

Impecunious magpies, or how to adorn a university with little ready cash

Ray Marginson, interviewed by Robyn Sloggett

This is the third in a series of interviews of Ray Marginson, speaking with Robyn Sloggett. The first and second interviews appeared in issue 3 (December 2008) and issue 5 (November 2009) of *University of Melbourne Collections*.

Robyn Sloggett: *In our previous discussions you have talked about developing the collection, developing buildings and securing the space and resources for the University Gallery. Of course there are many more stories about the cultural collections and their development that are worth telling, but you did promise to talk about sculpture in the grounds and some untold stories about these works.*

Ray Marginson: Perhaps I will stray a bit from that path and fill in the secret history of more than sculpture. It was for many years a constant battle for us to acquire works at little or no cost. I have dealt with the enormous support we received from generous donors, but there was also the other way, following the magpie instinct, taking the opportunity to pick up ‘unconsidered trifles’. I cannot claim to be unique in this area. The legendary Brian Lewis (Foundation Professor of Architecture, 1947–1971) was one such, as was the brilliant, dedicated and creative



first University Archivist, Frank Strahan. Frank acquired a vast number of objects illustrating and supplementing the important collections of business and general archives that make our holdings such an important resource.

I could well start with Brian, whose Andors Meszaros *Eagle* (1968) from the demolished Eagle Insurance building adorns the south foyer of his building.¹ It joins with the limestone statues by R.S. Jackson (UK) of *Britannia and Goddess* (1860), a gift from the ANZ Bank.² Brian was an outstandingly successful ‘magpie’.

Another example of the scrounging approach was the rescue of the abstract sandstone carving by George Allen, commissioned by the architect Sir Osborn McCutcheon and which formerly graced the forecourt of the Humes building in William Street.³ This took place through the initiative of Professor Carrick Chambers⁴ and the speedy action in 1971 of our then grounds curator Alec Brierly. The story was that the Humes board caved in to a client objection and a disgraceful campaign by the then Melbourne *Herald* that labelled the work ‘The thing’. It was one of Melbourne’s

Opposite: James Gilbert, *Atlantes*, c.1880, bluestone and stone, 542.0 cm x 680.0 cm. Reg. no. 1932.0001, gift of the Colonial Bank, 1932, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

Below: Inge King, *Sun ribbon*, 1980–1982, black painted steel, sculpture: 355.0 cm x 614.5 cm x 355.0 cm; base: 603.0 cm x 404.0 cm. Reg. no. 1982.0023, gift of Mrs Eileen Fox in memory of her parents Ernest and Fannie Kaye, 1983, University of Melbourne Art Collection. Shown here when covered in aluminium foil by students in 1985. Photography by Ray Marginson.

first free-form public sculptures and it was removed and dumped in a municipal tip. Today it is safe in the east courtyard of University House with a plaque recording this saga.

Brian Lewis also figures in a very happy piece of eccentricity when we hauled out of the store the Irish door, originally on St Stephen's Green in Dublin.⁵ It was gifted in 1963 (I think through Brian's actions) by the government of Eire. It now stands as the south-eastern entrance to the underground car park. The south-western entrance is equally striking with the James Gilbert bluestone *Atlantes* originally from the Colonial Bank in Elizabeth Street, demolished in 1932. They were donated to the University and were first installed as the entrance to Old Physiology (demolished in 1970 for the new Physics Building). Known by the staff as 'Soapy' and 'Foamy' for their posture, it is my regret that we could not accommodate their original height—they stood on substantial plinths, as can be seen in the historic photos of the old medical school, which show them grafted on in portico form to the Palladian front of that building. I did at the time facetiously express the desire that we negotiate to secure the (then unrestored) Luna Park mouth for the north-eastern principal entrance

to the car park. It would have been somehow the finishing touch!

Robyn Sloggett: *Many people ask about the enormous steel sculpture east of the Union Building. How did we get that work?*

Ray Marginson: This is *Sun ribbon* (1980–1982) by the important sculptor Inge King. We also have the maquette of this displayed in the walk-through of Old Physics.⁶ It was a much-valued gift, but its birth was tortuous. It came to us from a substantial sum donated by Mrs Eileen Kaye and is a memorial to her parents. Eileen was a cousin of Dr Geoffrey Kaye, a Melbourne anaesthetist. He was a well-known collector of 18th century objects.

