

JAMES GLEESON INTERVIEWS: LYNDON DADSWELL

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JAMES GLEESON: Lyndon, at the moment, apart from a group of drawings, you're only represented in the collection by two bronzes, a situation I hope we'll rectify later on. But would you mind telling us what you remember about the two works we have? First of all, there is a piece called *Seated figure* in bronze of 1947. Can you remember the circumstances under which that was created?

LYNDON DADSWELL: About that. But wasn't it sold to the Queensland Gallery?

JAMES GLEESON: Well, apparently not. It has come into our collection. It might have been bought by Robert Haynes for his own private collection.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh yes, there certainly (inaudible) one there.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: That's true.

JAMES GLEESON: Was it a one-off piece or did you cast—

LYNDON DADSWELL: One-off.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, you didn't cast an edition?

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, I've never done that.

JAMES GLEESON: Do you do your own casting, or how do you work in making casts?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Up to about three years ago I worked in clay and plaster and had them cast into bronze in Melbourne.

JAMES GLEESON: In Melbourne.

LYNDON DADSWELL: What I'm doing now, I'm using sheet metal, although my hands are weak now. I can't use them very well.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I've got a man who owned a factory, an engineering factory, and he got fed up with it, too many strikes and so forth.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: So he now, I give him models and drawings—

JAMES GLEESON: Is that Les Wild, by any chance?

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LYNDON DADSWELL: No.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, because I knew Les Wild was doing that sort of work.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I see.

JAMES GLEESON: This is, of course, a figurative piece and you began earlier in your working life as a figurative artist.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes. I must admit that the people who've impressed me most in my life are Carl Milles, the Swedish sculptor.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Epstein, Henry Moore. I think through seeing Carl Milles' work, he was a very figurative sculpture. But he put a great deal of accent on the space between the arm and the body, for instance. Whether it should be an inch or two inches and so forth. So he first introduced me to the hole in space.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Then I was able to understand a little more Henry Moore.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Epstein I can't fit in at all except that I just like what he does and I've been a little too overcome by his grandeur.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: But I think now, after wandering for years, I think I'm arriving at something that's personal to me. I hope so anyway.

JAMES GLEESON: Lyndon, if my recollection is correct, during the thirties you worked with Paul Montford on the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne.

LYNDON DADSWELL: That's right, my first commission.

JAMES GLEESON: Was it? What work did you do on that?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Well, the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne has an inner shrine and 12 feet from the ground there are 12 seven by seven carvings, sculptures.

JAMES GLEESON: In stone?

LYNDON DADSWELL: In stone. That came my way because Paul Montford, who is a dear old man—or was—had the commission to do the big sculptures on the four corners outside, and he got on the wrong side of the committee. They said, 'We must have an Australian on this as well'. So Rayner Hoff, whom I was working with as a student, said, 'Here's a chance for you, Dadswell, to go and get some experience'. I think he was rather glad to get rid of me. I went down there and the committee—I made a little model. The committee just commissioned me

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to do my 12 now under his supervision. In fact, I'm quite sure that I was too young for the job.

JAMES GLEESON: You don't feel that you—

LYNDON DADSWELL: Well, it's not good enough for something national.

JAMES GLEESON: How old were you then?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Twenty-one.

JAMES GLEESON: How old?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Twenty-one.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh well, that is young to be doing such a monumental job.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. What about your early training? Now I know you studied with Rayner Hoff and earlier were you at the Julian Ashton?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Julian Ashton Art School. First of all. I should start off by saying that when I was in my primary and secondary schools I was last in every class, always. So when I get commissions or win a competition, well, to me it's like passing, I'm being accepted and I've passed a standard. I've got this feeling still with me.

JAMES GLEESON: Really?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I forget your question I'm afraid?

JAMES GLEESON: Well, just the earlier period of your life.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh yes, right.

JAMES GLEESON: Early training.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: What did you study at the Julian Ashton, drawing, draftsmanship or sculpture?

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, drawing.

JAMES GLEESON: Drawing.

LYNDON DADSWELL: My father took me away from school, being hopeless as I was (inaudible) to him and I drew every day for barely two years. Then my teacher called in my father and said, 'Look, this boy is pretty hopeless. I can't do anything with him, take him away'.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

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LYNDON DADSWELL: So dad was a bit upset about this. He looked around and he finally thought the technical college might be the place, and he'd do something with commercial art.

