

## **JAMES GLEESON INTERVIEWS: ROBERT KLIPPEL**

4 August 1978

**JAMES GLEESON:** Bob, I want to get all the information we can about all the works of yours we have in the National Collection, and I thought we'd begin with this *Red Sandstone* which of course is one of my favourite works, partly because I saw every detail of it being made. Can you tell me first of all just the material, where you got it, when you started work on it?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Well, I think in 1947 I was searching around for a stone in London and I came across this piece of stone from a bombed building. I liked the colour and the shape and I had it shipped out to the Abbey where I was living, and it lay there in that workshop for quite a long time. I'm not sure, I think I began it 1948.

**JAMES GLEESON:** There were drawings, I remember, earlier than that?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, drawings that I didn't know at the time, but they seem to relate to my thinking about this stone. Unconsciously I think I had it in mind, you know, thinking about it, but I didn't consciously.

**JAMES GLEESON:** You didn't use the drawings.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I didn't consciously because when I actually did come to start on the carving, I remember that I based it on a cylinder and a sphere balanced on top of it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** And used that as a basis and using all my formal interrelationships and the movements and rhythms and tensions and hot and cold forms and everything that I was involved with at that time. Everything I knew about sculpture at that time.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I know at this period you were also working on two major works in clay.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Something of that same sort of interrelationship of forms and the combination of organic and mechanical forms occurred in those two pieces—now lost. Is that true?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Absolutely. Yes. This was very connected to the organic machine and the machine monster, but it was more simplified I suppose than those ones.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Simplified perhaps because of the medium, the stone demanded it?

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, I remember the clay ones had a much greater complexity because perhaps of the plasticity of the medium.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, well it could have been like a fragment of the organic machine brought up into a bigger scale just made from—well I see this bigger scheme of things. You know, some small to large and the same process goes on in all of them, even if they're complex or simple. But I do remember where these parts, like these knobs come there, where I was still involved in this process of inner structure which they were the extremities of the axis, of these lines where the masses were suspended. I did think very much about it and when I was carving a bit down here, you know, it would be all the time looking at the extremes all the time.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Thinking all the relationships very much in this one. Well, in everything for that matter. Very much more consciously I think on this one.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I remember in conversation at that time that you were very deeply concerned with the idea of the surface being an absolutely logical form evolved out of the inner structure of the work, so that you in fact envisaged the whole inner structure in its relationship to the surface.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right. That's exactly what I was trying to do with this carving, to show this inner structure, but I found that I didn't know enough about inner structure. I kept going—well, I've kept going all these years—and I never really, apart from one or two carvings, done any more, because I felt I still haven't understood it sufficiently this whole inner structure idea.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see, but it has been a really central concern of yours.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Oh, it's really interrelated to this whole concept of geometry and process involving the whole universe. It's not just our little—you know, just an object for its own sake.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes. Now I understand that because this comes out very clearly in your notes and in your work too. But I remember drawings from I think about this period in which you explore the surface as a sort of edge between the inner structure and a negative volume outside, a negative structure implied by the skin of the object.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That would be absolutely right. Like the skeleton of a figure would be inherent within that and I image this part, this round part of a casing with all this activity, complicated activity, going on within it. I try to imagine exactly what went on inside, and where it came to surface, I try to be aware of the whole thing.

**JAMES GLEESON:** This is of course what gives the work its feeling of inevitability, a feeling that it couldn't be anything else.

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes. Well, remember in the notes I was going on about relief in the round with internally hollow and I felt this was what was wrong with the sculpture, that nobody was understanding working from the inside out. I tried here. Well, I feel I could have done better, but also it took on two completely different aspects from this view and that one, they give the idea, which I accepted at the time. Which is being a bit unorthodox, but the Henry Moore thing was supposed to be able to imagine the whole thing three-dimensionally. This one, well, you'd walk around this and get a surprise. It was totally different. This is more surreal sort of feeling about this strange head like thing with teeth or something. But I remember particularly working with this range of hard and soft forms in this one. You know, like brittle cast iron steel type of form against very soft organic forms. Like in this part here, it's very soft compared to some of these other hard planes and things. Funnily enough I notice a part like that, I've noticed in microscopic form books the same sort of things implied.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, like the forms in a seedpod, or something like that.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Exactly. Yes. Because I didn't know then, you know it was unconsciously. I feel that one just sort of knows about this thing intuitively. It was built into one.

**JAMES GLEESON:** But leading up to this you'd done a lot of work studying all sorts of forms in nature and mechanical forms. I remember the notebooks from that period are full of analytical notes examining forms. You were, I suppose, building what you called if I remember, a form alphabet.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Vocabulary forms in which I could—

**JAMES GLEESON:** Instinctively call on.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Just draw upon intuitively. Or when you just have that built into you where you need the certain form, well, it just would come out the right time at the right place. But I would feel that like now this sear at the top, I mean you can see it on this photograph better, but it's broken up, and that was supposed to be a—

**JAMES GLEESON:** Cylindrical.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** On certain spheres it looked like a cylinder. But I only used that as a very basis and I threw that aside, once I had that main sort of structure idea.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, that I think clarifies it very well.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** And these hard driving forms against the slow, more lyrical forms, and thinking very much in three dimensional mass relationships. But all the relationships, you know, not just masses, but the planes and the lines and space. Although one, there's no actual holes in this one but the shape of the space of the contours, as we discussed it in London, was extremely important to me.

4 August 1978

**JAMES GLEESON:** Bob, was this—if I remember correctly it was—the last of your works in stone?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I'm not sure. It could have been in London. I did one in 1954. That one *Entities Emerging from a Mass*.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Ah yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That was stone, that was the last one in stone, I'm sorry. But I did a woodcarving, solid form.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Solid form.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Solid form.

