

JAMES GLEESON INTERVIEWS: FRANK HODGKINSON

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JAMES GLEESON: Frank, I'm talking to you now in the studio at Melbourne University where you are now Artist in Residence. How long have you been here?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I came in August. It's a short appointment by agreement with the Vice Principal and myself—or the committee really, who appoint the Artist in Residence—because I wanted to spend a little time in Melbourne for private reasons. I didn't want to take a 12 month appointment because I felt it was too great a disruption in time. I've got so many other things going. I'm in the middle of a series of paintings based on Arnhem Land and I've been at that now for 18 months. I want to get back up there. It's rather difficult to come to Melbourne, as I did in the winter, and dream up ideas about Arnhem Land, you know. There's practically no sun here and there's brilliant sunlight out every day in Arnhem Land. So for those various reasons we decided on just the one semester, which has proved very successful from my point of view because I was able fortunately to break the studio in and get rid of the ghosts of the previous Artist in Residence, both of whom I like personally and I like their work. But my work has nothing in common with theirs, you know, William Delafield Cook and Robert Jacks.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see, yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Who are already diverse, and I understand the artist that follows me is John Hoyland from England. He arrives sometime next year, I'm not sure when.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Frank, some biographical information. Exactly when were you born and where?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I was born in Sydney on 28th April 1919, a war baby, in the western suburbs of Sydney.

JAMES GLEESON: Where?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Ashfield.

JAMES GLEESON: Was there any sort of background of interest in the arts? How did you come to come to be interested in art?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Well, I think immediately through an older brother of mine. I was born on his birthday, oddly enough, my brother Roy, who was a well known graphic artist.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah yes, of course.

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FRANK HODGKINSON: He was a war artist. Did some brilliant, I think, graphic work about the war, and worked on the *Melbourne Herald* for many years. I was a sort of a birthday present for him and I think he fostered me into drawing.

JAMES GLEESON: Was he much older than you?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, eight years.

JAMES GLEESON: Eight years.

FRANK HODGKINSON: So that was tremendous encouragement in the early days. I think we can trace it back to our grandfather on my mother's side, a man called Henry Corbett, who was an astronomer and astrologer who lectured at Sydney University and he was also head of the PMG in Sydney. So he was an all rounder. He did some rather delightful drawings, some of which still exist. On my father's side, my father was a sign writer and decorator, very well trained, so there was every reason why I—

JAMES GLEESON: There was a background there.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: So it was natural for you to be interested in art.

FRANK HODGKINSON: I think so, yes, yes. It was important in the family. There were paintings on the walls. Not very good ones, but they were paintings one could look at and you know, criticise.

JAMES GLEESON: Did your brother teach you drawing at all?

FRANK HODGKINSON: He gave me some initial lessons, yes, and then I went to Dattilo Rubbo at the Royal Art Society and studied also with Sidney Long. But Rubbo impressed me more because of his power of teaching, teaching drawing basically. He insisted upon, you know, the rudiments of drawings in the manner of the old masters and he really bashed the thing into you, you know. If you had anything going, you couldn't help but learn.

JAMES GLEESON: What years were they, Frank?

FRANK HODGKINSON: They were 1936 to '38.

JAMES GLEESON: Can you remember any fellow students there at the time?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, Wallace Thornton was there, Donald Friend, and Dennis Adams, who I think did some ships during the war time, that sort of thing. They were the top students.

JAMES GLEESON: You found that Dattilo really gave you that background of drawing?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I think so. As a personality he captured my imagination and he kept repeating certain things which confused me for a start. Like, 'You must learn to visualise the rhythm'. Well, that confused me tremendously. I'd say, 'How is that, Senor?'. He insisted on being called Senor. He'd take a big piece of

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charcoal and say, 'Like zis and like zat' and these sweeping lines would go through a large piece of paper which confused me even more. But fairly quickly I got on to his idea of the breadth of the thing and the essential lines only, you know. A little like in a more modern version of Matisse, you know, searching for the essential line, that sort of thing. That I got from him and it was invaluable.

JAMES GLEESON: When did you first begin to exhibit, Frank?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Oh, not till long after that.

JAMES GLEESON: You were in the war, you were involved?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I was involved in the war for six years.