JAMES GLEESON: About what year was that, Lyndon, in the twenties, early twenties, mid-twenties?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes, it would be the mid-twenties, I think. I'm not sure. I think so, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: So he took me away from the Ashton School, enrolled me in tech and left me to my devices.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Too long.

JAMES GLEESON: What sort of things were you studying at the technical school?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Lettering.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Illustration. Things like that that I was not very hot at.

JAMES GLEESON: Is that the East Sydney Tech?

LYNDON DADSWELL: East Sydney.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Who was the head then?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Forget his name. I shouldn't. Rayner Hoff was after him.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. It wasn't Medworth, was it?

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, Medworth was after him.

JAMES GLEESON: When I was there as a student in the mid-thirties Rayner Hoff was there. I don't know who preceded him there.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I can't recall.

JAMES GLEESON: It's not important. From there you worked with Rayner Hoff, what, as an assistant?

LYNDON DADSWELL: As an assistant. Well, as one of his small assistants.

JAMES GLEESON: Was Barbara Tribe working there at that time?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes.

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JAMES GLEESON: That brings us into the thirties, of course.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes. Well now, I did four years at the tech and each night I came home my father would say, 'What did you do today, son'? I said, 'I did some modelling today, Dad'. He knew my program: that I was only keeping to modelling and ignoring all the rest. So he was a bit sore about that. Rayner Hoff was a bit sore about it too, I think. That's how I got to the Melbourne Shrine.

JAMES GLEESON: What was Rayner Hoff like as a teacher?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I couldn't get anything from him for many years, but I realise since how much I did get from him. He'd talk about looking at a thing and devising form, dividing form in physical matter or space. This is just foreign, I didn't understand it.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes. But in retrospect, later on you did?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh yes, I felt I had. Strangely enough, I thought I liked his work because it was so orderly.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Quite precise. You may not like it, but the way it is developed is the thrilling part of it. I wouldn't want to do his work, that kind of work, but I'd like to have the same ability.

JAMES GLEESON: How, in your opinion, does he compare in style, say, to Paul Montford? Were they very different in their approach to art?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Rayner was younger than Paul and had been to schools, and his modelling was a little more formal.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Montford's work was, not airy fairy but full of grace, full of grace.

JAMES GLEESON: Did you find the experience of working with him useful?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh yes, yes. I would have been still working on the panels, I think, if it hadn't been for him.

JAMES GLEESON: Really? Well, at 21 you can't set up as an experienced—

LYNDON DADSWELL: I tell you this, that before I got that job I was at tech. I did nothing else but model soldiers.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: So I rushed this, panels. But I think, on the whole, he was glad to get rid of me. Then I went to London. I took my photographs of my work along to the academy and they gave me a scholarship there. Barbara Tribe came in and joined the classes. She arrived at 9 o'clock in the morning and left at 12 and she never came back.

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JAMES GLEESON: Really? That was the extent of her study at the academy.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: How long were you there, Lyndon?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Two years.

JAMES GLEESON: Two years, and then what happened?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I bought a bicycle for 30 bob and rode to Munich.

JAMES GLEESON: A very nice thing to do too. Now that brings us to, what, ... the end of the thirties?

LYNDON DADSWELL: The end of the thirties, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Just before the war started.

LYNDON DADSWELL: That's right, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Were you in Europe when the war broke out?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Hoff wrote to me in London and said, 'Would you like a job, Dadswell?'. I'd been broke for two years virtually. This was heaven, the thought of it. So I came back and I was teaching at the tech at this when the war began.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I enlisted from there.

JAMES GLEESON: You were in the war, what, for the whole period?

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, in 1941 I did a commando course and then we went to Greece. All I remember about Greece is that it was absolutely orderly. The grass was cut, the trees were perfect. Quite lovely to look at. Rather like a Walt Disney forest.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: On the way back I ran the whole length of Greece. I remember one thing, I came across a store dump of food. They had tinned peaches and Ideal milk. I drank so much of it I couldn't touch it for years.

JAMES GLEESON: This was before the German invasion of Greece, was it?

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, it was just at the same time.

JAMES GLEESON: At the same time? The Germans were coming in.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes. You could see them coming down the hills.