**JAMES GLEESON:** So it's not the last of the volumetric ones but it is the last of the stone carving.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** The last of the stone carvings, yes. Because I felt I just didn't know enough, and yet technically I feel there's no problem, I could carve stone quite easily. I find it easier to do that than metal work, as a matter of fact.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Just off the top of my head, I can only remember three stone works altogether. The Harry Boyd one that De Crebbin has, the Leg of lamb one—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, that's right.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Painted.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Which was thrown overboard in the Atlantic, on top of me—a leg of ham. There was another one which was discarded, a soft sort of stone, and this. So I've only really done three carvings, and I've got a half finished alabaster started in 1947 in London downstairs.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Which I could work on today as if it were yesterday. It doesn't feel any different to me. The time doesn't make any difference, actually.

**JAMES GLEESON:** No, no. Well the same basic problems are central to your whole concern as a sculptor.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes. It hasn't changed essentially since 1946, the concept of sculpture.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Bob, this was shown in our joint show in the London Gallery in November 1948.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Right.

4 August 1978

**JAMES GLEESON:** Then you showed it again in the Nina Dausset Gallery?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, that didn't go. It was too heavy to carry to Paris.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Oh, it stayed in London.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That stayed in London. Luckily, otherwise it might have been lost. But I had it shipped out when I came back in 1950, and the next time it was shown was in the open air show in 1951 in the Botanic Gardens.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Oh yes, the beginning of the Sculptors Association.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** The Sculptors Society.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Sculptors Society.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Sculptors Society. I remember you wrote quite enthusiastically about it in the review of that one. After that I don't think it was shown again, apart from that next time around the 25th anniversary of the Sculptors Society down at the Rock, down there.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Ah yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** It was lent by the Commonwealth.

**JAMES GLEESON:** So it had been acquired by the Commonwealth in between?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, I've forgotten the date we got that.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, I'd forgotten that.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Acquired directly from you?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, it was given to Cynthia as a wedding present and she got Max Hutchison to sell it and he sold it to the Commonwealth.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see. So now we have its whole history until the time it comes to the Commonwealth.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Publications, Bob. Has it appeared in any books on Australian art or magazines, pictorials?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I'm not sure if it's in that Bob Hughes article, I can't remember.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I can check on that.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, I'm not sure about that.

4 August 1978

**JAMES GLEESON:** Any other publication? Was it in the Lenton Parr book?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, no. I think it's been obscure till that time.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I seem to remember a small black and white of it in an *Art in Australia*, could that have been so?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I wonder if that's the *Art in Australia*, the Bob Hughes article. I'm not sure if it was in that.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Ah, yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I think it was that or the *Organic Machine* was in it. I don't know if it was.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Anyway I can check on that.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes. I'm not sure at all.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It's nice to have, you know, a history of its reproduction, if it has been reproduced.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** But as far as you know you can't think of it being reproduced?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, maybe it hasn't been reproduced ever.

**JAMES GLEESON:** All right.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I don't know the height of it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Oh, well, we'll have all that material.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Twenty-five and a half is not very high.

**JAMES GLEESON:** No, no. The bombsite you found the stone on, was it in Central London somewhere?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Somewhere in London, yes. I can't remember exactly where it was, but I remember discovering this pile of stones and having it shipped out to the Abbey.

**JAMES GLEESON:** That's interesting.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** It was from a building which was bombed during the blitz apparently.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Bob, before we move on to another work, let's clarify the title and the Opus number of this one. I know you keep a book in which you set down the Opus number of each work as you finish it. What number is this one in that list?

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** This number is No. 40. It was originally titled *Anatomy of Sculptural Energy*, which was in the catalogue in the London show, and later on I changed that to *Red Sandstone* carving because I felt the original title was a bit pretentious, and just keep it simple. So it's now called *Red Sandstone* carving.

**JAMES GLEESON:** That's what you'd like to appear in the official catalogue?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** For its title. We don't give it a title; it's just a *Red Sandstone*—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** *Red Sandstone* carving, straight out. That's its title.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Fine, okay. Well now, which one will we go on to? Bob, what Opus number are you up to now? In your total work, 370 was it?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Three hundred and twenty-seven, and I most likely have a few I'm working on—oh, about thirty pieces down there—so I have about two or three finished but number 327 I'm up to. I would like *Locus Solus* to be—

**JAMES GLEESON:** The next one.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Number 350. Oh, 330, I'm sorry.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Three—thirty.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Three—thirty, yes. 330. An even number.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Fine, okay. Well, Bob, this one now.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes. Well, I haven't got a title for it. It was number 200. It's 78 inches high and was made in 1966 at this workshop in Woollahra I had, where I made that big thick piece.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Oh, the great big piece.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** The big piece, yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, yes. Nineteen sixty-six.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Sixty-six.

**JAMES GLEESON:** How long had you been back from America then? You came back—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That was before I went to America the second time. I came back in 1962.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I had this tin shed of a workshop in Woollahra.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I remember that, yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That was made there. It was made just before I went to America for the second time for the one year.

**JAMES GLEESON:** In 1968?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I went in 1966, later in 1966.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Sixty-six, and you came back in—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Max Hutchison, I could put this in Max's possession and to exhibit. He put it in a show in Melbourne, where James Mollison was Director of the Melbourne Gallery A and he's the one who sold it to the Art Advisory Board.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Ah, I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Well, again, it's dealing with the same process I'm involved with with all my work. You know, this could keep going or it could go out that way. I see no difference, just like a fragment of this whole big thing I see going on all the time.

