

JAMES GLEESON INTERVIEWS: LES KOSSATZ

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JAMES GLEESON: Les, let's begin at the beginning: first of all, exactly the date of your birth.

LES KOSSATZ: Tenth of January 1943.

JAMES GLEESON: Forty three. Where?

LES KOSSATZ: In Melbourne.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Where were you trained?

LES KOSSATZ: Trained in Melbourne, yes. I took on a teacher-training course at Caulfield College for two years, one-year teacher training at Melbourne State College and then RMIT one year.

JAMES GLEESON: How did you come to get yourself involved with art? Was there any tradition or background or interest in the arts in your family?

LES KOSSATZ: No. Purely by default. No, I think it was a situation of parents insisting that there should be some sort of security. Teaching seemed to be their logical choice, and I actually didn't give a damn. It was only when I took on sort of the art training course that I realised that, you know, I was interested in just other things apart from teaching.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Oh, so it came fairly late to you?

LES KOSSATZ: Fairly late, yes. I mean, I was always working, but I didn't—

JAMES GLEESON: Drawing.

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, drawing and painting, but I didn't see it as a—you know, I was probably fairly naïve. I never saw it as a profession.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: So I went into teaching instead.

JAMES GLEESON: You did eventually study both painting and sculpture?

LES KOSSATZ: Very briefly studied sculpture under a woman called Anita Aarons.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah yes, yes.

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LES KOSSATZ: Who was quite a sort of dynamo.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. I remember her; she's in America now.

LES KOSSATZ: She's in America. I think Canada now. Yes. She was very angry that I didn't decide to major in sculpture.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: But at that time I didn't understand sculpture. I could see no reason why I should work in it and I preferred painting. So I've always seen myself as a painter, yet I've probably done more sculpture than I have painting.

JAMES GLEESON: Where was she teaching? At RMIT?

LES KOSSATZ: No, Caulfield Institute.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, Caulfield.

LES KOSSATZ: Then she left there to go to Canada.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Who were your teachers in RMIT? Anyone that left any sort of impression on you?

LES KOSSATZ: No, not really. Well, actually it was a very odd course. Then the course in painting was purely to do with figurative painting, and I wasn't a very good draftsman, so I couldn't sort of cope very well in that area. No, I can't think of any one person there who was a sort of dynamo.

JAMES GLEESON: Any of your contemporaries, fellow students there, who sort of helped to sharpen your interest?

LES KOSSATZ: Oh sure, yes. There was Gary Sansom. I think he was probably the first person I was aware of as a student who knew what it was about. You know, he knew what painting was about and he was into it as a sort of serious business, I suppose.

JAMES GLEESON: I just did a good tape on Gary this morning.

LES KOSSATZ: Did you?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: Oh, that's great. You know, it was an odd situation because in actual fact when I went to RMIT I was a bit of a sort of outsider because I'd done teacher training, whereas these other people hadn't. So they didn't take kindly to me being there in a sense, but it was just the nature of the exercise that I should do my diploma there. So I was always a bit behind the rest of the group. But still, I mean, none of the others are painting apart from Gary.

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JAMES GLEESON: I see. So he's the one who's made a reputation out of that work.

LES KOSSATZ: I think so. I think so.

JAMES GLEESON: When did you start showing your work and what was it? Was it painting or sculpture first?

LES KOSSATZ: Drawings first. Let me think. Probably 1963, a couple of drawings. I remember actually the first drawing I sold I sold to Zara Holt for the grand sum of three guineas. You know, that was at an exhibition. I think it was the Young Minds, or Young Contemporaries, I'm not sure. There were two exhibitions held over two years at the old Museum of Modern Art in Flinders Lane. Off Flinders Lane, Tavistock Place I think it was called. That was always a good time to show because you were only showing with other very young artists. But that would be the first time I had shown.

JAMES GLEESON: Have you had many shows since? One man shows?

LES KOSSATZ: One manners.

JAMES GLEESON: I know the Sydney ones you've (inaudible).

LES KOSSATZ: I would have had, say, probably four or five in Melbourne, probably four, one in Sydney, one in Perth, two in Brisbane, two in Canberra. That would be about the total.