JAMES GLEESON: Then you were evacuated from Greece. Where to then?

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LYNDON DADSWELL: I was off on the last ship to evacuate troops, so we didn't go to Crete. Otherwise I would have been in the bag. We went straight back to Alexandria.

JAMES GLEESON: I think that was where—wasn't Justin O'Brien captured, was it in Greece or Crete? I know he spent the war after that as a prisoner of war.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Was he? I never knew that?

JAMES GLEESON: In Poland, I think he was in a prison camp in Poland.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Must have been Crete, I think. Wouldn't be Egypt.

JAMES GLEESON: You didn't come across him.

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, I didn't, that was the first I'd heard of it.

JAMES GLEESON: You went to Crete then?

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, I missed Crete.

JAMES GLEESON: You missed Crete?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Because the boats weren't going to go back for any more. Well, I went to Syria and two days after I got there I was hit in the head and the legs just on the edge of Damascus. There was a hospital. The Damascus Hospital had been closed down and it was opened up. I didn't know this till later. I was carried into the place. I remember them digging these things out of my legs. I was crying and this dark skinned nurse came in. She said, 'Do not cry, you are a soldier'. That night a group of medical men came round and inspected everyone, me included, and said I couldn't be moved. That was okay by me, I was having a lovely rest. But that night the only bombs that fell on Damascus fell just on the hospital. I can hear them now. In the morning they came around to say who could go and I was sitting up whistling. They said I was too scared to stay there. I got up and walked about.

JAMES GLEESON: Goodness.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Sheer fear of being left another night. I don't know if there's anything interesting. No, I can't think of anything.

JAMES GLEESON: How long were you convalescent?

LYNDON DADSWELL: About nine months.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh goodness, that's a long period. Did they ship you out to anywhere else or was it all in Damascus?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I was shipped out of Damascus that day I sat up whistling.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I saw to that.

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JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Where did you go to from there?

LYNDON DADSWELL: All through the—

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see. Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: In a train mostly.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Did you go back to active service or were you—

LYNDON DADSWELL: At this stage I was given a commission to become a war artist.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I was billeted in Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo, as you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh yes, one day I had a room given to me and lots of clay and I modelled soldiers, to my heart's delight. I enjoyed myself. I wasn't going to go up to the front line any more, thank you.

JAMES GLEESON: Sensible man.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes, I never know why I joined. There was something I was just going to say about—

JAMES GLEESON: You were modelling soldiers in Heliopolis.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh, yes. General Blamey came with them one day. He said, 'I see you admire Epstein, Dadswell'. I said, 'I do but you wouldn't know by this'. God, I could have been shot for that.

JAMES GLEESON: The wrong thing to say to a general.

LYNDON DADSWELL: He called me down some weeks later to his headquarters. I stood in front of him for a while while he finished writing and then he looked up, he said, 'Dadswell, do you know what the Dog River is?'. I said, 'No sir'. He said, 'Well, the Dog River or El Kelpay is a river. If you're invading from the north and you take this river you've got the country. If you're invading from the south you've got this with you, you've won the country'. So it was a sort of half way place.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Do you want to answer the phone?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh, they can wait. If it's important they'll ring again. Something I was going to tell you about there.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. About the Dog River or—

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh the Dog River, yes. I'd been wounded near there and he said, 'I want you to go and carve some lettering on the wall, on the south side

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of the Dog River. You will find there innumerable reliefs done from ancient history. Invading armies always gave their symbol to this'. So all he wanted was lettering from me and I was no good at lettering. I said, 'I'll need some assistance on this'. He gave me a note which allowed me to take what I liked. I collected two stone carvers (inaudible). Took them up there, saw the spot and said, 'Now look, this is what you've got to do. All this lettering and you ring the Heliopolis Palace Hotel and tell me you're finished. I'll go home then'. So that's how it was done. It's been recorded that I did it, but I didn't.

JAMES GLEESON: You didn't? You set up the circumstances but didn't do it.

LYNDON DADSWELL: That's right, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Now, what happened after that? Were you in the Middle East all through the war?

LYNDON DADSWELL: All through my portion of it. I was B class after my wounds. I couldn't see myself sitting around all day long and doing nothing much but drill.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

LYNDON DADSWELL: So I accepted gratefully the fact that I could go home. I did so, and I packed all my work, about a dozen pieces of sculpture. I packed them well, I believe, and they were bombed at (inaudible). The ship went down with the sculpture. I was told that we'd lost everything but we haven't, apparently. At the museum they've got about five pieces.