**JAMES GLEESON:** This whole period sort of culminated in that very big piece of what, 1968 was it?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Sixty-six to '68.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Sixty-eight. So that while you're working on that big one, you were also working on—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Oh yes, I always work on a great number of pieces like you saw me in London. I've always done that. Always worked on a number of pieces, because if I get stuck with one particular problem, it means there must be something wrong. I work on other things till I walk in and just say, 'Right', and I can solve it. It doesn't become a problem. I don't believe in problems.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I remember that tin shed and it was incredible. It had great piles of junk that you assembled.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Oh yes, it must've had 20 tonnes of IBM and National Cash Register parts in it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I can remember you telling me that when you moved.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Then I moved 15 tonnes out, unfortunately, and that's why I've had to collect more recently again. But that other one was 1965 to '68.

**JAMES GLEESON:** That's the very big one.



4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** The big one, so I started that other one in 1965 over years and then there was a break going to America in between, and I finished it when I came back.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I kept the shed, that tin shed, on while I was in America. So this piece was finished before I went to America.

**JAMES GLEESON:** The second time.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right. Just for one year. I don't know what there is, what one could say about it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, just the fact that it was bought from Gallery A.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Gallery A Melbourne.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Melbourne, and came directly into the

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Art Advisory Board, at that time it was called. So I wouldn't know what to talk about formally, or what goes on.

**JAMES GLEESON:** No. Well, we've got that clear. Oh one thing, Bob. This was coming towards what I suppose might be the first climactic period of your use of junk sculpture. When did that begin, in Minneapolis, didn't it?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, that began in Minneapolis in about 1960. I did a great number of drawings, which I've been doing these collages since 1952, using junk or found photographs, bits of machine parts. But I'd never had the courage for some reason or other. I felt I had to make everything myself. It wasn't till that big bout of drawings in 1960 in Minneapolis that I just felt ready to use found objects. But I had used found objects as you know in London.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Of course.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** In all those constructions and things.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes. So it wasn't basically new.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, it wasn't new. But I did actually—when I think about it, the piece that I did for the Botanic Gardens in 1951 it was using, I did pick up pieces and put the extremities of these lines.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see, so it goes back to—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** To 1951, I did actually use junk parts.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Without thinking about it.

4 August 1978

**JAMES GLEESON:** But really the conscious part of using junk as a source, a really positive source for yourself, began—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Nineteen sixty-one.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Sixty-one.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Sixty-one, yes. So this was just part of the process and I suppose the big high point would have been that piece I finished in 1968, '65 to '68—a long slow process. That was equal to a whole—well, I mean about a dozen pieces into one.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, it was a climactic work, a summing up of a whole—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, 1968 that would have been it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well this obviously comes before, but within the same—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** This one was done—are you on?

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I'll have to find the number.

**JAMES GLEESON:** That's all right.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Not this one. But this one was a time when I was interested in—done in Minneapolis. I'll have to find out whether it was 1960 or '61. I had a forge out in this workshop in Minneapolis and I was very interested in forging heavy metals, but because of council regulations I wasn't allowed to go ahead. They wouldn't allow me to put a big hammer in to bash this stuff down.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** So instead of forging this very heavy metal parts I just used an oxy torch to bend it round on the anvil and bend things around and braised it all together.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see. So it's a welded piece? It's forged?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, well it's mostly braising. Well, it's not really forged because I just use an oxy torch here with the heat, and bent it around an anvil and beat it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** What's the difference between braising and welding?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Well, welding is where you fuse the two metals, where it has the strength of the metal.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It becomes a single piece.

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes. It should be just as strong as the metal itself. Braising is like a solder, it's more like a glue, where you just attach it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** It's not as strong, but with my small pieces, you know, if it's done properly it can be strong. Also I was interested in the colour, of the colour of bronze.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes. This is bronze?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's bronze rod used in all there.

**JAMES GLEESON:** The previous piece that's not—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Part would have been welded, and part braised, I would think. I can't quite remember. But I would think, because you can get a clean—with braising the bronze flows under it and you can't see it so clearly. Where welding you see this little mark, marks like little globules of metal where you weld it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Or if you weld properly, you know, it should flow right in.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes. But this is what, combination of steel—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Combination of steel, cast iron, which is difficult to braise and weld.

**JAMES GLEESON:** And this is all bronze?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's all steel. That's all steel and braised together.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I'll just find out when I—

**JAMES GLEESON:** Its Opus number. I'll turn off.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, if you can just turn off.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It's Opus number, Bob?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Its Opus number is 98, number 98. I've got here in my notation, heavy square steel and rod, square rod, round, rod braised, 25 and one-eighth inch. Can you hold that a minute?

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, certainly. Bob, what's the history of this piece?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** History—it was made say here in 1960 before I started on the big bout of junk work. We'll just have to say just before then.

4 August 1978

**JAMES GLEESON:** In Minneapolis?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** In Minneapolis, when I was teaching there. I notice that it was exhibited in the Parma Gallery, my second show there in 1960.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Is that in Minneapolis?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, that was New York.

**JAMES GLEESON:** In New York. What month was that, can you remember?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I can't remember. I'd have to check. About some time in 1960 I had the show. It might have been the latter part of 1960. I'm not sure on that. Oh November, excuse me, it's got here a note, 'Exhibited in the Parma Gallery, New York, 1960'. In November, 1960.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Oh good.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** November 1960. I had 23 pieces in that show. It didn't sell and when I came back to Sydney— I know what happened. My sister-in-law and brother were visiting in New York.

**JAMES GLEESON:** At that time?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, excuse me. I shipped out an exhibition to the Clune Gallery, which Myra arranged. That piece, I don't think was in that one. I think I might have kept it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It wasn't in the New York exhibition?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** It might have been—yes. It was in the exhibition in New York, but I'm not sure if it exhibited in the first Clune Gallery exhibition, or the second one in 1962. I had the first one which Myra arranged when I was still in New York.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Then the second one, when I came back in 1963, I had this show, I brought a lot of work back with me and I think I must have had it in with me because I was renting this workshop with from Sheila McDonald at Woolloomooloo. Tas Drysdale, who was a member of the Art Advisory Board, came down and looked through my work, and he purchased this particular piece for the Art Advisory Board in, it would have been 1962 or '63. I'm not sure of the date.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Directly from you?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Directly from me. Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** And you're not sure whether it was exhibited?

