

BOB MESSAGE CREATIVE ARTIST

December 2017

Philosophy

Creative expression is a unique ability fundamental to the endeavours of all human beings. Whatever the field of investigation, it provides the basis for new ideas, thoughts and values. Progress requires a willingness to challenge contemporary practices through analysis and review. It follows that advances in art in particular require a willingness to challenge existing fashions and to investigate and experiment with new and alternate strategies for visually conveying ideas and values.

Some of the most expressive images known to man have been created by primitive peoples in now remote areas of this continent. The images communicate evocative, enduring and meaningful records of the beliefs of these people. The simplicity of the works enabled by their exclusion of subsidiary detail provides an important example for modern day artists.

The unique shapes, colours and textures of this continent created by the evolution of the Australian topology over millions of years provide an inspiration and stimulus for the contemporary artist in making meaningful and often aesthetically pleasing comment on the issue of climate change through artistic expression.

Background

Early inspiration was provided by the cultural environment of my childhood home in the 1950's and 1960's. The small Melbourne enclave of Fairy Hills, secluded by the junction of the Yarra River and Darebin Creek, was rich in artistic heritage. For much of the 20th century painters, sculptors, mosaic artists, jewellers, photographers, furniture designers and stained glass makers had chosen to establish studios in this quiet valley. Renowned painters, muralists and mosaic artists Napier and Kristian Waller, Norman MacGeorge, Madge Freeman and Audrey Scarffe were across the road and around the corner. Furniture designer Grant Featherstone was up the street. Puppeteer, academic and aboriginal art expert Bill Nicol was next door. We played tennis on Clem Meadmore's tennis courts while his son, now world famous sculptor Clement Meadmore, was experimenting with his early massive steel sculptures in the adjacent garage. We attended the local church fitted with stained glass windows made by Napier Waller with Walter Stringer, noted Australian Ballet photographer and with his son, John, who was to become a world recognised contemporary art curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

If that was not enough, we were nearby to Banyule estate which was a base for the Heidelberg School and which exhibited many of its works. Across the river in Templestowe was Heide, the famous home and art community of John and Sunday Reed. Still a bike ride down the river were Warrandyte and Eltham, known for their ceramics, sculptures, painting and jewelry. How could we not be encouraged to dabble in the arts in such an inspiring locality!

My approach to painting has been derived from a variety of early creative experiences. An early passion involved the crafting and firing of ceramics. In this most primitive of art forms I was able to experiment with locally collected materials in the creation of earthenware forms. This involved the refining of local clays with which the bodies were hand formed, the crushing of local rocks to extract minerals necessary for the manufacture of natural glazes and the building and operation of wood fired kilns in which the pots were fired. The emphasis on the creation of simple organic forms and designs often using found materials remains as a focus in my approach to painting.

Later, experimentation occurred in the field of black and white film photography. In particular, the development of techniques to manipulate lighting in both the taking of exposures and in the development of film and prints enabled the creation of more atmospheric and organic images at the expense of subsidiary detail. This emphasis was to later underly my approach to landscape painting.

Experience

While painting irregularly for much of my life, I began to devote my attention more fully to painting during the 1980s. I resigned from my professional career in education at the beginning of 1998 to paint full-time. I have subsequently travelled in coastal and inland regions throughout Australia. The focus of my work has been on the creation of images which document the aesthetic and emotional impressions stimulated by these experiences.

During the 1980s and 1990s I painted with contemporary landscape artists, the most notable being the Australian water-colourist Edward Car. Since then I have sought to develop my own individual techniques and philosophies with continuing experimentation. In this process have maintained an interest in the constructive relationship of the Aboriginal people with the land as depicted in their artworks. The impact of their use of simple harmonic forms, strong textures and natural materials may be seen in some of my work. I have also continued to be interested in and influenced by the work of a number of other contemporary artists. In particular, the influence and stimulation provided by leading Australian abstract impressionist William Ferguson has been significant.

Consistent with my belief that painting is about communicating ideas and impressions with others, I have actively sought to display my work both formally and informally. I have had a number of successful one man shows with the renowned Carlton Gallery, Art Affairs, run by ceramacist and academic Lindsay Anderson. I have also successfully participated in a variety of other one-man and invitational exhibitions as listed below. My work has been positively reviewed in a number of publications and is held in public and private collections in Australia and abroad.

Focus

My objective is to convey a personal emotive response to the physical changes being wrought in the Australian environment through climatic change. I have a specific interest in documenting the forms and tones created by the constant weathering of more marginal, threatened and often ignored areas - the outback and remote coastlines. I also seek to show the elements of beauty and harmony which are associated with the ongoing evolution of the Australian environment.

I am particularly interested in the eroded organic shapes and sharply contrasting colours created as a by-product of the conflict being waged by nature's forces in remote localities. Excursions have been undertaken to investigate changes wrought in areas such as the Flinders Ranges, Arkaroola, Central Australia, the Kimberley region, the North West Corner, the Northern Territory, the Nullabour and Southern West Australia. I seek to observe the impact of rising temperatures as displayed through the growth and encroachment of salt lakes in Central Australia and the decline of coastal areas due to the encroachment of sea levels.

Techniques

At the heart of my paintings are generic lines and forms depicting the dramatic outlines created by the interaction of water, weather, earth and mankind on this continent. Elevated perspectives are often employed to allow the organic forms and vibrant tones to be fully addressed.

My essential concern is with primary shape rather than secondary detail and decoration. In keeping with my earlier experience with raku ceramics, I experiment with found materials including sands, minerals and pigments to build up surface textures and shapes consistent with relief sculptural forms.

The paintings have an acrylic base, but are built up with the application of numerous washes of pigments to achieve the complexity and subtlety of natural occurring colours and tones. Through the uncertainties inherent in such processes, the development of the paintings is always experimental and the outcomes remain uncertain - but always exciting.

Solo Exhibitions

1999, 2000, 2001, 2002: Art Affairs Gallery, Carlton, Victoria

2010: Cotham Gallery 101, Kew, Victoria

2017: Quadrant Gallery, Hawthorn, Victoria

Invitational Exhibitions

2001, 2002, 2003: Manyung Gallery, Mount Eliza, Victoria

1998 - 2006: Yarra Valley Art Exhibition, Croydon, Victoria

2000 - 2008: Bilyara Gallery, Merimbula, NSW

2009: Lioli Gallery, Camberwell, Victoria

Group Exhibitions

Annual participation since 1993 in exhibitions including St Kevin's Art Show, Toorak College Art Show, Box Hill Rotary Art Show, Camberwell Rotary Art Show, Bayswater Rotary Art Show.

Publications

I was feature Artist in the *Australian Artist* magazine, December 2000 and March 2001. My work was featured in *The Age* newspaper, September 2001, *Antiques and Art in Victoria*, August 2002, *Art Gallery Guide Australia*, September, 2003, *Melbourne Weekly*, May 2010. I am a feature artist in the book, Selected Contemporary Artists of Australia, Michael Berry, Kunyung, 2003.

Further Information

Quadrant Gallery, 72 Barkers Road, Hawthorn, tel 03 9079 0943,
www.quadrantgallery.com.au.

Bob Message, 25A Victoria Street, Sandringham, 3079, tel: 0425 883700,
mmmessage@hotmail.com.