JAMES GLEESON: Rescued?

LYNDON DADSWELL: In fairly good condition.

JAMES GLEESON: Salvaged from the wreck?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Must have been. I expect you didn't know this.

JAMES GLEESON: They're now at the War Memorial in Canberra?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, that's interesting, I didn't know they'd had that chequered history of having been bombed and sunk. What material were they?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Plaster of Paris.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, they survived being—

LYNDON DADSWELL: Bits and pieces, I'm told. That you might get together, if you're lucky, with other pieces. But I've seen photographs, they're too far gone.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, are they? Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: There's about five in good condition.

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JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see. Have they been cast in bronze?

LYNDON DADSWELL: No. Such is the state of—what is it?

JAMES GLEESON: Financial state?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: They're still in plaster.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Still in plaster, yes. The last I heard was about a month ago, they were thinking of doing another one.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: But they just didn't like my work. A bit too formalised.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. In this manner, do you think, or was it even more formalised than the seated figure we have?

LYNDON DADSWELL: A bit more than that.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: This is a little freer. These were postured really (inaudible) perhaps if I say it.

JAMES GLEESON: This was done, what, a few years after you came back?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I was discharged from the army in 1942.

JAMES GLEESON: Forty-two, oh. That was just five years later.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Were you teaching then at the—

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh yes, I came back to teach. I'd been teaching before I went away, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I took the job gratefully, but I don't know if I should have.

JAMES GLEESON: Why?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I made a mess of teaching.

JAMES GLEESON: Did you really?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I think so.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, your reputation is of a great teacher.

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LYNDON DADSWELL: Well, this says how much our lives can be bandied about.

JAMES GLEESON: Why do you feel that it wasn't right for you?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I wanted to do something fine. Just wanting to do it is not enough.

JAMES GLEESON: What, as a teacher or as a sculptor?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Both.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I felt that if I have 30 hours teaching and the rest of the time making sculpture, I'd be happy. I would prefer to have one day a week now, I realise. But I felt the need to produce something that was terribly personal.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I dragged this out of my students to such a degree that it was me they were doing.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: This is dangerous.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. I can see what you mean: that you felt that you projected your own ideas too strongly onto the students.

LYNDON DADSWELL: That's true, yes. Even now when I pass the tech I don't look at the gates. That reminds me of another job, a commission I had on the three figures on the bank in George Street. They were three aluminium figures.

JAMES GLEESON: Which bank was that?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Commonwealth.

JAMES GLEESON: Commonwealth Bank.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Opposite Farmers.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh yes, yes. Oh, I know the one, the corner of George and Martin Street.

LYNDON DADSWELL: That's right yes. Well now, I was walking with my son down towards it not knowing. I was just shopping one day. Suddenly as I came (inaudible) I saw it in position. I was horrified. It was so awful. I didn't go past it for months, I couldn't bear it.

JAMES GLEESON: Goodness gracious.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I still feel the same way about it. It's pretty ghastly.

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JAMES GLEESON: How do you feel about this bronze, *Seated figure*, Lyndon? Do you feel that, you know, it's characteristic of the period you were working?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I think you could say that, yes. Oh yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, I think if Robert Haynes bought it, and Rob Haynes has great taste in (inaudible) stand out.

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, on seeing it again I like it quite well, but it doesn't hold its head up in the company of artists really.

JAMES GLEESON: Lyndon, you've always worked in a very wide range of media, you know, in modelling and—

LYNDON DADSWELL: Hammering.

JAMES GLEESON: Bronze and in direct casting and in constructions.

LYNDON DADSWELL: You make it sound interesting but it isn't.

JAMES GLEESON: Isn't it? But you have worked in a wide range of media and styles, haven't you?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Not very great. Bronze casting, or casting, plastic a bit.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. The metal and paper work.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Metal, sheet metal and paper. That's about the end of it, I think.

JAMES GLEESON: And the direct carving, of course.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Reluctantly, I must admit—

JAMES GLEESON: It wasn't part of your real interest?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Not at all, no.