JAMES GLEESON: Before we start on the actual works we've got here, could you tell us something about what you're doing now? I know you're working on a project, were working with Baldessin for the High Court. Could you tell us something about that project and how it's shaping up?

LES KOSSATZ: That's the High Court, the doors for the High Court, ceremonial doors for the High Court in Canberra. Yes, it's an odd one because it's taken a long time. I think it's now three years since we did the initial ground work on it.

JAMES GLEESON: Is it?

LES KOSSATZ: Because I was working with George it presented problems because we were working in two different areas. George was to do metal plaques which would be recessed into glass doors for one court, the main ceremonial court. I was to work on the other courts, there being two others. The doors there were all glass with similar emblems, or similar imagery blasted in. It's a difficult one because we had to work together, so the imagery itself had to be worked out.

JAMES GLEESON: A uniform sort of system.

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LES KOSSATZ: As a uniform system.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: In fact, George and I had a lot of arguments about it initially, but then we came to the party and decided we could do it together.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: Unfortunately we were just at the end of the design stage when George died, which put the problem on then that I had to find a way of being able to carry out his part of the work too.

JAMES GLEESON: He hadn't actually begun the work?

LES KOSSATZ: No, he was still in the last just design stage. I decided that, okay, I could take it on. Oh, I felt an obligation to take it on too because of our very close friendship. But it meant finding a new technique. I couldn't use George's technique. I tried and I mean I'm just no good at it. I can't work in clay as readily as he could. So it took a long time for me to come up with a technique where I could feel as though I was still being true to the group design, if you like, but at the same time being able to carry it out in my particular manner. So we've got that done. That's all cast.

JAMES GLEESON: It is? Oh, really.

LES KOSSATZ: That's all cast. We're just in the final stages now of putting the emblems into the doors. But it's not like an artwork, it's been going too long and it's almost sort of businesses. It toughens you up somewhat.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, these commissions often have a way of being a burden.

LES KOSSATZ: Very much so, very much so.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Les, now we've got four pieces of sculpture of yours. *Packed landscape* 1976. *Sheep*. Is that its proper title?

LES KOSSATZ: I don't think it was ever actually titled. I think, you know, I found it difficult to title the sheep pieces because in titling them there was always the tendency that you were labelling them as well, as though you were trying to get the observer to see it in a particular manner. So I don't think any of the big sheep, the four or five big ones that have been done, have got titles, specific titles.

JAMES GLEESON: So should we just call that Untitled? For the purpose of identification we've just got in brackets, sheep on a couch.

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LES KOSSATZ: No, I think that's fine. I think it's probably better to use something as simple as that rather than any other title. Yes, that's okay.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, would you mind if it went into the catalogue as *Sheep on a couch*?

LES KOSSATZ: No, not at all.

JAMES GLEESON: Fine, okay. I don't know if you suggested we got it from a catalogue in 1970-74 with an exhibition of work covering that period. It was actually done (inaudible).

LES KOSSATZ: From memory I would think it's done in '73.

JAMES GLEESON: Seventy three, okay. We've got two earlier works of yours related in that they are both, well, caged again like the *Packed landscape*, both untitled but one of them *8 ounce soil test*. Is that a title?

LES KOSSATZ: That's a title. In fact, it's written on the actual cast section of the aluminium grass section. It is written there somewhere on one of the sides it has just 8 ounces or something like that.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: It's a weight factor.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: Once again just through titling. The scales are basically replicas of old post office scales and the actual cast aluminium section does weigh eight ounces.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. So that will go in as *8 ounce soil test*?

LES KOSSATZ: *8 ounce soil test*.

JAMES GLEESON: The other one untitled?

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, I think it should be untitled.

JAMES GLEESON: It relates in a way to the *Packed landscape*.

LES KOSSATZ: It does.

JAMES GLEESON: But it's earlier.

LES KOSSATZ: It's a fraction earlier. It could be, you know, obviously could be caged landscape but I think just untitled is probably better at this stage.

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JAMES GLEESON: I see. Can you recall the year in which these were done. They were bought in '73, both of them from Sweeney Reed. March '73. Would they have been done much earlier?

LES KOSSATZ: They wouldn't have been done much. I would say by that date that they would have been completed in '72.

