometimes I would of course sketch, mostly with pencil, and where portraits were concerned directly on the canvas with paint. Later on, after coming back from England, I used to make more sketches but I did my painting, the actual portrait, directly from the sitter. In those days you could get a sitter to sit still but nowadays they don't sit still, they want everything done in a hurry so that the method has to change. It takes very much longer to paint a portrait than it used to, simply because you can't get your sitter.

Still life is direct. I may touch a thing up or change the colour or the composition to suit the picture but I like to set up my group.

In my 'Portrait of Richard', a school boy about twelve years of age, I can remember that I painted him or drew him in first of all with terre-verte and then painted directly in colour. It took me about three weeks. He came and stayed with me and so we worked every day.

In a portrait I try to get the character as well as the outside resemblance of the sitter, to get the feeling, because that would be your feeling of the sitter; it wouldn't be the sitter's feeling of you, fortunately. In this particular case I was very fortunate. It is a portrait of my nephew and he was very cooperative indeed.

In still life, I think I like to paint objects—flowers, bits of bush, shells—that either have been given to me or that I've managed to collect. In the more rugged parts of the bush, it seems much easier to pick up stuff that you can bring home and paint, and it's different, quite different.

I used to take my students out painting into the bush close to Sydney or down to Bradley's Head, to give them rocks and water, but generally I painted alone. I very seldom went out painting with anyone else other than my own student groups.

While I was teaching at the Sydney Art School—it was not then the Julian Ashton School, although it belonged to Julian Ashton and was started by him and run by him—Thea Proctor came for a short time and gave the first design lessons ever to be given in that school, and I think they were the first design lessons to be given in Sydney. She had a very great influence on design and drawing on a great many Sydney artists, not necessarily the most publicised artists but the men and women who are interested in art. She was one of Sydney's greatest artists in the way of drawing—portrait drawings very beautiful—and also her paintings on silk, still life and designs, flower pieces and designs on silk for fans. She is one of the Australian artists who used to be known in London, very much more actually than in Australia, for many years. I think that possibly Thea Proctor started off with her fan painting through the influence of Charles Conder whose fan paintings were very delightful, but I think that Thea Proctor advanced, her drawing was more academic, I think, than Conder's, and the work she did was very beautiful.

Margaret Preston was another of the Australian artists that I met, in fact she sat for me and I made some portrait drawings of her. She was a very good sitter; she had such interest in other people's work, and she loved the Australian bush. She based her work to a certain extent on Aboriginal art. She tried to get the secret of Aboriginal art and use it in her own work; her oils, her monotypes, her linocuts are Australian. They've all been based on Aboriginal art.

When I first came to Sydney I met Roy de Maistre. We both had studios in old Burdekin House, but he shortly afterwards went abroad again and I lost track. He was quite a social person, sort of aide to the Governor [Sir Walter Davidson], and he brought the Governor up to my room at Burdekin House. The Governor was very interested in painting. He wanted to know how to start a portrait, and I having just started a portrait seemed to be the right person. He was a very pleasant person and very intelligent, I thought. He asked me the right questions. I don't know whether he ever painted portraits himself later on.

The exhibitions of the Society of Artists in those days were in some ways more dignified. As a rule they would be opened by the Governor; the Governor would certainly attend, and any notable person visiting Sydney. It was a very great social event, one of the social events of the year.

Nowadays, having given up teaching, I paint at home from the Lane Cove River which I look out on at the back of the house or the Parramatta River from the front. I do portraits occasionally, when I can get people to come and sit for them, still life and so on. All my life I've been a realistic painter, because realism, I think, is important in this world.



## Grace Cossington Smith

1892–1984

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 122

This is Grace Cossington Smith. I was born in Neutral Bay, Sydney and I studied with a very good master, Signor A. Dattilo Rubbo. I have my mother's name, Cossington; she was born in Cossington, Leicestershire.

I studied with Signor Rubbo for a number of years and he was a marvellous teacher. He was very keen about colour and the modern masters. He was the only one in Sydney at that time who knew anything about the modern masters, Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh: they were hardly known in Sydney at that time.

I was always very keen about painting and I drew from my earliest years, and I always wanted to draw what I saw. I didn't begin painting till I was quite grown up, because I was so keen about drawing.

My earliest work—I used to go out and sketch, make a drawing, not a very detailed one but just with the forms, and I'd put a little note as to the colour and then I came home and painted it in my studio. Afterwards, I wanted to paint from the thing itself and that is how I paint now, really, from the subject itself.

My chief interest, I think, has always been colour, but not flat crude colour, it must be colour within colour, it has to shine; light must be in it, it is no good having heavy, dead colour.

[*Cuckoo clock chimes*] Will that come in? Oh how nice!

I only paint when I want to, really. I don't make a continuous job of it and sometimes I go quite a long time without painting at all. When I do paint, it is something I want to do and I paint for two or three hours in the morning and then perhaps an hour or two in the afternoon. This may take me a week or two, or if it is a large painting it takes me several weeks, and then I don't do any for some time.

I think my chief interest now is interiors. I used to be very fond of the bush but now it is interiors. I used to be very fond of the bush but now I can't manage to go out into the bush, and I used to love wildflowers; the Australian wildflowers are quite on their own, they are the most lovely things that we have and their colour is not what you'd call brilliant colour but it is a soft brilliant colour like our atmosphere, which is very wonderful. I'm particularly fond of the Australian bush with its marvellous soft colour and the colour of the gum trunks themselves, the pinks and the whites, the reds and greys and blacks. The Australian bush, I feel, has never really been painted and I think it is still waiting for somebody to paint the Australian bush as it is.

The large painting which I have in the Wills art prize competition is an interior and the subject took me very much. It is a room with a wardrobe and a bed and a carpet but the chief thing to me was the yellow walls, so that is why I call it 'Interior in Yellow'. It was a very exciting thing to do and I wanted to express the forms in colour with the light because the whole thing

is meant to express an interior with the light. Forms in colour is the chief thing that I have always wanted to try to express. I feel I haven't accomplished all I want to do, it is a continual try, to go on trying.

I use squares in the way I paint, not from a conscious way but it came to me naturally because I feel in that way that light can be put into the colour, whereas just to put colour on to the surface in a flat way, I feel that it gives it a dead look.

The room is in my own home here, and the sunlight did not come in in a definite way but the whole room seemed to be full of light, which is what I want to do more than the actual sunlight. I feel that even the shadows are a subdued light and they must have light in them as well as the light parts.

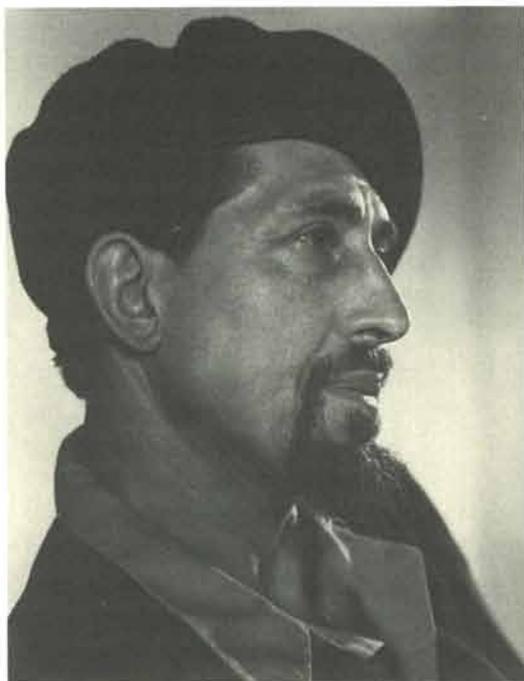
In the early days when I first began painting, I knew Roy de Maistre, Roland Wakelin and Lambert a little, I didn't know him well but he was most encouraging. When I had my first painting taken by the Society of Artists, it was chiefly owing to George Lambert and Thea Proctor that it was accepted at all, because in those days it was extremely difficult for anyone to get a painting accepted that was in any way out of the traditional style. Lambert himself was very interested in the contemporary movement and, of course, Thea Proctor has always been, and she has always been an encouragement to me.

In the early days when I was a student with Signor Rubbo we had very interesting lunch hours, because he always read something interesting to us about the contemporary painters of that time, Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and others which I can't remember just now, and from time to time other people used to come in, and I remember so well Margaret Preston coming in, and she gave us a very interesting talk on her methods. Margaret Preston gave us a very interesting talk, but unfortunately as it is such a long time ago, I can't remember exactly what she said, but she had a colour chart with her and she showed us how at the time she decided the colours of her paintings by this chart. She had a cardboard wheel, as far as I can remember, and she turned it round and it had open spaces, and whatever the colour was in these open spaces decided her on the colour scheme for her painting. I don't know how long she kept this up, but it was very interesting at the time to see the method of her work. She was a very vivacious, quick and interesting personality. I saw her many years afterwards when she was the judge of the Mosman Art Show, and I was particularly pleased that my painting of Australian gum blossom won the prize. Margaret Preston said at the evening in the Mosman Council that she didn't know me personally, and then she turned to me and said, 'I've never met you, have I?' Unfortunately, I was truthful enough to say, 'Yes, we did meet in Signor Rubbo's studio,' I think I should have been untruthful!

I don't remember any other artists particularly well who used to come to those lunches at Signor Rubbo's, except Roy de Maistre, who in those days was a very oncoming contemporary painter. He did extremely well with his quite individual modern way of expression; also Roland Wakelin. Those two are really the founders of Australian contemporary painting.

The spring is coming in the garden and the bulbs are out, and the camellias are beginning to come out, and the birds very often sing. The birds about here are perfectly lovely, and we have all kinds of birds, I don't know their names unfortunately. The magpies are lovely and the kookaburras, and there is a lovely Australian thrush which has the most beautiful note of all, it's got a singing note. There is a bird now. There it is again. There they are again. I think there must be several of them away down among the trees. It is such a happy, clear note and it is lovely to see them flying among the trees. There is an enormous gum tree at the bottom of my garden and the birds go for that very much, the kookaburras love it. Years ago we used to have wagtails and blue wrens, but unfortunately, so many people and the Council use these poisonous sprays, and so we haven't had any wagtails for a long long time, I'm afraid it has affected them.

It's lovely to hear the birds, there they are again, quite a chorus. We have a firewheel tree in the garden and sometimes the parrots come to the scarlet flowers, and it is a perfect picture to see them with their bright colours flying in and out of the boughs, and also of course going for the honey in the firewheel flower. The firewheel is a lovely scarlet wheel and it grows right on to the branches. I think the ones before this one were currawongs, they are a very large black bird like a magpie without the white wings, and it is most interesting about the currawongs because all through the summer they go somewhere else, and then in April or May there is suddenly a tremendous chorus of these big birds singing, and we know that they've come back again for the winter, and they stay here till about September and then they go back where they'd come from.



Weaver Hawkins  
1893–1977

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape nos deB 158–9

*Recorded in his home in Willoughby, Sydney, 31 December 1965. I had often seen Weaver Hawkins at art shows in Sydney. For many years he was President of the Contemporary Art Society (which flourishes in Sydney). On his tape, Weaver Hawkins mentions the CAS and its function in Sydney, and also the Printmakers Association which was founded in Sydney by Laurie Thomas. Weaver Hawkins was the foundation Vice-President of the Printmakers Association in Sydney.*

*Weaver Hawkins is a kindly man and often helped me make appointments. Despite the fact that he is over seventy he has an enormous capacity and an acceptance of all new art forms and ideas. I think he is a Buddhist by persuasion.*

*We recorded in the lounge room.*

*With the exception of Douglas Annand's place, I have never seen so many things around. Shells, pictures, stones—all beautifully arranged and dusted.*

*His biography is long and there are a lot of his war experiences. It is all very moving—particularly when you hear of the war injury which left him severely incapacitated.*

*This is a long recording but it was not difficult as he speaks easily and naturally. It is little wonder he has an open mind, he has lived in so many places. His ending is typical of his interest in people—it doesn't matter what you do as long as you do it from yourself.*

*When he finished he said, 'Will you join me in a glass of wine?' I was late already as I had promised Daniel Thomas to drop the last list of recorded artists into the Gallery. But I could not refuse—I stayed and talked and some of the quietness of this young-old man came into me. 'We could learn a lot from him,' Daniel Thomas said at the Art Gallery. 'He is wise.'*



This is Weaver Hawkins. I'm always known as a painter and a lecturer. My full name is Harold Frederick Weaver Hawkins. I was born in London in 1893, August. Right from my earliest years I've had an inclination to draw and paint. I can remember even at the age of four doing continually drawings of the objects and scenes and experiences that I came across around me. My father was an architect.

I'd always, even at school, had the desire to be a creative visual artist, and was not particularly interested in most other studies, but I could not get the time off in college—I was at the Dulwich College, the Alleyn School in Dulwich, after going to earlier schools, from 1906 to 1910, and I asked if I could put in more time than the weekly one-hour lesson in the teaching of art, and the art master there—we had a special art room—and he was interested in me too and put forward a recommendation that I should, if possible, have extra time, and the only time they would allow me off apart

from the usual art class was the scripture class, so I missed scripture always at school and went to study art.

Now, when I left school I was determined to carry on with my studies, so my father sent me then as a student full time to the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts. I went in 1910 and I was there till war broke out in 1913. He considered that I should do something more than just go through classes and listen to lectures on the history of art and so on and so on, anatomy, perspective and all these things; at the same time, he wasn't a wealthy man and he used to consider that I should be ready to earn a living in some way when I did get old enough to take on a profession. So it was decided that I should train as an art master. All the previous experience I had had all helped me towards this, and I then went through the Board of Education series of examinations and examples of work. Each year certain things were set and other drawings and so on which were done at the School of Art were sent in to the Board of Education, and this I did every year until 1913, and I then had one more exam to take and I was made a pupil-teacher at the School of Arts and Crafts there. I had studied, by the way, both stone carving and wood carving as crafts.

Well, the war was then coming on and I could see what was coming. I have a way of being able to feel things that are going to happen, it's happened several times in my life, and I thought Well, it's coming and it's going to be inevitable, I can see we can't get out of it, and I joined the London Territorials, the Queen's Westminster Rifles. The result was, when it came to 1913—sorry, 1914, the outbreak of war, I was then down at a Territorial camp and we suddenly got the notice as soon as we arrived there to pack up and return to London and hold ourselves ready for mobilisation. This I did, so I never took the final exam for the Board of Education art mastership.

By the time I came back five years later, after the war, the whole system had been changed, so that was finished as far as that went. In any case, I then had to put in some years then to use the other hand altogether.

I will tell you what happened. I went out to the front, I'm one of the Old Contemptibles. I was rushed out with my regiment to join the Regulars, the Durham Light Infantry actually, to hold and stop retreat, a panic retreat it was, from Mons. When I got out there, we had to be very careful how we went.

Finally I went over on the Somme on the 1st July 1916, I was then a lance-corporal, and by the way I would not take an officer's job because I said I wasn't trained as an officer and I needed much more experience before I would undertake to be responsible for the lives of a number of other men. Well I went over in charge of four signallers, one was hit as soon as we appeared above the surface, although we were going through then a smokescreen which was put up, and our guns were pelting the Germans, they

had been for five days, and then suddenly the German attack sort of dwindled down and we got over. I had one man each side of me, there were three of us, and the first one as I said was hit as we got out and he had to drop out, drop back into our trench, and we went over. Then I was hit in the leg by a machine gun, I think it was, it may have been a rifle, through the leg; luckily it didn't hurt my bone, and then a heavy explosive burst over us. Both men with me were hit. One fell dead immediately, absolutely flat dead, didn't move. The other one tried to struggle on to his knees. I was hit in the armpit, the whole side of my arm was torn open and the whole arm felt dead. I stumbled forward through the German wire where holes had been blown by our artillery, and luckily for me I fell down into a very deep shellhole in front of their trench. That saved my life, because the Germans by that time had appeared again because our guns had all moved from us down to support the big attack which I thought was going over further south, so there I was laying in this hole.

I then had to think about getting back to our line. I noticed that occasionally one of our men went running back towards our line, but only one or two during the day. The Germans had then started up with their snipers and so on. Anyone who showed themselves would have been killed, so I saw that the only thing was to lie in below the level of the ground here until it got dark. I got back that night towards our line, I knew the direction, and I could only do it on my hands and knees. Luckily I pulled the hurt arm across me and put it through a sling of the gas mask which I was wearing, and that caused the blood to congeal and seal the wound which actually had practically severed the artery and also the nerve.

I got back by doing two yards at a time and then fainting, and then I fell into another shellhole and in there was a dead corporal. My water had gone during the day, it had been very hot and sunny, and in his haversack I found a bottle of rum and his water bottle. I took a long swig of this army rum, which is overproof, and I have a feeling that the finding of that rum also helped save my life. Well I went on like this till it began to get light and I thought, What am I going to do now? I came to an advance sac in front of our lines and there were two men sitting in there on mudheaps with liquid mud all around them. They couldn't move, their legs were shattered, they'd been there all day, so I slid down into this, keeping my head below the surface from then on and asked if they'd like a drink of rum. They naturally nodded, they were too faint, apparently, or weak to speak at all, they just nodded, and I got hold of the first one, gave him the bottle and he had a swig, then I took it and got over to the next one, gave him a swig, and then I put the cork back, luckily, which I'd kept in my teeth, and I don't remember anything more till I felt a cold ring clawing up round my head, and I was sinking on my back into the mud, and this cold ring was the surface of the mud, crawling up my head. Another

minute or two, if I hadn't regained consciousness, I would have been under the mud. I managed to scramble out of the mud and clutched the bottle of rum, which was floating, and had another good swig and then I went off. I suppose I fainted or something, I don't remember anything more till it must have been, I suppose, that evening, and I felt, I'll risk it now before it gets dark, and get in. I could see the bayonets of our fellows in the line ahead, about thirty or forty yards, and I crawled over, put my head over them; the men all got the wind up in there, of course, but they helped me in and so I was back and rushed through to the base.

Now I was in hospital then for two and a half years. I had twenty operations. They were very good to me always. I was always a serious case, and it was some months before they could send me over to Blighty, England, although I was longing to go, but finally they sent me over to Bristol where I came into the hands of Major Heygroves, one of the leading orthopaedic surgeons of that time, and he was so interested in my case that he wouldn't allow anyone else to do anything to me at all, and asked permission of my father to operate in the way he thought was best. He said he might kill me but if successful he would give me partial use of both my arms, one particularly; the other one he'd do what he could do, because the artery had been damaged and so had the nerve, and this he did. He managed to give me partial use of the left hand and arm but not of the right hand, although he did of the right arm. He operated on both elbows, I had no elbows, they're flailed elbows, he had to cut them right out. Both shoulders were ankylosed, both wrists were ankylosed and the fingers were partially ankylosed. And so I was discharged in February 1919.

I got back to London—by the way, I used to go into the operating theatre sometimes in the hospital for this Major Heygroves, because he wanted diagrams and drawings made of operations being done, skin and bone grafts and things, and I did this for him. He wanted me to stay there to go on doing that but he couldn't do anything more than make me a sergeant. Well I wanted to get back to my art, and so I had to decline.

I got back to London and I applied for assistance from the government as an ex-soldier to study for three years. This I got, and I went back to the Arts and Crafts School in Camberwell first and studied under Walter Bays who was there at that time. I was getting on so well with him with one or two other students I knew who got back from their troubles too, Frank Medworth and David Jones, he is a well-known painter in England, still alive, and we went through three years, and then I had to get out on my own and do what I could.

During that time I also went to the Royal College of Art and studied etching under Sir Frank Shaw. I attended lectures at the Royal Academy and other classes I went to also. Now during this time I had begun to paint, draw,

paint in oils and watercolours, and I began to exhibit in London, the New English Art Club, the Goupil Salon and various other places, and also in the provinces. Then I had an exhibition, after I'd left the school, of my work, after I'd been out for a stay of about seven weeks in Morocco, I did a number of drawings and paintings and had a one-man show in London.

At that time I met my future wife and I decided, now what was I going to do? Was I going to put in for a teacher's job? Well, I did try for one or two, and the difficulty was of course my hand. I think they probably thought the difficulties were too great and so on, and so I thought, Look here ... Oh at that time, then, I got a lot of notice; the press took me up because of my arm disabilities. They started to write about me as the handless and armless artist, and so it became a nuisance. I couldn't go anywhere without being recognised and so on. So then I decided to marry, my wife and I married in London and we were in Paris that evening. I didn't go back to England for some time. We went to live down in Provence, Saint Tropez actually, where at that time there were a number of artists, quite an artists' colony actually.

[After living in Italy, Spain, England and again in France, Hawkins, with his wife and three children, moved to Tahiti and then on to Australia.]

We came through to try New Zealand first and we found the atmosphere there, to us, rather narrow and parochial, and we decided then to come on to Australia; this was in 1935, and it suited us perfectly. We found a property and went to live at Mona Vale, New South Wales, and the children went to the local schools and then came in to high schools in Sydney and so on.

Then years afterwards when the children had left, got degrees and so on, we moved in nearer to town, sold the property out there. While we were at Mona Vale I had joined up with the Contemporary Art Society as I was interested in the contemporary side of things, the more progressive and the more creative, and I became a member of the executive on that, then up to Vice-President and then President, and I continued as President of the Contemporary Art Society for about nine years. I was always interested in what was being done in the art world, naturally, and did what I could to forward it. The Contemporary Art Society is not only an exhibiting society, it is one that also tries to bring art and progressive moving new art to the people, and organises things for that purpose, discussions and so on, lectures, films, art films and so on; every month we've done this for the public for years and years and years; also quite a number of our members go out and give lectures to associations, organisations and even little local places out in the country and so on where they have started an amateur art society; they like us to go out there and criticise their work and give them some ideas. This has been going on and still goes on.

I'm getting on, I'm seventy-two now, and although I'm quite vigorous I feel that, especially with contemporary art, younger ideas should come in to

control, and so I persuaded them to allow me to drop out now, although they wanted me to carry on and become a sort of established thing, and well, a new one did come on, and now Mr Elwyn Lynn has taken over.

Now perhaps I'd better say something about my own work and my feeling about art personally, and the way I work. Well, I am primarily a classic artist, that is to say, what people call an intellectual artist, an architectonic worker; that is to say, I generally build pictures up step by step, like the architect building a building brick by brick. That can be done sometimes very quickly, sometimes it takes quite a long time, and the idea may not come fully at once. I might make quite a number of quick sketches of the idea which will develop, and I always find that the design, the colour scheme and so on, for the purpose it is thought out, it changes right to the end. Of course I have always done an enormous amount of drawing from nature, landscape, interiors, exteriors, everything I saw around me, also figure drawing, life drawing, paintings of life drawing using various media, that is to say charcoal, pencil, ink, colour, gouache and so on all my life, and these things have developed, of course, into a personal way of expressing and so on which is connected, of course, with my aim of building a sort of classical construction of my art as a whole. Many of the things are done, of course, straight from nature which might be more spontaneous and very free sometimes, but I find work generally tends to be controlled. Now, people say it is too intellectual and cold. I hold that it is possible to create beauty with the intellect, and that is what I've always tried to do, because I have strong views about freedom, entire freedom, with the romantic and the emotional. I think emotion can be a very dangerous thing, and if you just go wildly at the thing and allow yourself to be carried away and be spontaneous to a degree, it can be beyond control, and I think especially in the modern world it is an evil influence, though I must say that I enjoy a lot of the things that are done by romantics and the emotional painters, and I would not stop them doing it, I don't criticise them and I can appreciate them. I've done quite a lot of judging for collections for prizes and things, and I have sometimes given prizes for romantic paintings, but my own inclination is to develop the other side and that's what I've always done.

When I first came to Australia in 1935 and looked around before I got contact with artists and exhibitions generally, I felt very little of the modern movement at all, very little feeling of creativity, and that made me come in—I was painting, because I've always been working in painting even when I didn't exhibit, but then I came in and got to know a few artists, and that is when I came in contact with the Contemporary Art Society. It has advanced enormously since then and the artists themselves have woken up to this fact and quite a number have been overseas, as you will have known, and have come back with very strong influences.

One little group had started in a small way to influence things here before I got here, some years before, so they were really the people who stepped off and started the ball rolling. Now we've come in later, myself and many others, and have encouraged the ball to roll and pick up bigger and bigger influences, knowledge and so on, till now I think it is becoming quite an active influence on the whole country. And I can see that in the future it will become more and more a part of our civilisation, because more and more people are realising, and we are pointing it out to them in our talks, that art which had been so neglected is really a very very important side of civilisation and that without it we are just developing into sort of automatons, just accepting the facts that the scientists give us, handing over to us the automation and the machinery and the gadgets and things that we live by and so on, and we'd just become like zombies, just using these things and never developing anything for ourselves so that the mind will become a sort of mechanical thing, whereas art even if you never do anything great at it, if you take an interest and do a little you are doing something for yourself and you're keeping the spark of creativity alive in you, and you'll find it will benefit you personally and, on the whole, the whole country.