JAMES GLEESON: In any art capacity?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Towards the end I was appointed a sort of half-baked war artist. I was put in charge of a field team because I already had a legitimate commission in the infantry and was bored with that. They were looking for officers to lead these teams of photographers and other war artists, writers and that sort, war historians, more or less organise them, administrate them and front to the powers that be.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Because most of them were completely undisciplined and didn't wear the right clothing and they needed their bottoms wiped and that sort of thing. So the part of the job was that I did some drawings and a certain amount of painting and I covered one or two of the landings in Borneo, specifically at Balikpapan and the peace ceremonies at Balikpapan and also at Samarinda, which it gave me a chance to get my hand in again to a certain extent.

JAMES GLEESON: What happened to those? Were they drawings or paintings?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Well, mostly drawings. There are some, one or two, I think three or four oils, and mostly gouache things done in inks and drawings, and these are in the War Memorial collection now. That was part of the deal; I had to hand over that sort of thing.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. After the war what happened?

FRANK HODGKINSON: After the war I went to Europe as quickly as I could get there. The war was a great frustration because I'd planned to go in 1939 and, of course, everybody was fleeing and coming back. People like Wallace Thornton were caught, I believe, in Italy, getting out. So I got a ship as soon as I could in 1947 and travelled to London. I actually travelled with Douglas Watson.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah, yes. I went over in '47 too.

FRANK HODGKINSON: I remember that, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: We met.

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FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, we met in London.

JAMES GLEESON: Majorca, too.

FRANK HODGKINSON: That's right, in Majorca. Yes a little later. I think the meeting in Majorca was after the Rubinstein, wasn't it? I think the Rubinstein in 1958.

JAMES GLEESON: That's right, that was later.

FRANK HODGKINSON: We met in that little village of Deià.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: But I spent six years in Europe, between '47 and '53. I didn't take to London at all.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

FRANK HODGKINSON: The grey skies just defeated me. I spent I think 10 days there and went screaming across the channel and felt much better as soon as I got into France. I don't know whether it was probably purely psychological, but the skies seemed to be higher and the landscape much brighter. I, of course, like everybody else, had been a keen follower of the French Impressionists. I could see them all over the place and some of the Post Impressionists around Dieppe particularly, and Gauguin. Just about everybody worked around Dieppe, didn't they?

JAMES GLEESON: What was your work like at that time?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Fairly academic, but breaking away from it. I sensed, you know, something broader than that, but I had to work my way into it. A painter I fell in love with very early in the piece was Bonnard, and he died in that year of 1947. He had a retrospective at the Orangerie, and that impressed me very, very strongly. So I went through a period of painting things that were in the manner of Bonnard. But my drawing was always, you know, a bit too firm to be convincingly Bonnard.

JAMES GLEESON: You were living in France now?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, I lived in Paris in 1947 for five months, and then went to Italy. I didn't care much for Rome. I spent most of the time in Italy, about three months in Florence. I had a look at Venice. I was there for a few days but Florence to this day still captures my imagination more than any other centre in Italy. Then my money ran out so I had to go back to England again and try to make some.

JAMES GLEESON: Were you exhibiting at this time?

FRANK HODGKINSON: No, I didn't exhibit at that time. I didn't feel that I was ready. I sent some paintings back to the Macquarie Galleries. They had a show every year at that time of Australian painters who were working abroad. You've probably exhibited in those shows. I didn't see them because I was abroad. But apart from that I didn't show anything until I got back to Australia in 1953. Then I

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started to build a house, which kept me occupied. I by this time had married and had a daughter. I didn't really exhibit much till about 1954 and then just in the Easter and Christmas shows at the Macquarie. I had my first one man show at the Macquarie in 1955, which went very well, and I was rather surprised. Even Paul Haefliger was kind about it; a little patronising but kind.

JAMES GLEESON: I'm sorry to interrupt but the thing that stick in my mind as where the big impact came were the shows you had at the Hungry Horse later. That was the sixties, was it?

FRANK HODGKINSON: That was 1963, February '63. This was after the Rubinstein. The Rubinstein really gave me a chance to work fulltime.

JAMES GLEESON: What was the year you won?

FRANK HODGKINSON: That was '58.

JAMES GLEESON: Fifty-eight.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Nineteen fifty-eight. It was the first opportunity I'd had to be able to work fulltime at painting.