At his death (and for some time prior to it) the University received from him significant gifts of silver, glass and furniture, now in University House. My co-conspirator in these negotiations, carried out in after-work visits, was Professor Sir Douglas 'Pansy' Wright,⁷ who knew Geoffrey well. These visits were lubricated by the consumption of a lethal dose of absolute alcohol with one drop of concentrated essence of West Indian lime served in beautiful 18th century twist glasses.

Back to *Sun ribbon*. I wished to use Eileen's money for a monumental sculpture to enhance the raised lawns east of the Union which we had just completed. Geoffrey on the other hand favoured a bronze birdbath



or some equivalent incorporating sculpture. For the inevitable and drawn-out negotiation I produced, with the help of Maurie Pawsey (the University's Controller of Buildings), a substantial submission, with photographs of the prospective site from the top of the Raymond Priestley Building, plus an in-depth illustrated review of Inge King's work. This submission is currently in the University of Melbourne Archives. The turning point was when, with student support, we said the Inge King sculpture was what the students wanted; and they have subsequently made good use of it—as a great sunny spot to sit in and have lunch! My favourite photograph of it is of the time when an industrious student group in 1985 covered it entirely in aluminium foil; a move that ante-dated Inge's wonderful aluminium and stainless steel works of later years (illustrated on page 27).

As a related comment, I have always been unhappy that this area has entered into folklore as the 'concrete lawns'. Anyone who knew the expanse between the Union and Old Commerce, in the winter, with its abominable muddy criss-crossed traffic lanes, will be aware what a remarkable change was made with the Mintaro slate and aggregate hard

standing, and the attractive raised lawns. The lawns put more grass back than was there before and they are a long-standing tribute to the work of the Grounds Subcommittee under Professor Carrick Chambers.

Robyn Sloggett: *You make a good point here about the constantly changing nature of the University campus. I noticed that the flying capital that used to stand behind the Baillieu Library has been temporarily taken down because of building works close by. This piece has always fascinated me.*

Ray Marginson: Yes, this is a fine work from 1970–1974 with an interesting history. It is presently in store and will be later re-erected. It is a work of the celebrated sculptor Norma Redpath (b. 1928) and is her memorial to her close friend Professor Sydney Rubbo of Microbiology.⁸ It was partly funded by an appeal supported by Sydney's colleagues, students and friends, and Norma gave her creative services without charge and supervised its casting at her favourite foundry in Milan.

Its erection had a curious story. Norma is an extremely meticulous sculptor and was very precise about the specifications for the column to be used, particularly its outside

diameter. We confidently contacted BHP Rolling Mills but were told they didn't produce to the required size. We then turned to the UK, I think to the Woolwich Arsenal, which made gun barrels. They were happy to take the order. When it arrived our staff engineer, Arthur Kinsman, cleared it through customs, took off the box lid and to his dismay found it was oval. I guess they couldn't meet the specifications and drew it out. Whatever the cause, it was a disaster and was sent back to them. A fairly tense negotiation with Norma followed and she gracefully agreed to accept the dimensions that BHP said they could make.

It is a substantial ornament to the bio-sciences area and I look forward to seeing it up again. Projects such as this require the various University departments to work together closely, and relocating this sculpture to ensure its orientation and height are precisely as Norma placed it is critical, but challenging.

Robyn Sloggett: *I think most visitors to the University are unaware of the vast amount of sculpture that the University maintains. Some works are a bit out of the way and often inside buildings and their profile tends to suffer as a result.*

Norma Redpath, *Flying capital*, Sydney Dattilo
Rubbo memorial, c.1970–1974,
bronze mounted on steel column,
head: 274.5 cm x 274.5 cm x 183.0 cm;
column height: 665.0 cm. Reg. no. 1970.0248,
gift of the colleagues, students and friends of
Professor Sydney Dattilo Rubbo, 1974,
University of Melbourne Art Collection.
Photography by Ray Marginson.