Daphne Mayo  
1895–1982

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1963

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 39

This is Daphne Mayo. I am a maker of images, that is, a sculptor. Ever since my childhood I have been addicted to scribbling with a pencil; the results were not so good as the children of today.

When I was a child, I had asthma, and the doctors told my mother not to bother sending me to school. That suited me very well, because it gave me unlimited time for scribbling.

Later I went to the Technical College. After a time there I won a scholarship and went to England. Those were my early years.

My family were interested in the arts. My father was a pianist, and also drew very well, and I have a cousin who was quite a famous cartoonist on *Punch*—H.M. Bateman. (That was a good long time ago.)

When I was in England I went to the Royal Academy, a place where you didn't get much training but wonderful facilities were given, and plenty of scholarships inside the school. I was lucky enough to win them all in the Sculpture Section, and finally I won the scholarship to Italy and was there in the Sculpture Section for a couple of years. Of course, that was really the beginning of my life. It was a travelling scholarship and I had complete liberty to do what I wanted. All I had to do was to send my sketch books back to the Academy. I travelled from Naples in the south to Rome, Florence, right up to Venice of course, and across to Milan. I had a wonderful couple of years.

At the end of that time I had to return. My mother was ill, so I had to return to Australia. I arrived back just as the Town Hall was building, and almost immediately I was asked if I would carve the tympanum of the Town Hall. The tympanum is a triangular shape above the entrance colonnade. This one was 9 foot high and about 50 or 60 feet long. I was absolutely inexperienced as far as a work of that nature was concerned. I said, 'Certainly!' and so had a very enjoyable two or three years. It was rather wonderful working on a building, of course, meeting all the workers, the different branches of workers, and—well, anyhow, it was a wonderful experience.

I have been asked how I set about a job. The nature of the commission, of course, has quite a lot to do with this.

I have been asked if I make sketches. Well, I think every artist, in the first place, works the idea out in his head, but then always, before starting the final thing, I always make not one sketch but quite a number, to make quite sure that I'm getting as much out of this particular idea as I can. Also, with these things, if carving a large work, or even a small work, it's impossible to make alterations after you start, and so you want a very clear idea of just exactly what you are going to do before you begin. It's the same if you work for bronze. If you work for bronze, you model the work in clay first, and of course, clay being very heavy and very inert, it has to be supported by iron

supports inside, and those supports must be exactly in the right place, because once you start you cannot alter them, you can't put a leg back several inches or raise an arm. It is fixed just where it is, and it has got to be inside; if it is an arm, it has to be right inside the arm, it mustn't stick out in a particular place.

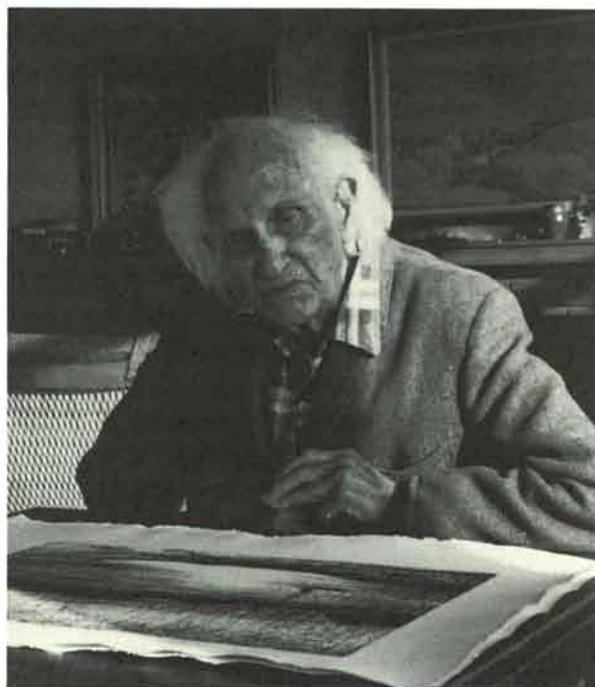
What kind of work do I like to do most? Well, that is a very difficult question. I like big work but I have earned my living by commissions, and when you have a commission, of course it's somebody else's wall that you're working to, but I quite enjoy that too, because it's a problem that you put your utmost into, to work out as successfully as possible. But I have always wanted to do fountains. They wouldn't be commissions. I would do them to my own ideas. I'm just about, I hope, getting to that stage when I'll be able to do that, just to concentrate on fountains.

There are two fountains in Sydney that give me very great pleasure: the Archibald Fountain; the bronze and the granite covered with the spray in the morning light are absolutely glorious—I think at any time of the day, in fact; and the fountain at Kings Cross, the El Alamein, isn't it? I think that is a most beautiful fountain. How people can complain that the water splashes out I don't know. Why don't they walk on the other side of the street, because it is so lovely to look at.

I personally am interested in the human form as the motif for sculpture, but I think that any manifestation of shape in space can be sculpture.

Nowadays we don't have to go and quarry our material like Michelangelo did, because all these materials are to hand. In Sydney there is plenty of very good stone, sandstones and other stones, wonderful clays of different colours to be found all over Sydney; let me think, what other materials? Plenty of woods in our forests for carving, and now plastics are coming on the scene. Whether they will ever form a very promising material for art is a matter for the future.

Also, when I was working on the Town Hall, I would like to add there were a large band of workers who carved out the rough stuff from my model and prepared it for my final working. The amount of stone was quite a quarry; 9 foot by 55 feet about, and 2 feet in depth. It was all done in the situation where it is, on the top of the Town Hall. Very often work of this nature is carved on the ground and then hoisted up, but in this particular case we climbed innumerable very high ladders to get to the position of the stone. The part that was so thrilling to me was the wonderful help and comradeship of all the workers on the job.



## Lloyd Rees

1895–1988

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1962

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 25

I was born in a riverside suburb in Brisbane called Yaronga and my early years were spent alongside St Lucia Flats where Queensland University now is.

I first became interested in painting and drawing so long ago I can hardly remember. I can remember doing friezes of railway trains along the verandah walls, which weren't altogether acceptable to my parents; and then I did watercolour paintings inside the lids of my mother's hat boxes. In those days, ladies' hat boxes were very big and the lids were very good to paint on.

Then I went to a little school called Ironside School. We had to even run the hazards of snakes in the bush, because it was a very snaky place. All of that now is built over. The old house we lived in, a big old two-storeyed wooden house, had a dado round the upper floor about eighteen inches high of stain; dark brown. That was the flood mark of the famous or infamous 1893 flood which was, of course, a couple of years before I was born.

I always look back upon those early years as being very confusing regarding floods, because everything happened either 'before the flood' or 'after the flood', and I got it all mixed up with the Biblical Flood.

Later on my art training was at the technical college in Brisbane, and there was a very dear old man there, Godfrey Rivers. He had come from the Slade School, I think. And there was a very accomplished man, Martyn Roberts, who had a fine idea of constructive drawing. He is still alive, over ninety, and active. And there was Harvey, who was a sculptor.

In my twenty-first year, I came to Sydney; that was 1917. I had very poor health, I must admit. I came to Sydney and joined Smith and Julius' studio. I suppose that is where I might say my real education began, because there was a remarkable number of people there, a gathering of people like Roland Wakelin, Percy Lindsay, Sydney Ure Smith of course was the presiding genius; and it was my good fortune to witness the beginning of colour printing in Australia. The Hilder book was the beginning of it. And Syd Smith with his enthusiasm got a young publisher, Hyde was his name, and the two of them put their heads together and really founded colour printing in Australia, a remarkable thing to do; and I remember the second Hilder book. The first one was a little five shilling edition which Syd Smith with his kindness had produced to help the widow of J.J. Hilder, the romantic watercolourist; and then later on, when *Art in Australia* was really launched, he did a full-scale book on Hilder's work. I had the privilege of going up with Mrs Hilder to draw the old cottage at Hornsby where Hilder lived and died.

Those days, going into the twenties, really were remarkable because *Art in Australia* was a great focusing point; Syd Smith became President of the Society of Artists, and I think that was what brought the interest in Australian art from Melbourne very much to Sydney. In that little place, 24 Bond Street, Lambert came, all the Lindsays came, Melba, leading visitors to

the city. Verbruggen, Roy de Maistre and Wakelin together were carrying on their early experiments in colour painting and linking colour with music—that was what de Maistre was particularly doing, because he was in the Conservatorium orchestra.

Now, about 1918 or 1919, in Penzance Chambers, Elizabeth Street, there was an exhibition held by Wakelin and de Maistre. The positive dates can be found, the Mitchell Library has the records, but it was either '18 or '19. I am stressing that, because that exhibition marked the introduction into this country of modern art. There had been certain evidence to the contrary by later generations who were not aware of the facts, and credit has often been given to the Melbourne group. Not taking anything from that, that was in the later twenties, but Wakelin and de Maistre must be accredited as the foundation members of the first contemporary movement in Australia.

Then the Contemporary Group was formed; Lambert was interested in that and altogether those were very very exhilarating days for a young and somewhat unsophisticated artist from Brisbane, to get into that atmosphere. After that, 1923, I went overseas, and then came back here and proceeded at that stage to do naturalistic painting up in the Parramatta district. I think I may say I worked rather consistently—put it that way. I used to be up at dawn, winter and summer, going out 'chasing nature' as they say now, the impossible task of trying to reproduce nature on canvas. It took many years before I got any grip of the problem at all, and it was an intensive period of drawing in the late twenties and early thirties, when as far as my capacities permitted I set out to analyse the forms of the country.

Previously I had been concerned with impressionistic, atmospheric delusions of reality. Now, some great schools of painting have carried that quite a long distance; the Impressionists did it. But from my earliest days, I was always interested in form, and it was not till I got to the problem with pencil and fine paper—hitherto, we always sketched fuzzily on rough paper—but fine paper and a fine pencil, and I started to analyse form, and it brought a new element into my work altogether, which I have pursued more or less consistently ever since.

The Abstract movement interests me tremendously, but I don't think at this age I could turn round and paint in that manner, I think it would not be a sincere thing to do, but I can see the reason for it; a breakaway from appearances, and the effort to make painting a pure art in its own right in the sense that music is, and also architecture. I think the earlier ages of our history placed upon the artist the necessity to become a recorder. Now that is past, and I think the confusion between photography and painting has been clarified forever by the latest schools, from Cubism onwards, which have insisted on painting being an art based on its own values and not necessarily based on appearances. By that, I am not going to say that great art and

appearances do not go together, because all the great masters of the past refute that; but the present day art is an effort to break away from appearances, and establish painting as a thing based on the human intelligence, emotions, and upon the colour box and the materials used, much as modern sculptors are stressing the same relationship between the material and the expression.

The only thing that I feel very strongly about is this: that the artist is a commander. An artist who is submerged by his material is not an artist at all, he must be a commander, he must control and mould and express his own will upon that material.

Henry Moore brought that matter out very clearly when quite a number of modern sculptors, slavishly controlled by the material, would quote him as an example of it. Henry Moore said that a sculptor who is controlled by the material, or words to this effect, is no more creating sculpture than is a child who makes a snowman.

I think that that is as near to expressing a code as I could hope to do in a limited space of time.



Alison Rehfisch  
1900-75

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 116

*Recorded in her home in Pymble, Sydney, 15 November 1965. Her husband George Duncan was also on the list Daniel Thomas gave me. I found the gate in the dark with huge trees and drove up past one house and trees into a cleared space and there was the house. It was an old house with verandahs and vines, and as I got out of the car there was this incredible perfume. It had been raining and there were huge shadows of trees around the cleared space and the smell was of youth and summer love—however old you are and whatever the season.*

*The door opened and the light shone across the steps and the cobblestones. 'Here,' George Duncan said, 'let me carry that.'*

*Alison Rehfisch stood in the doorway, slim and waiting and the light made a halo of her fine hair. There was no detail of her face and I can't recall it even now—there is just this feeling of light around her.*

*We recorded her first and when I asked her about her childhood she said, 'It was sad—my sister died—but you don't want that.'*

*'Do you think that had any effect on your painting?' I asked.*

*'Oh, yes—it's the whole basis,' she said.*

*'Well,' I said, 'I think you should say it—if you can.'*

*So she began with this story of her childhood and later told how she studied with Julian Ashton and Dattilo Rubbo, and mentions various painters. Tells how she painted 'Ecological Fragment'. In the telling of this, she reminded me slightly of Helen Lempriere, although Alison Rehfisch's work is much more clearly defined and she uses bolder colours. When she talks about this picture it is interesting to notice just how she does relate 'life and place'. 'I think living in this old house helps,' she said to me when she finished recording. 'It has a feeling of harmony and I know the people who have lived here have been happy.' 'Sometimes too,' she added, 'I think about before the house was built and the Aboriginal people were here.'*

*'Like Rex Ingamells,' I said. 'A thousand camp fires every night in ages gone would twinkle to the dark.'*

*'Yes,' she said, 'it's just like that.'*

*Her life balances out because she is teaching art now. I think she would be an inspiring teacher—she believes in people.*



This is Alison Rehfisch speaking. I'd like to talk a little about my early childhood. I was born in Sydney, in Woollahra as a matter of fact, in an old old house that I think is still standing but I don't remember it. We moved over to Mosman when I was very young. I was very lucky, really, very fortunate. I had parents who were very interested in painting, in all the arts—music, literature, everything.

When I was very young, at the age of five, I had a tragedy in my life. I lost my youngest sister, whom I loved and adored, and I was a very, very lonely child after that; she was my sole playmate. Life seemed so cruel and I was so frightfully alone without her, but I started to draw, strangely, pictures of God and Heaven and angels and things, and the landscape and the world to which I imagined she'd gone and where I longed to go myself.

Well then, of course, I grew up, and I used to write stories and compose tunes on the piano with one finger, and draw; all those things interested me. I was encouraged by my mother, who did all these things herself. She was a very good painter and carved in wood, and she was a good musician, and she encouraged me in all these things.

Then, when I left school, it was decided that I should take up drawing seriously, and I was sent to Julian Ashton's Art School. Julian Ashton was a wonderful teacher, as everybody knows, and the father of many well-known artists today, but I didn't work terribly hard. I was full of *joie de vivre* and so on, the material side of life, of course, and then at the age of nineteen I married, and then for the next two or three years, or three or four years, housekeeping and motherhood—I had a child—and that sort of thing took up my time.

Then when my daughter reached school age, a terrific longing to paint came over me, I just had to do something like that, so I joined Dattilo Rubbo's classes; an Italian who had been teaching in Sydney for some time. It was then that I really did start to work. He was a wonderful teacher. He realised I was an unconventional, peculiar sort of person really, and he rather encouraged it, not always approving but always sympathetic and helpful. And he helped me. He did help me with construction and drawing, which has always been my weak point. It was there that I met my present husband who has always been a help to me with his encouragement and criticism and so on—George Duncan.

I worked seriously for years and years, and from that day to now I've never ceased to paint. In about 1934 I was lucky enough to be able to travel abroad, and I saw the great art of the world. El Greco was one of the people who made a terrific impression on me, with his sombre colour and his elongated shapes and his drawings; it just rang a bell, somehow, in me. And then Braque with his feeling of design, his reality. Reality has always appealed to me; I've always hated frills and that sort of thing in life and painting, too, I think.

And then, I was very interested in Marc Chagall's work. You know, I've always thought that artists should never really be influenced by any other artists, but stimulated by them. Marc Chagall was a terrific stimulus to me, and I think it was from when I first saw his work that fantasy started to creep into my work, it had been mostly still-life subjects up to that day. But then I

tried to join up with fantasy, and from then on, when I came back to Australia—I was over there about, oh, six years—I came back and I worked on my own, and within the last few years I've been extraordinarily interested in an ecological approach, which is the balance of life and place. I wanted to balance my subjects with something behind it, something deeper behind it. I think my early childhood feelings about trying to get behind things had something to do with it. It's always been with me; always being interested in the other side of things.

From then on, I've gone along those lines. I think one of the best things I've ever painted is 'Ecological Fragment', which has something of Australia, the heat and harshness of Australia, behind it; the Aboriginal death symbols, totem poles and so on, balanced with the gay still life of bottle brush and leaves; trying to get that balance in between. Somehow or other it's terribly difficult to get right behind things, as I think every artist should do. After all, it's not just a superficial rendering of the things we see in front of us, it's trying to get the spirit behind all that and join it up with something, another life that isn't quite only of this world, and I expect I shall go along those lines for quite a while yet, I don't know—I probably shall.

If I am using a large canvas, I usually make one or two notes first, but I don't use them. I just use them in my mind, I destroy them before I put charcoal or paint to canvas. I have it all clear in my mind. Usually, when I'm painting anything at all, things come to me. I'm slightly psychic, and things come to me in that peculiar period just between waking and sleeping. I see the whole composition, the colour scheme, the feeling of the thing, but I have to work out the detail, of course, physically, myself, afterwards; but the whole general feeling of the thing usually comes to me, and I never start an important work unless that happens, because I find it's never any use at all. I paint sketches, of course, landscape, flower pieces, still life, all kinds of things, but when I'm really working on an important work it usually comes to me in that way, and then I make just very rough notes of it first, which I destroy before I start painting.

I work rather quickly, really. Well, sometimes I work for five or six weeks pretty well every day on a large canvas, but not for months and years as some artists do. I'm rather impulsive and impetuous, and I like to get on to it. If I don't get what I want in the first painting or two, it's lost, I never get it again.

I think colour is the most important thing, colour and design and dimension in a painting. You can't decry the skeleton of art, it must have drawing, design and colour whatever it is, whatever your outlook is, it must have, that is why the years of study have been very very good for me.

It's only just recently that I've forgotten all that and tried to get through to the thing that I want to say, and having done that, one or two of my old

students that I had in the past—I haven't done very much teaching, but they have asked if they could come back, and just recently I've started a class for a few of them, and I'm very delighted to see the way they're simplifying their work, getting away from details and frills and so on and getting down to colour and design, just the way Braque did and some of those people. I'll be very interested to see just how they'll go on and how they'll develop.

A few years ago my husband and I were desperate to know where we were going to live, and quite out of the blue we found an old old house, about eighty years old, built of mahogany. We haven't done very much to it. We've taken a bit of a wall down to make a studio so that we'd have room to paint. It has verandahs all round and grapevines and a lovely old garden, nearly an acre of old rose trees and fruit trees and things of that sort, and we love our garden. We spend most of our spare time gardening, weeding out a horrible weed called oxalis that is prevalent on the North Shore line; but we grow camellias and roses and we tend all the old trees that were there, and we hope that we'll always be able to go on doing that. It's a great interest, very good exercise and mental relaxation as well. We love our garden, I hope it will always flourish.



Treania Smith  
1901–90

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 141

*Recorded at the Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, 15 November 1965. I had long wanted to record her and get some of the background to the Macquarie Galleries and also her personal background as a painter.*

*The Macquarie Galleries was one of the first commercial galleries in Sydney and has had exhibitions of many of our older artists. It maintains the standard of its predecessors and shows works of artists who work through the subject although it is also the sole agent for Ian Fairweather, who has no communication with accumulated tradition except that he uses traditional media and so on (although the fact that he paints on clean pieces of daily press-paper is a little unusual). Another artist whose work they have exhibited is Ostoja-Kotkowski—the young Adelaide artist I recorded here at Macquarie in 1962, and who has since gone on using electronics and various other devices of the present day. He, more than other artists, working in Australia today, works completely in the present and should in all fairness to the future, be recorded.*

*Treania did not wish to record in the open gallery, so we fitted the two of us and the recorder into the tiny office. She is a mature woman of strong character and I had got to know her comparatively well through various exhibitions. It was as well I knew about the twinkle in her eye and her ability to tell a story because she conveyed nothing of this as we sat cramped in the little room trying to get started. Her recording is excellent and she hopes now to have time to paint again herself. Her father was Evan Smith—Government Architect in Victoria and later, New South Wales.*

*It was interesting to hear her say when she studied art in Melbourne with Max Meldrum that Arthur Streeton occupied the studio below. She also studied in Edinburgh and Sydney. She used to go out painting in Sydney with Grace Cossington Smith and Enid Cambridge and Thea Proctor. 'We had a terrific time,' and her eyes sparkled. 'I wish I could tell you some of the things we did.'*

*'Like what?' I said.*

*'Oh,' she said, 'we'd be staying in the country and we'd paint all day and talk all night.'*

*'What about?' I said.*

*'Painting,' she said.*

*There is the history of Macquarie on this tape from its first director, John Young. She mentions people who exhibited there including Rupert Bunny. She told me a funny story about him and put a bit of it on the tape. How they came to exhibit Fairweather's work is another story in itself. I notice Lady Casey once got him out of jail.*

*'It is impossible to tell all of this on the tape,' she said. 'Lionel Lindsay used to say whatever came into his head at the top of his voice.'*

*It was hard to get her to tell her stories on the tape—she wanted to tell me first—but this is fatal. Some I managed to get her to tell straight. Hal Missingham came in in the middle—back from the Commonwealth Arts Festival*

*in England. He had recorded some artists for me at the Festival and this was the first time I had seen him. He wanted to hear Treania's recording but she wouldn't have it. 'It's not finished,' she said, 'and I won't do any more till you leave.'*

*Mary Turner brought us all a glass of wine and we drank to the recordings 'including the ones I did,' Hal said.*

*We finished the recording and heard it back. I had left the car at a garage opposite and Treania helped me over with the things. The others had gone but it was late spring and still light.*

*'Thanks,' I said, and kissed her. 'You came good.'*

*'I didn't want to do it,' she said.*

*'But you're glad now,' I said. Her face was glad.*



This is Treania Smith. I was born in Brisbane and I've lived all over the eastern states of Australia. As a child I always seemed to be drawing. When I was five I went to Edinburgh to stay with my grandmother, and while I was there I went to a little school. Bigger children were being given drawing books and I stood up and put my hand up and said, 'I would like a drawing book because when I grow up I'm going to be an artist.'

After this I came back to Australia and I went to school first in Brisbane and in Melbourne, then in Sydney, then back to Melbourne again. When I was at school I had drawing lessons, of course, in the normal way and I also had some special lessons. When I was leaving school my father, who was then living in Brisbane—father and mother came down to Melbourne and I got out of boarding school then, and father was a great friend of an artist called Max Meldrum and he took me along to his studio, and I fell in love with the sort of real studio life that I thought I could see there and finally I was left in Melbourne, staying with another artist friend of my father's called Harry Harrison and his wife, Daisy Dow Harrison, in an old house in South Yarra that belonged to McCubbin, and living in half the house was Louis McCubbin who became the director of the Adelaide Gallery. There I had a very happy six months or so studying with Max Meldrum.

Max Meldrum in those days was a very dynamic personality and he had as an assistant a painter called Justus, I think it is, Jorgensen, and he used to teach also. The Meldrum studio in those days was at the top of a big theatre, I think it was the Palace, in Bourke Street, and there were a number of studios in this building and the floor below was occupied by Sir Arthur Streeton.

My father was Evan Smith, an architect very well known in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, in fact he was Government Architect in Victoria and later Government Architect in Sydney. He won the bronze medal for the best

street architecture, I don't remember which year, for the Emily McPherson College which is very well known in Melbourne.

After I came back from Melbourne and the Meldrum school, I lived in Brisbane for a year or perhaps two years, I can't remember, and I kept on painting and I also did some pottery with a man called Harvey. After this my father became Government Architect of Victoria, and we moved there and I continued to paint and I took lessons at the Technical College in modelling and sculpture, from a Mr Davey. Mr Davey was a delightful old man, he was a Scot and he was always telling me about old days and old times and famous people that he knew, and talking about Edinburgh where I'd been to school as a child, and I think out of that came the feeling that I'd love to go abroad, and quite soon, and be a sculptor in Edinburgh.

I went first of all, of course, to London, looked all round the galleries there and that sort of thing, and then I went up to Edinburgh where my people come from, or were living, a lot of them; they really come from the north of Scotland, but Edinburgh seemed quiet. I had cousins who were at the university, and I thought I'd like to go to the Edinburgh College of Art, and there I enrolled and had lessons from quite famous people.

When I returned to Australia, my father was then Government Architect in New South Wales and I returned not to Melbourne but to Sydney, and I continued painting at home—there was room for me to paint there, but not enough room for me to have a studio for sculpture, so I went to the Technical College and worked in the kennel, as it was called then, under Rayner Hoff. Shortly after this, I put in a landscape for the Wynne. I think I'd already put portraits in for the Archibald but I don't remember much about that, but the landscape produced through John Young, who was the father of a girl I was studying sculpture with, Beryl Young, and he was the original director of this gallery, Macquarie, he had a great friend Roland Wakelin, and Roland Wakelin had noticed the landscape and John Young took a great deal of notice of what he thought, and so he wanted to see more of my work and he gave me my first show. It was opened by the then champion of modern art, the critic of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Kenneth Wilkinson. I didn't know him at all before he opened the show but he became a great friend of mine.