JAMES GLEESON: You went back to Europe then?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I went back to Europe. I arrived in London, spent just a few days there meeting people from the British Council, getting some addresses on the continent. I was headed for Paris for a start, where I met Madam Rubinstein who was quite helpful. I was astonished by her apartment, the penthouse L'Isle St Louis, particularly the roof garden which had views of Paris on three sides overlooking the entire thing. Then on the fourth side there was a slightly taller building, so she'd had an enormous set of mirrors put up there, surrounded in gilt frames. So you got the view six times really. From there I went to Italy and had a look around. The Rubinstein, as you probably know, was not very well endowed. It was a thousand pounds and you had to travel the world, pay your own fares. In my case I had to take my wife and child, so that made it more expensive. I really had to look for a base where we could eke out the money. In those days Spain was perhaps the cheapest. In fact, I think surely was the cheapest country in Europe. So I went to Spain and found out that John Olsen was on Majorca. I got a message through him and he said, 'Come across here, this is beautiful'. It was a toss up whether we'd stay in Spain or go to Greece. I'd been to Spain previously and enjoyed it but I'd never been to Greece. However, we crossed to Majorca and John was living in this little village of Deià, where Robert Griefes has been living for years.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: I was charmed by the whole setting and I was told by several people who'd been to Greece that this was the most beautiful island in the Mediterranean and it was silly to travel. Also it was closer to the centres of Europe, to Paris, Germany and all sorts of places. So I found a very pleasant house called Canbee set in its own grounds. A very typical Spanish house made of rocks and mud and stuff like that, very thick walls with a well, it's own source of water, and very poor electricity, a fuel stove and that sort of thing. But it was absolutely charming. You remember, you came to that house.

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JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: So we decided to stay there and my daughter went to school at the local village school and in no time she was speaking Spanish fluently and (inaudible). I managed to get quite a lot of work done there. From there I ventured back to Madrid where I met some of the painters, Mejares and Canaga and Toni Tàpies. They seemed to think that my work was okay. It seemed to belong to the sort of thing that they did, but it was given a slightly different twist, I suppose. That was the Australian thing that I was bringing into it. They asked me to show with them in the Biosca Gallery in Madrid in 1960. I went on from there to London and I had the temerity to invite various dealers to have a look at my work, and I got the cold shoulder from just about everybody. In fact, the director of Tooth's at that time said to me, 'What age are you?' I said, 'I'm 39'. He said, 'What a pity'. He said, 'Had you been 10 years younger I would have taken you on'. He said, 'We're looking for a young painter at the moment, and we want somebody young whose name we can build up and, you know, we want some mileage out of him'. He was very honest about it. I said, 'But had I been 29 I couldn't have painted like this'. He saw the point. However, I made a contact through the British Council with the Drian Gallery, a lady called Halima Nadeech, who was very off-hand and said, well, perhaps she would come and have a look at my work, but I shouldn't be surprised if she didn't turn up because she was a very busy lady. We arranged the date for the following day at midday and, of course, I had a bottle of sherry waiting and all this sort of thing. She arrived and I ushered her upstairs and she had a look. She walked through the door and I said, 'Well, may I take your coat?' She said, 'No I won't be here long enough for that'. I felt like, you know. However, when she saw the works she said, 'Yes, I will take off my coat'. Previously she'd told me that she was booked out for two years and couldn't show me anyway, and then she said, 'When would you like to show?' I said, 'Well, when do you have a free date?' She said, 'In two months time'. She said, 'I've been let down by a painter and you can have that one'. So that was the start.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. It was a one-man show?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, a one man show.

JAMES GLEESON: When did you come back to Australia?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I came back to Australia in late '62. I painted that show for the Hungry Horse.

JAMES GLEESON: In Australia?

FRANK HODGKINSON: In Australia. Showed it in February '63, and I think I left again while the show was still running and went back to Spain where I had commitments to show.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: I also had a commitment in Paris with two salons, the Autumn Salon and the Salon des Comparaisons. So I had to get paintings there for these things. By this time Spain was travelling my work along with Spanish painters.

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JAMES GLEESON: I think they were regarding you as Spanish?

FRANK HODGKINSON: You know, and these shows were touring Europe. So as I'd started it, I wanted to keep it going.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: There was no confusion about me being Spanish. What they were trying to create was a deliberate thing. They wanted to create, say, a school of Spain or a school of Madrid, rather like the Ecole de Paris. So it was a promotion deal really.

JAMES GLEESON: Frank, when did you paint *Sunburst*? Is *Sunburst* the title?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Mm?

JAMES GLEESON: Is *Sunburst* the correct title?

FRANK HODGKINSON: No, that's *Time of the last cicada*.