JAMES GLEESON: Seventy two, so both works date from '72. Okay. Well, we've got that sorted out. Now, you were telling me that the *8 ounce soil test* one was done from a cast of post office scales, was it?

LES KOSSATZ: Well, it's actually a replica.

JAMES GLEESON: A replica?

LES KOSSATZ: Of post office scales.

JAMES GLEESON: It's not an actual post office scale that you found?

LES KOSSATZ: No, no. No, I had to make replicas.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: There were an edition of those, of the actual scales, with the little soil thing but without the—

JAMES GLEESON: The cage.

LES KOSSATZ: Without the cage. I think there was an edition of five of those.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: This is one that I decided to cage up.

JAMES GLEESON: The height we don't have. Can you remember the height of it just off hand?

LES KOSSATZ: I would think the cage is possibly only about maybe 15 inches high. Yes, I wouldn't think it would be any more than that because of the scales. Certainly wouldn't be more than 10 or 12.

JAMES GLEESON: The other caged piece?

LES KOSSATZ: It would be the same size.

JAMES GLEESON: About the same size.

LES KOSSATZ: Exactly the same size cage.

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JAMES GLEESON: Les, I can see that there is a sort of landscape suggestion in these, these are growing forms. They're rubber are they, or plastic?

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, it's a silicon rubber.

JAMES GLEESON: A silicon rubber.

LES KOSSATZ: You can cast silicon rubber quite readily.

JAMES GLEESON: What, you actually got these and cast them in this silicon?

LES KOSSATZ: Well, some of them are actual blades of grass which have been then built up to a thickness.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see.

LES KOSSATZ: So on one side usually they have the actual impression of grass, but the other side is not. It's just a drawn line down the centre because as you cast silicon, rather than make a two piece mould, these were simply done in a one-piece situation.

JAMES GLEESON: Is the earth in this one too a cast?

LES KOSSATZ: No, from memory I would think that that's over polyurethane—

JAMES GLEESON: Shape.

LES KOSSATZ: Shape, and silicon rubber over the top.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: So it's the same material as the actual blades.

JAMES GLEESON: I know that three of your works here have a landscape implication of some sort, even in the growing leaves or grass, the *Packed landscape* and in this *Caged landscape* one. You've obviously got this feeling about a landscape but you treat it in a completely different way.

LES KOSSATZ: Yes. I suppose the preoccupation is with landscape. I lived in the country for 10 years on a farm. Even in some of the earlier paintings I was concerned with what I call the immediate landscape. That is, the one that's at one's feet, on a sort of size for size level.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: There are a series of paintings to do with holes in the ground and objects, almost sort of rubbish objects, litter objects, on the ground.

JAMES GLEESON: (inaudible)

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LES KOSSATZ: Yes, but size for size. These were paintings done, I suppose, from 1969 maybe through to '72. But the thing was that they worked in themselves but there was no extension of them. Because they tended to be pictorial rather than—

JAMES GLEESON: (inaudible)

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, I couldn't get the landscape to actually work in painting. That's when we decided on going into a third dimension, which was hard because I had to rely quite heavily at that time on George Baldessin because he had a much better understanding of sculpture than I did. He was of great assistance at the time. But I felt that it was the only way I could condense a landscape, you know rather than trap it in a frame.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: As you do in a painting often. Sometimes one tries to trap things in a frame. I used other devices, which you can do in a third dimension, such as the suitcase, such as the cage.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: To confine a landscape, and yet you're not inhibiting the actual quality of landscape. So that's why we actually got into sculpture. There was no intention ever to branch out into sculpture.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: In fact, I always thought sculpture was rather boring because it takes so long.

JAMES GLEESON: There seems to me to be—I might be reading into it something that isn't there—a surrealist quality in a lot of your work. This irrational idea of a landscape crammed into a suitcase. It's sort of ambiguous, irrational and, you know, seems to relate quite closely to the surrealist approach.

LES KOSSATZ: Oh yes, I think that's quite true, James, because whenever you use any domestic device or urban device with something which is a natural object you're going to create that sort of tension, you know, which is to do with surrealism. Also it happens to be the only way that you can make a landscape more real is to—

JAMES GLEESON: Something almost portable.