I think I had two shows here before I came into the gallery as John Young's secretary. His partner John MacDonald had gone to Queensland and times were a bit hard in the galleries then, and John had an elderly father and I don't know what caused him to go, but he had gone up there and John Young needed some help in the gallery. I think I had two more shows before I took the gallery over at a time when John Young wanted to get out. He made it easy for me to take it over, and I found a partner in Melbourne, Lucy Swanton, who came over here and went into partnership with me.

Lucy and I were in partnership for sixteen years, and then she found it a bit of a burden and decided to get out, and I went into partnership then with Mary Killen as she was then, Mary Turner.

When I had my first show here, Enid Cambridge wrote me a very charming letter, and we became very good friends, and as well I had other friends in the painting world, Thea Proctor, Helen Stewart, Grace Cossington Smith; and sometimes Enid, Helen, Grace and myself would go away painting. We'd go away sometimes for a week or ten days and I found their companionship very stimulating.

Well we all painted straight from the landscape, you know. I mean those were the days when you were trying to express yourself through the subject, and the idea in those days was to have an individual approach. We'd all paint the same thing and arrive at an entirely different conclusion.

With the increasing work in the gallery and looking after my parents, who were becoming old, I stopped painting about fifteen years ago, I think. Before that I used to paint just as an amateur would but I never had another exhibition after I took over the gallery, because I had no agent. Now, for the first time for many years, I feel a little freer and I would like very much to paint and, who knows, I may go back to it all.

My work in the gallery, of course, brought me into touch with all the painters or a great many of them; other people intimately connected with the gallery, the artists who were exhibiting here long before I took over, names that come to mind: Roland Wakelin, Lloyd Rees, Thea Proctor, Grace Cossington Smith, Enid Cambridge and many others, all very well known. I've known Thea Proctor for about thirty years, I suppose Roland Wakelin for the same, Enid Cambridge and Grace Cossington Smith.

I remember having a conversation with some elderly gentleman in here when I first came into the gallery; he told me that he'd known Thea Proctor many years ago when she was a young woman, and how very beautiful she was, he'd followed her all the way from Mosman wharf or something like that, just to have a look at this beautiful creature. She has retained both her beauty and her vitality, and is now doing work that is more vigorous than when she was in her thirties.

I suppose we have come into contact with practically everybody whose names have now become famous and a great many of them had their first show in this gallery.

When I first went into partnership with Lucy Swanton, we talked about our enthusiasms for a painter called Rupert Bunny, who'd just come back to live in Australia after living in France for pretty well three-quarters of his life, and I asked Lucy if she could see him when she was on a visit to Melbourne. She did, and he said he thought we were mad to want to show his pictures, and nobody looked at them now, and we said we didn't care, and so began an

association that lasted till his death. Rupert Bunny was a very interesting and very attractive man, although he was probably, when I met him, in his early eighties or late seventies, I'm not sure which. He'd been married to a French woman who was quite a good painter, he showed me some of her work once. He'd never got over the idea that she had attached much more importance to her voice, which was a mezzo-soprano, and he didn't like it. He himself was very musical, and he used to compose music, and I think that for some reason or other that was why this voice always irritated him.

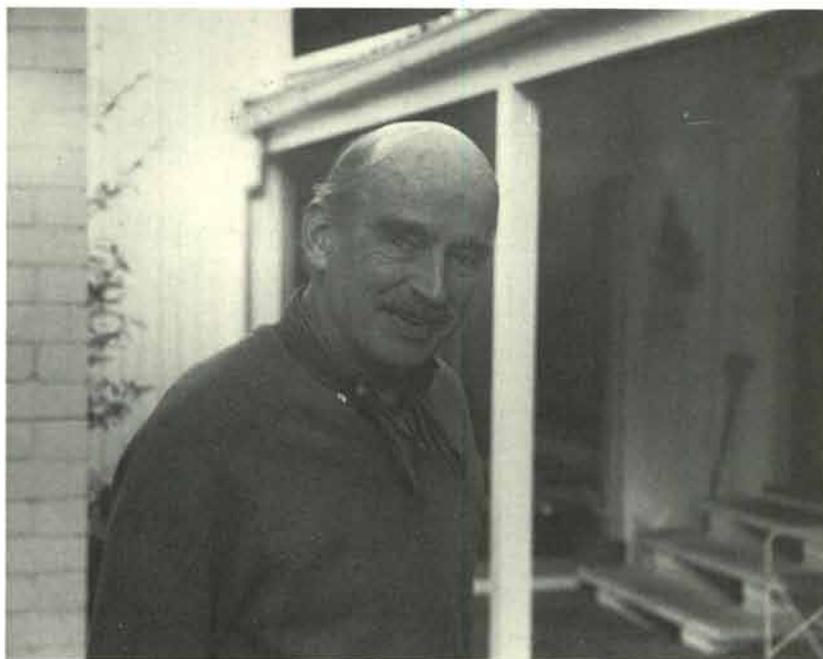
On another trip to Melbourne, I was going to the house of Lina Bryans to look at some of Jock Frater's work, because he was going to have a show in Sydney with us, and I met Jock Frater in Melbourne and had a cup of coffee with him first to arrange this meeting, and I said to him, 'The thing I'd love to see would be some of Ian Fairweather's,' while I was out visiting them, because he lived in the same house at that time, and he said, 'Oh well, that's a very difficult thing, you know, we'll see what we can do.' And I later on went out to have lunch with Lina Bryans and Jock Frater, and catalogue his paintings for his show in Sydney, and they said, 'Well, you've been a bit lucky, because he's consented to leave some work in another room for you to have a look at.'

So I said 'Oh, that will be lovely,' you see, and as we walked down to this room, I was conscious of the fact that he was walking down the hall behind us but I thought, like Lot's wife I'd better not look round, otherwise I'd never see the paintings, so I paid no attention, I walked into the room and I was also conscious while I was in there that there was a chink of a crack in the door opposite which meant that he was kind of looking at me, watching to see my reactions to the work, and I was really terrified. However, I hoped I was saying all the right things about them, and I saw this great bundle of Fairweathers and became absolutely in love with his work. When I came back to Sydney we wrote him a letter to see whether he'd have a show with us, but there was no reply and there was no word from him for years. In the meantime he'd gone up to Queensland after having a row with his benefactors in Melbourne on account of an exhibition in London that he didn't approve of or something, and while my partner Lucy Swanton was in Europe I got a letter from North Queensland saying that he was sending me three or four paintings and telling me that the wolf was howling at the door, so when the paintings arrived I rang Hal Missingham and he came down and he bought two and then he told me about somebody else who'd be interested, and we sold the four of them, I think there were, and in the meantime, as soon as I got the letter, I sent him a fiver which was a lot of money in those days, not much now, but still it would keep the wolf away for a few days, and then I sent him the rest of the money, and from that time on we've been his agents, I should think.

Every month I write to him and he writes back, we keep in constant touch, except for the time when he fixed himself up a raft and started to drift from Darwin to Dili in Timor, wasn't it? Anyway, I don't know but off he went on this thing, and we thought he was dead, of course; but he did arrive and then he was thrown into jail in Java; he'd no papers, no money, but Mrs Casey as she was then, now Lady Casey, managed to get him out of jail and as he held a British passport he was sent back to London, and we still didn't hear for a while, but not long after that there was a telegram from Central Station asking me to send some money to an address in Brisbane. So I sent the money and said, 'There's a lot more money here waiting for you, but I want you to write to me, because I can only identify you by your handwriting.' At that time I'd never met him. Since then I've been up to Queensland and out to Bribie Island and had several very interesting visits with him.

Over the years that I've been in the gallery, fashions have come and gone and the whole face of art has changed, I would say about every ten to twelve years you get an entirely new crop of painters with new ideas. The best of the old ones still keep going, some fall by the wayside, some are never heard of again; they might be dead or they might be still alive and nobody ever thinks of them, which is sad.

Really, when you come to think of it, I don't think more than five out of every decade will really live, but if they're good enough they do.



Douglas Annand  
1903-76

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 132

*Recorded in his house at Killara, Sydney, 2 November 1965. I knew Douglas Annand quite well and he was waiting out the front for me. 'I thought you were lost,' he said.*

*This is a lovely house with banksia trees in the front and the garden is carefully (not methodically) laid out. 'Nothing is ever wasted,' Douglas said. This is very true—the same creativity he has in his work is brought to bear on all the odd things that come his way. We walked across myriad coloured bottle bases set in cement, and inside the house what looks like a rough stone wall with designs is really the pages cut from a magazine and pasted over the entire wall. There are Japanese dolls arranged in scenes that could be a puppet show—everywhere you look there is something and yet it's not fussy or cluttered.*

*'Did you do that?' I asked of the dry seeds of grasses in precise confusion on our morning tea table. 'Who else!' he asked. His wife, for whom he had the house built had died and his short second marriage was over.*

*Douglas Annand is a happy person whose work brings him in contact with the commercial world and with many architects. 'I'd like to see us end up with houses like the Greeks,' he said, 'then no artist would ever be out of work.'*

*This is an interesting recording because the subject matter—murals for the Oronsay and Orcades and other places, also the Australian pavilions for various exhibitions—is a little different from other artists. Some people say that commercial art is not art; that a mural for a milk bar can never be art. It's not the location that makes them art, it's the work itself and this has always to be considered individually.*

*Sometimes when I hear things on a tape like the way he got a break from someone seeing a picture in *The Home* magazine, I think how some of the Australians of his generation have made it to the top without any money and established a standard in their particular field which is now accepted and built on.*

*Douglas Annand is outgoing and happy—success has many faces—but he is only doing what he likes. 'Lucky it paid,' he said, 'I couldn't have done anything else.'*

*His recording was not difficult but it took a long time. He liked to talk around a subject and it was hard to get him to be specific on the tape. He was wearing a beret (even in the house) and kept getting up and showing me books and illustrations. He is alert to all that is happening.*

*We had a beer while we listened to the playback and he was pleased. 'I'll get you some lunch,' he said. I said I was having lunch with my sister, Marjorie, at Roseville and a drink for her daughter Rosemary's twenty-first birthday and then I was calling at Peter Lindsay's to copy off a tape he had of his father, Lionel Lindsay.*

*Douglas Annand gave me a banana and apple to eat in the car. 'You might miss lunch,' he said. He was so right—when I got to my sister's the Melbourne*

*Cup was on the TV and I only had time for a champagne drink for her daughter, before going to Peter Lindsay's at North Sydney.*



This is Douglas Annand. I was born in Toowoomba in Queensland in 1903, and when I was a little over a year, or about a year old, my parents moved to Brisbane where my father was the manager of a city bank.

My parents were both, although not exactly intellectuals they were both readers, fond of poetry and music, and oh, always I remember lots of their friends used to come and have musical evenings round the piano, with probably very indifferent singing, but still—that was just part of our life as we grew up. They were also very fond of gardening and one of my father's main hobbies was the amateur army, so that he was a man to be obeyed always, but nevertheless we loved both of them very much.

I went always to state schools in Brisbane, the first one up till the age of about eleven, and there we had art or drawing once a week, I think probably half an hour or possibly one hour, and we were usually required, or anyhow whether we were required or not I used to take a flower or an insect to school to draw, and I always felt myself to be the champion in the class, and I had no more drawing until I went to the high school, the Technical College high school. My father was at the Kaiser's war then. There again I seemed to be the star pupil at drawing class, if not at anything else, and I think we had about one hour a week there.

I left school at about seventeen and then my father came back from the war and I got a job, lured by twenty-five shillings a week, in a bank, where I remained until I was about twenty-two. Then a printer offered me a job in his studio, where there was only one other commercial artist, and I churned out some frightful jam labels and men's fashions and such things—which I hope I never see again—and after about a year there, I decided I'd better go and learn to draw. I had enough money for about one term at the Tech all day, and I suppose that was—well, I'm sure it was—useful, although we had a model, I think, once a week, always clothed. Such a thing as a nude model was never heard of in Brisbane at that stage. In fact, I remember later, I think while I was still—oh, while I was still in the bank—some artists asked me to come to a meeting one night where they were going to form a sketch club. Well, everything was going swimmingly until someone mentioned nude models, and then the thing divided into two sides, some of the disgusting creatures wanted to have nudes which shocked the others, and as far as I know no sketch club was ever formed.

I've always liked drawing, of course, and when I was, I think, about eight my father took me to the Tech in Brisbane, which was a grim purple brick place as far as I remember, with a hideous doorway, and there I remember Mr Godfrey Rivers sniffing at my crayon drawings of palaces with king and queen standing outside, and I was dumped into the Round Room—this was on a Saturday morning, I suppose—with a ring of gigantic adults and I had to draw a black kettle in pencil outline, which was very depressing for a little boy! I think I remained there only a couple of Saturdays but could never find my way round to my father's office and, well, I suppose he gave up as much as I did.

As a commercial artist, which I remained at, freelancing, until about—well, in Brisbane till 1930, I had to draw anything any of my clients wanted from dreary dinner sets to sewing machines, boots and shoes, men's fashions and farm machinery and cars with backgrounds of genuine Brisbane city streets and such things, so although it was often tedious and very difficult, I suppose it was good training in draftsmanship.

When I was about, well, in 1928 anyway, I married Maida Morris who was the prettiest girl in Brisbane, and we moved down to Sydney where I longed to go, to the big city, in the beginning of 1930, where I had a job with an advertising agency and got the sack eight weeks later because of the Depression that descended everywhere, and as I was last on I was first off. Then a man called Alan Lewis who ran a little show called Allied Advertising Artists took me on with three others, we sort of freelanced and took commission on whatever work we did, he collected the work and we executed it, and then—I was with him for about a year or eighteen months I think, and then I got a studio of my own and freelanced again. Very soon, Farmers and Atlantic Union used to get me to do quite big newspaper spaces and I became quite well known, and prospered from there on, not making a fortune by any means but still, so many people including quite good architects were making absolutely nothing, so I think I was very lucky indeed.

After a few years, I think about 1935, Sydney Ure Smith, who was a wonderful old boy, asked me to do a cover for *The Home*, which was the only really well printed and laid out magazine in Australia at that time, I think. Then Sir Colin Anderson, one of the directors of the Orient Line in London, who had married an Australian and used to get *The Home*, he wrote out to the Orient advertising people in Sydney and suggested they get me to do some advertising drawing for them, so this great opportunity came one day and they asked me to do a full page advertisement in colour in *The Home*, and on the advice of an engraver in Sydney I charged them the colossal price of twenty guineas, with much trepidation. However, they paid up like lambs and continued paying up—even to this day, they've been my favourite client,

I think, I've done a great deal of work for them including, later on, murals on two of their ships, *Orcades* and *Oronsay*.

As a matter of fact, I painted the *Orcades* mural in Sydney—for the *Oronsay* I had to go to England, which was no hardship, to do it in London, but when *Orcades* came out on her maiden voyage I happened to be in Melbourne, and Professor Joe Burke, Professor of Fine Arts at Melbourne Uni, introduced me to Sir Kenneth Clark who, of course, was a great art authority and had come out on the maiden voyage, and Joe said, 'Why not come back to Sydney on the ship?' So I jumped at the idea, and did, and the first night at dinner—I was at another table with seven strangers who'd come from England—I remember halfway through dinner, one woman said, 'What was your name again?' So I told her, and she said, 'That's the name on that terrible kangaroo mural, the green kangaroo that we all hate so much!' and so they made me admit that it was my name. There'd been all sorts of strange comments in the press, of course, she was a very good ship and had caused quite a stir with all this modern art on board, specially this very controversial green kangaroo about which there were very divided opinions.

The first architectural thing I ever did was for the architect John Mansfield and this was a panel on a mirror for a cocktail bar in the house that John had designed for Alexis Albert at Vacluse. Immediately I became interested in glass, although I had little opportunity to do other panels, not very often—however, there have been several different ones and at the moment I'm doing quite a lot of work in glass.

I think the next architectural thing was to design a ceiling for the miniature but first individual pavilion that the Commonwealth had had at an overseas exhibition, and this was a little cylindrical pavilion at the Paris Exposition in 1937, and I simply designed a map of the world for the ceiling, and the world was centred round Australia.

After that, oh, they'd had very bad notices and criticism along with most of the other Commonwealth countries, for the Australian pavilion at the Glasgow Exhibition, I'm not sure when that was, 1938 perhaps—and then they engaged the architects Stephenson and Turner to do quite a large pavilion for the New York Fair, the fair to be held in 1939, and I was appointed sort of art director and there did my first murals. Most of the murals were partly photographic but I did do one that was partly painted, and Adrian Feint, who was a friend of mine and a good painter, also enlarged some drawings I'd done for *The Home* annual as part of the travel section in our pavilion, and then he gave me great assistance in showing me how to put oil paint on to my New Guinea mural, and in addition to paint I used photographs of some natives in rather a strange sort of way, and set some sea shells into the wall, various things like that. I remember that in part of the travel section I had some sea shells x-ray photographed by a doctor in

Macquarie Street. They looked quite charming. In fact, a couple of them had revealed little shells caught in their volutes.

After that came the New Zealand Exhibition in Wellington, which was an Empire Exhibition, and again Australia had its own pavilion, quite a good one that time, and for both of these *The Architectural Review* gave great praise, which was rather nice.

In the New Zealand Exhibition I was sort of art director or chief designer of the cultural section, and there did one mural about—more than 20 feet square as far as I remember, and then a couple of others, one on New Guinea which was partly photographic and partly drawn and painted, and another for music.

All through that time and almost up to the present day, I was mainly concerned with commercial art. When the war came, I was in the air force doing camouflage; I was a sort of camouflage inspector, and indeed, while I was away in North Queensland I felt I had to do a bit of sketching, so I jotted a few things down. I used to have to come back to Sydney every few weeks or few months, and on one occasion John Moore, who was a great old boy, an architect and a very good watercolourist, saw these sketch books and persuaded me to put some in the Society of Artists Show, and so I put in the limit of eight, and got a telegram in Cairns later on from my wife, saying they'd all sold. In fact, she listed the names of the paintings and their buyers and told me later that when she was dictating this telegram over the phone, the girl in a very stern voice said, 'Madam, is this a code?' However, it was quite a thrill to have these things sold in the Society of Artists Show, and so I churned out watercolours wherever I went then, all in the government's time but they seldom took more than a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, for which they were probably all the better.

I've never really been more than a sketcher as far as paintings go, although I'm often promising myself a few months to do some painting but never seem to get round to it.

I love using new mediums and new ways of doing anything and I was always experimenting in my commercial art as well. From time to time, before and a little after the war, I'd be asked to do a mural, sometimes in a house, sometimes in a milk bar. I remember doing one in a milk bar in Sydney, in Pitt Street, years ago, and I did three blue cows prancing around and they had bells for udders. That seemed to be quite a success. In another one later on, near Wynyard Station, I used—it was a long, narrow panel and I always rather like making something interesting out of cheap materials, so it was a plywood background and I just used odd bits of wood, sticks or just different lengths of any timber, and painted them in different colours and stuck it up in a completely abstract way, and that, I think, looked quite successful and gay, in this quite nicely designed milk bar.

Most of my sketches start off in a very miniature way, sort of postage stamp size sometimes. I remember when my wife and I went to London when I was about to do the *Oronsay* jobs, I'd done only a very vague idea before I left here, and I suppose rather astonished the directors by producing this miniature sketch, a little pen thing about 2½ inches high by about more than 20 inches wide, I think, for this 400 square feet of wall space I was about to cover. However, they accepted it, and it was quite a success, I think; it seems still to be a conversation piece on this ship.

This trip to London took about six months' work in London and then the travelling time brought it up to about nine months, and we managed to have about three and a half weeks in Italy on the way back, and then came back on the maiden voyage of the *Oronsay* from Naples.

Then in 1956 I was invited at about five days notice to go on a cultural delegation to Red China. I have never discovered whether we were culturing them or they were culturing us, but it was a jolly good trip. Eleven of us went and had five and a half weeks in China, which was a wonderful experience; marvellous countryside and the museums. We had more than two weeks in Peking and various excursions from there, in fact they just let us do and see anything we wanted to, and I certainly didn't want to see factories and things, and didn't have to.

Then I thought it was crazy to be so close to Japan which I'd always loved in pictures, so when all the others came home from Hong Kong I went to Japan under my own steam and had about five and a half weeks there and brought back quite a collection of wonderfully beautiful Japanese toys and things, all very cheap of course but quite fascinating, and lots of other things.

Then I went again in 1962 after a Chinese architect in Singapore had asked me to do some murals for a new Chinese bank in Kuala Lumpur, and I modelled those here and sent them across cast in concrete, quite a big wall about 120 feet by 17 feet, I think. After that, I had just immediately before reluctantly divorced my second wife—this marriage should have got on well but didn't, and I felt that was the best thing to do. Anyway, after a few weeks in Kuala Lumpur, while I was sticking the job to the wall, I went round to visit about nine or ten other countries in Asia up to Korea. I'm very fond of the East in many ways, especially the people. Then again I brought back masses of things that I don't need but love very much, such as more toys and household goods and ceramics, some very old but all, I think, very beautiful. We built a new house, we'd always longed for a house of our own but could never afford it, and at last, after we came back from England—or while we were away, really—our new house was building, designed by Arthur Baldwinson, just what we wanted but more than we could afford, we'd bought a piece of land in Killara that had five wonderful *Banksia serrata* on it and a very pleasant outlook over two golf links, and we were very thrilled

indeed with this house, but unfortunately my wife had a stroke just before we moved in and she died a couple of years later. However, she did enjoy it, and of course, since I've been to the East twice and brought back all this junk the house is sometimes, I think, cluttered. All the junk has to be arranged and kept in some sort of order, and people tell me it looks very pleasant now. We were always terribly keen on gardening too, and what I thought was a five-year plan for the garden is still, and I secretly hope always will be, decidedly unfinished and I keep on doing more bits of paving and odd things round about. I'm the kind of person with whom nothing is wasted. Some paving is done with bottoms and rims of flowerpots stuck into cement and barrel staves rescued from a rubbish heap and all sorts of nonsense like that stuck around, but I just like doing that sort of thing.

All these things I do, whether it is commercial art or gardening or quite serious architectural decoration (for want of a better word), I suppose is largely done for me, and I do enjoy them all tremendously much. They give me a great deal of pleasure as well as a great deal of agony while I'm doing them. I constantly seem to be thinking up something for a new building that means working in a material I haven't used before, but I find that, although dreadfully difficult sometimes, terribly interesting. I'm doing at the moment three or possibly four columns of glass for the new CSR head office in Sydney, and although that has been through various sketch stages where engineers have said such things as, 'What's going to happen if there was a serious earth tremor?' and things like that. All those engineering problems have got to be overcome but that's just part of the works, doing this sort of thing.

Although there are always the tedious bits of these jobs, the whole thing is a great enjoyment and well, I just love doing them and I hope I'll keep on doing them for a long time yet without getting old hat.

Constance Stokes  
1906–91

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Melbourne, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 170

*Recorded in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2 December 1965. She is a very gentle woman and as I fixed the tape said, 'I won't be nearly as good as the others.'*

*'Your work is better than a lot of others,' I said. 'I believe you were chosen for an Australian exhibition for London.'*

*'Oh, that was in 1953,' she said.*

*This was the exhibition of Australian painters shown at the Burlington Galleries in London in 1953. She was among a small group of selected Australian painters including Drysdale, Nolan, Godfrey Miller—she mentioned it (under pressure) towards the end of the tape.*

*On her tape she was to say, 'I was semi-classical for quite a while, and the prime thing now isn't the classical structure, it's making space with colour.' So despite her shyness and her obvious dislike in talking about herself (her face is soft and her speech gentle), her strength emerges in the fact that she can progress and embrace new ideas—her drawings are very strong and so is her use of colour.*

*By the time Constance Stokes finished her recording the shyness was all gone—'It's funny how you learn to cope,' she said, 'I think having three children made me keener than ever to paint.'*

*'That's what I like to hear,' I said.*

*'I wish you had time to come out and see the work I'm getting ready for my overseas visit,' she said. (Her tape ends with the hope of this exhibition.)*

*'I wish I had too,' I said.*



I am Constance Stokes and I was born way out in the Wimmera district on a very hot February day; I believe it was in my mother's bedroom. I lived most of my childhood up there in the Wimmera district which is very—well, it was very much way out of the world in those days. I think I was up there till I was about twelve. I was always very fond of drawing, it was the only thing I felt that I could do. I was a very shy child and rather had a bit of a complex, you know, inferiority; and I've had that most of my life unfortunately!

I didn't begin to know anything at all about painting or art, it wasn't thought of or heard of in my family, until I went to school down here; it was a convent school and there was an elderly Scotch woman, the art teacher, who was Susan Cochrane and she inspired me. I think I remember her as well as anybody in my career. She inspired me to want to do this thing. I was terrified at school. I hid behind trees and I couldn't make friends but I lived from one week to the other for this art at school, you know, half-hour. She thought I was so good that she sort of pressed my mother to send me to the National Gallery school and I went, earlier than I would have. I wasn't much

of a scholar, too shy and timid; but when I got to the National Gallery that was it, nothing else existed in my life from that day on. I was thrilled and delighted with it and it was my salvation.

