

Mechanomorphic Figures 1985



The sculptures at this time generated ideas that stimulated a number of visits to museum collections. Most noteworthy was the Imperial War Museum with its collection of First World War stereoscopic sights that were resonant of figure/machines shackled to enormous pieces of artillery. The First World War poetry of Wilfred Owen, (*Strange Meeting*), adopted a much more significant role in terms of the influences it brought to bear on my conceptual framework at this time and addressed the dehumanising qualities within the research that I was attempting to resolve. Earlier commentators on my work had turned to the Mechanomorphic qualities in the sculptures and made references to Mary Shelley's *Modern Prometheus*;



"On closer inspection these figures seem to stir, like Mary Shelley's *Modern Prometheus*, breaking his bonds or engaging in viscous, loveless couplings. Occasionally within the compact modelling of these cadavers a detail would emerge, a folded arm or a clenched fist which sometimes seemed like direct transcriptions from Wilfred Owens poem, *Strange Meeting* upon which this work is largely founded."

William Varley, *The Guardian*, 1985.



Strange Meeting, was the title of my exhibition, held at the Hatton Gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne referred to above. The visits I made to the Imperial War Museum focused on artifacts from the Great War and numerous sketchbook studies were made from these objects. These drawings were later transcribed into large-scale works on canvas, as well as sculptures. My own background, with its emphasis on heavy industry, (now left discarded), the detritus of an industrialised past, fuelled the way in which I researched my subject matter. Much of this detritus, which ranged from redundant pits to giant chemical plants, subconsciously framed the way in which I selected and edited the raw material that became the basis for future works.



The sculptural process of casting also informed the eventual formal vocabulary of these pieces. My interest in the *objet trouvé* tradition, exemplified by Picasso in a number of memorable works was also relevant to the ways in which this research developed over the next few years. The use of Found Objects within the framework of much of Edward Kienholz tableaux's encouraged me to invent ways in which selected objects, (that had analogies to the figure), could play an articulate role within the overall reading of my Fine Art practice.

I started to collect a number of Found Objects that had resonance's to do with the figure and filed them into what was to become an extensive three dimensional library of redundant everyday forms from the twentieth century.



These forms would then be moulded in plaster or rubber and laid-up in clay. At one stroke, changing the material specific language of the object and homogenizing it into a common identity for future sculptures to be made from. These clay casts of objects would then be introduced into the appropriate areas of the ongoing clay sculptures, underpinning the Promethean references to the work.

Outcomes of this Research were exhibited at the Juda Rowan Gallery in London in September 1986.

Other outcomes for this work included *Three Decades of Contemporary Art*, published by the Juda Rowan Gallery. This publication supported a major survey exhibition of the same name and was reviewed widely in accredited journals.



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One part of the Newcastle and also London exhibitions consisted of table structures suggestive of sarcophagi or altars, each supporting recumbent hybrid figure/objects. These same sculptures were later shown in Hong Kong, Recent British Sculpture, alongside the works of Phillip King CBE and Sir Anthony Caro.



The success of this research attracted interest in Australia and in 1989 I was invited by the Australia Council and financially supported by the British Council to undertake an Artist in Residency at Victoria College in Melbourne, Victoria. The British Council also supported a lecture tour on my own work that involved visits to major arts related institutions in Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Melbourne.

The outcomes of the Artist in Residency at Victoria College, (where I had studios in the sculpture, painting and ceramics areas of the college) resulted in major exhibitions of my work at;

1990 - Sculpture, Jam Factory Gallery, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia.

1989 - Sculpture & Drawings, Heide Park & Art Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.

1989 - Sculpture & Drawings, Rex Irwin Gallery, Sydney, Australia.



The outcomes of this research were secured in a number of private and public collections, including Carrick Hill Sculpture Park, Adelaide.

Reviews of these exhibitions appeared in the press and major publications throughout Australia.

From this body of work a number of large-scale drawing on canvas, (employing a collage technique that also referred to the decoupages of Matisse), evolved. These drawings were based on the sculptures that I had been making but focussed on the abstract, formal aspects of my work.



The particular outcomes of this research were entitled Embers, (a series of drawings on canvas) and were to become a break from a language that relied on the suggestion of the figure, to one that emphasised the absence of the figure.