LES KOSSATZ: Portable, yes. As though you can, yes, just carry it around. Or confine it by one means. I've used this all through, well, since doing these early pieces of the cages and so on. The sheep, if we get on to that later, they're always bound or contained, or confined in some manner.

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JAMES GLEESON: In fact, it seems to be a recurring theme in all your work, this urge to contain the object in some definite but perhaps symbolic way.

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, now we're getting into a different area in a sense because I find it very hard to analyse. In fact, I'm almost frightened to analyse what I do for fear that I might get it down to a sort of pattern.

JAMES GLEESON: Pattern.

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, a thing where I can just keep churning out.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: So I try not to but I do realise that the confinement thing and the devices used are common and they have been now for quite a long time. In fact, the recent pieces, it's now been reduced to using a shroud type wrapping around sheep rather than the more obvious ones in the earlier works.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: But it's still the same device, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: It's an image that seems to be particularly your own and recurs throughout I think every example of work that we've got of yours.

LES KOSSATZ: I think it does. I think it does.

JAMES GLEESON: Les, tell me about the materials and the techniques involved in *Packed landscape* of '76. The case is what?

LES KOSSATZ: Is stainless steel.

JAMES GLEESON: Stainless steel. It's specially made.

LES KOSSATZ: It's specially made. In fact, I had a lot of trouble having it made. I went to a stainless steel fabricator and told him that I wanted two stainless steel suitcases. His reaction was that he pointed out to me that they would be very heavy. Because I didn't mention to him that it was for sculpture. I just said I wanted two stainless steel suitcases. When he finally saw the end product after I'd put things in he then understood what I was about.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LES KOSSATZ: But his reaction was it had to be portable. But I often get work done that way by tradesmen who are experts in their field naturally without letting them know that it's for a sculpture.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

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LES KOSSATZ: The bands around the case are steel.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Painted?

LES KOSSATZ: No, they're just rusted and lacquered so they have something of the quality of, I suppose, old leather.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: The grass is silicone, rubber, and the rock type forms are expanded urethane, polyurethane foam.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: Which I think have been probably lacquered in some way just to toughen the outside surface.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Is it solid? Is this enclosed form solid?

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, it is solid. It's solid, but quite lightweight because of the nature of urethane.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, of course. Good, I think that gives us an idea of that. Sheep, now that's the sheep on the couch. That's probably the most startling one of yours that we have at the moment. We haven't got a photograph of it but I recall it as a life-size sheep bound and lying on what looks like a rather Victorian style couch.

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, the couch is a sort of cross between a landscape form of a sort of hill come valley form.

JAMES GLEESON: So it's a landscape turned into a couch.

LES KOSSATZ: Into a couch, but the fact that it's leather and it's studded as a couch would be. It's supported by two steel half wheels, if you like.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: So it has some sort of connotation of a wheel-chair, but because they're only half wheels as though it's either bogged or, you know, it ain't goin' any further.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. The end of the line.

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, as its support. The sheep is life size. The fleece is an actual fleece. It's been tanned but not degreased. It's wrapped around a steel armature which has been hacked out.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

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LES KOSSATZ: The head and legs are cast stainless steel taken from actual hooves and the head had been skun before I took the cast.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: So I suppose you could call those dead—I suppose, what would you call them? Death or death casts.

JAMES GLEESON: Death casts, yes.

LES KOSSATZ: You know, of those particular sections. The horns are hand carved and then cast.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. What did you carve them in?

LES KOSSATZ: In a urethane.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: Polyurethane.

JAMES GLEESON: The couch itself, is that real leather?

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, it's real leather.

JAMES GLEESON: So that there's an enormous amount of fabrication goes on into your sculpture?

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, certainly, certainly.

JAMES GLEESON: Clearly you think it all out well in advance, because we have the drawing in fact for that particular sculpture.

LES KOSSATZ: I try to. Sometimes the drawings are half completed prior to the work. The drawings are probably the notation, but often the drawings mightn't occur until the job has been finished.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, really?

LES KOSSATZ: This one I think would have been done actually after the event. In fact, I think it's done from a bronze. There's a little bronze of that piece, which from memory either occurred during the process and then the drawing would have come from that. Yes, I think it did actually from memory. I think I decided that I'd do a little bronze at the same time as doing the major piece.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Working in bronze you do them, what, in clay first?