From the National Gallery school I was lucky enough to get a scholarship which took me to London. I had two and a half years over there and really that made all the difference in my life, I suppose. I lost a lot of my shyness. I had a while at the Royal Academy school in London and I felt that I learned to draw if I didn't do anything else there, and during that time I was lucky enough to have a few months' training with André Lhote in Paris; he was a very well-known teacher and artist, a Cubist painter, and that was a revelation to an Australian youngster of those days because there wasn't a great deal of French painting to be seen out here; and I think colour—I began to be aware of colour in those days more than anything else.

Yes, well I returned from London and it wasn't very long before I married, and another very lucky thing for me was that my husband was sent overseas within six months and I had another six months in London which right on top of what I'd already had was magnificent, and I did travel a great deal with him and saw most of the galleries in Europe. I think one of the highlights of my early times was when I visited Spain. I had a very very productive and interesting time in Spain. But the world galleries are the thing, you see, of course.

But then after that there was a long break. I had my children, three children, but I kept painting hail rain or shine, and sometimes it was raining! I managed to exhibit perhaps one or two, perhaps three paintings a year, and that's really how I made my reputation, on that. I didn't have any exhibitions or anything, until last year I had my first one-man show at Levenson Street, and it really did surprise me, the success of it, it was unexpected and altogether fantastic.

Well I think as far as time for painting, it takes me a great deal of time to paint and be satisfied. I can paint quickly but I very rarely like the things I do when I paint direct, so some paintings take years to complete, not all the time, but I keep coming back to them. I work from my own drawings; I find that is the answer to me, because drawing was my great love and I spent years trying to draw and I can't help wanting to use it even now when so many people don't use drawing; it's so strongly in me that I don't think I'll ever disregard it. I think I'm more inspired—sometimes I'm inspired by a performance, perhaps at the theatre I see a face or a character and I have a sort of photographic memory, I suppose, and I sometimes paint something—if it is fairly soon I can paint something from that. For instance, I painted Marcel Marceau's head after seeing his performance and it came by really sitting in the front row and watching him, that one character isolated, you see, nothing to distract. I had a print of his face and his personality and I got

straight to work and made a head and I think, according to other people, it worked very well.

For a while in my early training I was in love—at least, I suppose it was after being in London and seeing old masters—I fell in love with classical painting and I was semi-classical for quite a while. My early works are definitely that way but later, as I got older and developed more colour, my work has automatically changed, the colour has taken over a great deal and the prime thing now isn't the classical structure, it's making space with colour which is, I suppose, the way we think today probably.

I set myself to investigate colour because I had done so much of the other work, drawing, but I felt that I lacked just that subtlety in colour—and modern thinking on colour is what I needed, so for the last I suppose ten years probably now, I've painted in colour, sometimes pure colour, and investigated its possibilities, you know, and scrapped a lot of work, masses of work really; but I feel now that I'm probably coming out of it as it proved I think, the show—this time last year it was.

Well I think our gallery has one of the paintings that I'm quite fond of, it's called 'The Girl Drying Her Hair', and that was done in my semi-classical period in which glazes—I got interested in the old master technique of glazing, and it was all in warm honey colours that were very much part of me in those days. I think that was possibly quite a successful one. This was done from a drawing, probably a life drawing, and invention; I invented the clothes and the background and it's all imaginary, but probably drawn from the little things I have around me, that's how it came into being.

Well the glazing method, really, I got interested in through George Bell. He was one of the keen ones, bringing back technique which had been lost a good deal, that sort of technique particularly, and this glazing consists of thin layer over thin layer of colour and then built up with whites and a thin layer of colour washed on with a medium, it can be a varnish or some sort of sticky medium, there are lots of them, and that sort of brings it to a glaze that looks very mature, and although it is a new painting, it can look like an old master, that nice sort of comfortable surface that does appear in old master paintings.

At the period when I painted 'The Girl Drying Her Hair', also a painting called 'The Girl in Red Tights' which is now owned by Sir Daryl Lindsay, I thought of course at that stage I had to work terribly hard because my children were very very young, my little girl was about two, and I had one boy who wandered all over the place and I had a house to keep; but I somehow managed to get into the studio, and often I'd be painting and carried right away and I'd feel somebody tugging at my skirt, and my instinct was to turn round and say something brutal, and then I'd think, No, this is my little daughter, I can't, I've got to behave myself. You see, you get so carried away with what you're doing that if anyone interrupts you it's like

somebody putting a pin into you, and of course, you've got to divide your time. You're half mother and half painter and it's a very difficult situation.

At the present time I'm collecting myself together and hoping to take some paintings to London, because my daughter who is now grown up has been over there for twelve months and she is very keen for me, and many other people want me, to have a show in London which I haven't. Actually I have exhibited in London but it was sent through the Australian Government; there were twelve or thirteen Australian painters shown at the Burlington Galleries in 1953, and in that group were Drysdale, Nolan, Boyd, Justin O'Brien, Jean Bellette, Godfrey Miller, one or two others I've forgotten, Donald Friend, myself, and that was the first time. I really think that was probably the first time London had seen a typical Australian show of the time; although later exhibitions got more publicity I think that was the one, because I managed to get to London in 1953 just as it was opening and I had the most extraordinary thing happen to me. I was given tickets to the Albert Hall to a concert performance of music, I've forgotten now what it was, but the owner of the box—it was unexpected, and we turned up and he found out who I was and he said, 'You're not the painter of "The Girl in Red Tights"?' And I said, 'Yes.' 'Oh,' he said, 'I've been talking to the critic of *The Times* and he said, "There's one picture in London you must see this week—" "The Girl in Red Tights"!' And out of all London's population that seemed to me a pretty remarkable thing.

Well I hope now to take a little parcel of my latest works and probably have a show, but it's a bit nerve-racking I find. I never get over the nervous sort of feeling, I suppose most painters are afflicted with it, but I hope that's what will happen. I'm sailing I think in February.



Margo Lewers  
1908-78

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Emu Plains, NSW, 1962

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 7

*Recorded at her home in Emu Plains, outside Sydney. Mrs Studdard [a friend who often lent her 'little black Ford' to Hazel to use on her interviewing trips] drove up with me and stayed outside in the garden while I recorded and came in later. We recorded in a studio built on to this lovely old home and at first there was a water pump over the Nepean making a noise but later it stopped. She gave us fruit and flowers—and in the garden were lovely natural looking stones but they were really the work of her husband, Gerald.*



This is Margo Lewers of Emu Plains, where I've been living for the past twelve years, and where I really first started to paint rather more consistently, because both my daughters were then going to boarding school, and this gave me more time; and without a phone, we're thirty-five miles out of Sydney and it was difficult at that time, I had less interruptions. Previously I had painted perhaps two or three paintings a year, when I could fit them in.

It's very difficult to say what makes one want to paint. As far as I'm concerned, I expect it's colours and tones of colours, because the garden and my flowers are just as exciting to me as putting paint on to paper. In fact I frequently leave off painting and just wander round the garden, which in the twelve years has grown enormously from just two trees in ten acres.

I've always painted in an abstract style. I can't say why, except that by reducing the whole to an essential minimum the painting should say more—I've always felt it could say more. It doesn't mean that my paintings have said more, but this is what I believe, and naturally one always feels that the next painting is going to be the painting that in a very few lines or a little colour perhaps, even, is going to say a great deal more than the last one.

I believe that one can't actually reproduce a scene or any of the parts of our life as a photograph can, and there seems to be little point in it anyway; and so one tries to grasp some of that atmosphere, something that the photograph can't take, and give it a living quality that could be anywhere at any time.

I think really it's most difficult to talk about one's work and how one works; well, it is hard to describe the exact way because a lot of it is emotional and is a feeling, and you just can't put it into words. I think that is really the most that I can say—well, I could say that sometimes I paint quickly and it's more spontaneous, and very occasionally it can be a unified painting. But I think generally I paint the hard way. I paint, and paint out; paint again, and I get a little of what I want and I try and bring the whole painting into that, or up to that, little passage, and I usually fail, and finish with repainting the whole painting again.

I rarely make any sketches because if I make a sketch, the painting never finishes the way I intended when I started, and it doesn't in fact, even from the sketch I had in my mind. I think of what I'm going to do but rarely does it finish as I have started.

I've always been interested in painting. My father was a painter, and as everybody knows, my brother Carl Plate is also a painter, and I expect we've all just inherited something from my father. As a small child I used to paint wildflowers, and very much wanted to go to an art school, but we were not very well off. My father died when I was five, and my mother couldn't afford to send me to school. I had to go into an office, which was a much quicker course; but I still continued to paint. Whilst I was in an office, I think somewhere round about eighteen or nineteen, I had the opportunity of becoming a cadet artist on the *Daily Telegraph*—a very poor one, I might add. I had no knowledge whatsoever, but the person for whom or with whom I worked just wanted to get rid of the dreary part, and he was positive I could do that.

I then started to go to a night class but unfortunately the *Daily Telegraph* closed down, and I no longer had the position as a cadet artist and very little hope of getting one elsewhere.

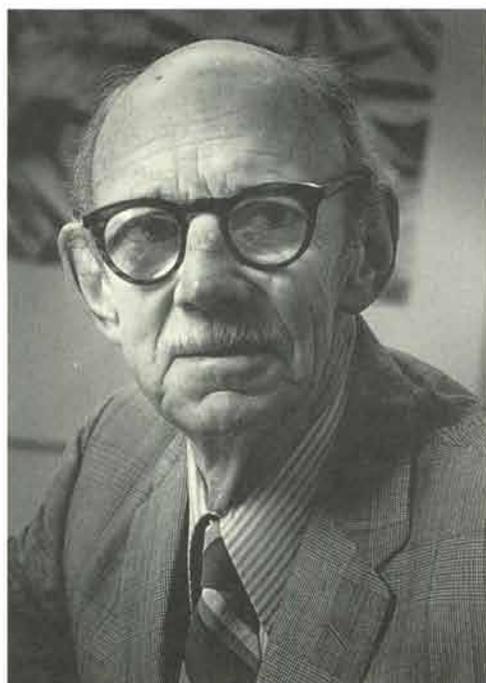
Then—I can't remember really—I think I took odd typing jobs, but was never really settled, and I finally got into a studio to design and paint horrible woodwork. From there I went into partnership with somebody and started our own horrible woodwork.

From there I went on on my own, bought out my partner, and started a commercial pottery studio, designing it only myself, and colouring it.

All these details are pretty dreary! I started an interior decorating shop, painting when I could. I was then married, and I went to England; I had six months at the Central Art School there.

I suppose I just sort of continued where I could, and joined art classes at night, and just gradually was able to do more and more.

When I'm asked why or what really excites me about painting, this again I find most difficult to explain. It's just something that—well, some people are excited by pretty ribbons and some people are excited by tinsel on trees, and I expect I'm just excited by what I can make one colour do to another colour, because the combination of colours, the position in which they're placed and the amount of one colour as against another colour, is what makes the colours sing, glow, and all the many exciting experiences.



William Pidgeon  
1909–81

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 146

*Recorded in the Clune Galleries, Sydney, 23 November 1965. He is well known under his pen name 'WEP'. 'You were off to a good start,' I said, when he said he was born in Paddington and his father was the Mayor of Paddington.*

*'Yes,' he said, 'but of course the artists didn't congregate there in those days.'*

*On the tape he says his caricatures resemble him because he has a 'large nose'. Shall we say simply that he has definite features—is animated, well dressed and casually confident.*

*Among other newspapers he mentions the Sunday News, the Guardian (with Eric Baume) and the Women's Weekly, with which he was associated for sixteen years.*

*He lives near George Lawrence and Lloyd Rees. 'They are both Wynne Prize winners,' he said.*

*'Must be a very satisfactory little community,' I said, 'say it on the tape.'*

*He speaks about William Dobell (at the age of about twenty-six) and later at the time of the court case over Joshua Smith. [A reference to the unorthodox portrait of Joshua Smith which won the 1943 Archibald Prize for Dobell. The award was contested by two of the judges on the grounds that the work was not a portrait but a caricature. However, the award was finally confirmed after a legal battle lasting two years.] He mentions a cartoon he made of the courtroom scene.*

*I was beginning to get the historical scene of the Sydney artists in true perspective. 'So you were one of Dobell's mob?' I said.*

*'You're learning, lady, you're learning,' he said.*

*He is also a serious portrait painter. 'Have to watch I don't send them up,' he said.*

*'I bet you do,' I replied.*

*He heard his playback 'Just like me,' he said, 'punch lines and not too much detail.'*



My name is William Edwin Pidgeon. I was born in Paddington, 1909. For about twenty-five years I lived there. At one period, my mother's father was the mayor of the area, so that we were slightly—a little more socially inclined in the area than most of the others.

My father was a glazier, and I found that as a child I used to go through a lot of his drawings. He used to associate with artists like Fred Leist in the old days and they used to go up to the Royal Art Society Schools, I think, at the Tech College, and he pursued life drawing and some oil paintings. Unfortunately, none of them seem to be in existence at the moment.

From there on I always seem to have taken a great interest in draftsmanship. There were great numbers of old *Studio* magazines about, and I used to go through these and occasionally copy the drawings out of them.

Later on when I went to high school, I was intending to become an engineer, and my technical education was directed towards that end; but at the Technical High School they used to have a school magazine and various students would do comic drawings for them, of which I was one of the students that did this sort of thing, and I became more interested in this comic approach to draftsmanship, and just after the Leaving Certificate I was in two minds, whether to become an electrical engineer or try and get into the newspaper world. Fortunately I had an uncle who was a dentist, and one of his patients was the editor of the *Sunday News* at the time. Pressure was brought to bear on the patient and I was put on as a cadet artist with the *Sunday News*. This would be about when I was sixteen.

I was down there for two or three years when the *Evening News* folded up. I've forgotten exactly now what the situation was. No, the *Evening News* was still going when I went round and joined the *Guardian* and worked with Eric Baume, and I was the newspaper cartoonist round there up until the period of the Depression, when the *Guardian* and *Smith's Weekly* organisation finished and they were bought out by Sydney Newspapers—not Sydney, Sun Newspapers. Campbell Jones didn't like the way I pointed noses, which was inevitable seeing my own nose is very pointed, so I got the sack.

During the Depression I freelanced and worked for the Labour newspaper the *World*, and when the *World* was sold out I did the original dummy for the *Women's Weekly*, that would be in 1933, and I stayed with the *Women's Weekly* and Consolidated Press then, as a cartoonist and illustrator, until 1949 when I decided that it was too long to have everything I do wrapped up round the purchases from shops, so I resigned from Consolidated Press and have been working as an artist on my own account ever since.

Well, from the time I left Consolidated Press, I didn't cut completely away from them, I made some sort of bargain with Frank Packer, who was then 'Frank' not 'Sir', and I used to do an occasional piece of work for them which managed to keep me going until I could try and organise some sort of routine for myself.

The background of the newspapers naturally had always kept me on the rather realistic viewpoint, mostly illustrations or caricatures—most of the work I've had to do has been involved with human relationships and that sort of thing, so naturally I became interested—I always have been interested—in human beings as such, and I like painting them, so this is the opportunity to settle down and try to win an Archibald Prize. It didn't happen very quickly, but nevertheless—what was it, about six or eight years, I won the Archibald

Prize in 1958; that was a painting of a fellow journalist, a rather rugged type. In 1961 I won the Archibald Prize again with a portrait of the Rabbi Porush.

I still earn my livelihood mostly by painting portraits, though I like to do landscapes occasionally, and sometimes experiment with a little abstractionism. It gets away from the literalities mostly commissioned portraits demand.

Well, I may as well go back a little bit further and mention the fact that I've had no fundamentally formal art training. It's mostly been picked up from books out of the public library and practice. I did six months with J.S. Watkins' art school, and a couple of months up at the Technical College, but apart from that I've never had any real education in the application of oil paint techniques and that sort of thing, so what facility I may have acquired has been picked up mostly by experimentation in working for the colour magazines and newspaper illustrations; and the interest in human beings has naturally been conditioned by the fact that I used to do a cartoon every week, if not more. These cartoons always involved some political character or somebody else you'd do a caricature of, and although I prefer not too formal an approach to drawing in cartoons, I'd rather keep it expressionistic, well, there was a certain amount of freedom in doing these things. Invariably, the idea has to be your own, the literary people in the newspaper world always conceive of ideas for cartoons and such like illustrations in terms of words rather than visually, so that in the final analysis all ideas for cartoons as a rule mostly come from the artist.

The ideas usually would I'd say necessitate about two or three hours thinking, occasionally you might get one quite inspirationally; it's a matter of reading the daily papers, going through the news. The cartoon is of no use to the daily press unless it's topical. Then after reading the newspapers, you sort of make your mind receptive and wait for something to happen. You'd think about all sorts of things, all different approaches, different angles; you'd discard them or you'd become receptive, the subconscious seems to work and sometimes you'd get an odd twist from that, and that will be the cartoon. You might do about three or four ideas of which you trust that the editor will pick the one you favour.

When I approach the problem of painting a portrait, it usually is conditioned by some particular size, specially if it is commissioned, maybe on the smallish side or it may be slightly larger, and you are limited by the set boundaries in which you have to work. So consequently I always prefer to do a drawing of the sitter. It takes me quite a long time to pose them to what I think mostly looks like themselves. It's rather difficult. I find that nobody knows what to do and I don't know the people well enough, and they are self-conscious, so that by the time you settle down to find a pose, and seek to generally observe how these people look, maybe an hour or so has gone. Well, I like to do then this sketch drawing and brush in the hands and the body, and call that a day for the first sitting.

Subsequent to that, I measure it over and scale it up, if it is to be 24 by 30 [inches] or 36 by 28, well, you get some idea as to where to chop the composition, and then I square it up on the canvas, and next time the sitter comes I start painting, and I usually work from the sitter from then on.

I probably find that from the past, where I've done so many years of caricature, I tend to react slightly the other way. I think that fundamentally I could well afford to use more of the element of caricature in what I'm doing, but there again, the thing still has to be some sort of synthesis. If you just paint them where the light happens to be falling on them it may look like them in a certain aspect, but if their hair is light and the light is in a different direction, it makes it look dark, so you have to make your modifications.

Sometimes the sitters may have the false look and you just wait till they wear out and they get somewhere near their real look, and it takes time because until they become themselves it's very difficult to say which way they hold their mouth or—and maybe, after about two or three sittings, you come to the conclusion you should have started them from another angle. However, if you don't let them know and you do that again, it's all right, but otherwise they get very despondent!

Moving around various places, I did art criticisms for the *Daily Telegraph* off and on for some years, and of course I met quite a considerable number of artists at that period. I only knew them very casually. I cannot say that I was very closely associated with them. During the Dobell case, I had known Bill Dobell previously. By an odd circumstance, the first job I ever had was at Wunderlich's out in Redfern and I was the office boy and Bill Dobell was the advertising draftsman for metal ceilings. Bill must have been about twenty-six then. I think the following year he won his travelling scholarship, and I didn't meet him again till he came back from Europe, and I went up there, spent quite a few visits up at Bill Dobell's place with various artists like Jackie Baird and John Santry, and talked about his work. When the litigation came on about Dobell's Joshua Smith, I remember having a long discussion with Bill Dobell about the pros and cons of this matter, and I had the interesting job of doing a caricature of the courtroom scene which incorporated Dobell and Mr Justice Roper, Sir Garfield Barwick, and seven other subsequent judges, many of the artists—Douglas Dundas, Mary Edwards, Joe Wilenski, all these people. It was rather interesting to do caricatures of them in this dispute about what a caricature was and what it wasn't!

Incidentally, at the present moment I live at Northwood, which is on the Lane Cove River, and immediate neighbours of mine are Lloyd Rees and George Lawrence, both extremely well known and fine artists, both of whom have won Wynne Prizes and I've won an Archibald, so that Northwood is fairly well represented in the list.

Michael Kmit  
1910–81

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 142

*Recorded in his home at Woolloomooloo, Sydney, 17 November 1965. Michael Kmit is a European and has all the charm and the courtesies that Europeans have brought to our country. Whereas at eleven o'clock in the morning most Australians would have morning tea, Michael Kmit led me to an array of liqueur bottles and insisted I sample them all. We were in his studio in the front room of the first floor and, unfortunately, there was no power point there. Much to Michael Kmit's distress we had to record in his bedroom, on the lower floor. He sat on a chair by the window and I was cramped on the floor in the space between the bed and the wardrobe. The power point was behind the wardrobe.*

*Extremely difficult to record—but cooperative.*

*He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts, Cracow, Poland, and painted in Italy, Paris and various European countries before coming to Australia. Mainly through his association with the Contemporary Art Society in Sydney he has (according to Daniel Thomas) had considerable influence on Australian painters.*

*He had been sick, mainly from the 'splinter' which he got in his head and refers to on the tape. He had received special treatment for this when in America and a lot of his Sydney friends were relieved at his complete recovery. 'But,' Thelma Clune [mother of Terry Clune, gallery director, wife of Frank Clune, writer and noted patron of artists] said to me, 'whatever you do don't mention the fakes—it might upset him.' A number of pictures had appeared under his name—but they were not his. It provided a mild scandal in the Sydney art world.*

*A solidly built man, he spoke emphatically—almost clumsily—in his need to communicate. When he mentioned the well-financed museums in America and the fact that the Museum of Modern Art in Melbourne had folded from lack of financial help, he shook his head sadly, 'The American Government is aware of art—the Australian Government is afraid of it. A country is never prosperous, however rich, until they accept new thought and enrich the minds of the people.'*

*He is a philosopher himself and mentions Rilke, Kafka and others, as well as the futurist painter Marinetti. There is another side to him as well and he laughed as he told me, 'Creative people are two people in one. The one who mixes with people and the one who paints—and the one is always at the expense of the other.'*

*Nevertheless, his eyes shone with pleasure when he said his wife and children were coming to Australia shortly and was crestfallen when I said I couldn't stay for lunch as I had to be at Emu Plains by 3 p.m. to record Margo Lewers.*

*'You will come back when my wife is here,' Michael Kmit said, 'the house will look beautiful.'*



But what can a man like me speak of with most pleasure? Of myself! Alright. Well, so I will talk about myself. Mrs Hazel de Berg, my name—I would like

to introduce myself—my name is Michael Kmit, I was born in 1910 in the north of central Europe, and I was attracted to painting in my early childhood, I think in the age of four I could recall illustrating with the help of my mother on the parapet of the window and on the frozen window—I used it for all my first pictures—and with a frozen finger perhaps! And at the time my father come, it was ten o'clock in the morning, and I liked to draw his attention to my unexpected abilities, so it was he saw this picture I draw with my frozen finger on the window, he said, 'He become a painter!' and he just went and bought me watercolours and crayons, and it was how my career as a painter started.

Well, my second experience was when my father took me to the exhibition of the Italian futurist Marinetti, and it opened my eyes to the worth of art. I tried to follow him up to my present days. It was the first thing which influenced me, but the following thing was when as a child I did like to study western philosophers and at the present day I studied a lot of such kind of western philosophers like Dostoevsky, Camus, Rilke and Sartre.

Well, as I said, Rilke, Kafka and Camus and Sartre and Heidegger, they all had an influence on me before I started to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. The first thing after Leaving Certificate, I went to the Polytechnic and studied architecture, and I didn't like so much, so I studied medicine, and again I changed my mind and I entered Cracow University where I studied philosophy, but I was always attracted to painting.

Well, I started my art training in the Academy in Cracow and from there I went to Paris and Italy, for a kind of exploring in the world of art. I went over there mostly to investigate, to look as much as possible. For the same reason lately in 1958, I went to the United States—for the same reason.

During my excursions in Italy and the south of France, I visited a number of monasteries and I was most attracted to Byzantine frescos and the mosaics of Ravenna in Italy. Well, the travelling through Europe, mostly France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, I tried to penetrate everything, to enrich my spirit. I was attracted really to everything, to every square inch of the past ancient history of Italy and France and Germany, also medieval castles, their architecture was very impressive. After I finished my studies I was full of hope, and some dramatic episodes in the Second World War, in which I participate and I was a prisoner of war, and I escaped a number of times.

Well, in 1939 I was wounded with a splinter into the right temple and I was in the hospital, and so later I was a captive as a prisoner of war in Germany. Well, in the late period of the war I ran as a prisoner in the direction of Switzerland but I stopped in Innsbruck in Austria, where I met my future wife and she brought me two beautiful daughters, their names are Zania and Tania, and they will join me next year after they conclude their Leaving Certificate in Oakland, California, USA.

From Italy I come to Australia in 1949 on the 20th May, and fortunately I come on an American ship and fortunately I landed in Sydney harbour. I regard it as one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

In 1957 I decided to go to the United States for further exploring in art and to investigate all unseen things. It seems to me that in world opinion, United States has been highly rich in collection of art gathering in the last century, mostly from European collectors and galleries. Of course I was highly impressed, travelling through United States.