Ray Marginson: Fortunately many students using the Beaurepaire Centre will know of the fine and very typical Leonard French mural in the Trophy Hall, *Symmetry of sport*.⁹ Not a sculpture, but perhaps not known to those outside the ‘fitness’ group.

More hidden, however, is the statue of Amanda Grimwade standing in an interior courtyard of the Old Arts Building. I have mentioned this in an earlier discussion.¹⁰ When in the lilypond at the Grimwades’ home ‘Miegunyah’, it had a bronze frog that spouted water onto it—hence its title *Gosh says Amanda*.¹¹ By the time we sold the house, intruders had made off with the frog, so, in setting it up in Old Arts, we had Michael Meszaros do a replica frog.

Another item a bit hard to see is the bronze plaque (1988) to Sir Paul Strzelecki, Polish-born geologist and explorer, by Friml, a gift to Australia by the Polish community during Australia’s bicentenary.¹² It is on the west wall of the McCoy (earth sciences) Building just across Swanston Street.

That building also houses other interesting work. Its stairwell has a Foucault pendulum (Google it if you don’t know what this is!). More importantly it also has in its foyer a significant work by the late

Stanislaus Ostoja-Kotkowski, Untitled (Theremin mural), 1975, vitreous enamel, 18 panels, each 89.5 cm x 89.5 cm. Reg. no. 1975.0048, University of Melbourne Art Collection.



Stan Ostoja-Kotkowski, a pioneer in electronic and laser art. It is a vitreous enamel wall mural of 18 panels, each about 90 cm x 90 cm, and originally concealed a theremin, the control panel for which was in the centre on the left-hand-side. The electronics were carried out by Phil Storr. It is a musical instrument activated by passing a hand over that plate. In a theremin two radio frequencies are mixed to produce an audible tone. The mural was commissioned on the advice of Professor John Lovering and installed in 1977. We never did get Stan's beloved project for a sun mural in which he projected a continuously changing colour mural

produced by light and sun energy, with sun movement producing both the kinetics and the colour. All this associated with it a changing pattern of sounds.

It is a matter of great regret that the theremin is no longer active and is obscured in the foyer.¹³ It would be a wonderful thing if the board of the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the Faculty of Science and the University in general could work to restore it operationally and ensure its visibility. The options seem to me to be to remove it entirely to another location (something of a challenge) or to have it operational on certain days of the year or month. The display

cabinets obscuring it also present a considerable problem.

Another almost unknown work is *The four humours* (c.1958) by Lenton Parr.¹⁴ The four panels are ironwork and are incorporated in the front of four small balconies very high on the north wall of the east end of the Student Union Building. They are somewhat obscured by the trees in front of them. Another of Parr's works *Sirius* (1962–1963) from the 'Centre Five' period is in the south courtyard of the Alice Hoy Building.¹⁵

Although walked past many times a day, few note the seven decorated corbels supporting part of the beautiful brick vaulting (one of our greatest treasures) in the east-west cloister (1856) of the Old Quadrangle. They have carved faces, some of which may be of early University identities, although the hairstyles of the female ones argue more for historical models.

Not many people know of the Clive Murray-White group in welded steel from 1974, the purchase of which the gallery curator, Mrs Betty Clarke, initiated in 1976.¹⁶ This is an important example of the new Australian sculpture of the 1970s and is located in the court at the east end of the Redmond Barry Building. Other pieces of sculpture,

Marshall Wood, *Sir Samuel Wilson*, c.1880, marble, approx. 83.0 cm x 63.0 cm x 40.0 cm. Reg. no. 0000.0438, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

like Parr's *The four humours* on the Union Building, have to be looked up at rather than sought out in obscure locations. Such a case is the sculpture panels by Teisutis Zikaras, originally installed in 1958, forming a balcony on the north of the Union. Four of them were reinstalled on the building during the 1997 alterations, high on the west wall. The others are in the adjacent garden.¹⁷

