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J U N E MACLUCAS THE ROSS BRIDGE D R A W I N G S

GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IS GIVEN TO
GERALD MAKIN OF ULVERSTONE, TASMANIA
FOR HIS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ANCIENT
CELTIC SYMBOLISM USED IN THESE ICONS

PLIMSOLL GALLERY
CENTRE FOR THE ARTS
VICTORIA DOCK - HOBART

13 OCTOBER - 3 NOVEMBER

1 9 8 9

JUNE MacLUCAS

Studied

- 1978-79 3 years Art & Craft and Advance Art and Craft, School of Art,
North Adelaide, S.A.
1981-84 4 years, Bachelor of Fines Arts, S.A.C.A.E. Underdale, S.A.

Exhibitions

- 1982 "Some Women Artists Work-in-Progress" Underdale S.A.
1985 Member Exhibition "Autumn Exhibition", Royal S.A. Society of Arts,
Kintore S.A.
1985 "Personal Visions 1985", Royal S.A. Society of Arts, Kintore S.A.
1985 Hartley College, S.A.C.A.E., Magill, S.A.
1985 "16 New Painters", Contemporary Art Society, Parkside, S.A.
1986-87 Greenhill Gallery, North Adelaide, "Xmas Show".
1987 "Dark Angels" Sydney University. Drawings of Sydney University
grotesques and gargoyles.
1987-88 "Some Provincial Myths". Recent Art from Adelaide, S.A. Touring
exhibition to Victoria, A.C.T., N.S.W., Brisbane and Mt Gambier.
1988 Solo Exhibition "Grotesques", Site 55, Port Road, Hindmarsh, S.A.
1988 "Dark Angels" Sydney University open day celebrations
"Grotesques and Garoyles".
1988 "Salon des Refuses", Art Zone, Adelaide, S.A.
1989 "Ross Bridge", The College Gallery, S.A.C.A.E.
Walled-sized drawings.

Awards

- 1987 Visual Art Grant from Dept for the Arts, Adelaide, S.A.
1988 Visual Art Grant from Dept for the Arts, Adelaide, S.A.
1989 Visual Art Grant from Dept for the Arts, Adelaide, S.A.

Collections

Private Collections, Sydney and Adelaide.

Bibliography

- "Grotesques and Gargoyles", Vincent Megaw, *The Advertiser*, 3.8.88.
"Artist Imprisoned by a Strange Sense of Purpose", Lynn Collins,
The Advertiser, 25.3.89.
"Gargoyles: a Feature of Local Exhibition", *Weekly Times, Messenger*, 27.7.88.
"More than Mere Decoration", Margot Osborne, *The Advertiser*, 5.4.89.
"June is Drawing on a Fascination with the Macabre",
The Leader - The Messenger, 19.4.89.

This enormous task took Herbert 58 weeks. An incredible feat, made easier perhaps because Herbert was using an ancient, continuous tradition that lived within him. To avoid persecution from the guardians of this tradition, Herbert cunningly disguised the true meaning beneath the surface of his forms. Somehow, Herbert was guided - inspired if you like - to make this quest to carve this knowledge on the bridge. I suspect that the authorities were only too pleased to have found someone capable of carving some sort of decoration and consequently did not enquire too closely into his intentions. Herbert, his wife, Mary Witherington, and his helper, James Colbeck, all received full pardons on completion of the bridge.

These six arches have visually and structurally a meaningful cohesion and balance. Herbert certainly knew the magical power of numbers, for every seventh and ninth stone from the end of each arch bears a head of sorts. Both these numbers allude to pain, power, conflict, transformation and gestation in alchemy, numerology, tarot, and the magico Celto-Atlantean practices. Although I believe all the stones to have been carved individually, there is evidence of groups of three, five and up to seven in a series. The Druidic triad can be seen in many of his symbols.

Four of the centre voussoirs or key-stones have monsters bearing crowns that represent gods: the sky god; the water god; Cronus, god of time; and the last represents the Christian Church - a lion with a paw on a gentle beast, symbol of the crushing of the old beliefs. Most of the icons talk of knowledge, offering spiritual guidance and wisdom through the use of myth and symbol, as in the carvings of the Lily of Aldebaran - a symbol of an astral flower returned to earth. Some illustrate risk-taking and the misery of forbearance, as in the heads of Danish adventurer and fellow convict, Jorgen Jorgenson and his bedevilled wife Norah Cobbett. Others demand us to listen to the forces within the earth and the necessity for spiritual development through transmigration as in the five-pointed star. Others refer to the Celtic cycle of time and the urgency of the approaching end of the cycle and its dangers. Makin believes Herbert foresaw the dangers of nuclear power and world destruction and carved a warning into the stones.

All the icons, and there are 186, are meaningful. None are purely decorative, all have been carved from sandstone and many are in an eroded and ruined state.

The work was carried out at The Jam Factory Workshops, Adelaide. The difficulties of drawing on such a large scale have had their own set of problems: scaling up from blue prints and photographs; measuring each and every stone as they varied sometimes as much as two inches from

each other; aching limbs and raw fingers, working mostly on ladders and boxes, sometimes in confined spaces; working from photographs of eroded stones, relying mostly on my own 'gut' feelings as to Herbert's intentions.

Three of the arches on the south side I have reconstructed the way I first saw them - dark, moody and mysterious - for the sun seldom shines on that side. On the north side, the sun floods the carvings, creating contrasts of light and shade. Each arch took approximately 6 to 8 weeks to complete. The complexity of the icons made it impossible to work with large areas at one time. Information associated with translations of oral tradition was received after the six drawings had been fully completed. I make no apologies for any intuitive response to Herbert's icons. This work is not a memorial, it is a pilgrimage - a journey into an ancient analeptic memory of my forgotten culture made possible through Herbert's icons.

The bridge has brought me into contact with others - some working with the bridge, especially Gerald Makin to whom I am indebted for his help in translation of these icons. (For those interested, an in depth translation by Makin will be published at a future date.) Also my grateful thanks to Doug Turner, bridge conservator of Hobart, for his support and tireless efforts. Many thanks for photographs received from The Department of Lands, Parks and Wildlife, Hobart.

There have been strange coincidences and encounters not only for myself but for others connected with the bridge. It has been said that perhaps Herbert had a hand in directing the procedure. Who knows! All my great grandparents were born within 50 miles of Herbert's birthplace.

So what is Ross Bridge? A portrait of a tortured soul? Perhaps. No one knows Herbert's intentions. It is known that he came from an area steeped in ancient folklore whose followers were linked to the eternal pursuit of a magico-religious knowledge. Perhaps this was still part of his life and so custodian of an ancient oral tradition. If the interpretations are even remotely true, then this bridge with its ancient references deserves greater recognition beyond its colonial historical significance.

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June MacLucas, 1989



A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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