JAMES GLEESON: It is?

FRANK HODGKINSON: This one over here.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Is *Time of the last cicada*.

JAMES GLEESON: Not *Sunburst*?

FRANK HODGKINSON: No, *Sunburst* is another painting, painted in Spain. I think it's about a format of six feet by five feet. It's very strong in primary colours, mainly in reds and yellows. It's a sort of circular form like that, like a big sun bursting and bits falling off it.

JAMES GLEESON: What happened to that?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I thought that was bought for the National Collection.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, perhaps we have two. This is definitely not *Sunburst*?

FRANK HODGKINSON: No, that's *Time of the last cicada*.

JAMES GLEESON: Well now, this raises a confusion.

FRANK HODGKINSON: I thought that painting was in the collection of the Sydney University, or the University of New South Wales, no University of New South Wales. That was the impression I had. But it was bought while I was away, as *Sunburst* was too.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, this is something we'll have to follow up, whether this *Time of the last cicada* is also in our collection.

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FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes. If it's not you might get it from the University of New South Wales.

JAMES GLEESON: Because it is a very beautiful one.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes. I think it's a good one of that period.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, we'll talk about both of them. *Sunburst*, what year was that painted, do you remember?

FRANK HODGKINSON: *Sunburst* was painted in 1967.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: It was shown in the Festival of Perth, at the Skinner Galleries in Perth. They had a one man show with Rose Skinner during the festival. I followed a show of Sidney Nolan's. A difficult thing to follow, a difficult act to follow, because he'd already sold brilliantly and I thought that there were a limited number of buyers in Perth. However, my show didn't do too badly; not nearly as well as Sid's did. Yes, that was an exhibition based on Lorca's, Garcia Lorca's poetry.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, was it?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I showed some bronzes, not very large ones. The tallest was about three feet, I think, mainly of his women who were sort of manacled, you know, emotionally and physically by their men in positions of agony and torture, that sort of thing. They were cast in bronze in Barcelona and they were sort of dark and stark. I played them off against a background of these very colourful paintings, which were painted mostly in strong yellows and strong reds which were this blood and sand, the Spanish national colours. These were largely based upon Moorish patterns. I'd done something else with them, taken them in other directions. But there's a repetition of pattern in them like the Moorish tiles.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Frank, were you using oil at that time?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, I was using oils on canvas.

JAMES GLEESON: And *Sunburst* is an oil on canvas?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes. Yes, *Sunburst is an oil on canvas*, and so is that painting there. That's painted with oils on canvas.

JAMES GLEESON: Day of the last cicada.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, *Time of the last cicada*.

JAMES GLEESON: *Time of the last cicada*.

FRANK HODGKINSON: *Time of the last cicada*, which is simply another way of saying the end of summer.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

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FRANK HODGKINSON: But I'd sprinkled some sand into certain areas, I think—largely that background, which is a sort of deep greenish colour in actual fact. I'd sprinkled some sand into the wet paint and then painted over the top to give it a variation of texture.

JAMES GLEESON: When was *Time of the last cicada*?

FRANK HODGKINSON: That was painted in 1962-63.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, earlier than *Sunburst*?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Oh yes, a good deal earlier.

JAMES GLEESON: Was this shown at the Hungry Horse?

FRANK HODGKINSON: That was shown at the Hungry Horse, yes. Then I think Kim Bonython had it after that.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

FRANK HODGKINSON: I had the impression that Bonython had sold that painting to the University of New South Wales.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, that could be so and it could have got into our files by mistake, but that's something I'll have to check.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes. I have seen that painting. In fact, it was shown, if it is the same painting—it's not a very good photograph of it, the colours aren't—

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

FRANK HODGKINSON: If it is that painting, it was shown here at the Melbourne University in the retrospective I had in 1973.

JAMES GLEESON: Frank, since then you went back to London. You've been living in London, I think, in the late sixties, weren't you?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I went back to London. I never actually lived there for any length of time. I lived mainly in Spain after that. I lived in Madrid for a time, then in Barcelona, and then finally I went back to Majorca and actually bought a house there in a little mountain village called Galilea, which is about 15 kilometres from Palma, and only about twenty minutes from the airport. So I could get anywhere I wanted in no time. There's an international airport there.