Hidden works, as I have said, are numerous. Some works have disappeared into storage, like the Norma Jones-Roberts enamel panel that used to hang in the lift foyer of the Raymond Priestley Building.¹⁸ The building in which, on its ninth vice-chancellor's floor, now hang the portraits of our vice-chancellors that used to be on the north wall of the Jim Potter Conference Room in Old Physics. Those portraits include one with an interesting history. On his retirement, Sir George Paton entrusted to me a rolled-up oil painting of Sir John Monash by W.B. McInnes. It had been brought to Sir George by Lizzie Bentwich (after whom the University has named a prize), Monash's clandestine partner. She said it should be hung after the death of Mrs Gershon Bennet, Monash's surviving daughter, who had objected to their relationship. This I eventually did.¹⁹ I regret that



this interesting group of portraits is now as inaccessible to public view as those of the chancellors that hang in the Council Chamber.

Finally, a really unusual piece that can be seen by those crossing Swanston Street by the overhead bridge. This is the Carlton and United Breweries' 'crown'.²⁰

Professor Tony Klein of Physics first spotted it in weed-grown storage in the CUB Abbotsford yard, whilst walking near the north bank of the Yarra at the foot of Walmer Street in Kew. It emerged that it was the top of a major chimney, and weighed three tonnes. Tony put wheels in motion and with the cooperation of the

University's Grounds Subcommittee through Carrick Chambers, the approach was made to acquire it. I think it was then Vice-Chancellor Professor David Caro who finally sewed it up at CUB board level. Today it is a most unusual ornament to the south side of the Physics Building (now called the David Caro Building).

Robyn Sloggett: *Of course Wilson Hall is a central focus for so much University activity, and I know there was vigorous debate about whether to restore or erect a new building after the fateful fire in 1952. I suppose there were some aspects of the various decorative features of Wilson Hall that have interesting stories.*

Ray Marginson: Yes, many. It was Robyn Patton, my secretary, whom I have mentioned before,²¹ whose discoveries (in her searching for many 'lost' items) included a Rembrandt etching under the Conservatorium stage. It was Robyn who found the busts of Lauchlan Mackinnon by J. Forsyth and R. Monti,²² and of Sir Samuel Wilson by Marshall Wood. They are now in the foyer of the Wilson Hall. One was found, with the head broken off, in the Wilson Hall basement being used to support the

iron bars used to clean the boiler. We owe it to the influence of the then Assistant Protocol Officer Tom Hazell with the Giannarelli brothers, the monumental masons, for the columns on which they stand after restoration.

More magpieing. I knew the late Douglas Annand and we asked him to restore the great bas-relief *A search for truth*, which he did, employing some fellow artists to help. He also restored his etched and stained glass mural,²³ commissioned by the Victorian Women Graduates Association, that had suffered from the poor quality of adhesives at the time of his original creation. It was the subject of much grumbling by the donors—of whom the most vociferous was Valentine Leeper, daughter of the Warden of Trinity College, and of whom a fine biography has been produced by Marion Poynter.²⁴ These objectors dearly yearned for a work like the great lost Stevens window on the south wall of the old Wilson Hall. My brother Max,²⁵ one of the many who watched the fire, said that the window melted like a river of colour as it came down the south wall. Loss by the fire was increased in its effect by the fact that the portraits that hung in the Hall had just returned from conservation and had been

stoutly rewired, making their removal impossible. The chairs were however rescued and the smaller ones are now in the Council Chamber and the two original thrones, conspicuous in the early photographs and engravings of conferring ceremonies, are now in the Wilson Hall foyer. They are joined there with a third replica throne to which attaches a story. I had the replica made by a Melbourne carver with the objective of replacing the Grant Featherstone pair on the platform, which by the 1960s were not in good order. We also had a replica footstool made. These footstools in early times were used for graduands to kneel for the chancellor to place the hood around the student's neck. The chairs themselves are of substantial height. I mentioned my intention to Sir Douglas Wright, who in characteristic fashion exploded, 'Can you see me sitting there with my little legs dangling in the air?' This certainly squashed the proposal and therefore the thrones and footstools inhabit the foyer of the hall.