JAMES GLEESON: Was that because you felt the Montford things hadn't worked out properly in the shrine?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Well, strangely enough, with the shrine I became swollen headed and a clever cockie and that ruined me for years. I remember going to the Royal Academy in London on my scholarship. I came walking up to the class one morning and my teacher, a chap called Llewellyn, the sculptor who's dead now, got out of a bus in front of me, put his arms around my shoulder, and said, 'Dadswell, why don't you go home?'. So I'd been got rid of twice. I think what keeps me too is I'm really rather pig headed. I'm slow to catch on. Any school I've ever been to since those formal days, I couldn't tell you a thing about it an hour after lecture or the demonstration. But a month later I had it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

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LYNDON DADSWELL: It's rather like the terrible business of teaching French in school. They were in a class and the French lesson comes along and a group of people there understand it, but then you go on to the next stage before anyone else has understood it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: This can happen in all kinds of teaching, of course.

JAMES GLEESON: Of course, yes. It doesn't always sink in at the same rate into every mind.

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, no. I'm frightened of copying. I've been so strongly influenced by Epstein and these others that I'm afraid my work is a la them.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. It's difficult to avoid something that you find so interesting in itself.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes. For instance, one thing that I notice in my work is that I make curves in a certain way.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Who was the wood carver who died, a fine sculptor, and lived out at Penrith?

JAMES GLEESON: Gerry Lewers.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Gerry. Gerry was driving me home one day and we were talking about sculpture and he said, 'Dads, I could always tell your work by the way you make a curve'. I didn't understand it then but now I know.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, a sort of a signature.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I had so much of the life figure drummed into me that even on these things here, it's still got a head to it and it's got a body to it, it's got arms and legs.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Not my intention.

JAMES GLEESON: No, but it came there instinctively.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes. I think I'm beginning to free myself a bit from it.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, this is a much later work. I remember the exhibition. I think it was at—

LYNDON DADSWELL: D.J.'s

JAMES GLEESON: David Jones, yes. What date was that? Can you remember when that was done? Perhaps we have it on the back. It's brass, two pieces made from the same mould, face marble. We bought it in 1976.

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LYNDON DADSWELL: Early '76 or late '75.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. So it was a recent work when it was exhibited?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes, yes. Yes, I like that.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. I think that's a very good example of that kind of work that you were doing then.

LYNDON DADSWELL: It's not anymore though, is it?

JAMES GLEESON: Well, I suppose it is in a way. You can see an influence there but you can also see Lyndon Dadswell.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I doubt it, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Do you?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Henry Moore was talking to me one day and he was saying about people copying his work. He was invited to New York to have a degree placed on him. He said when he got to the art school he was going to inspect, you see, they were met by the dean of the college and the head teacher of sculpture. He said, 'Mr Moore you're going to be very pleased and very happy, when you see what we've got'. He went in, everyone was a Henry Moore.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, he's been a dominant influence in sculpture.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Well, after all, anyone can do a Henry Moore but not before he did it.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no, no. Well, that's a profound thought, isn't it? He invented something that everyone instantly recognised as valid, but he had to do it first. Well, I suppose very few sculptors have escaped some influence at least.

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, but when you look at the many great artists of sculpture, it's just something unique about them, just a touch. You know this.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Who do you consider to be the great sculptors of all time?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Leonardo, Michelangelo, and then some—I can't remember—Egyptian sculptors.

JAMES GLEESON: You wouldn't rank Donatello among them?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I can't ignore him. What position am I in to ignore him? But that's how I feel.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I suppose it's rather like the ones I like best. After all, one can't prove that's one's better than someone else.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no. How do you react to Rodin?

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LYNDON DADSWELL: Favourably.

JAMES GLEESON: You don't feel the emotional element is too strong? I know that in your work there's stronger formal quality about and I thought you might have regarded it a rather extreme, expressive quality of Rodin.

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, I think he's comfortable to live with. But I feel the other people had more for me. For instance, Michelangelo's *Moses*, seated figure.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: You look at the knee and you can see right from the dead centre of it, it comes out, you know that it's built up, it's understood, it's alive. Whereas I would make a knee which you'd recognise as a knee, but it wouldn't have this guts about it. It's tremendous.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh well, he was perhaps the greatest artist of all time.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes. I hesitate to place them in order even today, those that I know, because in the end all you've got to say is, 'Well, prove it, Dadswell'. I am prepared to look at a thing and say I like it or I don't like it. I can't tell you why, not fully enough to win anything.

