

Cold War Enigma.

In 1982 I had an exhibition at Mori Gallery of ceramics and pictures titled ***Attachment to Place*** which was an elegy to the littoral zone marine life of the rock platform at Lagoon Head on the South coast of NSW Where our family spent just about every holiday in a corrugated iron fisherman's shack.

As a result of making this work I was invited by Ace Bourke to have work included in a show called ***Living in the Pacific*** that Ace had curated for the magnificent Crafts Council Gallery at the Rocks in 1983. This invitation prompted me to research and question the ecological and cultural implications of living on the Pacific Rim. I began to investigate the French nuclear testing on *Moruroa Atoll* in the Pacific. I read widely and on the basis of this research began a series of Atoll ***Reliquaries***. One, titled ***Armory/ Bestiary*** was included in 'Living in the Pacific' as was a large pot titled ***Bass Straight Crude on Coastal Vessel*** about plastic debris derived from petrochemicals, fossil fuels and oil spills and a vessel tilted ***Oracle***, inspired by the Blowhole at Kiama where all manner marine and other flotsam is thrown up by the suction and force of the waves.

At this time I had become a signed up member of the Labor Party so that I could campaign against Uranium mining in Australia

Other reliquaries were made subsequently and shown in ***Vase Rattle and Box, dislocation from Place*** at Mori Gallery in 1984. These had friezes of relief images depicting allegories pertaining to nuclear test information.

I continued to develop a series of narrative stage sculptures that depicted particular dire nuclear scenarios that I had encountered in my research. In these sculptures, I placed figurines within the frame of the proscenium to investigate whether this dramatic framing device would rebut the notion that small figurines are trivial and decorative. These sculptures were shown in a solo exhibition titled ***Ceramics*** at Christine Abrahams Gallery in Melbourne in 1985, during a National Ceramics Conference.

During a residency at Queensland film and Drama Centre at Griffith University, curated by Marguerite Bonnin, I continued to research nuclear themes to develop new work for inclusion in ***Australian Perspecta 1985*** curated by Ursula Prunster at Art Gallery of NSW. I created ***Object Scenarios***, a series based on research into the Nuclear Industry, Colonialism in the Pacific, Science and ethics.

The *Object Scenario* titled ***Cold War Enigma*** held in the collection of *Manly Art Gallery and Museum* arose from this body of work. However in this work I was reflecting on my own family life growing up on the shore of Middle Harbour in the 1950s during the Cold War. Two children,

brother and sister and Mum and Dad, we were the classic 'nuclear' family a term loaded with portent and typical of the hijacking of names to whitewash bad things that were happening. Our life by the water was idyllic **for children**. Yet.... there seemed to be an emphasis on privacy and containment and self-sufficiency that bordered on secrecy from our parents' perspective.

My parents had met at a factory where my father worked as an electrical engineer and my mother had been seconded for the war effort. Her artistic skills as a photographic colorist were adapted to painting the fine calibrations on the dials of meters and time switches produced by the factory for air force planes. My father was not permitted to join the air force as his electrical engineering skills were required to service the boiler rooms on the battle ships. The asbestos insulation on all the pipes lead to his tragic death from mesothelioma in 1999.

Post war, my parents acquired a precarious slope of land in Powder Hulk Bay, Middle harbor where they took seven years of weekends to painstakingly with pick shovel, block hammer and gads to make a flat sandstone shelf on which to construct a modern house with views. During this time they were shacked up with us two kids in a one room fibro boatshed. *Aussie Battlers* was what people who did that sort of thing were known as then. The two figures paddling in unison refers to my parents and their work ethic. My father had an old launch in which he took the family for many fishing and exploration adventures. When I was fourteen I acquired a wooden kayak that I named 'Pod' in which I explored all the estuaries sand banks and beautiful waterfall creeks off Middle Harbour.

The Boatshed was built over the water on stone piers beside a beautiful old sandstone tidal swimming pool encrusted with Sydney rock oysters where my mother taught my brother and me to swim. The land had been subdivided from the Estate of the Shakespearean actor and entrepreneur, George Rignold who, it is believed had the rock pool build by the same Italian stone masons who constructed the dry stone walls that surrounded his estate.

Seaforth pole and wire swimming pool was close by in the inlet with the sand flats beside 'the Bluff.' Down the hill from Seaforth was the marvelous Manly Swimming Pool with its wooden walkways and diving boards and square pontoon floats with water wheels and slippery dips. These motifs feature in relief on the 'backdrop' of the sculpture. Before Manly Warf was redeveloped, a box carriage from the ghost train on the amusement pier would emerge out over the water on a little curved rail. This provided a spectacle of astonishment to passengers arriving on the Manly Ferry. Other references in the boat like orchestra pit or 'mouth' of the sculpture are a Chinese musician, and an Oceanic personage.

© Toni Warburton August 2020.