Robyn Sloggett: *Many of the names you mention have long-time and often intergenerational relationships with the University. The Meszaros family would have to be a case in point, and seems to be well represented in bronze works on the site.*

Douglas Annand, designer and painter,
Tom Bass, sculptor, *A search for truth*, 1956,
plaster and paint, height: 914.0 cm.
Reg. no. 0000.0085,
University of Melbourne Art Collection.



Ray Marginson: Yes, among the interesting things in University House is the wall of portrait medallions, some of which are by the father, the renowned Andors Meszaros (1900–1972), and others by the son Michael (b. 1945). It took some time but, with the enthusiastic help of Mrs Meszaros senior, who importuned many sitters' families to lend their copies for recasting where the Meszaros no

longer had the original plasters, and by gifts from families and University departments, we assembled an interesting set highlighting important University figures. They include George Paul, the disciple of Wittgenstein, briefly here from Oxford in the 1940s and whose great philosophy lectures in the Public Lecture Theatre were standing room only; figures such as Professors

R.M. Crawford, Ian Maxwell, A.R. Chisholm, Maurice Belz, Sir Peter MacCallum and Boyce Gibson, as well as Jessie Webb, Sir David Rivett, Sir Russell Grimwade, Sir Howard Florey, Sir Hugh Devine, Sir Robert Menzies and many others. The then Florey Institute also commissioned portraits of its founding board members. As time went on I commissioned others from Michael.

Andors did a beautiful Australian animal piece in 1962 for the then Zoology Building (now called the Baldwin Spencer Building). The sculpture is now on the south wall of the new 1986 Zoology Building.²⁶ Michael also did a work for the civil engineering building *Tension and compression*.²⁷ However we were never able to afford his concept of a free-standing bronze sculpture for the south end of the north-south reflecting pool on the great south lawn.

The final in this series of interviews will appear in a future issue of *University of Melbourne Collections*.

Dr Ray Marginson AM held the position of Vice-Principal of the University of Melbourne from 1965 to 1988.

Associate Professor Dr Robyn Sloggett is Director of the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne.