JAMES GLEESON: You mentioned your admiration for certain kinds of Egyptian art. Is there any reason for that? Is it the formality?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Formality.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, that strong sense of—

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh, yes. For instance, taking spot figures, very simple, and there'll be a cluster of details. But the cluster has a boundary. Then you see another spot. The same thing happens again. Your eye, you're looking at a thing and you see it and while you're studying this you become aware of something else. The eye has lead to something else, as though the sculptor or the designer was taking you on a trip. It wasn't accidental.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

LYNDON DADSWELL: It's a place where you pause for a moment. Without knowing you did it later on. Seems to me fine sculpture has that. I'd love to, if I could do something before I die, that would not be forgotten. I know that's wishful thinking, it's very bad.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, it's the goal that every artist sets himself, I suppose.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes, I suppose so.

JAMES GLEESON: Lyndon, at the moment we're richest in our collection of your drawings. We have, I think, a group of 50 at one stage, and an additional earlier one, that have come into the collection in the last—

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh, the gallery bought them, did they?

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JAMES GLEESON: Yes. A group of fifty came in around about September last year.

LYNDON DADSWELL: All little ones.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. Daniel Thomas, I think, organised it.

LYNDON DADSWELL: (inaudible) yes, yes. I'd forgotten that.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Now, when you work, do your sculptural ideas normally come in the form of drawings first?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Let's put it this way. From 1947 or eight until 1955 or six, I use 30 by 40 litho sheets with ink and chalk.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I drew all that time and hardly did any sculpture at all.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I was looking all the time for something to come from it. I didn't see anything coming from it. I enjoyed it. But now when I look at one of these works here, I've seen it as it was then. I hadn't caught up with my thoughts.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I'd made a thing that eventually I felt was sculptural, but I didn't know it at the time. It was just a drawing to me.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I mean, (inaudible) I've been drawing about 3,000 of these drawings. I work for about six hours every day just drawing these different combinations. Well, I think out of about 2,000 of them, I think I could say safely there are about 10 sculptures, which I can see as sculpture to a degree where I could give it to someone to make it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: So sure of it. So I found my way.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. They are abstract?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Totally abstract. No figurative or symbolic—

LYNDON DADSWELL: No, except that I'm always bothered with the fact that I had too much figure in me.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. You mentioned that earlier, that they do tend to take the sort of proportions or the implications—

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LYNDON DADSWELL: That's it, yes. Yes. You were going to ask me something else about the drawings, were you?

JAMES GLEESON: No. You answered it really that at one stage you were drawing just for its own sake and you didn't realise the sculptural potential. But later on you recognised sculptural potential in some of them.

LYNDON DADSWELL: And only since I've started the second bout of drawing.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see. When did that second bout start?

LYNDON DADSWELL: About three years ago.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. So there were periods when you draw intentionally and then for a while not at all, and there have been two phases of this.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Just two.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see. But I remember at one stage you'd had a show, I think it was at David Jones. Anyway, they were very big drawings, six feet high.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Farmers.

JAMES GLEESON: Farmers, was it? The Blaxland Gallery.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Blaxland Gallery.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes, over 30 by 40 litho sheets.

JAMES GLEESON: That was a period when you were working, I think, with that iron or metal framework and built the strips of paper wrapped around it.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Well, that's another period.

JAMES GLEESON: Were the drawings related to that period? I seem to in my mind think of them—

LYNDON DADSWELL: The early drawings?

JAMES GLEESON: Those big ones.

LYNDON DADSWELL: The big ones?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: See that up there?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Well, that kind of thing happened—

JAMES GLEESON: That's the paper ones?

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LYNDON DADSWELL: Paper, yes. If it was modelled on a wire frame, it would have certain results. But if you did what I did there, I hardly use wire at all.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, didn't you?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I waited till the paper dried stiff. Then gradually build out and then strengthen it.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: So the shapes are different because of the method of working.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Were none of them built on a wire frame?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Not wholly, no.