JAMES GLEESON: When did you come back to Australia with the idea of living back here?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I left Majorca in '68, and sold out, deciding I'd had enough of that, and went to live in Rome. I lived till 1971. I returned to Australia in '71.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

FRANK HODGKINSON: I have been back to Europe since but—

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JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. But you really now feel yourself—

FRANK HODGKINSON: Oh, I'm based here now. I really am. I feel that there's such a lot to be done here. Whereas everything's been done, you know. I'm thinking particularly of landscape, which has always interested me. Though I've been dubbed frequently an abstract painter, my paintings have always been based on landscape and figure and frequently a merging of the two, which is the theme I continually come back to.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: I'm here to stay. I feel that the landscape anywhere you look, you know, even just outside the cities, is quite unique. It hasn't been painted yet, you know. They've just scratched the surface. Fred Williams has done some marvellous things but it can be taken in other directions, and hence this Arnhem thing. I've worked in the Flinders Ranges, in the Coorong of South Australia, the mouth of the Murray River which is, you know, something else again. It's like a lunar scape there, you know, the fine grittiness of the sands and vast spaces, the erotically shaped sand dunes and bird life, as you know. I've been to Lake Eyre and had a look at that. That fascinates me but it doesn't grab me nearly as much as, say, the Olgas or now Arnhem Land which I think is something fresh once again.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, (inaudible) studies that you've made, I take it from your Arnhem Land experience?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes. A lot of them are taken directly out of sketch books and notes I made. Some of them I've developed. This thing behind you here where you can see, well, it could be rock and river forms, taking on a kind of human form.

JAMES GLEESON: Exactly, yes, I can see those.

FRANK HODGKINSON: You can see the nude, the top series, a female of course, and the lower series are the male nude, but blending with rocks. There's another one just over there which looks like two bottoms and buttocks and things, which is really based on the base of a couple of trees which were nestling together. During the wet the root system had been washed away and then pandanus is shooting up from the bottom.

JAMES GLEESON: Frank, do you usually start off with gouache or pencil?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Sometimes I do pencil drawings, though usually I work directly with gouache.

JAMES GLEESON: On the spot?

FRANK HODGKINSON: On the spot. It's such a fluid medium I can work quickly with it. I keep usually three pads going and a large sheet of paper as well, so that while they're drying I can rip off the top of a pad, you know, and get on to the next layer and so I'm never held up.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, and then back in the studio you develop whatever you feel is—

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FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes. That's a gouache developed in the studio, based on a rock form in Arnhem Land.

JAMES GLEESON: That's a beautiful one, it's very fine.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Actually, I couldn't find out the name of this rock. I will find it one day. But the local Aboriginal tribes have been using it for centuries for target practice. It's actually sandstone which is eroded and it's formed into kind of the form of a bird really, and I've taken it farther by introducing those egg shapes on the right there which get tangled up with a dead tree and what have you.

JAMES GLEESON: In all of these, I feel, you know, this fusion of organic and inorganic forms.

FRANK HODGKINSON: This is what I'm after. I think I'll probably finish my days still teased by the same thing.

JAMES GLEESON: (inaudible) develop that into an oil?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, I've already started one. It's upside down here, but I haven't got very far with it. I'm waiting for those layers of paint to dry. Oils, as you know, is a sort of—

JAMES GLEESON: You don't use acrylic at all?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Not any more. I used to. But I've had some disasters with them. They take on after a few years a sort of rubbery surface which I don't like, and the colour ranges are very strong but the colours are a bit sort of, you know, put my teeth on edge.

JAMES GLEESON: You're an oil fan?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I prefer the subtlety of oil and I like the living quality of the pigment. As you know, the pigment never dies because it never dries out completely. It can be revived again. If it does dry out you can put it in the sun and it comes to life. But acrylics, mm, I've had nasty crackings with acrylics.

JAMES GLEESON: Have you?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Which I find a bit deadly dangerous.

JAMES GLEESON: Do you plan to go back to the Arnhem Land?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, I'm going back in February because I want to be there during the really wet season, the raining season, when all the landscape I knew, all the plains below the Arnhem Land escarpment which I know fairly well in the dry season are completely covered with water. The rivers like the East Alligator, South Alligator, the Adelaide and the Mary overflow their banks and you travel by boat rather than by car.

JAMES GLEESON: Really?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes.