LES KOSSATZ: In wax, straight in wax. In fact you haven't got any of my little sheep in the collection.

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JAMES GLEESON: No.

LES KOSSATZ: Little maquettes. But they're all worked almost like an identikit system where they're all combinations of three or four bodies of sheep. The legs come off in a production line, as rows of legs these are then cut, worked and just added to the bodies as one sees fit. That's the beauty of wax.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: So we work that way normally.

JAMES GLEESON: We also have of course the drawing for the *Packed landscape*. Was that before or after the event?

LES KOSSATZ: I would think that that one is also at the time of the event. You know, they're sort of detailed drawings. I think it was probably at the same time, because my initial working drawings are but mere sketches.

JAMES GLEESON: Are they? But you do make those—

LES KOSSATZ: Oh yes, certainly.

JAMES GLEESON: You'd have to planning a work as complex as *Sheep on the couch* or *Packed landscape*. You'd have to have a pretty clear idea exactly what you were going to do before you started on the actual fabrication, wouldn't you?

LES KOSSATZ: Oh yes, certainly in size limitation but then there are other—I try not to over plan the thing from the beginning, for fear of being caught out, you know, with a fixed idea. I like things to develop a little bit as they go through.

JAMES GLEESON: Just leave the door open for any fresh idea that comes in.

LES KOSSATZ: Well, yes, yes, I think one has to.

JAMES GLEESON: Good. Well, now a whole group of graphic works of yours. This is called *Partial shroud* 1975. Are we correct in that date.

LES KOSSATZ: Well, I think it would be on the front. Yes, it would be '75.

JAMES GLEESON: It is. Of course it is, yes. So there's no need to check on that. Silk-screening, where did you study that technique and who with or was it something that you developed yourself and picked up the technique?

LES KOSSATZ: Yes. Actually, I think I've tried most techniques.

JAMES GLEESON: Printing techniques.

LES KOSSATZ: Over a period of time. I work quite closely with Jan Senbergs, who's probably a master of silkscreen. So I would think that it came from partially

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that area. But that particular print, the drawings for that were done in London. If I recall, the drawings were sent out from London, even the colour separations were sent out from London, to be screen printed here. But something happened on the way. I think the material I'd worked on was a plastic. I'd done the separations on clear plastic. I think there was some sort of expansion or contraction problems so they couldn't actually be done until I got back. But this little series here were printed. I didn't actually print those. They were printed in Melbourne. They printed that one over there. What's that one called? I printed that one.

JAMES GLEESON: *Struggle of a many time prizewinner.*

LES KOSSATZ: *Struggle of a many time prizewinner.* Yes, I did that one. These two here, the *Partial shroud* and *Prizewinner*, were printed here. Actually, I don't know who printed those because they were being handled by a photographer at the time who was organising the colour separations, a guy called John Edson. He was handling those two particular prints in terms of having them processed for me.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LES KOSSATZ: But that one, the *Struggle of a many time prizewinner* is one I printed. Yes, I printed that one at Melbourne Tech.

JAMES GLEESON: Good. *Trophy room.*

LES KOSSATZ: *Trophy room.* That was also drawn in London, and it suffered the same problem as *Partial shroud* and *Prizewinner*, in the fact that my separations didn't work by the time they got back to Melbourne. So that was also printed by John Edson.

JAMES GLEESON: When were you in London?

LES KOSSATZ: 'Seventy three, '74.

JAMES GLEESON: Did you show over there?

LES KOSSATZ: No, no. Just all look and see.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. *Maughan's sheep*, now that's a series of five, of which we've got five but only four photographs. They are etchings, aren't they?

LES KOSSATZ: They're etchings.

JAMES GLEESON: Can you remember the date of those or are they dated on them?

LES KOSSATZ: They should be '77. They're a series of small bronzes.

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JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: In the bronze form they're like little altar tables.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I remember them very vividly. You showed them at Rudy's.

LES KOSSATZ: That's right, the seven were there. At the time they were supposed to have been done full size for the Paris Biennale. But something happened at the last minute and the Biennale decided to become mainly a conceptual show. I don't know what happened, there was a tremendous mix up and so we never got to do them full size. But the bronze maquettes exist for it, as you know. These were done from the maquettes.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: The five etchings. Although there are seven sheep in the bronze stage, there are only five in the etching stage.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Would you wish now to complete those maquettes to full scale if the possibility arose?