Well, I come to Australia. I was bound by contract as a physical worker, I was working for the first year for industries in Villawood, and for another year I was a railway porter, and before I was assigned to the railway I was working for three months as a blacksmith somewhere in Woollahra, and finally I was working as a house painter at David Jones factory in Surry Hills. Well, all this time, during the day I was working and at night I planned to paint, and I was influenced by my fellow artists and friends to exhibit, so I became a member of the Contemporary Art Society. Later Paul Haeffliger formed the Sydney Group and I was a member, and simultaneously I became a member of the Society of Artists.

Well, since then I only paint, and I participate in a number of competitions, and I was lucky enough to win some of them.

To answer your question, I never work from sketches. The shapes come as I work but it would be better to determine if—I would say there have been three stages in my life. In the first, I have found the essential part of my painting being experimenting exercise, like a dream work full of anxieties and self examinations. In the second stage, I painted in the belief that a painting inevitably tends to be decorative. In the third stage, I found the subject itself is of no account; what matters is the way it is presented, it is the shapes trapped by the four sides of the canvas.

Well, if I start a painting I never have a clear vision of what will happen to the canvas. Painting, in my opinion, is a phenomenon, a unique kind of practical activity with alternative, nothing or everything, it is a question of a painter's spiritual destiny and creative power of self expression.

I work on my pictures spontaneously and during the time of execution I put to myself some basic questions: First, what can I know? Second, what shall I do? And finally, what may I hope would happen to the picture?

To answer your question about symbolical meaning which is employed mostly in allegories, but lately often I tend to Abstract Expressions, and I am the most delighted with the spontaneity of invention, and any creative ideas of sincere or obscure origins.

I never work on the one picture. I always start about ten pictures, and the picture in question 'The Three Wise Men', which is in the National Gallery in Melbourne, I could not recall a special feeling I did have during

the execution of this painting because, as I said, I paint simultaneously on ten other pictures. In each painting one shape is related to another shape but it is better if it is not related, because if the shape is related you are bound by some academical rules in which you don't like to think about it, but it is much better for a picture to paint against the rules without regard for the relationship of forms.

When I start a painting I try to paint with violent colours and later in process of execution to determine what would finally happen to the canvas. I think for a creative person it is a failure, it is a great failure, to paint correctly. On the contrary, for a student it is essential, the base of his education, to paint correctly and to know about all the rules. The student, after he finishes his study, he shouldn't—well, he shouldn't stick to the rules, the academical rules, because then progress becomes meaningless; the philosophy, the religion, the human relationship, our social environments, they have all great significance on our creative way of expression and our self discipline and self determination should be under a constant analysis and critical judgement about creative processes.

Well, I try mostly to be as versatile as possible, so I would jump from Figurative to extreme Abstract Expressions. Well, most of my time I was working to mature my intellectual integrities but at some stages I found I am bored with myself terribly and I am attracted to the unexpected in life.

Finally, our interview is over Mrs Hazel de Berg, and I am deeply in debt to you and I highly appreciate that you give me opportunity to preserve my voice on a tape recorder. Thank you.



Russell Drysdale  
1912–81

Interviewed by Geoffrey Dutton  
Sydney, 1963

National Library of Australia  
Tape no. TRC 2843/1

*Recorded in Sydney in November 1963. When we started to record the interview the main trouble was Drysdale's notorious procrastination. This usually manifested itself in finding ingenious excuses to avoid picking up a paintbrush. In this case, I would turn on the tape recorder but Drysdale would suggest that we needed another whisky first. Thus it went on, and the recordings were eventually made over three days between 3 a.m. and 5 a.m. His voice, however, is firm; his thoughts coherent and his words fluent. Mine are less so.*

*It is typical of Drysdale's distrust of the self that there should be no self portrait of him in existence, either as a painting or a drawing. Nor is he inclined to talk about himself. The self portrait in words that follows, therefore, must be regarded as a tribute to the invention of the tape recorder, and also to a well-known brand of Scotch whisky.*

*Some information already given may be repeated here, but that does not matter very much. When you meet a man in person, after you have read about him, and he talks to you, you do not mind if he tells you a little of what you already know.*



RD: When you become a student then, it's rather odd at the age I was then, I felt naturally enough that the majority of students are people who have just left school, it's just like carrying on with another kind of school, and I felt a little apart in a way, and I couldn't really lead a student's life. I was a young married man eager to get on and in a way very much in the same position as young men who came back from the war, who were no longer just youths, but men. I felt too that I had a long time to catch up, so I used to work pretty hard, work at the school all day and then go home, work every night at home until ten o'clock and this went on week after week. I was subject to every influence that there was, I literally laid myself open for it. It was the one way in which you could garner in everything you could about art, it wasn't just modern art it was every sort of art, and also the art and craft of art.

I was lucky to have a good teacher in Bell. I'm afraid that when I look back on it, I'm not very good at remembering really the dates of what happened in the art world, the date of when the Contemporary Art Society was formed, who was concerned with what or anything, I've realised it always, when I look back that I had no interest whatsoever in the politics of art. One sort of had a loyalty to one teacher—that I think is normal, but on the other hand I wasn't concerned with proselytising causes. All I wanted to do was get on and work and try and make myself an artist. To me that seemed so much more important, and perhaps too, in a way, I was a bit older or maybe a bit more mature, I don't know what it is, with five or six years on

the land, of pretty solid work too, and somehow I couldn't be interested in the organising of art, or the organising of a cause, or the formation of societies. That didn't interest me—it never has.

So that when I think of being a student, I'm really only concerned with how I felt myself, about painting. I can't even remember really what was known then as the days of the formation of modern art. I know I was part of it. What I think impresses me when I look back on it—you're not aware of course of it when you're a student—and that is the extraordinary ability that Bell had as a teacher. Not only was he a man who could talk to you sympathetically about art, but also about its craft, of which he had a great knowledge and which I particularly remember at the time being fascinated with. I wanted to know, for instance, it wasn't sufficient just to be able to sit down and paint or attempt to paint and draw, but I wanted to know about the materials that one used. I think probably it was a natural thing for me to ask because I'd been brought up in a condition in which when you're learning things as a jackeroo, for instance, you've damn well got to know what sort of materials you're going to use, or what sort of job you have to do, and you want specifically to know all the particular technical aspects that these things involve. You just can't handle stud sheep without knowing something about stud breeding, it's quite obvious that you've got to, and you can't carry out the numbered and varied and sometimes highly skilled jobs that have to be done on a property without of course first of all acquiring the technique, or learning the technology of these particular tasks. I think that was one reason why it intrigued me tremendously, I wanted to know about the materials I was using, it didn't seem to me that it was sufficiently as easy as just buying tubes and squeezing the damn things. I wanted to know something about colour, the consistency of colour, how it was made, apart from its application, and I think anybody who has ever painted a fence and watched the paint peel off in the sun, he'll want to know something about grounds, what is the best ground to put paint on, so that it doesn't peel off. All those sort of simple things which I suppose one enquires into, well I got a tremendous response from Bell, he realised I really did want to know, and that out of his own fund of knowledge of this he taught me a lot.

The preparation of grounds, of canvases, the grinding of colour, the making of varnishes, the difference between paint which is applied and left, or the underpainting and then glazing, the difference between various mediums, the making of emulsions for tempera, all these things—to me they were all a part and parcel of it and a lot of it was good meat. These are the sort of things that Bell knew, but that wasn't really just it, I mean there are a lot of people who can show you these things, but they can't 'teach' you them. I think Bell's ability was this, that he could always sense the stage which a student's mind had reached, and I think he sensed how much that could

encompass and he never overburdened it with more than what a student could absorb at a particular time. And that I think was rather remarkable, that's an intuitive thing, and what it means is that the student can be taken along at his own rate and pace. That means he's not hurried through, thrown into two or three states of mind, on different aspects which might confuse him, but he gets everything completely clear and can absorb it. It's very difficult to explain this because there are people who I think are called 'born teachers' and those who teach by rule. Bell was a man, I hate using this word, who was a 'born teacher', he was an intuitive teacher, and an extremely able one.

I remember too that when he saw that I could draw he talked to me one day about this question of looking at objects and not just remembering them, but thinking about the essence of an object. I mean, if you looked at a jug, for instance, you considered that it wasn't just a jug but it was the essence of jugs, that all jugs had a shape because they had to conform, to 'hold' something, so there had to be a confirmation of shape, and that when one drew from one's memory one should try and get this into a form which was the essence of a jug, an archetype if you like. There again, I don't like the use of these words, they tie you down too much, but this question of doing so was a great aid to memory and I found more and more that one could draw from memory. I remember too that Bell when he saw one was interested in this, if a model was posed facing you, and you were drawing her from the full face position, Bell would say: 'Now look at her, the model, and think that you're sitting behind her and study the forms from where you're sitting now and draw her as though you were sitting behind her, and later on go and check up.'

Well, I used to do this, and I found it was fantastic—that one could really think and encompass forms, and apart from the anatomy that one was taught one could then begin to fit anatomy into its proper place. That meant that one's mind was always logically thinking of the sequence, of the blending if you like of forms logically one within the other. The framework was no longer just a two-dimensional framework but it was something which had thickness and depth, and the integration of each part logically moved.

GD: Paris also helped to give you this, didn't it, after you'd left George Bell's school?

RD: I suppose to every man or woman who was ever a student in Paris when they were young there is that fantastic, quite wonderful appeal that Paris has. This hasn't anything to do with the fact that one is a painter or a writer or a musician or anything, but merely the fact that Paris, before the war, at least, was the gravitation point for students. And you can feel, still, the thrill of being in Paris. All the things that one had to see, or the fact that one was suddenly no longer just a student in a far, faraway land, but you

were here, right to grips with all the sort of things that you wanted and wished to emulate.

Here, if you wanted to see them, a bus ride away, was all the endeavour of hundreds, thousands if you like, of years of civilisation, gathered into places like the Louvre. All sorts of things like that, which you can't really express when you're young, you don't know how, but when you look back it was one of those, I suppose, tender moments in one's life which you will never have again. This sounds corny and frightfully romantic, I don't quite know how to express it anyway, but I think that anybody who has ever experienced that will understand, really. It is not just emotional, because after all it is overlaid with all sorts of things like the business of living, counting out money, wondering whether it is going to be easy enough to budget for the next week, but on the other hand you were living in the wings of, or under the shadow, if you like, of the wings of great men, of great, great things that had occurred in history, of works of art which, although you could wish to emulate, you could never hope to ever reach. All these things were frightfully important in those days, tremendously important, because one was young and one was reaching for impossible stars, and these, you know, were the sort of stars, they were the big things. And then when you look back on it too, which you didn't realise because you were humble at the time, as you must be, when you are a student, you were living really in the same town and you used the same café, for instance, as people whose names today are landmarks in the history of art. Men like Chaim Soutine, simply because he happened to be a man who used the same café, and he used to ask the same questions of Madame about her rheumatism in her shoulder. All sorts of things like that. One was aware that Soutine was a great painter and that you were a student then, but on the other hand you had the busyness of being a student and therefore it was not necessary that you pay all this deference. It is only later in life, when Soutine is now dead, one is fifty, that one looks back and tries to recall that sort of atmosphere.

Paris was a place then which it will never be again, but in my knowledge Paris has probably never altered to anybody within himself, although it alters within one's life. It meant really that when you left Paris, as we did, because war was coming and we went back to England because it was difficult if you didn't know where money was coming from and you had a small child who was six months old, it meant that then there was this terrible dissatisfaction, and then finally we came back to Australia.

I realised then that one had suddenly stopped being a student anymore. One had the real necessity to be a painter.

George Bell was very kind, he gave me the use of his studio, which I painted in for a year, but they were still sort of formative things which I destroyed all the time because they didn't mean anything. I realised that I

couldn't possibly ever go back again into an atmosphere in which I was a student, I had to go again into a totally different place in which there was no context for me, some place in which I didn't know people, I didn't even know the landscape, that is to look out of your window and see that it was familiar. I wanted to be in a place where I could paint. I had terribly ill-formed ideas. Who hasn't when they try and start?

You know it's the most ridiculous impertinence that anybody could think of, that when one is young one seriously considers that you can *create* something! But you are not aware of this when you are young, but the impertinence is there, and I suppose this thing so weighed with me that I felt I had to try and essay what thousands of far better men had tried before. And I wanted to do it in a place where I had no distractions, where I knew nobody, and so I went to Sydney.

It wasn't easy, really. The war was on, I was in this position of thinking to myself, well, I must do what I must do, and all the friends of mine who belonged to a former life in the country had joined up. I, too, before I left Melbourne wanted to join up and I was rejected. And before I actually went to Sydney I thought, well—this unease of wondering whether you are half grown or not grown—I went out to a property to manage it for a friend of mine who had gone off and joined up. I managed the shearing and I looked after the property, but then it was ridiculous for me to do so, it was a fine great gesture, but one of the stock and stations agents could do it far better than I could, and I had a wife and child. So I went to Sydney.

And from then on I began to paint. I don't quite know how I started to paint, all I remember is I destroyed a tremendous amount of things. I think after a while, of course, your own personal vanity catches up with you, you can't destroy too much, you know, you really *have* to look at what you do. Probably in a way your own vanity is something which is going to sink you at any time, but it can possibly save you, and I remember once when I painted a small picture, I didn't like it much, but I couldn't bear to destroy it, because it was the only *real* thing I had ever painted and I wanted to look at it, and I kept it for months. I looked at it and looked at it and looked at it, and then I destroyed it, not because I thought it was bad or indifferent, but because I didn't want to be tied any more just to that.

I have always found painting a very *difficult* thing, it's never been easy. Technically, I've always had to think carefully before what I have been doing, and whenever I've felt in later life that one is developing a sort of facility, then one stops, because I think quite frankly that it is far better to use the kind of facility, or if you like the technical way of arriving at a picture, because the *subject itself* dictates it. So that, maybe, if you feel something about a particular thing, then maybe you have to apply a totally different way of painting it. The idea of being able to just learn how to paint and then apply

it to subjects is something which I think is absolutely abhorrent, because it just means that the business of handling paint overrides anything that you might think. It's far better for what you feel to arrive in your mind. You should then have to think about how you will arrive at it, and you're not concerned with the fact that you can do it this way or do it that way, it's what you have in your mind that determines the way you do it. That's why it's not easy to paint. It's *hard* to paint. There's no known technique to make it easy.

So far as mediums in painting are concerned I am not what is known as a direct painter, in the sense that one puts down paint and does not touch it. I am what is known as an indirect painter, I prefer to be able to build up an underpainting and glaze and paint into the glazes, and so forth. The old technique of painting, fat on lean, or lean on fat, cold on warm, or warm on cold, to me this gives paint a quality which I think is beautiful, I love it. There's a lusciousness about paint, there is a sort of thing that if you're just interested in paint is beautiful, and I feel that a picture—you know, secretly I feel if a picture, however exciting it might be, it's so much better if it can excite your tactile senses, so that you do want to step forward and touch it, simply because the surface is lovely. Because it has a beauty within itself. But this of course is a little specialised. Probably it sounds a little precious, I don't mean it to be precious, this is actually the workmanlike approach which I think all professional painters must have. Anybody who has ever seen a man painting a door, who's a good craftsman, if he's painting a front door for instance, you can see them in London, those beautifully painted front doors, with five or six coats all rubbed down, and you feel that every time they're rubbed down they're not done by the man who's rubbing them down as a chore, they're done with love, and feeling, so that finally that final coat goes on, and he can stand back. And if you've ever seen a man when it's dried out thoroughly, he'll come and he'll run his hands lovingly over it, caressing the paint just to see how it feels, that's how I feel a painter ought to feel about his medium. If people like Titian and Rembrandt were not afraid to feel like that, who the hell am I to be frightened?

And it's perfectly true, I know that there is an awful lot talked about it, that there are painters who say: 'Oh don't bother me with technical things, all I want to do is express myself, painting is the only important thing, the main function of art is expression of oneself'—the only trouble about this, it's fine, it's grand, and it may have some logic, but how the hell can you express yourself unless you're going to use material to do it? And the curious thing about it is this, that the aestheticism of life doesn't depend necessarily on carrying out a prime object, but it can also concern itself with the means with which you carry it out. It's not sufficient, for instance, to be able to say in bullfighting the aim aesthetically is to please yourself and kill the bull. That is just not so. But peculiarly, it is the *manner* in which you kill the bull. And if

you're going to paint, I don't think it's just sufficient to say that I'm a painter and I don't care two hoots about it. But if you're going to paint, let's think about the manner.

GD: Then there's the subject, Tassy, there are certain people, characters, types, that especially seem to please you.

RD: You were asking about people that I've painted, individuals, so called characters, the people like Billy the Lurk and Old Larsen and others, as to why I paint them, why I like painting them. This of course is part of one's own life and one's own early experiences, these were the people virtually that one grew up with. And when you meet them as you do throughout your life they're the sort of people whose common language you understand, because that was the language that you knew. I remember when I was young I probably was a little bored sometimes with listening to the tales of old men back in the twenties. I've often wished since that I had listened a little more to them, more earnestly. Pensioners, men in their late seventies, some of them getting on for eighty. In the twenties these were men who in their youth had been born about the 1860s, these were men who had shorn down the Darling and whose fathers before them reached back into the days of ticket-of-leave men, the rural workers, the nomads, the shearers, the yard-builders, all those curious strange people who had little luggage but a swag, and who travelled and made and built the ethos that we know in the back country today. And even as a boy, a young lad, I virtually was in touch with it because I was talking to old men whose memories of their father's stories were still extant.

These are the things, the background, the sort of thing which lives in your blood, you're not aware of it, the sort of thing you come across in a camp somewhere out in the far west or in Queensland or in the Gulf, that when you walk into it and somebody hands you a billy and a mug and you sit down, you fall into a kind of easy talk that you've known for a long time. It's your life, it's not that one lives apart from it and because of that one outgrows it, you can never outgrow this, this is something which I think is part of the mainspring that makes you, that directs you towards this sort of thing.

It's what makes me want to paint, basically, it's these things which in my youth impressed me, things that I loved, that I want to record properly for myself. I can't think I could ever paint a thing because I thought it was pretty or impressive, an impressive affair like the Sphinx of Egypt, I would never think of painting it—why? Because although it may be stupendous and cause awe in oneself it has no response, no responsive chord in myself, it doesn't in particular interest me. But, my God, you watch a mob of shearers coming out of any shed, their actions today are exactly what the actions of other men were, the groups that form in the early mornings, with the dewy grass and men wandering their feet through the grass, getting into a knot in groups wondering whether they could declare the morning black because there's too

much damp on the sheep, all the tricks and the humanities and the mad nonsense about it all, I don't know, it's something which is part of you, if you're brought up in it and know it you love it. The old men that always hung around the sheds in the old time, old men who had finished virtually with life but needed the happiness and comfort and talk and cheer, men who all their life had been on the boards, they couldn't help it. They were the men who would just come along and volunteer to do just little jobs, anything, so long as they could sit and yarn, sit and yarn and talk, sharpen blades for men shearing stud sheep. All the old yarns, 'You remember Billy the Hoose', that type of thing, I don't know, Geoff, those are the people that are fascinating. They've got this character. They are characters. You can take your society people, however beautiful they might be, but to me they're ephemeral people. These others aren't. They just go on. They're the kind of towers that reach out. The survival thing that means something. These are the lessons learned at the knee.

GD: And what about the Aborigines?

RD: I don't know I've ever tried to analyse this question of painting Aborigines. Somebody once said to me: 'You're doing something rather valuable, because this sort of thing will disappear one day and there won't be any records.' Well, I hadn't even thought of it like that, that might be of course from somebody's point of view quite valid, but I'm not really concerned with that, I don't know, I think it is simply because somehow in a way these people, they not only have to me a peculiar dignity and grace, not the sort of dignity or grace that one thinks of in the Apollo Belvedere, but the way in which a man comports himself in an environment which is his and has been his and his alone, he's at ease in it.

The way he sits with his feet in certain positions, his hands and feet are anatomically the same as yours, but they comport themselves with a certain difference, all this, all these sorts of things are intriguing, they become part if you like, and yet they're not part of a landscape, they do stand out. It might be his landscape, certainly, on one hand, but on the other hand he is man, and to me this strange primitive quality is the same thing as in the landscape, it is part of the trees, and the rocks, and the river, it's man in this as he virtually was. This I know sounds terribly romantic!

GD: And this bring us to the much-discussed theme of loneliness.

RD: On this question, Geoff, that we were talking about, this question of the loneliness in the outback and this frightening spectre which appears and which has now been discussed frequently in the press, I think it is very important to say this. I can very well understand why anybody in England, for instance, does think this is a powerful and strange and frightening spectre, almost, that hangs over you. But it is I think true as Max [Harris] said the other day, it *is* true that, to me at least, and it must be for a lot of Australians,

that there is no fright, there is no sense of loneliness. I don't think for instance anybody in the city of Sydney is really ever aware that there is, as a recent visiting journalist by name of James Morris stated, that everybody in Sydney always seems to be crouching down under the shadow of this great loneliness. I don't think most people in Sydney are even *aware* of it, they wouldn't have the faintest idea, but those people who *do* know, that have been into the back country, there is no loneliness for them at all. There is a great sense of freedom.

The most peculiar thing about Australia, and we always talk about it in terms of country, *our* country, whereas in effect what we are really talking about is a vast great continent, not a country at all. This thing ranges climatically from the tropic to the temperate zones, and although it has this great rigid shield, with the worn-down mountains, and the large area in the interior which most people would call briefly desert, and which is not truly a desert, it has on the other hand (and this is quite peculiar for a large land mass such as this), it has nothing that is virtually frightening, that a sensible man could not combat. We have no savage animals, we have no predators that Africa has, we have no savage peoples, we have no endemic diseases, we have nothing that an ordinary healthy man cannot combat. If for instance he is in lonely places or in arid conditions where he can't expect help, all he needs to do is make damn sure that he's got the means of subsistence for the time he's in that area.

He won't be lonely. He'll have the company of birds, the ubiquitous company of birds, he'll find that he's living on terms with them which he can never do normally, because the semi-desert growth or semi-desert as we call it, is populated by a xerophytic growth. This means that you do not have great tall trees, but you have birds nesting in trees as you would in a normal landscape, but they nest in stunted trees, which means that they come down to see you. You don't view them as you would in a forest of great flights, you see them at a lower level. They become curious of you, you find they're friendly and they're about you. You can never be lonely in areas like this.

Where is this great loneliness? If you like to look at the ground you'll find it peopled with insects and life, so much movement that's always going on. Where is this thing? This is only a matter of adjustment to scale. I think it's just what I was talking about before. I think I said that when people from London, for instance, saw these things, they were right to feel this sense of loneliness, because they have never had such an experience.

The point that they bring up about my paintings is that they depict a lone man in a landscape and therefore it's lonely. I don't, quite frankly, really mean to emphasise that there is a loneliness. There is a loneliness in everybody who lives apart, I quite agree, but this isn't the sole thing. What happens is this. You can delineate landscape, the bones of a landscape, and in

this country this age-old thing is tremendously gripping, but if you really want to point up a landscape that is deserted, then if you put somebody within it, you do two things. You point up the loneliness, not because it's the man that is in the landscape, but it's because the man is there that the landscape is lonely, unpeopled. At the same time, secondly, you can try and point out that this is a man, *man*, just *man*, unconquered by landscape, because man is a species which has arisen like every other species on this earth and he is not *alien* to a landscape, otherwise he would have to live somewhere in outer space.



Noel Counihan  
1913–86

Interviewed by Mark Cranfield  
Canberra, 1981

National Library of Australia  
Tape no. TRC 1059

*My interview with Noel Counihan was recorded in July 1981 in the studio which he was occupying at the Canberra School of Art as an ANU Creative Arts Fellow. I had planned several hours of material but after thirty minutes the telephone rang. It was Noel's wife, Pat, who had locked herself out of their university flat some twelve kilometres away. In this difficult situation, Noel compromised. He generously spent another half an hour with me before leaving hurriedly. I remember clearly his kindness, his willingness to share his experiences, his ready laugh and his complete lack of pretension. He invited me to resume the interview in Melbourne (he was leaving Canberra the next day) but we never met again before his death.*



MC: Can we turn to the mid-1930s when you were touring New South Wales and later Queensland with Judah Waten. There are two reports that I've seen about this; one was a fairly straight account, the other said that that was the year you drank yourself around New South Wales and Queensland. Do you remember it in that way?