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I'm not sure if it was exhibited in the Clune Gallery—it could have been. I think it most likely was exhibited either in the first or the second one, 1962 or 1963. Since that time I've never seen it again.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see. Now it's been down there probably in a case, or lent.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right. It just disappeared.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Right.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Quite different really to any of the works I've done, except there's a piece using junk metal done the year after, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and it's got some of these heavy metal parts. It might have been limbering up for that.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** But this, as far as I know, is the only one of its kind.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Of its kind.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Of its kind.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well that makes it interesting. Good. Well, Bob, we'll move on now to Opus No. 226.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Two—two—six. This was part of a series of waxes I made which were cast into bronze in Minneapolis between 1966 and '67. This particular one, I've called it *Cynthia's Piece* for want of a better name. It was part of this whole group of work I did when I was visiting Professor of Sculpture invited back there for one year in 1966–67. I had a chance, I found a sculptor who wanted some work and I had the choice of either learning bronze casting myself, or working in wax in embedded plastic parts.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Ah.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** So this is a combination of parts which I cast into wax myself, and parts which are found objects in plastic from these kit models, which I embedded into the wax, and the whole thing was then cast one-off into bronze.

**JAMES GLEESON:** So they're all just one-off pieces.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** One-off pieces. This is a one-off piece. There was no mould made. So parts like that there, I have an enormous variety of parts. I embedded objects into clay and I poured wax into it and got, you know, an enormous range which I used in combination with the plastic where they burn out, just like the wax.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes. So the wax and the plastic all burn away.

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Burn away and you're left with the bronze. This is one of that time which would have been finished in 1967 in Minneapolis.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Was this shown in your—oh no, this was after.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, that was shown in an exhibition at Bonython's of all the bronzes in 1968.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It then remained in Cynthia's collection?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right. I gave it to Cynthia, I think. I can't be 100 per cent sure, but I think it was in the exhibition, but I gave it to Cynthia in Minneapolis when I did it, because it was the one she liked, and it was in her possession till the Commonwealth bought it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Has it been published anywhere?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Not that I know of, no.

**JAMES GLEESON:** What publications about your work generally have there been apart from the Robert Hughes article in *Art in Australia*? Have there been any other publications or magazine articles in which your work has featured.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No. There've just been odd photographs in various art books or textbooks for kids at school and odd things like that. But there've been no articles at all from my knowledge.

**JAMES GLEESON:** The Robert Hughes one would be the major one?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Good. Well from that can we go to the other one?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Oh yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** From Zara Ducker.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Oh, don't you want the one done in 1955?

**JAMES GLEESON:** Oh, yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** The one that Nina—

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** My two wives—

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, Bob, Opus 66. This belonged to Nina.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That belonged to Nina. It was done in a workshop I had in Wylde Street, Potts Point, in 1955. It must have been, I think—I notice here in my book it's the only piece I finished in 1955, only one in the year, but it's

4 August 1978

an awful lot of drawing. The thing which I find quite remarkable, which happens every now and again, that it's 60 inches by 60 inches—60 by that way and 60 diagonally.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** It works out exactly the same. I never deliberately did that. That's a series of metal rods and planes of mild steel, braised on to rods which was then—I've always been fascinated by the idea of having a vertical post or, I don't know what one would call it, something going up like that and then this activity of going down diagonally. Then I've always been interested in the idea of where this meets on the vertical, just what happens there. All these forces and energies, what goes on. This one was based on that principle of a vertical post, or not actually a post here but something vertical with a diagonal going down.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see, yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That was the essential idea.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It seems to me to have a very dynamic character, which probably comes from the fact that nearly all the forms, the inner forms, or the smaller forms that make up the large ones, are triangular with acute angles.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, well the triangle has always been, for some unknown reason, has been important to me. Unconsciously—I don't know why. In those years it would have been the first one of the triangles, but after that in the years following this particular one they end up in lots of small triangles, very complicated small triangles and rectangles.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Drawings and works?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right. But the year before that I'd been working in a very strict formal sense, practically constructivist, on a piece which was vertical and horizontal with clear perspex inside that like some sort of structure with these coloured ball knobs which would go back to the *Red Sandstone* carving concept idea, still connected.

**JAMES GLEESON:** The interior form.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes. Well, these were there for some reason, all those knobs. They're not just aesthetically—well, that's one of the aspects. They're there aesthetically, but there is some deeper thing in me that must have that particular colour of a certain shape and weight there.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It's extraordinarily different to the one—this is the immediate predecessor to this painting.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes. I must have spent six months to a year on this piece, and I think I must have spent nearly a year working on the one the Commonwealth's got now, Nina's piece.

4 August 1978

**JAMES GLEESON:** This one was destroyed.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** This one was destroyed when I took it to New York for an exhibition.