LES KOSSATZ: I don't know. I think actually probably not now. I think it would be great but it would take too much time.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. You feel they make the statement?

LES KOSSATZ: I think they make the statement in the small size.

JAMES GLEESON: I think they do too. I think they look marvellous in that scale.

LES KOSSATZ: I suppose, if the Paris Biennale had gone ahead, they would have been quite spectacular in full size.

JAMES GLEESON: They would, yes.

LES KOSSATZ: But, no, I think there are more important things to get on to now.

JAMES GLEESON: Can you find any reason for your interest in the sheep as a recurring image?

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, there is a reason. As I said, going back to what we were talking about before about the landscape when I was painting, I couldn't animate the landscape successfully. I found that often if I was just painting the grass and the holes in the ground and so on they were becoming rather decorative and I wasn't getting an impact out of the painting which I was after. So I decided to try and use an animal of some kind which was apersonal. So one didn't get the connotation of, you know, some people like cows, some people like horses.

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Certain animals you can't use. The first animal I used was the rabbit, and there were quite a series of rabbit paintings.

JAMES GLEESON: I don't recall ever having seen those.

LES KOSSATZ: Well, there's a few, there's quite a few around, yes. They're quite interesting paintings because I had to somehow draw from the actual rabbit and rabbits have a crazy habit. If you isolate them, if you put them on a pedestal they won't run away because they're frightened of heights. But you can't get round the back of a rabbit to draw him because his eyes will always follow.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Turn you around too.

LES KOSSATZ: Yes. So I had a big problem. I didn't want the rabbit to be looking at me, and I found it very hard to draw a rabbit. So I thought the only way I can do it is I'm going to have to model a rabbit. Then I've got something which is not going to look at me. That's possibly the first time I used the animal. Certainly the first time in painting, but also the first time that I became interested in doing, you know, a three dimensional work of the rabbit. So after this series of rabbit paintings I felt that I wanted to develop the landscape thing. But I wanted to upgrade almost the scale of the animal.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: The only other animal which I could conceive of which would work both for practical reasons just for life size—because I'm always concerned with working to a life, a life size—was the sheep because it shared that sort of apersonal connotation that the rabbit's got.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes, yes.

LES KOSSATZ: So we decided to move into the sheep thing. Also living on the farm, having sheep at the time, if a sheep goes down or something you'd have to somehow tend for it. This started to become, well, not a daily event but, you know, a sort of seasonal occurrence, if you like, started to give me a bit of a lift. Because sometimes you'd have to put a sheep into a wheelbarrow or you'd have to put it into a sling of one sort or another to make it fight for its existence.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: You know, if it was down—you know what sheep are like if they go down—that's it. They have a habit of throwing in the towel very early. So that sort of lifestyle I suppose almost promoted the extension into me using it as a sculptural and as a painting form.

JAMES GLEESON: So you've actually seen sheep in sort of cradles and wheelbarrows?

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LES KOSSATZ: Oh, I've made cradles for the real articles just to keep them alive, just to keep their legs on the ground but without supporting weight and so on, you know. They're a very vulnerable animal. These Maughan's sheep are taken from a series of drawings I did from a property near Saint Andrews a friend of mine had. He rang me one morning and said that the dogs had been at his sheep that night and there were 40 sheep had gone down. Some had run into fences, some had had heart attacks just because of the chase, some had fallen down holes. So, not meaning to be morbid, but I went across there and did a whole series of drawings that morning. The *Maughan's sheep*, the series, are in actual fact basically to do with that particular set of drawings. Except that I've elevated them on to a possible altar table situation, I suppose.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. I remember in those bronze maquettes you have sheep, and some of them disappearing down a hole.

LES KOSSATZ: Oh down holes, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: So this really arrived from your experience.

LES KOSSATZ: Oh certainly. I think most of it does. I still regard myself as being pretty much of a realist actually, in terms of observation. Okay, of course you don't see sheep running and falling down trapdoors or down holes. Well, you do see them falling down holes, but not down trapdoors. But it's only one extension and it's the same device. Again, a trapdoor is the same as the cage.