NC: Well there's certainly an element of truth in the latter report. We grogged around quite a bit, but you have to remember that we were both pretty young and very avid for life and new experience, and in the country towns that we did visit the bars were an essential part of living and terribly important from the point of view of being able to make, to establish personal contact with the citizens. So that we were also taken into various clubs in the different towns, as we got to know people, so there was a fair amount of carrying on in the grog line. But the whole enterprise commenced really very soon after Judah had had quite a serious operation for a malignant sarcoma of the wrist. The prognosis was considered to be pretty good afterwards but nevertheless it was a shock to him. Around that time both of us were getting rather sick of Melbourne and we'd been friends for a few years, since Judah had come back from England in 1933. He'd spent three years away and I had met members of his family while he was away, so I actually knew them before I knew him. But we were both very restive and anxious to get out and throw Melbourne off for a period at least, and we thought it might be possible if we teamed up together to finance our way around some of the country towns, particularly on the other side of the Murray, by organising exhibitions of pencil portraits. The division of labour was that Judah would look very much after the business of tracking down suitable subjects, arranging appointments and all the rest of it and I'd go ahead with the drawings. Now I had already done quite a lot of newspaper caricaturing, things of that nature, and by taking a clippings book with me, it meant that we felt—we estimated that we

would have access to the newspapers in country towns and that we could probably do a bit of bargaining; that in return for me making some caricatures for these papers, the editors would supply us with a list of notables and that would give us a good leg-in.

We had a brief look at Albury and for some reasons which I can't quite recollect now, we decided that it wasn't the most favourable base to start from and after meeting a few people in Albury and talking to them, we thought that the Riverina could probably offer brighter prospects. We moved on to Wagga and commenced there. The way it worked out was, we spent from four to six weeks in each of the towns that we visited. We asked people to sit for us on the basis of no obligation to buy, and naturally, we buttered them up a little bit by assuring them they were only being asked to sit because they were such notable personalities in the area. And of course, in a number of cases, they were. We met some extremely interesting people, fascinating people, and the way it worked out was—I think in Wagga for a start—in about a month I must have drawn thirty portraits. Now that was hard work, the sittings were about two hours each, sometimes I did two a day and it was a very very good artistic apprenticeship for me, because every head that I drew presented me with a totally different challenge. I was honest enough with myself not to want to just knock off facile flattering studies of these people, but I used them to really investigate the structure of the human head and the mobility of expression, and the problems of trying to give life to an individual personality, and I really worked hard. I remember, to such an extent, that the last sitting, just on the eve of the exhibition of portraits, I was to draw the wife of the dentist and when I got to the house to make the drawing I was completely unable to draw, I couldn't see. I'd actually temporarily, exhausted my capacity to respond to what I was looking at. Judah had gone off to see somebody else while I was doing the job—it was a Sunday evening if I remember rightly—he came back after I'd been in the dentist's home for about an hour and a half, and we sat down and talked, and I said I was completely helpless, I might be able to do something in the morning. In the meantime the dentist produced a bottle of whisky and unfortunately we drank most of it—whisky was no friend to me—and I had to be, literally, helped back to the hotel. I was in a bad way. Judah took whisky much better than I did. But the following morning I had an awful hangover, but I was able to see better and I made the drawing then.

MC: Had that happened before, that sort of blank—writers blank, if I can use that expression?

NC: I think that was the first time in my experience, but it wasn't the last. It did happen again once or twice later on, purely as the result of this daily business of tackling one or two personalities a day, and they were, as you

can imagine, a most varying set of heads, both male and female. But the towns that we worked, you might say, were Wagga, Tumut, Goulburn, then I think we went back to Melbourne if I remember rightly, briefly went on to Sydney and spent two or three months in Sydney because in Tumut we met a chap who was staying at the same hotel as us and he had very good connections with—I forget what his job was, but it took him around the countryside and took him into the homes of graziers, and he had all sorts of connections with the rural elite. They used to gather at Manly from January to March and literally drink their way through the summer in Manly—it was the summer holidays. He knew a lot of them. He said if we came to Sydney, he'd get me plenty of sittings. We would be able to raise the price and that would pay for our stay in Sydney. It worked out like that, I did do a number of portrait studies there.

In the meantime Judah tried the radio stations to see if he could sell some radio stories, he was starting to think in those terms. He had already, during his years in England, been published. Sections of a novel were published I think, in a tri-lingual journal in Holland. I think he was published alongside people like Dos Passos and Joyce—he was only eighteen or nineteen. He got very self critical, very fed up with what he was doing and when he came back to Australia he wasn't doing any writing at all. We thought this might be an opportunity, while we were away together, that he might resume. As we needed money badly in Sydney to get going again, he started to try the commercial radio stations for short radio stories and of course, he discovered that they worked appalling rackets. They would for example accept a script, read it, reject it and use it—you know, variations, they would alter it. If the idea was good they would actually do that. So that was a rather salutary experience, but we managed to get around it eventually. Apart from drawing some of these personal portraits, I did a number of drawings for Eric Baume when he was the editor of the *Sunday Sun*, the weekend *Sun*, and I drew the test cricketers and so on when the test cricket was on and I did some drawings of aspects of public life in Sydney, in the market place, the parks and things like that.

The we launched off again and went to Orange. There's one interesting thing there—during the stay in Sydney we came across Danila Vassilieff, the Russian painter who had just arrived in Australia. He was painting studies, very rapid, very spontaneous and vigorous paintings of life in Woolloomooloo and Surry Hills and so on. He was very friendly with another painter, who was not known at all in this country, Ambrose Hallen, an Australian, who had lived many many years abroad like John Peter Russell. Hallen was a friend of Matisse and numbers of the most eminent painters of the School of Paris in the earlier part of the century and after the First World War. He and Vassilieff teamed up together and we got to know both of them

quite well. I've often been asked whether my work was influenced by Vassiliev. At that time I wasn't painting, I was only drawing. I was very sympathetically impressed with what he was doing, because I wasn't painting myself, there was no direct influence, but I appreciated what he was doing very very much.

Anyhow after experiences like that, we launched ourselves off into the countryside again and we went to Orange in the middle west, during the autumn, and we had a similar sort of exhibition there. We had a very good time there, it was a very nice town and it was during the time of these wonderful autumn displays of the very lush beautiful flowers—gladioli—which at that time appear on the front covers of all the popular magazines. After Orange we went to the New England area. We tried Tamworth—in Tamworth there was a daily newspaper with its own cartoonist, which was rare, to have a country newspaper with a paid cartoonist. He didn't take kindly to this intrusion into what he might have thought was his preserve. We both realised, after a chat with him, that that newspaper wasn't going to be terribly hot for us, so we went a few miles on to Armidale where the situation was very friendly. It was a conservative pastoral town and we spent a month or so there and had quite a successful exhibition. Then we went on to Brisbane.

MC: Were you living in pubs at that stage?

NC: Yes, we lived in hotels. We used to pick about a second grade pub, where after we sort of smelt it out a bit, where we felt the publican, or the publican and his lady would be sympathetic, that if we ran short of dough, they wouldn't take too harsh a view and extend a little credit. We had that experience on a number of occasions where we had to really—we'd have to wait until the exhibition before we could pay up.

On the sales side, the average seemed to be that we would sell about 70 to 75 per cent of the drawings that I made. The prices were three guineas each and sometimes, of course, we had to indulge in some hard selling in order to convince people, who didn't really like their portrait, that they should buy it. But on the whole, I think we averaged about 70 per cent—we simply tore the others up, and that was that. When we got to Brisbane, we hadn't got much money, we'd gone through a bit of it, from our Armidale experiences, but we went into the *Courier Mail* and sounded things out there. The atmosphere wasn't bad, but we discovered that there was a very good cartoonist on the *Daily Telegraph* named Ian Gall, and I believe he died only quite recently. He received us in the most friendly way, quite unlike the provincial artist in Tamworth. Ian Gall was only too delighted to meet some kindred spirits from the south and he helped us to get a hotel, right opposite the post office in Queen Street, called the Royal. He knew the publican there who was a former international rugby player who had played at about 12½ to

13 stone. When we got there, he had been retired for some time, and he was 21 stone. But he was a charming chap named Vince Mooney and Ian asked him if he would extend us a few weeks credit until we found our footing. In the meantime he introduced me to the features editor, and I showed him my clippings from the *Bulletin* and the Victorian newspapers, and they commissioned me to do a caricature a week at, I think, about thirty shillings a time. That served two very good purposes, gave us some weekly money and secondly, was a direct introduction to the most prominent political and public personalities in Brisbane, from the Governor down, through Forgan Smith, the Catholic Archbishop Sir James Duhig, Doctor Wand, the Anglican Archbishop, and we met—through these caricatures it gave us an entrée to people whom I could also ask to sit for me. Vince Mooney, anyhow, agreed to give us two or three weeks credit, but the thirty shillings a week from the *Telegraph* was really only enough to keep us going with 'out-of-pocket' expenses, so the two or three weeks credit extended to three months. I wouldn't like to try that in a pub in Sydney or Melbourne. But Vince Mooney—we stayed three months; and he never once raised the question of the bill. He sat for me for his portrait and I used to draw him—I had an appointment to meet him on the Sunday mornings, and within five minutes of sitting down he'd be sound asleep. One of the barmen told us Vin started off the day with about eleven gins before breakfast. Now that isn't recommended as a physical fitness diet, it's not recommended for longevity, it's not recommended for anything except a temporary good time. But he never once raised the question of the bill. When the day of the exhibition came, we hired a room in a hotel I think it was, or it might have been in a bank—I've simply forgotten now—and we put the drawings up there—they were unframed—we put them up and Sir Raphael Cilento, the Director of Tropical Diseases at the time, he agreed to open the show, after the Governor, whose name I've forgotten, had already agreed and then had to cancel because of some intrusion, some other appointment which was more important. But he was quite a congenial fellow. I drew him, a most pleasant chap. So Cilento agreed to open the show; he was a fascinating personality. But on the morning the exhibition was to open, the house manageress, as Judah and I were going off to the opening, she stopped us and she said, 'Well Mr Counihan, both Mr Mooney and myself wish your exhibition every success.' Well it worked out around the same percentage, I think we sold about 70 per cent and that meant our hotel bill, due to Vince's generosity was about £35 and there was about £7 beer bill. What we used to do to try and help him—if anybody suggested having a drink, we would take them to our hotel, so they spent money in the bar and when it came to our turn to shout we'd put it on the slate. We'd invite people for dinner, well they would pay for their dinner, but ours was part of our weekly bill. So we managed to get

by and we paid off every penny of Vince's bill and when we left Brisbane about a week later to come back to Melbourne, I think we took berths on the *Duntroon*, which was the first oil-burning ship to do the coastal run, a very nice natty little ship. We arrived back in Melbourne with about two quid each after twelve months away.

MC: Were you drawing for your own interest as you were going along?

NC: No, I was absolutely involved in the portraiture and also making caricatures. I not only did the drawings for the *Daily Telegraph* but for extra money too, I was shooting off drawings to the *Bulletin*—say somebody like Senator Hardy in Wagga, who was eminent because he was the rural politician who led the Riverina Movement, which was a reactionary movement of farmers who threatened to march in many, many tens of thousands strong to Sydney and by armed force throw Jack Lang out of office. It didn't come to that. Hardy was the motivating force. He came from a very well-known family in the district and he was also quite a personality in his own right. We had some quite entertaining sessions with him. He was newsworthy, so I would send a drawing of him off to the *Bulletin*. But we met very eminent people of quite different types, for example, Bishop Burgmann of Goulburn. Did I mention that we went to Goulburn?

Well we went to Goulburn from Tumut. Anyhow I was an ex-Cathedral chorister from St Paul's. Now we knew about Bishop Burgmann because he was the leader of what you may call a left-wing faction in Anglican hierarchy. They were a group of Bishops, all cultured men, who were terribly concerned with the rise of fascism in the world, the danger of war and also very concerned with the social inequities within Australia, they were very concerned with unemployment and all sorts of things. They were a very progressive group of bishops, I think Bishop Moyes was another one, and Doctor Wand in Brisbane was associated with them and so on. Now Burgmann, we wanted to see, because we knew about and respected him, before we got to Goulburn. So we decided to get in touch with him, but as a chorister I couldn't—a former chorister who left St Paul's Cathedral, hating every stone in the building, I couldn't bring myself to go into the evening service to meet him. And Judah, my good Jewish atheistic friend, he went along and represented us both and I waited outside the Church. Judah appeared with Bishop Burgmann in his full regalia. He had explained to him the reasons why I hadn't really wanted to attend the other service and the Bishop was most understanding, he said he understood perfectly and in my place he probably would have felt exactly the same. So in his robes, the three of us walked around the grounds of the church and we chatted, then he invited us home. He had a magnificent library, really quite an eye-opener, and he was an absolute delight to sit down and talk to. So apart from doctors, dentists, mayors, pastoralists—sometimes with them we were invited home to

some very charming traditional homesteads, very elegant homesteads, but we always got into frightful arguments, political arguments with these squatters and relations didn't always remain unsoured. But men like Burgmann were amongst the very finest personalities we met.



Donald Friend  
1915–89

Interviewed by Geoffrey Dutton  
Sydney, 1984

National Library of Australia  
Tape no. TRC 2843/2

*I interviewed Donald Friend in May 1984 when he was living in a little two-storey house in Belmont Place, Paddington. The house stood by itself in a little paddock, and he was growing some vegetables in the front garden. Although suffering painfully from emphysema, he was smoking as relentlessly as ever. I arrived with a bottle of Seppelt's Special Show dry sherry, which I knew was a favourite of his, and we did it justice during the interview. In the sitting room there was a still-life painting in oils which he had just finished. Despite his age and sickness, it was as fresh and cheerful as if it was by a twenty-year-old, except that it was beautifully drawn and painted.*



DF: I think the Sydney modern art movement—meaning, really, Post-Impressionism—started much earlier than the Melbourne thing did.

Really, it started off with old Roy de Maistre, who was painting Cubist pictures before he went to Europe—and he went to Europe in the thirties, and early thirties at that. And of course such people weren't popular here.

And there was Wakelin, Roland Wakelin. Well he had a small following here, which was enthusiastic, and his paintings were very lovely things, and then he went to Melbourne, and he no longer was a colourist, he painted that sort of Melbourne, you know, paints grey and government brown and all that, and that was really the end of him, I thought, as a painter—we all thought.

Anyway, then in the mid-thirties, round about '34, '35, etc., a few Sydney painters like Billy Dobell and—like myself, I went in '36 to England to study there, and, and one found a lot of, well, four or five students that I'd known in Sydney, who'd been Dattilo Rubbo students, were already there, painting at the Westminster school.

And the accent really was on painters like Cézanne and Braque and Picasso, and when we all came back to Australia at the beginning of the war, that was when the sort of, the big howl sort of began, you see, Melbourne started up then with the Contemporary Arts Society and you know, angry people were tearing up their catalogues and saying 'this is all rubbish'.

Well then those exhibitions moved to Sydney, and we had that same sort of scene—you know, the early Nolans and that sort of thing, Tucker.

But quite a few of those Sydney artists were sort of refugees from Melbourne, like Drysdale, David Strachan, and so on, they'd all been George Bell students down there. But George Bell was a very good teacher, I gather, and pretty worldly about art, you know, he knew the score internationally. And John Reed, perhaps, was the other figure there around whom a lot of them gathered. But Melbourne then—and I include Sydney of course—we regarded them as sort of interesting exotics from the deep south.

But Sydney art was lively, it's an extroverted town, and it's never gone in much for dignity. Melbourne, of course—dignity's headquarters, so long as it's got a good blue suit.

And—but it was Sydney that was doing the exciting things and all of that, Melbourne during the war and after the war, went in quite heavily for social realism, which is a kind of expression of resentment against being poor, and other people being poor.

Sydney artists, of course, had enjoyed themselves in their attics, you know, drinking plonk and eating [*laughs*] crusts of bread, and you know, the usual thing. And we all lived that sort of life up here, in attics round the Cross and all this sort of thing.

And we didn't think of resenting it, we had a marvellous bloody time, and we did all sorts of interesting things. But it was that sort of Sydney extroverted sort of thing, plenty of laughter—and plenty of laughter in the paintings.

I saw the other day, at the Sydney, the New South Wales Gallery, a big exhibition it's on, still, now, of nearly all of Melbourne paintings. And you go through the whole lot of them, and then at the end you see three little paintings which are incredibly different, and Billy Dobell's pictures of workers working on the docks and that sort of thing, and they're full of life—they're really well painted, which was rather a change from those Melbourne things, you know, they [*laughs*] really, they are pretty awful, there's no doubt about it. But you know, poor dears.

Well they went on, the lot of them down there (which is the reason why people like Strachan and Drysdale came up here) with the most bitter vendettas, art vendettas. The George Bell ones, you know, any of them were seen dining with the John Reed ones, they'd never ever be out for a meal again. That sort of thing, you know. Meldrum and Jorgensen, and all the rest of it, they added fuel to their fire.

But in Sydney, of course, inevitably a lot of us detested one another's work and despised it, but that didn't stop us from all being together and drinking and dining and having parties and, you know, the sort of Sydney bohemia which did exist to quite a degree there. And right up until, oh, after the war, in the sixties, still in Sydney there was quite a strong bohemia.

By that time I'd moved to Paddington, around here, people like John Olsen and all of those painters. And then you get significant teachers like Jeffrey Smart, who lived out here in those days and Justin O'Brien, really I suppose in a bit smaller way, and, but Jeff was at the Tech, and also at the Tech were people like John Passmore—who just died the other day—he was much more Melbournian temperament than one, I can tell you. [*laughs*]

And Ralph Balson, I could never understand his work, but he was a nice old thing and he was a real artist, and Godfrey Miller, who lived a sort of an artificial hermit's life. Actually, he used to sort of see lots of glorious beautiful

rich blonde ladies and none of them knew of the existence of the others, you know, he used to pretend to be a great hermit.

But he was a very much admired teacher at the Tech, and he had a considerable influence. And unlike most artists, he was rich; didn't affect him, he lived pretty simply in Paddington. It was an advantage to him, because if he wanted to see a Picasso show in Paris, he'd go to Paris for the weekend and see it! But the others couldn't.

Sydney artists seem to have travelled a great deal more extensively and imaginatively than the Melbourne ones.

GD: When did the New South Wales Gallery start to perk up? When Hal Missingham went there? Or ...

DF: Hal Missingham perked it up a bit, yes, there's no doubt. He used to offend society people a lot, because he was very unconventional, and so he missed out on a lot of gifts simply because of that, you know. He didn't like the cocktail parties and all the rest of it, you know, he'd never appear in a tie, and all that kind of thing, he was very kind of *dégage*.

But he was good friends with the artists, and he knew good stuff when he saw it, there's no doubt about it. So I suppose it started to perk up in his day. But just the same, it—there are some lovely pictures, lovely Australian pictures, you know, in that gallery. Hal got some, some of them have been bought since Hal.

GD: I meant how early? You know, because none of you got any encouragement from the gallery, did you, in those early days?

DF: No, the gallery sees itself as a patron of art in Australia—patron of directors and curators, and things like that. But the patronage of Sydney artists, mostly in private hands, and a few sort of insurance and bank people buy well. Nugget Coombs [Governor of the Reserve Bank] got together a marvellous little collection.

GD: And what about Paul Haefliger?

DF: He had a long influence. He was not really a good painter. He had everything which should have made a good painter, but he had the sort of intelligence that once he started on something or other, immediately he'd done a few pictures, in a sort of a new exploration of painting, you see, he'd then set up a theory about it.

Well the theory kills the art, I think. A painter should never really theorise about what he's doing, he should simply do it. And then leave it to the critics. But then Paul was a very, very intelligent art critic—a very hard one. He used to infuriate us! But just the same, we took notice of him. His standards were the great standards of Europe and the Orient. Our little sort of colonial bit, sort of found it very hard to stand up to that. Yes.

But he was an extremely good critic, too intellectual. He wasn't, he didn't write in an exciting popular way like Robert Hughes can, you know, he

was just not very readable and consequently the gut of most of his criticisms was cut out by an editor and—who really would only understand a blue pencil and not anything about art, anyway.

GD: I wanted to ask you about the galleries, about the ladies of the Macquarie, you know. They did the most, I suppose, didn't they?

DF: They did the most. Lucy Swanton was pretty bright, but very conservative, and somehow or other, well both she and Treania Smith were so ladylike that they thought that, you know, having unearned incomes themselves, they thought money was rather vulgar, and couldn't understand why painters were always moaning and groaning for, you know, a cheque for four guineas or something or other, that would take months to get to you, you know.

And then a few smarter, more commercial galleries rose up after the war, and they used to buy stuff at the Macquarie and sell them for twice as much, you know, three hundred yards away, in another gallery. But it was a good gallery, that had you know, quite a good stable of painters, there's no doubt about it.

They used to—I liked Lucy, but you know, they used to condescend to one a great deal. And I know it sent John Olsen nearly round the bend with fury, you know, this sort of attitude, you know, 'Oh we think we might be able to fit in just a tiny little work of yours in our next five guineas show' or something, you know.

And there would be queues of students outside the gallery from about midnight onwards, for the opening of that sort of exhibition. They were all being paid by the rich who were having a lovely time themselves drinking champagne and eating caviar, and every now and then come down in their Rolls and Daimlers etc., with some sandwiches and hot coffee for the miserable students sitting on little camp stools in the street outside the gallery waiting for it to open in the morning. That was really funny. Well, we'd have drawings of Dobell and Drysdale, and all these real plums, you know, and they were all five guineas! [*laughs*] But, well, the Sydney art world, and—we all enjoyed it, whether it was simply because we were young anyway and we didn't know any better!

GD: What did they live on, with such miserable pickings to be had?

DF: Well I don't know. I had an unearned income of fifty pounds a year at that time and so anything over that—and sometimes I made as much as two hundred pounds in a year from painting, and I lived as I thought, fairly well, you know, [*laughs*] usually in attics around the joint, you know, the Bay or Kings Cross.

GD: Well Tas [Russell Drysdale] had some money of his own.

DF: Tas had money of his own. David Strachan had a little money of his own, but he was living most of the time in Paris in those days.

GD: There weren't any grants from the Art Board, or there wasn't an Art Board.

DF: Oh there was nothing like that, no, no, no. And actually, I don't suppose there was any dole for a painter, you couldn't say you were a painter and go on the dole, you know. [*laughs*] You just had to say you were unemployed, you couldn't get anything being a painter, unemployed.

But then art suddenly became rather fashionable round the 1960s and then galleries mushroomed up all over the place, one or two of them are still going.

I used to go up to Brisbane quite a lot. When I went to live in Hill End in the, oh, in about—it was after the Second World War a bit, probably 1946 or '47, and I got a cottage up there with a friend of mine. Winters there [at Hill End] were very severe, so I got a Jeep and I used to drive up to Brisbane very slowly and then pick up somebody like Margaret Olley or sometimes I'd go all the way up with David Strachan, and we'd go up, just painting along the way until we got to the warm country around Cairns or Townsville etc., and stay there painting. And then sometimes I'd go up to the Torres Strait islands, and you know, this was really marvellous.

And Hill End—I had a cottage there, then different artists began to come there. Paul Haefliger and Jean Bellette got a cottage there and did it up, and they used to lend it to students and other artists who'd go there and paint, like Strachan and so on. Drysdale used to come up with his family, and stay often there. And it was a marvellous place because it was a ghost town, and there were marvellous landscapes around, it was an extraordinary landscape.

GD: Well Sydney had a remarkable bunch of women. I mean Margaret Preston, Grace Cossington Smith ...

DF: Margaret Olley. Melbourne did have one advantage, it had a few writers who were really like bombs. Who was that chap who wrote *Arquebus*?

GD: Adrian Lawlor.

DF: And you know, I'd say it was like just stuffing a bomb in the middle of the people. This sort of thing of his, you know, and we didn't have any of that here. We were much sort of milder from a literary point of view than, you know, Lindsay ever was.

GD: And Norman Lindsay?

DF: Very curious. He, he was a terrific wowser, really. I knew, you know, quite a few of his family, and if there was a party up there at Springwood, or wherever he lived etc., they'd have to hide their bottles of plonk under bushes in the garden, because demon alcohol and rum and that ugly thing called sex could never raise their ugly heads in the Lindsay establishment.

And this amuses me enormously because, you know, his best work is absolutely stuck full of orgies and satyrs and nymphs, and you know, breasty

ladies, and sort of men with most terribly horny looks on their faces and horns in their heads—and pricks the size of peanuts. You see? It's quite extraordinary, you know.

It's amusing to see how he concealed the sexual parts of the male in his pictures. He didn't go so far as to use floating veils in the Victorian manner, but he, you know, there was always something in the way, a bush or another person or something or other, and this, and here they all are as naked as hell but decently covered, you know. Except for the ladies, who were really sort of brilliantly blatant about it all. My own personal, absolutely personal reaction was that Lindsay, when I was about fourteen or fifteen was an absolute god as far as I was concerned, and it was because of Lindsay that I began drawing with pen—pen and ink—and have ever since.

And one birthday or Christmas or something or other, my mother asked me what I'd like as a gift, and I said, 'I'd like ...', there was a book with a hundred pen drawings of Norman Lindsay's, a limited edition called *The Satyricon of Petronius*.