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JAMES GLEESON: How do you manage to get around up there, or get to where you want to go? Do you have a, some sort of Land Rover?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Well, I have two sources; one from the museum, who've been kind enough to let me use some of their transport. The last trip I did with Colin Jack Hinton, Dr Colin Jack Hinton, who's the Director of Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory. He had to go out on a field trip and he took me with him.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

FRANK HODGKINSON: We just went out and camped for days and days and days. He showed me some rock paintings I'd not seen before. Previous trips I had stayed with one of the mining companies, who were kind enough to let me use the facilities of the camp. They put me in a van which was air-conditioned—that was nice at night, because it's so hot and humid. They fed me and we were fortunate enough to have a Chinese cook with whom I became very friendly and he cooked me some marvellous Chinese dishes. They have a fleet of four-wheel drive trucks and, if one wasn't being used, I could take it at any time.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

FRANK HODGKINSON: So I couldn't have been better off.

JAMES GLEESON: What is attractive about that area that interests you? Is it some quality that you can define?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I had seen photographs which intrigued me. Then with this looming mining of uranium, we know that even though the mining companies would do a very good job in restoring the landscape, you just can't restore a landscape. There'd be endless damage done, not only by the mining but by the thousands of people who'll be employed. They're going to do the real damage, you know, and their children. People have to live en famille up there and they'll be going out over weekends and probably scratching graffiti over the rock paintings and trampling down, you know, growth. I know the buffaloes have done a lot of damage but human beings can do much more damage than animals can as they get working.

JAMES GLEESON: So it's going to change.

FRANK HODGKINSON: I think it will change very rapidly. Roads will be used more and more, so that will through dust over growth and that dust will cover the rock paintings once again. So I thought it would be a good idea to get up there and have a look at it before the damage was done. That was the start of it. But now I just find the subject matter up there endless and quite mysterious, you know. People have talked a lot about the Dream Time but now I'm beginning to believe in it and feel that I'm becoming part of it. There's an otherness about the place, you know, it's quite other. I've always been interested in the other face of the landscape.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: It seems to me that I can dream myself into that world and perhaps understand the other face of that landscape.

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JAMES GLEESON: Well, clearly what you're doing is not just depicting the landscape, but interpreting it, getting towards the spirit of the place, as you sense it, and trying to recreate that in your painting.

FRANK HODGKINSON: That's exactly what I'm after. You said it brilliantly.

JAMES GLEESON: Frank, I see over on this other wall a range of lithographs that you did. Have you done many lithographs?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I did a couple many years ago, but I hadn't touched the medium again until last year.

JAMES GLEESON: Where did you study lithography?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I didn't actually study it, I just did a little with dear old Strom Gould in Sydney, who had a press and we played around with it. I think only one or two prints exist now. I destroyed most of them. I wasn't very happy with them as prints. But this time I seem to have gone off with a flourish. I've been working with Druckma Press here in Melbourne. John Robertson and George Baldessin, Les Kossatz and I think Jan Senbergs too, bought the press between them. It's an old German press, electrically powered, a beautiful press.

JAMES GLEESON: Whereabouts?

FRANK HODGKINSON: That's in South Melbourne. Carlton, I mean, just across from—it was designed for cartography, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Big maps, military maps, and that sort of thing. But it's a very sensitive press and it works brilliantly for, you know, artists.

JAMES GLEESON: Is that where Les Kossatz has his studio, Kaye Street, in Carlton?

FRANK HODGKINSON: No, it's not in Kaye Street. Gosh, I've got a shocking memory for names. I can give you the address later. I've got it written down in my book.

JAMES GLEESON: Who found the machine? Baldessin?

FRANK HODGKINSON: I think John Robinson and George were together when they discovered this place. The press was actually in the situation so they were able to buy a lease on the premises and buy the press at the same time.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

FRANK HODGKINSON: They've produced some marvellous stuff. George Baldessin has done some marvellous things there. I was working with him the actual day that he died, you know. He went off to lunch—

JAMES GLEESON: A tragedy, yes.

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FRANK HODGKINSON: A terrible tragedy and it's very sad. Fred Williams has done a series there. Cliff Pugh has done some. John Olsen has done many, many coloured lithographs with John Robinson.

JAMES GLEESON: What's the name of the—

FRANK HODGKINSON: Druckma.

JAMES GLEESON: Druckma. D-R-A—

FRANK HODGKINSON: D-R-U-K-M-A. I think it's K-M-A not C-K.