JAMES GLEESON: When you put them up on an altar table as you do in the series and in some of your sculptures, is that a kind of symbolic device? Are you making some statement about sacrifice?

LES KOSSATZ: I think it's the same as I was saying about the rabbit. If you have a sheep bound and it's lying on the ground, it doesn't have the same impact as if you elevate it on to some form of pedestal or confine it by putting it on a pedestal. I think then of course there is that connotation that the table, whether it be a butcher's table or a church table, it still has that altar connotation. Yes, people have drawn all sorts of religious significance things with, you know, sacrificial lambs and so on. I don't worry too much about that. I think it's certainly there. I mean, the reason I call it an altar table is it is there as sacrifice. But I don't see it as being you know, over heavy—

JAMES GLEESON: Symbolism.

LES KOSSATZ: Symbolism. No, I don't. I can't. I can't.

JAMES GLEESON: You're not drawing a parallel between the condition of the sheep and the condition of humanity, for instance? Man bound.

LES KOSSATZ: Not really. I think, you know, once again it can be read in quite easily. Maybe I do play a bit of a game at times and it's inferred but not as a sort

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of heavy number on my part. I see art as social comment certainly, but not as a not necessarily as a heavy social comment I think. You have a few good days and your bad days. You have your reasons for binding up a friend, I suppose, as much as a sheep. I think it comes through on different levels, but not as an ongoing thing.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no. It's not the activating element in your work.

LES KOSSATZ: No, no. It couldn't be because of the actual time process. I can't maintain one emotion for the length of time it that takes to do a sculpture and I think this is another reason why they do change from day to day. They have to.

JAMES GLEESON: In this series of *Maughan's sheep*, were they quickly done? All you know, closely (inaudible).

LES KOSSATZ: Oh, they would have been done within four or five days. Oh, yes, it would have been an ongoing thing.

JAMES GLEESON: No. 5 is missing but we've obviously got it without the photograph.

LES KOSSATZ: Oh well, we'll rectify that one.

JAMES GLEESON: Well now, *Jump jump*, that's a drawing. Pencil on paper.

LES KOSSATZ: On paper.

JAMES GLEESON: Was this related to those series of bronze maquettes?

LES KOSSATZ: No, there were a few drawings which are almost sort of fantasy things because they won't work—this is the other extension—they won't work in the third dimension. You can't get a bronze to sit in the air. So sometimes you have to go back to drawing or painting, you know, where you can make use of the illusion, or the illusionary space thing. But you can't in sculpture.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

LES KOSSATZ: So I think that's probably just a—

JAMES GLEESON: You wanted this sort of feeling, the airborne sheep.

LES KOSSATZ: Just up there and I can't quite do it in sculpture without using some other device.

JAMES GLEESON: Was it at the time you were doing those maquettes?

LES KOSSATZ: Oh certainly. Yes, they'd be right through that particular period.

JAMES GLEESON: Now this one is, what?

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LES KOSSATZ: *Homage tank 1.*

JAMES GLEESON: A lithograph.

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, it's a lithograph. Yes, I'm involved in a print workshop in Melbourne called Druckma Press.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, yes.

LES KOSSATZ: A guy called John Robinson is the printer. We're partners in that particular business. All we do there is work for artists, you know, so I naturally make use of the facilities from time to time.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. *Homage tank.* How does that (inaudible)?

LES KOSSATZ: Well it's to do with a drought situation.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah yes.

LES KOSSATZ: It's almost as though, you know, the sheep are obviously carcasses in this sense, in fact they're quite hollow. I think probably it's similar—I shouldn't say it's similar—but what I'm trying to get across was some of the qualities in sort of Nolan's *Drought* series, which you know, I found quite impressive.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, they were very moving.

LES KOSSATZ: I think I'm after something of that connotation where the tank, well you know, it exists as a bit of rural ugliness, but also it's a sanctuary of sorts to animals either for the water or for the shade that it offers. I think this is just to do with that particular statement.

JAMES GLEESON: It's numbered 1. Were there a series of those?

LES KOSSATZ: No, they weren't. There probably was intended to be.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: That's as far as we ever got.

JAMES GLEESON: So you really do work on quite a wide range of graphic media?