And so mother got me this thing, which was quite expensive in those days, it was about five pounds. Nowadays it's about five hundred, a thousand dollars, or something like that. Beautiful book, wonderfully got out by the Francolico Press. Well I had that for some years; we'd left Sydney in the Depression, we were up in the country on a country place, belonged to the family, and the library books hadn't arrived so my mother went into my room to see if there was something readable amongst my books and thought, Oh well *The Satyricon* etc., and of course she was horrified!

But she was a very broad-minded woman, really. She sort of laughed like a drain about—sort of Christmas present for little Donald, you know.

GD: [*laughs*] How old were you?

DF: Oh, I don't know, fourteen, fifteen, something like that. But you know, you still have that sort of attitude in Sydney and Melbourne even today.

My pictures, many of them male nude, and some woman'll come up and say, 'Oh I love your work' you know 'I'd adore to have that picture but you know I have children'. And it's quite an extraordinary thing, you know, because you gather that the children of these art-loving people have no private parts whatsoever [*laughs*] and you know, you really do get a peculiar vision of what they might look like in the bath!

Anyway, so much for Lindsay. But of course later I didn't admire him nearly so much, he's not the greatest draftsman but at least I did get the discipline of pen drawing from him, and that's been very, very important to myself.

And actually even now, there's no other artist in New South Wales, I don't know about Melbourne, who works with a pen, except Brett Whiteley.

Tas was a beautiful draftsman, beautiful drawings. He, he'd studied under George Bell of course, and a lot of his training which impressed him a great deal with George Bell was the business of looking at the model etc. and not being allowed to draw it, and then make drawings of it from in front, behind, and all around it, the model was just no longer there, to train your visual memory.

And that stood Tas in very great stead in his later career, because he was simply mad, you'd go out working like stink with him, wherever, you know, Queensland, or in Hill End, what-have-you, he'd do nothing! [*laughs*] And then about a year later come out with wonderful little drawings, oh beautiful drawings, you know.

GD: All out of the memory?

DF: Oh yes, with what he'd seen absolutely digested and translated into terms of his own drawings.

One great advantage the Sydney artists did have, from the thirties onwards, was that they did go abroad and they knew, from constantly looking at them, great works of all kinds in the galleries of Europe and England.

Whilst Melbourne, in the formative years of those people like Perceval and so on, they were interested, Perceval very much so, and I think Boyd, in European art, but they knew it through those colour reproductions in that American picture magazine. What was it called? *Life* magazine, that's right, yes.

Now you see the early Percevals, etc. they're so influenced by those pictures, painted by Gozzoli, and Bruegel and all that sort of thing, but they also have that yellowish tinge that you get from a magazine reproduction, you know, which I suppose they took to be the real colour of what the things were, you know. But the Sydney people went—they were much more the Post-Impressionist people like Braque and Picasso. I was always interested in the Old Masters and all that; Italian Primitive and that sort of thing, but most of them, well modern art was for me also, but most of them were for the Post-Impressionists, Cézanne and that sort of thing. And Cézanne had considerable influence in Melbourne on people like Jock Frater. But they didn't seem to really, to understand what it was all about. Cézanne was a Classic painter, and these chaps were Romantic Impressionists. I know that Jock Frater could go out for a weekend and come back with six Cézannish landscapes. [*laughs*] Poor bugger, it'd take him about a year and a half to finish one, you know.

We had one minor—I think minor—draftsman here, who was very well liked and very well known, and that was Francis Lymburner. Lymburner from day one was so sure that he was a genius and his work was sort of equivalent, you know, to the Great Masters. And they were charming little pictures, you know, but they never went very deep into anything. They had a

quality which would certainly justify some of the Melbourne criticism of us for being, you know, Tinsel Town.

And you ask, 'Why did I leave Sydney?' Well in actual fact I left Australia, not Sydney. And it was not sort of exciting enough visually and all the rest of it.

It's terribly difficult to do anything out here, it's really a hell of a bloody struggle to paint here, because there's nothing really stuck there for you, you've really got to hack it out of the bush or the city, or whatever, yourself. Whilst in other countries, Europe, Africa, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, you have an environment which is incredibly exciting artistically, and I always liked that.

I didn't go on trips here and there, I went to live in these places and learn the language, you know, just become as much as one could, part of the life there. And part of their art, even.

But you can't stick overseas forever, talking a foreign language, you—oh your mind just gets sort of, you just long to put your feet up and sort of talk with a whole lot of rotten old ockers or something or other, at the pub, you know. And, because it's one's own country, one knows all about it really, whether you like it or not. I like Australia in bits and spots.



Francis Lymburner  
1916–72

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 144

*Recorded in his studio, corner of Park and Pitt streets, Sydney, 20 November 1965. It was a big room with windows—easels, pictures and paints. He works and lives here and paints from his sketches—of which he has hundreds. He is quite well known for these drawings and has published a book of them with Sydney Ure Smith and is about to bring out another one. He speaks about these on the tape.*

*When I rang Francis Lymburner he was pleased—'I heard about these recordings,' he said, 'and I will be glad to do it.'*

*He had a cup of coffee ready and we just talked about the different climate for art in Australia, from when he left here in 1952 to go overseas—returning in 1964. He is a tall well built man—very civilised but has returned and established the same sort of studio which existed in the city before he left. Artists today do not do this, preferring to paint either at home or in the suburbs.*

*He was almost shy to talk about his childhood. 'The bush always seemed strange to me,' he said.*

*'Did you like the city?' I asked.*

*'Not particularly,' he said, 'but I love the sea—when I was in England—Australia always seemed to me the Eastern Coast and the Pacific—I missed it.' So he spoke about it and his time at the Brisbane Tech and his teacher, Martyn Roberts. Mentions a picture of his 'Mainland Boat' (now in the Art Gallery of New South Wales) and mentions two pictures 'Queen of the Night' and 'Actress Sleeping'. There is a twenty-five-years time span between these pictures and they were both on his studio wall. The first is much tighter than 'Actress Sleeping', which is the later one.*

*'I expected this recording to be over in a few minutes,' he said, 'but it is in great depth.' I had asked him just what he would call his paintings. 'They refer to my work as the charm school,' he said. Now, I knew about this and think it is a revolting term. When I told him that (and you have only to look at his remarkable animal drawings to see how false it is) he said, 'I hate the name, too!' Then he went on to say just what he considered himself. He also tells how he got the material for his animal drawings.*

*He was pleased when he heard the playback. 'Even doing this,' he said, 'is part of what is happening in Australia today—it's all very exciting.'*

*He carried the recorder down to the car and talked for a while in the street. Late Saturday and the pictures out—people passing. I remember him saying on the tape 'in another century I'd have drawn the streets ...'*



My name is Francis Lymburner. I was born in Brisbane in Queensland. I drew as all children do. I think one of the significant things that started me as

a painter is that when I went to the Brisbane Grammar School, I remember doing a whole cartridge page full of characters from *The Tempest*—it was our play for the matriculation examination, and the master pinned them up on the blackboard, and I suddenly had an inkling that perhaps I was an artist.

Well I consider I had a normal Queensland childhood. My father was a mining surveyor and I used to go on camping trips with him, although I never really took to the bush; my love was always the Pacific and the surf. We were always taken for six weeks or two months every holidays, and I think the stronger impression I've got of the Australian countryside does seem that magnificent coast that stretches so far down the eastern seaboard.

I failed dismally in academic subjects at the end of my school year, and I had this vague feeling that I wanted to be an artist and didn't quite know what to do about it, and I was lucky enough to go to the Art Department of the Brisbane Tech, and at this time there was rather a remarkable man called Martyn Roberts who was in charge. I should think he has had a stronger influence on my life than any other early teacher. I'm always very grateful for being there at that time. He was a Victorian gentleman in attitudes and in fact in training, but I am glad that I did have a solid Victorian training in drawing and painting. It has its disadvantages but at least it gives you a professionalism which I think is important.

I left Brisbane when I was quite a young man, just before the last war. I came here about '37 or '38, was entranced with Sydney and since then have struggled desperately to survive as an artist which I've managed to do.

My first big break was when Sydney Ure Smith published a book of my drawings after the war, in 1948. I achieved some success in Sydney at that time, after that time, and I left for England in 1952 and subsequently returned in '64.

England, when I went there, was before what you might call the Australian invasion, before Australians were known at all. I think Mr Nolan is largely responsible for putting Australia on the map, but when I went there in 1952 we were an unknown quality and it was terribly difficult to get an exhibition, in fact to get any recognition at all.

When I think of my English experience in retrospect, frankly it wasn't one of the most successful periods of my life either financially or in many other ways. I think I gained immensely from it, in fact critics have said so, and I think I have; I think it was a necessary experience, and possibly necessary for most Australian painters.

I travelled fairly extensively in Italy and France, and this again was part of my education.

After a very successful exhibition in Melbourne that I'd sent from England, I suddenly had an impulse that it was time I came home, both for artistic and personal reasons. I remember getting on the airliner with very

mixed feelings but I've been terribly happy that I made that decision. I find Sydney where I've spent most of my time since I've been back, very exciting, there's a sort of artistic ferment going on, much more appreciation than when I was young. I suppose it is a fruitful atmosphere for me to work in.

All my paintings are based on drawings. I never paint directly from the subject, either outdoors or in my studio. It's only a matter of refinement; an idea comes in a drawing and then perhaps a sketch for a painting, and then it develops after that.

I've always been fascinated by the human figure, and as in the book I mentioned earlier, published by Ure Smith, there are a lot of figure and animal drawings. One of my main joys since coming back is to discover the beach again with all these marvellous near naked figures, which I'm at present embarking on a series of paintings, but my method is always to work with a sketch book and then subsequently evolve ideas from it.

I find all my pictures start from some object, either a person or a landscape. In a sense I'm triggered off; I suddenly think how marvellous, how exciting this is, and I've got to say something about it, and then it often becomes a long involved process of refining and synthesising it.

I've often been asked to describe myself, into what category I fit as a painter, you know, Abstract, Expressionist, Figurative and so on, and I think broadly I'm in the French tradition. My whole background comes from the School of Paris, and of course their progenitors.

It's a very mixed time in painting, and I think that it's very easy to be influenced; it's one of the troubles of our age, that there are too many influences coming from all over the world and in fact from all periods, but I've always tried to trace my tradition and evolve it. People say that I'm painting the same way as I did twenty years ago but quite differently, in the sense that it's an evolving and not any backtracking. I suppose very loosely you could describe my work as a form of Romantic Expressionism which I think is the great—well, people I particularly admire in the modern world are painting in this manner, but it still has its roots in a European tradition that goes back to well, maybe the fourteenth century.

I think in painting you must resolve things to absolute essentials, and I suppose Cézanne changed the course of modern art by doing just that in his work.

These two pictures in the studio that are side by side, there's twenty-five-years difference in their painting. They are both romantic figure subjects: one is called 'Queen of the Night' and the other is called 'Actress Sleeping', and I'm very pleased to see the resemblance in them. It hasn't been easy to hold to my course, because after all there are times, especially in England when the Abstract Expression wave was on, that I thought, Well, I can't be the only one in step. But I think that is how an artist must resolve his life,

that he's only got one thing to say which is as personal to him as his hands, and he spends his life working this out.

The later picture, which is called 'Actress Sleeping', evolved from a tiny drawing I did on the back of an envelope in Hyde Park in London. I was going across the park one day and I saw this girl sleeping on the grass, and there was a curious fashion on then, it's probably a bouffant skirt, and I thought—it rather touched me. It's been a difficult painting. It looks spontaneous but in fact I've done dozens of sketches for it. It was completed in Sydney, last year I think, and as all paintings, it gets to a point where you realise that's it—nothing can be added or taken away, and then, well, you exhibit it.

I'm probably better known as a draftsman than as a painter. Drawing has always been a passion with me, it was a department of art where I felt—well, more secure, happier, happier in. I think it was Ingres said that drawing was the probity of art, and I believe this to be so. I can generally find out what I think of a painter by looking at his drawings, which are all too rare in this modern age!

One of my great experiences in England, I did a lot of drawing in a lot of famous theatres, and apart from giving me the opportunity of rubbing shoulders with the great, I found it a fascinating atmosphere. Probably in another century I'd have drawn the streets, but the streets are so drab now; motor cars are impossible to draw and people's clothes have lost character. In fact the streets are characterless, so by going backstage I find people in costume, in strange sets, and it always stimulated and excited me.

I've just finished preparing a book of drawings which I like to think are my best drawings over the last five years, and it is an ambition very near my heart to see it in the bookshops. I'm fairly optimistic about this happening. The plates will be, I suppose, the things I've always drawn but rather stronger and more complex: figures, animals, a few landscapes, you know, mostly things that move, that I find exciting.

When I came to Sydney first I haunted Taronga Park Zoo. In fact I should think that is where I really learnt to draw, and I think there should be more of it in young students, because unlike the figure class, an animal never poses, you suddenly have to get a great deal of expertise to understand and know what they're doing. I've always held to this, I've always drawn animals. In London I went to Regent's Park and I've always drawn my friends' pets. I once went to the Natural History Museum in London where they have all these stuffed animals, and I found I couldn't lift a pencil: the animal must be alive and must be ready to move off or else I can't get the least excited in drawing it.

I don't consider myself a landscape painter primarily, landscapes are mostly settings for my figures, although I have painted some landscapes, one

of which is in the possession of the National Gallery of New South Wales, it's quite an early painting of mine and I did it in Queensland when I was coming back from Stradbroke Island. The picture is called 'Mainland Boat' and it's a view from the jetty, one of those old wooden jetties that ring Moreton Bay, old pylons, and then far in the distance you see the boat going back to Brisbane. It's like so many of my paintings, it's a painting of mood, it's very low tones, there are no bright colours. Again, I think it links with this latest painting we are looking at now, the same thing but very different. I am fascinated by the sea. People say that they can even see the sea in my landscapes or figures, but it is one of my ambitions and I think it is a part of the Australian environment, in as much as we've talked a great deal about the bush but nobody, I feel, has really said anything significant about this coast that is so much part of our lives.



David Strachan  
1919–70

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1962

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 23

*Recorded at the Clune Galleries, Sydney, September 1962. We couldn't find the key for the room I usually recorded in so we did this in the middle room on the second floor. It was full of pictures and we had to clear a space, and I thought we would never get around to the recording because he looked at every picture we moved. When we finished his recording I said, 'Your voice seems to go up at the end of each sentence—not quite like an Australian voice.'*

*'I lived in France for a number of years,' he said, 'and I suppose it shows.' After we heard his recording he added a bit about a book [Accent and Hazard].*



Ever since I can remember I have been painting, rather childish primitive paints in letters and books. I come from a village in Victoria, or I spent my childhood there, where there were many painters, the Lindsays and many others; so painting has never really been foreign to me, except that I've never done it very well.

At about the age of sixteen, my family wanted me to do medicine, as the others did, and I refused, and was eventually sent to the Slade, where I studied for three years.

After that I came back to Australia and worked for a short time in Melbourne, then Sydney; then after the war I went back to France again, where I stayed thirteen or fourteen years.

When I was in France, I studied deep colour etching, lithography, and I continued painting and going to art schools. I found that, after starting off as a more or less natural primitive painter, I was making some headway in traditional methods of painting. I can remember at George Bell's, when I left—he had a studio in Melbourne—being very pleased with myself and saying goodbye, and he said 'Well, Acid Drop'—as he called me—'I haven't taught you a thing.' But I had to go back to Europe for that.

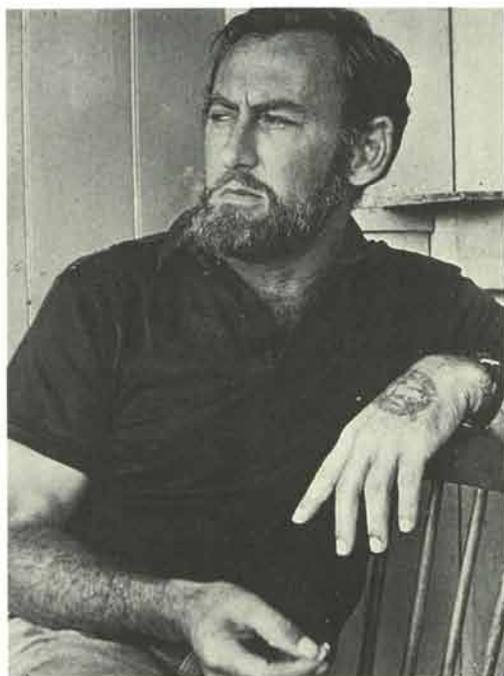
When I paint, I do my utmost to simplify into a very very simple image. I don't feel that any complication should show or should worry the observer. I think anything that can be said should be able to be taken right down to its basic qualities, and then and then only will it have this quality of timelessness; it will mean something as a work of art rather than as a purely pictorial representation of the object depicted.

The method in which I paint; I see a subject, nearly always I go out and do a drawing which I throw away, several drawings; then I go out with a canvas, probably diametrically opposed in shape to the motive, and I start painting and I fight my way through it. Very often it ends up in the dustbin but if it doesn't, well, I've done what I want to.

Basically, the thing that I'm really striving for is to express the feeling I have about that subject, and sometimes I can put it down very quickly, and sometimes it takes me months and months of reorganisation of the shapes and colours and tones to get that feeling. When I've got that, that is as much as I can do.

The subjects that I choose are nearly always banalities or very close to it, because to me these subjects that we see around us all the time, the first subjects that impress us as children, have got something of an archetypal quality that I feel is all important, especially in life today, because everything is getting more and more complicated, and done with machines, and our feet are getting moved more and more from the earth; and it is there that we must return.

When I was in Paris, I also made *editions de luxe* in deep colour engravings. This tradition was revived recently with Vollard, and one brings to mind the most beautiful books made by Rouault and Picasso and Bonnard and many many others. I always wanted to make one of these books and I made one at my own expense, which was exhibited in New York, and in Paris and eventually I sold it out; but after that I did a *semi-luxe edition*, and I gave up the whole business, because primarily I'm a painter.



Jon Molvig  
1923-70

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Sydney, 1962

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 15

This is Jon Molvig. I didn't paint when I was little. I didn't do anything at all except play, I think. I was a very bad student at school, in fact I've never been able to pass an exam in my life. At the age of fourteen I went to work in a garage, from there to the steelworks, and various other little things. In 1941 I joined the army and after a little bit of feeling around after the war, I did a rehabilitation course in art at the East Sydney Technical College for three years; then I went overseas for another three years and—what did I do then? I came back and—too many 'ands' in this!

I paint quickly, slowly and what—I do, honestly. As far as painting pictures is concerned—oh, you may get an idea from some experience that creates an impression upon you, an emotion; and one tries to put it down in paint. This means transposition from what is in your mind—which no one can, which is completely abstract, I suppose—into visual language on canvas, which is bloody hard.

Periodically I change style in painting. I think that every subject demands a different technique or approach or whatever you like to call it—different treatment. These particular pictures are what you call symbolic, I suppose, a set of symbols used to express an idea or a feeling I have about humanity. The subject of them, the title of the whole series, is 'Eden Industrial', and Adam and Eve are the two main figures in the series; they are purely symbolic and have nothing to do with religious significance. They are a symbol of humanity as it stands today, or will stand, has stood, in future and past generations, and it is a comment on the increasing mechanical aspect of the world.

I don't know whether you have ever noticed it but colour has a lot of psychological significance; some colours can make you happy and some sad, some heavy and some light. I try to use colours that heighten the feeling of what I want to say. For instance, if I was painting a young girl, I would not use brown and purple and heavy colours like that; I'd naturally use something that is light and youthful and airy, happy, perhaps, depending on whether I wanted to make her happy or sad. If I was painting an old man, I wouldn't use light greens and light blues, things like that. That's only a very rough basis for the psychology of colour.

The time it takes to paint a picture or the way in which it is approached depends entirely on the picture. Some pictures need to be done spontaneously and they must be done, perhaps, in one go; this might take two hours or ten hours. Some of them have to be laid aside and worked over afterwards when the paint is dry.

Quite often I use drawings, particularly in portraits. When I have a portrait commission to do—not a commission necessarily but a portrait—I usually do a lot of drawings; I like to become familiar with the subject, especially the character of the subject and the general feeling of it. I usually

throw the drawings away and do the painting from memory. But usually now, with an ordinary subject, I just start straight on the large canvas and work it out from there. Once a picture is started, it sort of paints itself. When you put a brushstroke down, it indicates the next brushstroke to put down and so on—it's like doing a jigsaw puzzle, in which you put one piece in place and you have to find another piece to fit in with it.

Some painters work very set hours. I know one particularly who has a time book in which he signs on in the morning and signs off for lunch, puts down what he has done and what he hasn't done; but I don't work this way. I usually just work when I feel like working, usually at night because there are not so many interruptions.

I think I usually paint at night because there are less interruptions and my mind is clearer then. I'm not a person who can get up in the morning and start straight into work, because I never really wake up until about half past three in the afternoon.

I'm called an Expressionist, and Expressionism means that a person tries to convey in a painting the feeling he gets from some situation or experience rather than the actual visual situation itself.

Actually, I believe that a painter shouldn't talk at all, because what he believes today, what may be true to him today, he must change tomorrow. The truth today becomes a lie tomorrow. The more he talks, the more he talks himself out of his own—what shall I say? The more he talks, the more literary he becomes in his painting. The more he can explain his painting, the more literary he becomes in his painting, because painting is a language of its own; apart from literature, apart from music, apart from anything else, it is a visual language in which you can only say something that cannot be said in another language.

Truth is not absolute, it is transient; there is no absolute truth in the world as far as I am concerned, you can only say what you believe it to be at the time, in paint. If you are talking about your own painting it is a different matter altogether, you may see your own painting in an entirely different light to what it actually is. Posterity will probably have an entirely different idea of your own work from the idea that you have, because it's like producing a child. Every mother thinks that her child is a beautiful child, but a person comes up and has a look at it and it is a wrinkled little monkey, not beautiful at all, you see, just like painting. You produce something, it is a child to you, you think, This is beautiful, this is marvellous! and someone else has a look at it and it's just rubbish.



## Clifton Pugh

1924–90

Interviewed by Barbara Blackman  
Melbourne and Cottles Bridge, Victoria, 1983

National Library of Australia  
Tape no. TRC 1417

*I made this interview in May 1983 when, with my husband Marcel Veldhoven, I was sojourning in Melbourne. I made the first interview with Clif in his inner city house which was his Melbourne pad. He then invited us to go home with him to 'Dunmoochin' for a couple of nights and extend the interview. So, while Marcel explored the landscape, gathered mushrooms and cooked, we talked on tape seated at the baronial table in his manorial hall surrounded by books, paintings and memorabilia. Clif was just back from a prestigious visit to the Franklin River, Tasmania, as part of the protest then in progress.*

*I had met Clif in 1951 when I first went to Melbourne, he then being a student at the Gallery School and I a model. We moved in the same circle in the fifties—the adventurous ones, the new wave of artists and accomplices. I visited the first mud wall beginnings of his house, and subsequently during its development, when the big stone, first outside the house in its immediate environment, was surrounded by a courtyard, then enclosed. In 1983 the house had grown enormously and the stone stood somewhat outlandishly well within the house structure.*

*Clif was so much part of that house he had built over thirty years in layers around him like a carapace or armour, his gallery of judiciously swapped paintings so comprehensive a representation of his fellow painters, his documentation of catalogues, reviews, photographs so carefully kept in order, his Balinese doors, skeleton on the mantelpiece and walls of Rudy Komon wine flagons so much a statement of his life, I ventured to suggest that he should will that after his death he should be cast in wax and stood among it all à la Madame Tussaud to make complete the Life and Times of Clifton Pugh in grand tableau.*



CP: Nolan, I think, is one of the greatest disappointments of my life. When I saw that 1947 show of his, the Ned Kelly paintings, I was a student at Dargie's. I saw it on a Thursday afternoon—this is very important, it should be recorded—I was a Dargie student doing internal painting and I was very much an innocent, I really was, I knew nothing about the art world, I just knew I wanted to paint. I had been spending a year learning to draw in charcoal these anatomical figures in the old traditional way. I walked into Tye's Gallery—I don't know how I walked into there, by accident, on a Thursday afternoon, and there is my country—that's what it's about. I wasn't worried about Ned Kelly or those shapes, but the shapes across it somehow or other tell you more about landscape, a two-dimensional object against a third dimensional long distance, something to do with the Australian light, something to do with Australia. Most of the good painters in this country have put, always, a flat two-dimensional image against a third dimensional, on, on, on forever, landscapes. It's something that is peculiarly Australian. It's

also black and white, operative colours in Australian landscape. I remember reading lots of European books about art, black and white aren't colours—in Australia black and white are colours, they are positive colours. Then you have infinite distance. Anyway, I walked in as a tonal Dargie student, by accident, and I saw those Nolan landscapes, the first Ned Kelly show. I stayed there until I was turfed out. I just sat there and looked at them. It was beyond my comprehension, I'd never seen anything like it before, beyond what I was learning, not with anything to do with what I'd seen or experienced or had any visual relationship, except it was telling me about my landscape, my landscape, mine. The next morning I was in there before ten o'clock—I got the train early in the morning—I grabbed hold of Dargie who was my teacher. I said, 'You must come'—and even at that stage I still couldn't say 'Mr Dargie' or 'Sir'—'you must come and look at this exhibition which I saw yesterday.' He said, 'What?' I said, 'Someone called Sidney Nolan, it's the Tye's Gallery in Bourke Street.' I was so insistent. He also got the other bloke called Don Laycock, who ended up with me at 'Dunmoochin' by the way—he was the prime Dargie student. We went down there I think about 11.30 or 11.45. I was almost like a little boy, as we walked down to Tye's Gallery. From the gallery I was sort of hopping around—I can actually see myself sort of hopping around. They both walked around, Dargie walked around, it took him about ten minutes. He looked at them, he looked at me, he said, 'I think it's all rather ...' I just looked at him and Laycock. They went back; now I stayed there the whole afternoon, I sat in that gallery—it closed at 4.30 because it was the last day of the show—looking at them. I thought there's something wrong, this is what I emotionally feel, this is what I think is to do with the landscapes. Two years with Mr Dargie and I think he's a good teacher, a beaut bloke—I think I lasted another four months with Dargie, then I left. I had great respect for Dargie, but I just left the school because I thought that Nolan had put his finger on, what I think, is Australian landscape. I do it differently, quite differently, but I think he put his finger on it and it wasn't decadent at all. [Later] he went downhill, the output didn't matter. A man who was a great hero of mine, I felt terribly sad.