**JAMES GLEESON:** That's in 1964.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** In 1958. That one was 1954. Then, strangely enough, I did the last wood carving I've done called *Entities Emerging from a Mass* in 1954, which was I suppose somehow connected to *Entities Suspended from a Detector*—but the difference. Then to branch off on to this triangular type, like now it reminds me like some great bird sort of shape, well even though I never thought, you know, it was meant to be completely non-figurative.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It seems to me extraordinary that in this period '54 to '55 you should have been working on so many different ideas, all related of course by your over-riding interest in the relationships of interior/exterior form, but using totally different means to express that.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right. But maybe at that time I was particularly interested in perspex which I found very difficult to work and I had done a glass blowing course in 1953. Well, it does seem very diverse but maybe it comes out in the drawings. There would be some link in the drawings of that period showing why there's this great changes in the sculpture, but I did so few pieces of sculpture at that time.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I remember this was a difficult time for you.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Sheer difficulties, terrible difficulties having to spend from nine till five, or whatever it was, working.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I remember that this period from the time you came back from Paris till the time you went to America the first time was particularly rich in drawings rather than sculptures. There were a few sculptures.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right, but it took me, like as now, it took me so long to make them. You know, like that one, that triangular one, you know, nearly a year on it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** At this time were you working on them only at night and weekends?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Night and weekends. No, I'm sorry. I'd given up that job and I was working in an industrial designer at this time in 1955, and I had this workshop in Potts Point, but I didn't have enough time to concentrate and get a great number of works going. But I think at the time I was doing this I did small—I think there'd be photographs of a lot of small little pieces of triangles and things coming into it at about that period. Which I think in this photograph taken by Drysdale, taken about 1956 or '57, shows all sorts of little sketches which you just catch sight of there.

**JAMES GLEESON:** That's right.



4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Because here's another triangle one done in 1956 which was—

**JAMES GLEESON:** So that it is right at the beginning, or in the middle of a whole period of works that expanded out from it.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That culminated in that. That was the last one I did before I went to America, that one. That complicated one. You see, and this one was painted in red, black and white, which are some of my favourite combination of colours. Then I took that, I exhibited it with the Sculptors Society I think in 1955 or '56.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Was that the David Jones Gallery?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** David Jones.

**JAMES GLEESON:** That's where these Opus 64 and 65 were shown?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right. That was the year before the year of the exhibition, the exhibition before. So this one would have been the year after—maybe 1956—it would have been shown in David Jones.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I remember there was a photograph of Bim Hilder and Gerry Lewers, press photographs of them against this one. Then in 1957 I packed all this work up, took it to New York, and I don't know if this one got damaged. I think it was all right. I'm not sure if I exhibited it in New York. I think I had such trouble—it was so big that I couldn't cart it around, even though it wasn't heavy. I've got an idea that it was never exhibited after that, and I gave it to Nina and left it at her father's place and stored it away and I couldn't—

**JAMES GLEESON:** This was in America?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** In America, and said take it and that was the end of it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It was from Nina that we acquired it?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right, through Max Hutchison.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Good.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Is there anything more you want to know about that?

**JAMES GLEESON:** It is damaged at the moment, but from the photographs here you think it's possible to restore it?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Oh yes, yes. Oh yes, I think it should be restored. In fact, it's lucky I have two photographs of it, or another one by Drysdale could help me to bring it together again.

4 August 1978

**JAMES GLEESON:** When did Drysdale come to the studio?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** He came in 1957. I have these photographs of 12 April 1957. Just before I went to New York he came in and wanted to take photographs of my workshop and all the things I was doing in there.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Was it that time that he bought the—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, that was years later when I came back from New York that he was—

**JAMES GLEESON:** On the Art Advisory Board.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Art Advisory Board and bought that particular other piece.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Ah, good.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** He wasn't on it then.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Bob, the piece that we acquired from the Duckers, Zara Ducker. When was that done?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That was done in 1970 in a workshop I had in Paddington, Liverpool Street, Paddington.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Its Opus number?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Its Opus number is number 250 and I call it *Metal Sculpture* and I've got steel and frame, like a framed piece.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** It's 25 and a half inches high by 12 and a quarter inches wide.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It again to my mind seems to be unique piece that I can't think of any other work of yours that's been so enclosed in such a precise and rigid frame as that. Did you see that rectangular frame as a kind of challenge to create an extraordinary sense of activity within a severe—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, I'd say that's exactly right. It would be like instead of the solid, it would be all this activity going on within this frame.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** The same thing as this internal structure, instead of having a solid block it's just frame—that would be right. I felt a sense of as if the thing is rotating at high speed, there's a kinetic sense about the thing.

4 August 1978

**JAMES GLEESON:** In many ways it's one of the most paradoxical works of yours because the idea that rectangular strict frame imposes a stillness on it, yet within it, it is the most kinetically suggestive—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** It feels as though it's running at high speed.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Exactly.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** But also another strange fact about this particular one. I always, when I did it, I felt all of a sudden it was very close in spirit to Duchamp for some reason or other. I don't know. Not literally, but there's something in common. I felt an affinity with Duchamp on that particular piece.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Any particular Duchamp, a nude descending the stairs or something like that?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, no. It's something about the whole feeling about it. I felt connected to Duchamp. The only time in my life really.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, certainly Duchamp at certain stages was very interested in the sort of kinetic element in art.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes. But there was just something about it. I can't explain it, what it is. But, you know, I could have called it Homage to Duchamp if I was into that sort of thing. But I felt connected to him after it was done, not during the process of making it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I certainly think it's one of the most striking and original of all your works, and partly because of that paradox between strict formality and great movement and energy contained within it.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Well that would be correct, yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Bob, that was bought by Zara Ducker from you directly?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Zara Ducker through Gallery A.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Ah, through Gallery A. It was exhibited in Gallery A?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, it was never exhibited.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It was never exhibited.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Never exhibited commercially. I used Gallery A as agents. It would've been 1970 or '71, I can't remember the exact date. They sold it to Zara Ducker. I remember you saw it and told me you were quite enthusiastic about it, when you saw it in Gallery A one day.

**JAMES GLEESON:** That's right, yes.

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Then Zara had it at home and people wanted to touch it and pull it about, and she had a perspex box made to stop her friends wanting to pull it. They have an irresistible desire to put my things and test it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, it's now in a perspex box again and travelling around in the Genesis II exhibition. So that's really its first public exhibition—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I'm very happy it's in the Commonwealth collection, that one, I feel it's one of my better works.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well I agree, I think it's a great work. Anything else about this one, Bob?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I don't know what to say but I feel it ties up with a lot of my thinking about sculpture and inner structure and movement. Things which not actually move, but have that feeling about them.