LES KOSSATZ: Well, this is why we started the press in particular. I mean, until we got that going you couldn't get a lithograph done. It's the same thing. Unless you do it yourself, you're not ongoing, you don't understand the material. So we got that going, we've got etching and silk-screening. We try everything.

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JAMES GLEESON: Good. Now we'll go back right to the early days and a series of woodcuts with a medal theme, it seems to me. Two we haven't got photographs of. But you seem to think that they are of this period and belong to this same medal subject.

LES KOSSATZ: I'm sure there are four. I think two of them aren't really good. A couple of them—that one's OK. But some of them I don't think are that good. I think I was just interested in woodcuts. The medal thing was a bit of the old angry young man number. I suppose at the time of this I would have been very early twenties, just probably 20 or 21 or something of that nature.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: Because of the Vietnam War and always the possibility of conscription. I suppose that I wasn't a sort of great protester but I probably felt as though there was some sort of reason why I should get angry against the situation.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

LES KOSSATZ: It was probably anti RSL as much as anything else.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah yes.

LES KOSSATZ: There were a whole series of medal paintings.

JAMES GLEESON: Paintings as distinct from woodcuts.

LES KOSSATZ: As distinct from woodcuts. These would have been some of the very very early ones. Very very early. They're to do with decorations and sort of that sort of Anzac Day Parade number.

JAMES GLEESON: Technically were they cut from rough pieces of timber?

LES KOSSATZ: Old school desks.

JAMES GLEESON: Old school desks?

LES KOSSATZ: See I was teaching at the time.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: They were very much cut from old school desks. I think they were three ply sort of laminated. But there's some nice score marks in it and there was quite sort of almost eroded—

JAMES GLEESON: Some of the things look almost accidental, the marks.

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LES KOSSATZ: Well, they would have been, you know, either chewing gum stains or score marks in old school desks.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. You use that to give that textured effect.

LES KOSSATZ: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Good. Now, *Sacrificial lamb*, another screenprint. That's '77.

LES KOSSATZ: Seventy seven.

JAMES GLEESON: So that really belongs to that other—

LES KOSSATZ: It tends to belong to that other particular set.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Les, I think that covers it pretty well. We've looked at your sculpture, the pieces, the four pieces we've got, and the wide range of graphic works that you've done. Is there any aspect of your work that at the moment isn't represented in the Gallery?

LES KOSSATZ: Paintings.

JAMES GLEESON: No, that's true, we don't have a single painting.

LES KOSSATZ: Not a painting there.

JAMES GLEESON: What do you paint in, oils?

LES KOSSATZ: Oils, using oil on canvas.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

LES KOSSATZ: I think that's about all that's missing. Stained glass, possibly not much stained glass up there. But then the Gallery doesn't need much stained glass.

JAMES GLEESON: You have worked in stained glass.

LES KOSSATZ: I did for a long time. I did quite a few churches in Melbourne.

JAMES GLEESON: That's right, I remember.

LES KOSSATZ: But Monash University, inter-denominational chapels, the major piece.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

LES KOSSATZ: But I haven't worked in glass much since then.

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JAMES GLEESON: Do you still work in oils?

LES KOSSATZ: Yes, most certainly. I haven't painted for some time now because of the High Court job. I find it very hard to keep everything happening.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, of course.

LES KOSSATZ: You know, this High Court one is the number one preoccupation at the moment. But hopefully back to painting.

JAMES GLEESON: You regard it as an important aspect?

LES KOSSATZ: Oh certainly. I still regard myself as painter.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, it's an oversight there (inaudible) representation of your work in that medium.

LES KOSSATZ: Oh well, there's time to rectify that.

JAMES GLEESON: That's true. Les, is there anything else now you'd like to add to that, anything we should know or does that cover it?

LES KOSSATZ: I think that covers it, James. I think there's enough there for the interim.

JAMES GLEESON: There's certainly enough for our catalogue.

LES KOSSATZ: Good. I think that's plenty.

JAMES GLEESON: All right. Well, when the time comes when we do add an oil or whatever to the collection we'll come back to you for further details on that.

LES KOSSATZ: Good.

JAMES GLEESON: Thank you very much.

LES KOSSATZ: Thank you.