BB: Well what about Arthur Boyd?

CP: He's a good painter, a good painter.

BB: What was your first encounter with Arthur Boyd paintings?

CP: He's a good painter. Even though Arthur had divorced himself from Australia, he always did line up with ten of the top.

BB: We were talking about the forties. I want you to see if you can remember when you first saw Arthur Boyd paintings and Perceval paintings and what was your impression of them. They didn't knock you out in the same way that Nolan's did?

CP: Oh yes.

BB: Did you meet his paintings, or the man, first?

CP: I went to Adelaide, I joined the army in Adelaide, when the war broke out, and I went to an art school for evening classes. The first contemporary art exhibition ever in Adelaide—I've got the catalogue at home—would have been possibly about 1951. There is an Arthur Boyd picture of a man in a wheelchair—a friend of his who is a potter ...

BB: Karl Cooper.

CP: When I saw that picture, it just knocked me sideways, it really did. Then there was a couple of Arthur Boyds, of gargoyles and flying things on roofs. Then there was a child holding a cat.

BB: That's Perceval.

CP: Those pictures just knocked me silly, they just absolutely threw me completely. Now that's very interesting because I was only seventeen I think then. I went home to my mother—because then I was with my mother in Adelaide, and she was encouraging me in the art bit and I was working as a clerk I think. I went home to her and said, 'I've just seen an exhibition that's on at the Royal Arts Society, which has absolutely bowled me over.' Also, by the way, in that exhibition there is a picture also by a man called Douglas Roberts, who was a South Australian, of a landscape—1942–43, which I've got at home now, he's dead now, I've still got that picture. My mother went over to look at it, and what she did that day, and she was on the pension, she went and bought two books for me that night, one of them on Victorian portrait painting and one on Constable. That's when I realised that my mum and I don't understand each other any more.

BB: But it was a gesture. Did you read *Angry Penguins*?

CP: I've just had lunch today with the printer of them.

BB: Bob Cugley.

CC: That's right. I have three of them, he only printed five. But that contemporary art show in Adelaide, it really set me off. Because my mother and father are both amateur painters. What it was was the Boyd painting of the man in the wheelchair ...

BB: Was it the imagery or the painting?

CP: A mixture, a mixture of a new concept, something new, something different, a concept of something to do with the times, something to do with reaction, something to do with colour, something to do with what is a proper reaction about what is happening—our time, change, do something.

BB: Clif, do you still keep up life drawings?

CP: I'll tell you what, this looks a bit like a violinist and I mean it in this way, not entirely, but almost. You've got to practise. I have a model every week, at home, and about three other people—the economics of it—because we now pay \$7.50 an hour or whatever it is.

BB: I was lucky if I ever got 7/6d an hour.

CP: Now it's \$7.50, which we pay, which is more than techs do, but it's all relaxed. We start at eleven and knock off about four, we have wine and lunch. I do it every week, every Tuesday. I have a model up home and a couple of the people come up and I think it's like keeping your hand in.

BB: You're having a show next year?

CP: I think so. Anyway every week, almost every week when I'm home, yes I have a model, just like Matisse. I find that that is the best exercise in the world and if I were an art teacher, I would insist that any school or any place I worked in, that every student at least twice a week spent at least four hours drawing the model so that your hand can control what your mind, your heart, your stomach, are all feeling. It must be a nude, whether it's male or female, you feel—also they're moving, the model never stays really still, and you've got to be able to relate and you relate to something inside yourself by looking at a model. I think that's the way that you learn control within your five fingers, your thumb and fingers, through your eyes and you put something on a two-dimensional canvas. The whole key is to learn control within your hand to what you feel. By drawing from a model, that's how you keep control, that's how you learn control, that's how you learn to understand your feelings in relation to someone else. You can't do it unless you learn to draw a model.

Fred Williams and I agreed to do a swap, about '65 or '66. He took mine straight away, but I was more cunning; I waited. We used to see a lot of each other, I suppose once a fortnight at least, we used to have lunch or see each other, and I waited nearly two years. I went up to his place one day and he'd just finished the painting, it was still wet, I said, 'That's it Fred, that's the one I want.' He's an honourable man—he was a bit upset actually, because he knew and I knew it was certainly his most major picture at that stage. But he was an honourable man, so he said, 'Alright Clif, that's the agreement we made.' So I didn't even wait for lunch, I shot it straight in the car and went back home before he changed his mind.

BB: What is it a picture of?

CP: One of his landscapes.

BB: A lot of swapping went on.

CP: Yes, I've swapped with John Howley, Don Laycock, Arthur Boyd, Fred Williams, quite a few.

BB: Would you like to talk a little bit about your relationship to the landscape as a painter in a sense of responsibility that you feel in that respect, which led to your conservation contributions.

CP: I've been a conservationist—well I'll talk for a minute. Why I'm here now, where you are right now, taping this, is 'Dunmoochin'. We've got 205 acres here. It's the only area of virgin bush left anywhere in this area. I personally set up, originally, a cooperative society, and we still own the same bit of bush between us all now, that was thirty years ago. Kangaroos are living

in this bush, blue flying possums, they're here, big possums, small possums, insects. The whole area is exactly as it was before we came—this is interesting—because physically there's very little difference now to thirty years ago. If we hadn't come here it would all be cleared now, so in terms of conservation, in terms of something, we've done a noble job without necessarily knowing it, but we're aware of it now.

BB: Can I just interrupt at that point. When you got this land thirty years ago there were a lot of rabbits and I think then myxomatosis came in. So do you think the landscape ...

CP: A lot of flora has gone because of the rabbits, but the animals are still existing here now, the rabbits are the sort of problem—they're proliferating again now. You go out and shoot a rabbit or even trap one—my neighbour Frank Withers does.

BB: You don't eat them?

CP: No. Well actually I used to live on—it was the only meat I had in my early days, rabbits. I used to make my own bullets and shoot them. I'd get a certain distance with my shotgun so I wouldn't put too much lead in them, but anyway that's beside the point. But we are actually custodians of a very large, 205 acres, of—it's almost like a National Park. We happen to own it and we're looking after it.

BB: Do you ever paint from photographs, either your own or other peoples?

CP: No, I've got a camera, I forget it, I never use it. No I don't. I have a very good retentive memory, extremely good retentive memory. I can walk into an area, sit in it for a while, come out and I could do you a very straight painting of it. The same as I can do portraits, I have a good look at someone and go away and paint their portrait.

BB: Have you got good eyesight?

CP: Shortsighted.

BB: You wear glasses?

CP: Yes.

BB: For all times?

CP: No I take them off for reading, they are for distance, I'm shortsighted.

BB: Perhaps the changes you've made in your palette ...

CP: The colour changes. I always painted emotionally, with colours emotionally, but I found I always tended to use black—black to me is a colour, a lot of people say it isn't, but to me it's a positive colour—red I use a lot ...

BB: Can I go back to black, this is a black you mix, or the black from the tin?

CP: Both. So black, red and white, I notice consistently have been three major colours that I've used. Now I use a lot of violet as well, but to me they

relate to this bush. I think the black and white in this bush sit superbly. A magpie looks absolutely right in the bush and he's just black and white or maybe a little violet tinge into it. I find a lot of violet in the trees and I find a lot of red in the leaves. So whether that is emotionally determined or whether it's visionally determined, I'm not quite sure and I don't really care, I haven't bothered about trying to find out. But, as I said, I've always painted that way.

BB: Have there been some people whose wisdom has helped you?

CP: Well Kandinsky was a very big influence in the early days, right through the war I carried a book and Kandinsky was in it. I lost almost everything else during the war, my own drawings and paintings, all my equipment, but somehow or other I held on to that book. It's very tattered and I've still got it. It's interesting looking at the marks I've got in it and the passages that I've underlined. I still hold those now. I notice that Kandinsky was a very big influence for some reason or other. Picasso would have been, and a Mexican painter, Tamayo, has been an influence. That's probably also why I wanted to go to Mexico, you see, because of Tamayo. So there would be three in my formative days who would have had an influence, although people may find it hard to believe where Kandinsky comes into it. Remember I was saying earlier how I started off painting completely abstractly, it could be a Kandinsky abstract, but then I add figure developments into it.

BB: Have you kept a photographic record of work in progress, the abstract stage and ...

CP: No.

BB: It would be interesting.

CP: It would be interesting, I often give thought to it occasionally.

BB: The making of a painting. I'm trying to get beyond your teachers through art, or perhaps that is the way you see your learning about life, no other writers, or people you have met, not painters, who taught you something about living.

CP: Yes, now that I think about it, of course. I read a lot.

BB: What do you read?

CP: Well you'll have to go through all those books there. All those books, I've read most of them. There are walls of books and I have read most of them over the years. I go through periods; a lot of poetry in the early days, I don't bother with poetry at all now.

BB: Whose poetry, classical poetry or Australian ...

CP: Australian. I was very close to Noel Macainsh. We'd go away painting together. Noel was a poet. He would write poetry and I'd do paintings. We've had exhibitions, we've put the two together, a poem and a painting because we'd be sitting next to each other getting the same inspiration. The poem was not necessarily about the painting, but it was an interesting experiment though.



George Baldessin  
1939–78

Interviewed by Hazel de Berg  
Melbourne, 1965

Hazel de Berg collection  
National Library of Australia  
Tape no. deB 170

*Recorded in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2 December 1965. I had written to George Baldessin after seeing some of his very exciting 'pipeline' sculptures.*

*He is a tall young man with a very intelligent face. Later, I was to see him quite often at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) where he was making prints—his hands blackened. It was from watching at the Tech, that I finally learned to distinguish (to a point) the various types of prints (a part of my education which you will be aware of by now was quite inadequate). However, for this recording, George Baldessin—instead of wearing the apron of the printmaker was well dressed in a suit and tie and a little cynical about the whole idea of recording. I think he has come to this, as you will hear on the tape because his work is so different and he has taken a bit of a beating to stand his own untrodden ground.*

*Although he is always concerned with the human figure he rejects emotionalism (as do most of the young ones). 'It's not even how it makes you feel,' he said, after he had realised I was not against him, 'it's just to relate the figure to what is around it.' I did not say anything. 'No one is ever isolated,' he went on after a while, 'even if you only relate them to air.'*

*The scientific explanation of this is the atom—with its different proportions of the same things. 'The thing I hate most is perfection,' he said. Notice on the tape what Marini has to say about this. He mentions some years of study at the RMIT and the period in Milan under Marino Marini. And speaks about a painting 'The Ice Cream Seller' and the sculpture 'Personage and Private Pipeline'.*

*Despite the fact that he was cynical about the recording and 'gets even' with a few things (critics, other sculptors) on the tape, he really has a terrific sense of humour. This does not show on the tape but I think it does show in some of his sculpture, and I would like to see, in about five years, if this has progressed. 'When I get recorded again in twenty years,' he said, 'I'll say all the right things.' Later he went to a lot of trouble to try to get Len Crawford for me, and one day George appeared at my door in the Art Gallery. 'He's here,' he said, 'over at the Tech.'*

*So the slightly cynical face I saw first is only a defence—not for himself or for his work but against concession. His ending is an affirmation and his idea of beauty is the scientific one of order. You have of course, to look at his work without the romantic glasses of history.*

*After the recording he helped me carry the equipment down the stairs and into the Library (in the same building). It was all dark in the Art Gallery but you could open the door from the inside to get into the foyer of the Library. There were a lot of people coming and going in the foyer. I had seen the Principal Librarian and asked if I might record there and they found me one of the alcoves near the Art section. I was glad it was near the Art section but unfortunately, it was on the*

*other side of the Reading Room. This night, as I clanked through the silent Reading Room I felt like a draught horse and sounded like a team.*



This is George Baldessin. I was born here in Melbourne, and I have always been terribly interested in drawing, not so much painting or sculpture but drawing. I wasn't terribly familiar with the other mediums. As a boy I was never encouraged to do this because of my background; because we didn't have very much money, I was always encouraged to follow a profession that could get me some money, a worthwhile profession such as bricklaying or plumbing. That apparently seemed to be the acceptable thing rather than art.

I stuck to this idea of drawing in my own time and working at other things right through even into my college days when I frequented the RMIT, the art classes there. I was there from '58 to '61, I was doing painting, and at night I would work. I more or less kept myself right through these years. Then after that I found that I needed to get away and that's when I went overseas. I was fortunate enough after a brief stay in London and Madrid to go to Milan where I was enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts under Marino Marini. I've heard recently that Marini is no longer at the Academy, I think he's gone down to Naples or somewhere, but during my stay there I found it terribly useful, not just so much being near Marini and near the influences of Marini but more than that, it was the other students. There were about five Japanese, quite a lot of Germans and Americans, and I found mixing with them very stimulating.

One of the things that I do remember was Marini saying to me how much he liked one of my pieces of sculpture. He said that everything was right, he liked the balance of it, he liked the forms of it, and I thought he was complimenting me, and all of a sudden he said, 'Now, go out there and make it ugly!' He wasn't pleased with it all. He was saying that everything was perfect, and that was the trouble with it. This is significant.

After an academic year at Brera I returned to Melbourne where I started working to pay back my fares. I flew back because I couldn't afford to live over there any longer. I lived there on borrowed money anyway. So when I came back, I immediately got down to work and at the same time, every spare time, weekends, night times and so on, I kept going with the sculpture and drawing and etching and painting.

I've been painting all the time, the only thing is, I haven't exhibited any painting. I don't feel that they're quite right as yet. I do want to continue painting, and eventually if I find they're successful enough I will show them, but as it is now the only things I'm really pleased with are my drawings. I find

the etchings have gone to a certain extent, I'm still not quite happy with them. I think perhaps I'd like to move on to a bit of colour. I might consider using a colour in my etchings or alternatively take up another printing medium such as lithography which I'm familiar with.

I had an exhibition last year at the Argus Gallery. That was my first one-man show. It went fairly well. Although the prices were moderate, I was able to get a couple of hundred pounds and build a studio, one thing I've never had before. With that I've managed to improve my technique, one thing I've always lacked, especially in my sculpture. I know nothing about technique, I was never trained as a sculptor and this was my greatest difficulty up to this point. Gradually I've improved but this is only by trial and error, anyway. I find one of the dreadful things about sculptors here in Australia is that none of them are prepared to help any other sculptor; everyone that knows a little bit about technique or commissions or anything of that nature, they keep it very much to themselves and there's no friendship involved. It's a cutthroat business still. I realised this has been so in the past but I feel that at the moment, since we're doing quite well really, I feel that it should change but I've had no cooperation from people who do know technique, so I had to find things out virtually on my own.

In my painting I find the things that I'm concerned with still, as in my other medium, is the figure. I find that I use the figure very much. One distinction between painting and the others is the fact that you can use colour. I'm able to use colour and I use the most violent type of colour at the moment. I hope to refine it eventually but I don't want it to become too sweet and pretty, so I find that greens against reds work quite well for me at the moment. If ever I feel that they're only there for violence and shock and nothing else, then I will change them. For the time being I feel that violent colours are the colours I'm interested in. This is purely an emotive thing, not that I regard my painting as emotional, they're certainly not that, they're not akin to the German Expressionists or any such movement. I'd say they're more classical, very classical, in fact I would say that if they're like any painting they might be very much like Modigliani's. This is because with delineation I still use the line; I'm terribly concerned with line, and colour used in a symbolic way rather than in an emotional way.

This is evident in the painting 'The Ice Cream Seller' where again the emphasis is on line, rather than contrast tone. It's not a painting that emphasises colour although the colours used, green, reds and blues, are again used in a symbolic way, that is—green here represents a type of decorativeness, it is a decorative green and does give a background, it's only a background colour, whereas the red clashes with this and forms the figures. There are three figures, two of them are of women eating ice creams, and there's a third figure in the background and that is supposed to be the ice

cream seller. This also is a woman. Now I don't know why I've made them all women, probably because I'm interested in women, but I can't see why we should use the traditional forms of subject. I mean, traditionally you think of an ice cream seller or vendor as being a man with a handlebar moustache. Well I can't see why we should stick to these hard and fast rules. I feel that if I'm concerned with a figure and if I'm concerned with a subject, why not combine the two? The idea stemmed from a series of etchings I did on show people, and this was connected vaguely, very vaguely, with the circus and show people, a theme I worked on early in the piece in '63.

At the moment in the sculpture I find that the big sculptures are made out of fibreglass. This is a fairly recent innovation as far as materials—the same material that car bodies and boats are made out of. I find that I can cast with fibreglass and I can colour it and I can get a certain neutrality in it, but I don't want to make fibreglass look like metal, I don't want to give it any patina, any imitation of metal, I want it to look like fibreglass. I've been criticised for this but I feel that if you are going to use a material, why not exploit the material rather than change its character?

In the small sculpture I'm still casting in bronze. In the future I hope to develop this casting from bronze into a number of metals and plastics. I want to cast, for instance, in silver if I can ever afford it. I would like to cast in other more precious metals and, of course, because of the expense these sculptures will inevitably be smaller, so I can see myself doing a lot of little tiny rather precious rather expensive sculptures in the future.

In my sculpture 'Personage and Private Pipeline', I've been criticised for making a section come out of a figure. People are accustomed to seeing the figure in the round, they want to walk right around it, they want to see it from all angles, and they're not accustomed to having sections, pipelines as I call them, coming away from the figure as I had. Now I did this not because, as some critics suggested, to hold the piece of sculpture up from falling, it wasn't that at all, it was simply that I wanted to add to it and I wanted the negative areas to be just as interesting as the positive ones. There was a fairly classical conception of the figure, probably reminiscent of Marini if you like—I mean, people like to state influences so I'll do my share of stating; so you could say it was a classical Marini-type figure with a pipeline coming out of its back and three other pipelines coming from the ground. This third section is quite detached and separate from the whole.

In the exhibition unfortunately I wasn't able to support and mount the sculpture properly, so the two things were disjointed. At the same time, I did find that although they were not connected physically they did relate, and I think they were true, they belong there, although people aren't terribly accustomed to seeing this. I do think that these pipelines ideas worked, because figures in themselves are only figures and they need to be related,

connected. People make contact with things and other people every day, every minute of the day, so there should be some relationship between the figure and its environment, this is what I'm concerned with. This is more evident in the small bronzes where I actually put the figures in an environment, and I think I will develop this idea.

People say that my work is ugly, it appears to them bulbous and ugly. I can't really understand this. I think beauty has a certain degree of order and one of the things about my work is that they're very ordered, they're not chaotic; they may appear to be chaotic at first glance but if you look into them, you find that they have an order, a different order, a new order—I hope, and this is my order and it's not anyone else's, and I think they're just—people are not accustomed to this order and when they become accustomed to it, they might find that these things aren't really ugly, they're rather attractive: at least droll, if not attractive.

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# Acknowledgements

A considerable debt of gratitude is owed to the following relatives of the artists:

Peg Adams, Tony Annand, Otte Bartzis, Pat Counihan, Lucilla D'Abbrera, Barbara Dare, Geoffrey Fairweather, Mrs I.E. Hawkins, Norma Kmit, Shirley Lahey, Darani Lewers, Julian Lymburner, Ann Mills, Judith Murray, Jancis and Alan Rees, Veronica Rowan, Michael Stokes and Thea Waddell.

I am also indebted to the following who assisted in various ways with this book:

Philip Bacon, Lina Bryans, Mark Cranfield and the Oral History staff (National Library of Australia), Michael Crayford (The Lewers Bequest and Penrith Regional Art Gallery), Geoffrey Davidson (Dunmoochin Foundation), Lawrence Daws, Bettina MacAulay, John Olsen, Paul Simmons (Ballarat Fine Art Gallery), Daniel Thomas, John Thompson (National Library of Australia), Mary Turner and Marianne Williams (National Library of Australia); and staff from the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australian National Gallery Library, National Gallery of Victoria, Queensland Art Gallery Library, State Library of New South Wales, State Library of Queensland and the State Library of Victoria.

Images of the artists:

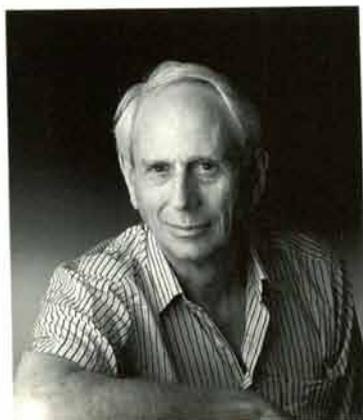
**Douglas Annand** courtesy Tony Annand; **George Baldessin** courtesy Baldessin family and Tolarno Galleries; **Noel Counihan** courtesy Pat Counihan; **Russell Drysdale** 'Self Portrait', Selborne Road, c.1939 (BW 143 Print, Helen Skuse 1986, presented by Lady Drysdale) courtesy National Gallery of Victoria; **William Frater** courtesy Barbara Dare; **Weaver Hawkins** courtesy Mrs I.E. Hawkins; **Michael Kmit** courtesy Norma Kmit; **Vida Lahey** courtesy Bettina MacAulay and Queensland Art Gallery; **Margo Lewers** courtesy The Lewers Bequest and Penrith Regional Art Gallery;

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Daphne Mayo** courtesy Queensland State Library; **Adelaide Perry** detail from 'Nude Figure with Large Feather: Miss Adelaide Perry' pencil drawing by Thea Proctor, courtesy Ballarat Fine Art Gallery; **Thea Proctor** charcoal drawing by George Lambert, courtesy Thea Waddell and Art Gallery of New South Wales; **Lloyd Rees** courtesy Jancis and Alan Rees; **Alison Rehfisch** courtesy Peg Adams; **Grace Cossington Smith** courtesy Ann Mills; **Constance Stokes** courtesy Lucilla D'Abbrera; **Roland Wakelin** courtesy Judy Murray.

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GEOFFREY DUTTON is the author of over fifty works of poetry, fiction, biography, history, art and literary criticism, and children's books.

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He was Chairman of the Australian Society of Authors, 1989–90, and in 1976 he was awarded the AO for services to Australian literature. His most recent work is *Flying Low* published by University of Queensland Press in 1992.

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA publishes a wide range of material including commercial book publications, with an emphasis on social history, biography and cultural commentary, material derived from its collections and a number of periodicals.

Here are twenty-six Australian artists, none of them living except in their work, talking about themselves and what they have drawn, painted, or sculpted. They speak for themselves as no one else could, with modesty but authority, humour without bitterness, and about their attitudes to art, technique and the artistic climate of the times.

'I like to have them on my wall cooking, and in time they grow by themselves.' (Ian Fairweather commenting on his preference for working on several paintings at once)

'We had a marvellous bloody time ... plenty of laughter!'  
(Donald Friend)

'You produce something, it is a child to you, you think, This is beautiful, this is marvellous! and someone else has a look at it and it's just rubbish. (Jon Molvig)

Although words are not the artist's medium, very few of them in this book have any difficulty in talking about their lives. It is of course more difficult for them to talk about their work. What matters most is their work—but how wonderful to have their words as well.

Artists chosen for *Artists' Portraits* are: Douglas Annand, George Baldessin, Noel Counihan, Russell Drysdale, Ian Fairweather, William Frater, Donald Friend, Weaver Hawkins, Michael Kmit, Vida Lahey, Margo Lewers, Francis Lyburner, Daphne Mayo, Jon Molvig, Kathleen O'Connor, Adelaide Perry, William Pidgeon, Thea Proctor, Clifton Pugh, Lloyd Rees, Alison Rehfisch, Grace Cossington Smith, Treania Smith, Constance Stokes, David Strachan and Roland Wakelin

Published with the assistance  
of the Morris West Trust Fund



ISBN 0-642-10579-0