**JAMES GLEESON:** The implication.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** The implication, that's right of this tremendous high speed.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** But I've never been attracted, I've never had the desire to actually literally have things moving, like Calder or Tinguely or any of the kinetic people.

**JAMES GLEESON:** No, I know that, but I've always felt that in many of your works there was this sense of movement implied.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Exactly.

**JAMES GLEESON:** The big piece for instance has an almost explosive intensity as though it's bursting from a central point, yes. This implied movement or velocity I think is a characteristic that runs through a great deal of this.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Well I would think this frame one, if I had the time, you know, one could use that as a perfect example of an inner structure and then make a solid surface over it and it would give reasons while all these things are going on within it and would show on the outside and the whole casing would go over the top of the thing. It would be like it would fit over the top or it would read as a good piece of sculpture.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It's like the skeleton of a volumetric work that's been fully imagined in your mind.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Right, exactly. I could imagine that one very much so.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, the next is a group of four works that we have, from what dates now?

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** From 1972 to '74. Jim Mollison gave me a grant to develop a concept of a large piece of sculpture roughly 50 feet—roughly in that size—and asked me to work on models and do some thinking about it, which I did over a year or two, out of which came these four pieces. But I was very ambivalent about fabricating at this particular point, and I felt it was hit and miss. It might be all right on a small scale, but I couldn't guarantee that it would be right.

**JAMES GLEESON:** You would lose the absolute control?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, I would lose control, I couldn't make it on that scale, 50 feet.

**JAMES GLEESON:** No.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Enormous beams and things, so I just kept trying, making these things, these models of actual pieces of sculpture and I put enormous effort in on these. I think it was after visiting Canberra, it would have been about 1970—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Well, I should say that at first the idea of making—Mollison was interested in a big piece for the garden and I was dealing with Max Hutchison at that time. He was going to be the agent for it. They put up the idea of one belonging to Cynthia which is in her possession now—it was in plastic—which I did in Minneapolis in 1967.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Is that a tall—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** A long tall one.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, yes, I remember that.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Can you hold it there and I'll show you the—

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes. Has it got an Opus number?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes. I'll get the number that belongs to Cynthia. Nineteen sixty-seven, I remember that. I gave it to her at the same time as that bronze.

**JAMES GLEESON:** This was the sort of idea that you had for something that would be suitable for—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, and Max and Mollison—

**JAMES GLEESON:** Not too sure.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, unsure about it. That's right, had to back onto talking about that. It was done the same time as your piece, Frank, that one. The only complete one.

**JAMES GLEESON:** What was that, 1967?

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Nineteen sixty–seven. I reckon that would be good. I can't see it. I can't see it. Are you right?

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Max Hutchison felt that a piece belonging to Cynthia, number 228, which was done in Minneapolis in 1967, was all plastic, 18 and three-quarter inches high, would have been an ideal concept for the garden in Canberra, the sculpture garden there. That's what got the whole thing going. Max was enthusiastic and I was enthusiastic and Les Wild was enthusiastic, but Mollison had doubts about it and he was very unsure about it. That's when he said, 'What about working on a series of models and see what you can develop?'—new ideas about a big piece of sculpture. The more I worked on them, the more I felt that it wasn't me. You know, I felt it wasn't for me. Losing control over it on a piece like Cynthia's one I felt it would be exact right, I wouldn't have to worry about that. I could imagine that 50 feet. Of course, the parts would have been brought up, the aeroplane engine parts would have been brought up to the actual size of an aeroplane and I wouldn't have had the scale problem. But on these, these models I made, it was hit or miss, I couldn't imagine them. In the end I remember Jim Mollison came over here and we had a discussion about it, and I said, 'Look, I just can't feel right about making a 50 foot piece of sculpture that I couldn't be sure about'. It'd be hit or miss and I'd rather not do it. I'd rather keep to my small scale. So he was very understanding about it. He could see that a sculptor has got to work on the actual scale. He's got to have complete control over everything.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, am I right in saying that your real objection to taking it further was that you would lose control at the point where they became so large that you couldn't adjust them?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I couldn't adjust them.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Couldn't personally, and you feel that in moving from one scale to another those fine adjustments are always going to be necessary.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Oh, absolutely essential, absolutely. You couldn't be sure, this might have to be longer, or it might be a different shape or a different contour and that could be completely wrong. That top bit, you know, would be an enormous thing up there and on this scale, this tiny scale, it looks all right. But get it on to a bigger one, the whole thing becomes a totally different thing, a different type of piece of sculpture. I think one needs to work direct and Mollison saw that and he was very understanding and I had a really good talk with him about that, and he said, 'Look, one day if ever you feel like making one without any pressure, just make it and we'll take a look at it'.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, can we look at each individual piece? The Opus 301 was the first of the sequence. There is four.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, 301 was one called *Waterfall* which was 15 inches high by 25 and three-quarter inches long in steel, done between 1972 and '74.