JAMES GLEESON: No. I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Two or three pieces.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. I always had the impression that they were on an armature.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Most people do that. But that's a problem I set myself and I enjoyed the solving of it. In fact, Margel Hinder thinks it's my best work, the paper—

JAMES GLEESON: Well, it stuck in my mind as an important stage in your—

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes. It's hard to know what to do with them.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Can't put it out in the open.

JAMES GLEESON: No, of course not. Would they lose quality if they were cast in bronze?

LYNDON DADSWELL: They might lose something but I think there's enough understanding of metal in me to avoid that. But one was cast and no-one would take on the others. In fact, the chap who did this—

JAMES GLEESON: It was too difficult?

LYNDON DADSWELL: It was too difficult. Such fine paper details.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: You'd have to make something else of it, in a sense, fill it up, fill the holes up and do all sorts of things.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

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LYNDON DADSWELL: So although I enjoyed every minute of that, sometimes they'd take a year to make.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Well, was that an invention of your own?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes. I can't remember. It may have come from someone. Can't remember who though?

JAMES GLEESON: Is it a kind of papier-mache system?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes, I think. Well now, you buy rolls of paper in various stores about four inches wide and they're glue on one side.

JAMES GLEESON: Sort of like a masking tape.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Exactly, yes. Cut off a strip, run it through water, and put it on whatever you're going to put it on and smooth it out.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LYNDON DADSWELL: As it dries you do another one, another one, another one.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Build it up like that, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: So what happens, you get a sort of anatomy. It becomes anatomical. There are tensions. There are bits of paper pulling themselves until they want to snap. Not often enough, but sometimes it happens. So that, in a sense, it's getting back to the figure again. I make tendons without thinking of it. I'm just thinking of the word for you now. It's a way of working that suited me, and from them I've done these others.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. The metal ones?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Metal ones, but not with the same actual physical tension.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no. Is that because now you feel that you can't actually physically do the metal work yourself? Do you feel that, you know, if you were physically able to actually weld and actually do that, you would get that tension?

LYNDON DADSWELL: As it is (inaudible) now—let's run over this quickly—I give to this chap and stand by him while he works.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, you watch him all the time.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Not all the time, no, but say twice a week.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: He'll do whatever I suggest, faithfully. The question I was going to answer, what was it?

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JAMES GLEESON: I'm not sure now. Do you feel that there is any gap between what results with someone else doing the actual fabrication of your work and what would happen if you did it, every bit of it yourself?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Oh, yes. Now, the difference is, the main difference is that if I were making it myself, at certain stages something I had along the way to getting it would reveal itself.

JAMES GLEESON: That's what I was thinking.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Then I would take this, if it was advantageous to the job. He can't do that. He mustn't do it.

JAMES GLEESON: No, of course not. That would be imposing his interpretation.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes. I always say, half joking, you know, 'I don't want you to improve it, thank you'.

JAMES GLEESON: But I think in creating any kind of work from, say, an original sketch or drawing, in the process of creation, alterations, changes occur.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Of course. Well. now this is too rigid for that.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I'd have to stand over him every five minutes to get that. But I like the way of working now. But I'm getting weaker in the hands. It's embarrassing if I go to a restaurant to eat, I've got to get someone to cut my steak up for me.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, dear. Yes. How long have you had this? It's Parkinson's disease?

LYNDON DADSWELL: About 10 years.

JAMES GLEESON: Ten years? Goodness.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Developing, yes. They tell me it's very slow.

JAMES GLEESON: But it's good that you're still able to work?

LYNDON DADSWELL: I'm in fact doing more than I've ever done.

JAMES GLEESON: Really? Isn't that marvellous?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Not in numbers perhaps. Yes, with drawings too. I think a lot of people think I'm nearly dead, which is maybe true of course.

JAMES GLEESON: You don't feel the shaking that accompanies it. Is it a difficulty when you're drawing?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Once I'm drawing or modelling or whatever I'm doing, I'm steady as a rock.

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JAMES GLEESON: Really? Is that so?

LYNDON DADSWELL: Yes. There's no worry from that side of things.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, that is marvellous, isn't it? Well, I think that about covers it, Lyndon, unless you have some anything more you'd like to say.

LYNDON DADSWELL: I'll probably think of it when you're gone.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Lyndon, thank you very much indeed.

LYNDON DADSWELL: Well, thank you. I hope something worthwhile comes from it.

JAMES GLEESON: I'm sure it has. Thank you very much indeed.