Notes

- 1 Andors Meszaros, *Eagle*, 1966, bronze, width: 182.8 cm. Reg. no. 1971.0011, gift of the Victoria Insurance Company Limited, 1971, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 2 R.S. Jackson, *Britannia and Goddess*, c.1860, limestone, each sculpture approx. height: 243.8 cm. Reg. no. 1966.0015.001.002, gift of the Australian and New Zealand Bank, Collins Street, Melbourne, 1966, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 3 George Henry Allen, Untitled (Freeform carved sandstone), 1957, sandstone, part 1: 109.0 cm x 242.0 cm x 103.0 cm; part 2: 49.0 cm x 98.0 cm x 39.0 cm. Reg. no. 1971.0049.000.A.000.B, gift of Sir Osborn McCutcheon, 1971, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 4 Carrick Chambers (b. 1930); Lecturer in Botany 1961–1964; Senior Lecturer 1964–1966; Professor of Botany 1967–1986; Chairman of the Department of Botany 1980–1984; Professor Emeritus from 1995.
- 5 Unknown creator (Irish), *Door*, c.1745, painted wood, brass door handle, knocker and boot scraper, approx. 387.0 cm x 281.0 cm. Reg. no. 1963.0031, gift of the Government of Ireland, 1963, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 6 Inge King, *Sun ribbon (maquette)*, 1980, painted steel, aluminium, 57.5 cm x 110.0 cm x 58.5 cm. Reg. no. 1982.0030, gift of Mrs Eileen Fox in memory of her parents Ernest and Fannie Kaye, 1983, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 7 Sir Roy Douglas 'Pansy' Wright (1907–1990); Professor of Physiology 1939–1971; Dean of Science in 1969; Chancellor 1980–1989.
- 8 Sydney Dattilo Rubbo (1911–1969); Senior Lecturer in Bacteriology 1937–1944; Professor of Bacteriology 1945–1969; Dean of Science 1955–1956.
- 9 Leonard French, Untitled (*Symmetry of sport*), c.1956, enamel paint on cement, height: approx. 500 cm. Reg. no. 1956.0034, commissioned 1956, gift of Sir Frank Beaurepaire, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 10 Ray Marginson, interviewed by Robyn Sloggett, 'High drama and ... comedy': Developing the cultural collections of the University of Melbourne, *University of Melbourne Collections*, issue 5 (November 2009), p. 20.
- 11 Sculptor unknown (re-cast by Michael Meszaros), *Gosh says Amanda*, 1930, re-cast 1973, bronze, overall height: 84.0; frog: 11.5 cm x 19.2 cm x 25.0 cm. Reg. no. 1973.0764.000.A.000.B, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 12 This work is held in trust by the University on behalf of the Australian people.
- 13 Dr Ros Bandt presented her research on this artwork at a History of the University Unit occasional seminar on 23 September 2009 (see www.huu.unimelb.edu.au/seminar/archive/Bandt-print.pdf).
- 14 Lenton Parr, *The four humours*, c.1958, welded steel, 116.0 cm x 92.0 cm x 64.0 cm. Reg. no. 1958.0007.001.004, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 15 Lenton Parr, *Sirius*, 1962–1963, welded steel, paint, 61.4 cm x 188.4 cm x 66.8 cm. Reg. no. 1980.0194, purchased 1980, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 16 Clive Murray-White, *Holocaust*, 1974, welded mild steel, 215.7 cm x 300.3 cm x 272.8 cm. Reg. no. 1976.0104, purchased 1976, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 17 Teisutis Zikaras, Untitled (Ornamental balustrade), c.1958, precast concrete, approx. 200.0 cm x 314.0 cm. Reg. no. 1958.0006.001.008, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 18 Norma Jones-Roberts, *Cyclic: Poem of an epic cycle*, c.1966, enamel on copper, carved wood, 182.9 x 182.9 cm. Reg. no. 1966.0020, purchased with funds from the Charles Duplan Lloyd Trust, 1966, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 19 W.B. McInnes, *General Sir John Monash GCMG KCB VD*, c.1920s, oil on canvas, 71.0 cm x 63.5 cm. Reg. no. 1979.0078, gift of Miss Bentwich, 1979, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 20 Unknown creator, Untitled (Crown), Carlton and United Breweries, 1901, steel, brick and concrete, height: 129.0 cm. Reg. no. 1986.0291, gift of Carlton and United Breweries, 1986, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 21 Ray Marginson, interviewed by Robyn Sloggett, 'High drama and ... comedy': Developing the cultural collections of the University of Melbourne, *University of Melbourne Collections*, issue 3 (December 2008), p. 4.
- 22 J[ames] Forsyth and R[affaello] Monti, *Lauchlan Mackinnon*, c.1880, stone, approx. 81.0 x 60.0 x 31.0 cm. Reg. no. 0000.0440, University of Melbourne Art Collection. Mackinnon (1817–1888) was a pastoralist, newspaper proprietor, and a member of the original council of the University of Melbourne.
- 23 Douglas Annand, Untitled (Memorial screen), 1958, stained glass, 198.1 x 457.2 cm. Reg. no. 1956.0015, commissioned by the Victorian Women Graduates Association to mark the centenary of the University in 1956 and in memory of the women graduates of the first 100 years, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 24 Marion Poynter, *Nobody's Valentine: Letters in the life of Valentine Alexa Leeper, 1900–2001*, Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008.
- 25 Max Marginson (1928–2002); biochemist; a founder and seven times President of University House, the University of Melbourne staff club.
- 26 Andors Meszaros, *Zoology relief*, 1962, copper, 152.0 x 182.0 cm. Reg. no. 1962.0001, commissioned 1962, University of Melbourne Art Collection.
- 27 Michael Meszaros, *Tension and compression*, 1979, bronze, sloping parallelogram: 140.0 cm x 140.0 cm. Reg. no. 1979.0089, gift of Hardcastle and Richards Pty Ltd to commemorate 25 years in practice, 1979, University of Melbourne Art Collection.