4 August 1978

I felt it had possibilities, this idea of planes, horizontal planes, but activity with vertical things coming out of it practically like a landscape idea.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I would have imagined that some of the concept of this form would have come from the fact that it was planned to show it in a landscape setting.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** On the shores of the lake.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, that's right. But trying to imagine underneath this, these parts that overhang, you know, these great things, I start to get very unsure of myself on this large scale. I think they're fine and I think they should all be shown as a group.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** They are—

**JAMES GLEESON:** Related series.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Related series.

**JAMES GLEESON:** The second one was Opus what, 30—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Well there's number 302 which I haven't got—this one is fairly strict geometry. I haven't got a photograph of it here, 302, which is 11 and a quarter inches high by 28 inches long. That was done in 1974, which must have been the last time I was in Canberra, because it was done after visiting the site with Jim Mollison. But again I was very unsure of myself, but I think it's fine as it is now. Then one has number 305 which was done between 1971 and 1974 which was another possibility for this big piece. That size is 15 and three-quarter high by 13 and a half in length. Then number 306, a sculpture with two pools, *Twin Pools*, and that's 12 and a quarter inches high by 17 and a half inches long and done in 1974. So as Mollison had more or less given me a grant to develop these ideas, when I said, 'Well I'd rather not go ahead with it', I said 'Would you be happy to take the four so-called models, pieces of sculpture, and leave it at that?'. He said fine and that's how they went into the National Gallery.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Now, do you view them as being displayed in public as a group as four pieces, say on the one stand.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** They are, it seems to me, very closely related in their thinking about the problems of sculpture and landscape.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Exactly, they are.

**JAMES GLEESON:** And would make a considerable impact being shown—

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I feel they should be shown as if one unit, as four pieces inter-relating with each other.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Bob, but in the thinking, in the forms that you've used here, were you thinking ahead to later fabrication, because the forms are simpler—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Oh yes, oh yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Themselves than you've been using in your several jungle sculptures.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes. They were definitely thinking of the scale. I was trying to project myself into the idea that this half-inch thing would be a big beam, and try to imagine it. But I couldn't imagine it well enough. It was too big a gamble for my liking, and I wasn't prepared to put a 50 foot piece up or 40 foot piece or what ever it was, and not have it spot on. I don't like that idea. I'd rather not do it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** No, no. No, I understand that very well.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** But that's why they're simple, because of the fabrication problem. I couldn't imagine them fabricated.

**JAMES GLEESON:** In other words you're not now here using found objects?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Found objects, no. They're all parts of cylinders, cut sections, cubes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** So that the movement to the bigger scale would have been relatively simple, if you could have been sure that the effect would have been right.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Exactly. It could have been done. But against one like that which, you know, it's very characteristic of me compared to this.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** It's simple, I mean the balance between a simple and complex has always been a problem with me, to have this spot on, which I feel that framed piece has got. It's got the simple and the complex.

**JAMES GLEESON:** One thing that still comes out in these to me is that although the forms now are strict and you might say mechanical, they still have that organic sense of growth, of moving in space, almost like living things, like trees, well as you say waterfalls, things of this quality. Natural things and it's that ambiguity that I think is, you know, interesting in all your work, that mixture.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, well, I think it's basic to my concept of sculpture that the organic and geometric are completely interrelated. I could imagine these



4 August 1978

parts growing up like plants. That's why I wouldn't be happy with the complete horizontal Caro type work at all.

**JAMES GLEESON:** No.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Over simplified. These are getting simple because of the fabrication difficulties. I think a lot of these pieces, old pieces that are done at the same time, were part of the thinking process of fabrication which I've discarded now.

**JAMES GLEESON:** They would condition the kind of approach you brought to it.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's right. That's why they have become simple which is not really what I'm about, really. That's why I'm glad to be out of it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Bob, about the earlier group. The earliest one we have of yours is a wooden one, Opus 10.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, called *Abstract Study*. It was, I think, my second carving, original carving, and it's only 6 inches high. It was like an abstracted sort of head figure. It's got a head like a top.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It's very abstract.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Very abstract, yes. Yes, it's very abstract compared to the very first one I did.

**JAMES GLEESON:** All your early work was in wood. They stemmed out from your interest in—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** In my ships. That's right. Before that it was done for doing figureheads and sterns on the ships, the 17th century ship models.

**JAMES GLEESON:** So this is a kind of evolution from that and right through, what year was this, '44?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Nineteen forty-four. That was when I did—just before this one—I did my very first original carving which was much more figurative, and was very poor. But funny how I went abstract so quickly without knowing much about abstraction.

**JAMES GLEESON:** But you still kept working in wood until you did the first stone in the Harry Boyd—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Harry Boyd one in 1946.

**JAMES GLEESON:** You didn't move to clay until 1948, '47 was it, in London?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** In London I was working. But of course at tech I was always working in clay and I did quite a lot of work in clay which was cast in plaster. I did sketches, I think. I did a portrait, you know, I used to do portraits.

4 August 1978

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** There's one clay piece which is owned by Marie Brown, or Cliff Brown, who is a close friend of mine. I did a portrait of him, and before I went to London I was going to break it up and she saved the mask which she still has.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, now the next one in the sequence of those early wooden carvings of yours is Opus 22.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Twenty-two, which is a torso, seven inches high done in 1945. It's more a torso. I don't know what one would say about that. It's just a wood carving in teak.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes. It's a more traditional piece.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** More traditional. I must have been a bit of swing back thinking I must know more about figures or something, and I knew so little about them.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, I know.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I might have been doing life modelling at night at that time in 1945 with Dadswell at tech. I just got on to doing figure studies with Dadswell in 1945 at the tech.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I know for a long time in the '47, '48 period you were deeply concerned whether the right approach was through the study of the figure and you went to Slade, the Slade School for a while, feeling that you should pursue that.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, I went through terrible torment.

**JAMES GLEESON:** After this period—after what, '47?—you never went back.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Never went back. When I seem using Coomaraswamy's term, nature and it's manner of operation rather than specific nature, rather than abstracting from nature from particular objects or direct perception, which I still feel like Cézanne, it's the greatest art comes from, you know, abstracting in front of some object.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** It's always been a hang-up with me.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, Opus 27 is related really to the torso.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** But it's much more complex.

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, it's number 27, 12 inches high, it's just called *Woman*, silky oak, done in 1946, and it's just continuing, it's not very abstract, it's just a woodcarving, a fairly ordinary woodcarving to me now. I wouldn't have much to say about that. It's just something I felt I should do. Maybe I'd been doing a lot of figure work. By 1946 I was working full time at the tech in the day time, doing figure studies. I most likely felt I should try and do an abstracted wood carving using knowledge I'd gained from all these figure and head studies I'd been doing, because you'd do a figure study lasting three weeks at a time, a model every day of the week.

