

Portrait of a wood sculptor: Geoff Bromilow

Lorraine McLoughlin

You make a living as an arborist, but your creative side is your sculpture. How do you manage both?

All my work requires a creative response. I am lucky to work out and about with a broad and expansive canvas rather than being stuck indoors with a close and detailed focus. I am besotted by trees, their majesty and age, sometimes centuries, of history and life stored in each piece. No wonder I want to work with wood as my art. Being an arborist and feeling akin to trees spurs on my desire to sculpt in remnant timbers. I work in Huon and King Billy pine and redgum, all sourced responsibly.

I've seen your sculptures described as seeking "simplicity rather than complexity", and "a play between nature and art". How would you describe your work?

I tap into the energy of each piece of wood and allow its character to emerge. Each grain of a tree has grown to support its life and I work with that rather than confining its story with too much detail. Instead of making something realistic, I am creating an opportunity for both the sculptor and the viewer to be involved with the wood and responsive to its spirit.

In sculpting, one removes layers that can't be put back, as opposed to modelling and building up an object. Hence, the first critical choice of where to cut determines the subsequent choices in shaping that piece of wood and working with its ancient story of growth and weathering.

Although you excelled as a sculptor at Brighton High School and went to the South Australian School of Art (SACA) in Stanley St North Adelaide in the 1970s, you didn't end up becoming a sculptor straight away? Why?

While my school experience with a great teacher had been very positive, the scene at SACA was frustrating and I disliked the approach to sculpture where we were told what art was, and to forget all we knew. I lasted just over a year and went into gardening for private people and then began to work as an arborist. It was in 1995, after an unexpected divorce, that I turned more of my focus to sculpture. My whole life was transformed by a move interstate – first to Queensland, then to NSW. I've been exhibiting and selling ever since .

What or who were the major influences on your sculpting?

My mother has been the most important creative influence on my life. She was a Master of the Sogetsu School of Ikebana. Crawling on the floor as a child, I watched her circle around amazing arrangements of flowers and greenery. I was conditioned to see and think in three dimensions.

My mother had amazing energy and a rigorous work ethic, creating costumes into the wee hours for the Patch Theatre and lecturing at the Kindergarten Training College. She inspired me in many ways and in turn, influenced my three children who are all creative: a shoemaker, an interior designer, and a musician and teacher.

Where had you lived en route to your present home in Delamere on the Fleurieu?

I was born in 1955 at sea in the international waters of the Indian Ocean as my parents left Australia for a stay in the UK. I was three when the family



Buddha outdoor sculpture in Canadian maple by Geoff Bromilow 2007

returned to live in Brighton. I studied, worked, married, and raised a family in Macclesfield, SA. In 1996, I left for the Blue Mountains with the bright lights of the Sydney artistic world nearby. I made my mark, won awards, and was exhibited in the mountains and in Sydney. In 2000 and 2001, I had exhibitions in New York. Over the years, I was greatly supported by the late James Tait Goodrich, renowned American neurosurgeon who bought some of my most significant pieces. (Sadly, James died of Covid in March 2020.)

In 2001, just before going to New York for the second time, I started a relationship with Kathryn Pentecost. In 2004, we decided to return to Adelaide as my parents were aging. We settled in the Adelaide Hills and discovered economic and creative opportunities. In 2012, we bought an acreage and a house in Delamere. To own an old stone cottage (c.1860 – 1880) and live sustainably, while pursuing our own creative lives, is a dream come true.

You were in New York September 11, 2001. I was moved by your photographs which were well supported by Kathryn's text in your book Peace & War: 9/11 stories. Have images of that experience dimmed?

Those memories will always be there. Having overslept that morning, instead of meeting for coffee at the World Trade Center, I am enormously grateful to be alive. I was, of course, terribly moved by the events, the horror of the deaths, injuries, and destruction, and the horrendous implications for world peace. I didn't photograph people initially, out of respect, but instead went with friends to Strawberry Fields, the John Lennon memorial peace park within Central Park. I had been recording New York in the days before 9/11, and in the following days, I created on film, (later digitized), a very personal photographic response to those shocking events and extraordinary days. Thinking back sharpens my belief that one needs to live fearlessly environmentally, socially, and politically.

Where is your art exhibited now?

Since 1998, I've exhibited with Gannon House Galleries in the Rocks area in Sydney, and I maintain a few outlets in the Blue Mountains. I also work extensively doing Nature-Play installations – nineteen so far in the Marion Council area, but also in other councils and kindergartens. Locally, I have work for sale in the Tallulah and Kai shop in Yankalilla run by Simi Roche and her partner James.

You can also view and purchase my work via my website:
<https://geoff-bromilow.weebly.com>.

What is the book 'Born at Sea' about?

Kathryn has written a short biography of my life and we are awaiting news from a publisher.

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