JAMES GLEESON: How did they arrive at that name?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Oh, it was the name of the press. It's written on the actual press, so they thought they'd retain that. They produced a series of eight lithographs. It was actually for the Labour Party so that they could restore premises in Carlton for their headquarters, some rather charming old national trust houses. They chose eight painters. I think it was Len French, George Baldessin, John Olsen, John Brack, Clifton Pugh, Les Kossatz and myself, I think.

JAMES GLEESON: These were done on that press?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes. Well, that was the lithograph that was in that folio that I had on the right called *The seed*.

JAMES GLEESON: Two coloured?

FRANK HODGKINSON: That's a two colour lithograph. They printed 300 of that and I think they've sold most of them and made some money out of it.

JAMES GLEESON: The other one's that I see, there are, what, four?

FRANK HODGKINSON: There are four in limited editions of 15. I try not to release them singly. I want to keep them as a group. It's a developing idea based upon the Banksia seeds. You know the Banksia fruit, which has fascinated me for many years.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: I like its strange sort of furriness, spikiness. I think it's a very Australian form. It looks a bit like an animal at times.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, it does.

FRANK HODGKINSON: And sometimes it looks almost human. So, as you can see there, I've given it some human appearance, characteristics.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: It's part of this sort of thing we were discussing earlier involving, you know—

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JAMES GLEESON: Transference of property.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Transference of properties, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: They're very beautiful. They have that direct quality of drawing which I find very pleasing. Did you use stone?

FRANK HODGKINSON: No, this was on zinc, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: And you drew straight onto it?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Directly onto the plate, yes. Yes, you have to steel your nerves and just go at it. Forget you're working on zinc. Think it's just an old piece of paper, preferably butcher's paper or something like that. It's funny how we never get over those complexes of our poverty stricken years when we freeze when we're faced with, you know, an expensive sheet of paper.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Frank, I think that covers it quite well.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Good.

JAMES GLEESON: Unless you've got anything else you'd like to add now.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Just that in '77 I spent the whole of the year in Papua New Guinea.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, did you?

FRANK HODGKINSON: As Artist in Residence at the university there, attached to what they call the Creative Arts Centre, which I think now has become the National Art School, working with natives.

JAMES GLEESON: Where is this, at Moresby?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, it's just outside of Moresby at Waigano, working with the natives and there were some quite bright ones there too. We were doing little, you know, silkscreen works, serigraphs. Much more sophisticated, their equipment was much more sophisticated than I thought it would be. I did a series of paintings up there and they allowed me—

JAMES GLEESON: New Guinea subjects?

FRANK HODGKINSON: New Guinea subjects. They allowed me, you know, freedom of movements. I did a canoe patrol down the Sepik River which lasted three and a half to four weeks. We covered about 600 miles, I think, of the river in a canoe, stopping at various villages and the people were very, very kind to me. I couldn't speak their language. I had a shaky knowledge of pidgin but was able to make myself understood and they were very, very kind all the way.

JAMES GLEESON: But it clearly hasn't had the same effect on you, on your visual imagination, that Arnhem Land had?

FRANK HODGKINSON: No. I think perhaps the reason for that is that there's so much green in New Guinea and it's my unfavourite colour, you know.

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JAMES GLEESON: I see.

FRANK HODGKINSON: It was like, you know, working in gigantic salad bowl, like a huge lettuce. I've always found greens a bit unpleasant. However, I took it on as a challenge and I painted a couple of things. One was about eight feet long by about six feet deep, all in greens, and I called it *The sound of green* because I feel that colours do have sounds and can be associated with sounds.

JAMES GLEESON: Lorca had that thing about green.

FRANK HODGKINSON: That's right. Green, I want you green.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Yes, it's almost sensual.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

FRANK HODGKINSON: But I showed everything I'd done at the new museum up there and it seemed to go pretty well. *The sound of green* is in their collection now. I showed some of the paintings at Realities last year here in Melbourne. I think the colour knocked them out, all these greens and fiery colours. But I just feel that the Arnhem Land thing and the colour in Arnhem Land suits my palate and suits my temperament very much better.

JAMES GLEESON: How far into it are you now in terms of having a show?

FRANK HODGKINSON: Well, I planned only one show. I've deliberately not planned shows until I get, you know, further advanced with this work. But I planned a show here at the University Gallery for early November next year.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

FRANK HODGKINSON: So that gives me plenty of time.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, marvellous. Well, I look forward to seeing it.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Good.

JAMES GLEESON: Thank you very much, Frank.

FRANK HODGKINSON: Thank you, James.