**JAMES GLEESON:** But this next one, the Opus 28 moves into a completely different—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, and this is really getting closer to what my concept was about by this time, it must have been crystallising about this inner structure idea or structure, having some central structure. I don't know how one would explain this particular one. Your writing in your book, it's exactly as I would see it and I can't verbalise it myself as well. Maybe you could—

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, we can get that for our—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** But it was called *Snake*, it was based on a snake, an abstract, very abstracted snake. It could be anything. It was number 28, 14 inches high, done in 1946, but it wasn't finished, because I was very concerned about the volumes, the negative volumes which you couldn't see.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, yes. I remember there were drawings too.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, there are drawings where these are outlined, these volumes, where they fit into this exactly.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes. So that in a way the drawing that should be seen together, put together, for significance.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, even though I'm embarrassed about how rough the drawings are, my thinking process was very related to the carving.

**JAMES GLEESON:** This was kind of conceived as a core to an invisible sculpture in a way.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Negative forms were implied by that structure, that inner central structure, and all the other forms were implied from that.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's correct. Exactly. I just used the snake as a vehicle for twisting and going around like that.

**JAMES GLEESON:** This is another complex one, Bob. Opus 30, which you've called *Idle*.

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** *Idle*, and that was 20 inches high, done in 1946. The top part of it was red wood—the flame like part which you called it—and the middle part was silky oak and the base part with a couple of figures, abstracted sort of figures in it, was of terracotta clay which I had intended to do in wood. But I never got round to it because by the time that happened I was off to London.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It remains unfinished.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** It remains unfinished.

**JAMES GLEESON:** None of these were ever exhibited, were they?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No.

**JAMES GLEESON:** So that they've come directly from you into our collection?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Exactly. Never been shown.

**JAMES GLEESON:** But this, I remember, was shown, wasn't it? Was that included?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That was shown, I think, in the Berkley Gallery show. No, it wasn't, I don't think. It wasn't shown in the London Gallery.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It wasn't in the London—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No, no.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, then perhaps it—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I think it went into your possession. You cast it, I remember. See this has got an interesting history, in so far that I had the drawing done maybe 1946, a rough drawing of the thing.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I remember that.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Which when I went to London I couldn't resist making it. It must have been one of the early ones done in London. Modelled in clay and then I was interested in all the other things, and I said, 'Oh, you can have it' and you decided to cast it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** That's right and we put a patina—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** So really I think that's as far as it went. It belonged to you for all those years, and then we made a spot for Madam Sesostoris which we in turn both gave to the Art Gallery.

**JAMES GLEESON:** That's right, yes. Bob, of all your works that were cast in plaster, this is the only one to survive. Is that true?

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That would be right. Yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It's the earliest.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** *Organic machine*. Yes, it would be, the only one.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, the only one in plaster which I'd like to have seen in bronze.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Do you feel that this is in a way outside your main line of development? It doesn't seem to be as concerned with interlocking forms.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** No. Well, it was in a way because I saw this as giant like triangles and rhythms.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Ah yes, yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I was very concerned with organisation of the whole thing, you know.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Do you feel that those experiences with the photographs of Negro sculpture—

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Oh yes, it directly connected with this and particularly the Harry Boyd carving. That convinced me this had to have that geometry inherent in sculpture.

**JAMES GLEESON:** One more piece now. The Opus 54 unfinished.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Unfinished wood carving done in Paris about which you've written extremely well, I notice in the book.

**JAMES GLEESON:** So we can use that.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** So that would be better than anything I can say about it except that I have grave doubts about solid form. It seemed a backward step to me after what I'd been trying to do.

**JAMES GLEESON:** At that time you were moving into construction.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** More open construction, inner structure things and this seemed—as much as I'm fascinated by solid form, which I like better than open form work, strangely. I always enjoy solid sculpture more than open form sculpture. Yet my role seemed to be one of going—

**JAMES GLEESON:** Exploring the inner.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, yes. The inner, that's right, like an explorer finding out about different area, something which other people haven't done.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, that's what makes them extraordinary.

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Well, I don't know what to say about this. That wood carving done in Paris was number 54, 20 inches high and it's unfinished.

**JAMES GLEESON:** It is the last carving you've done.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Well, except that one in 1954 which was *Entities Emerging from a Mass*.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Oh yes, yes, of course. Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I did start a wood carving down there a few years ago which I never went very far with. I still have a hankering to do wood carving. I've got all the woodcarving I collect on my way to London. Ebony, rosewood and all these wood and I still feel I could do something in it.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Oh well.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** There's too much. I haven't got enough time to do it all.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Good, well thanks Bob. Anything else?

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I think not really. Any other thing you can—

**JAMES GLEESON:** No. I think we can get a lot of information from the book, which has already drawn from conversations and from your journals and notebooks and so on, so with this information plus that, I think we've got it.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Yes, well I feel all I can say is I'd like to have a more major work in the collection. When I look at this, apart from the Zara Ducker piece which I think is quite a good one, I'd like to see a big one which I've put years in on there.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes, I'd like to see that too.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** That's what I'd like to see. When I see this little bit you know, it doesn't seem enough for the Commonwealth collection, the National Gallery, to me.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Oh well, we've got you covered in drawings.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Drawings. I feel fine about the drawings.

**JAMES GLEESON:** The sculpture will come.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** But sculpturally, apart from the *Red Sandstone* carving and the Zara Ducker piece, I feel that one De Crebbin has, if that were there I'd feel better.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** I'd feel more covered.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Thanks Bob.

4 August 1978

**ROBERT KLIPPEL:** Right.