

JAMES GLEESON INTERVIEWS: JUSTIN O'BRIEN

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JAMES GLEESON: Justin, could we begin by talking about the individual works we have in the national collection? Anything you can remember about them; circumstances of their painting.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, certainly. What would you like to ask?

JAMES GLEESON: Well now, this one is called *Flower study*, and it looks to be a fairly early one. Is that right?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, it is. I painted that when I came back from the war, and I think Tas Drysdale was responsible for buying that, the collection.

JAMES GLEESON: For the Art Advisory Board?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, yes. How many years ago was that?

JAMES GLEESON: Well, it would have been a long time.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Twenty years. About 20 years ago, I think. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: It was shortly after you came back from the war?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, it wasn't long after. Well, yes, it was shortly after I came back from the war.

JAMES GLEESON: In style it seems to look like the sort of pictures I remember you painting at that time.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, any other details of it? It went straight from you into the collection.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, you know, I don't remember really very much, except I was very influenced by Derain at that period.

JAMES GLEESON: At that time?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. I saw an exhibition of Derain's a little while ago in Rome, and I loved them. I still had that fascination about Derain's work. You know, like I said, I don't know how great he was.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

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JUSTIN O'BRIEN: But he was a very good painter.

JAMES GLEESON: He was indeed.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: He was a lovely painter, yes, yes. I don't like his clowns or, you know, but I love what he did with still lifes and people in rooms and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, it's very consistent with the sort of work you were doing at that time.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. At that time I was, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: So that it really does come out as one of the sort of classic works of that period which would be what, late forties early fifties?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Are you referring to classic works about me? You're not. I love you, Jimmy. Yes, that was a very classic work at that time.

JAMES GLEESON: Early fifties.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Now, where are we? It must be very early fifties, I should think. I don't know when that was painted. There's no date on it, is there?

JAMES GLEESON: No.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I never date anything. Do you date your pictures?

JAMES GLEESON: No.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I never do, no.

JAMES GLEESON: Well now, *Boy and a red jacket*.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Now, that boy, he went to Cranbrook. His name was Donald McClisky. Donald McClisky is now working up the road from where I'm staying with Merv. Yes, he is, and he's sandpapering pillars and working very hard.

JAMES GLEESON: Go on.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, he is.

JAMES GLEESON: He was a student? He studied art with you?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, he was a student of mine and he married a woman called—oh God, what's her name? I can't remember it. Anyway, he's married.

JAMES GLEESON: Is that dated? Do we have a date for that?

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JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, I don't think so.

JAMES GLEESON: Also known as the *Red jacket*, 1963.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, it would be about 1963. He came and posed for me at my flat in Elizabeth Bay Road. Well, he's a well-developed young man now. He's not a child any more.

JAMES GLEESON: You used gold there.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I didn't use any gold.

JAMES GLEESON: Isn't that gold in the jacket?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, what comes out like gold?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: It's probably Indian yellow, I suppose.

JAMES GLEESON: Is it?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: There's no gold leaf in that. No.

JAMES GLEESON: The gold leaf didn't come till later then?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, I used gold leaf long before that. But there's no gold leaf in that. No.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, isn't that surprising because it does—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Do you think it looks like gold leaf?

JAMES GLEESON: You look at the highlights on that red jacket.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, Jim, there's no gold leaf on that.

JAMES GLEESON: Isn't there?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, not at all.

JAMES GLEESON: It's a long time, I must say, since I've seen the actual thing.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Wait a minute. That's travelling round the country now in that funny collection.

JAMES GLEESON: That's right, yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: What do you call it? Patrick McCaughey.

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JAMES GLEESON: The Heroic Years.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Patrick McCaughey gave it several write-ups.

JAMES GLEESON: The Heroic Years, that's right. It is some time since I've seen it.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: He looks so professional. Look at him.

JAMES GLEESON: I know.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Terrible things on his ears. Are you going up to Mars?

JAMES GLEESON: Just this (inaudible).

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: What is that?

JAMES GLEESON: *Interior with still life.*

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: How in the hell did you get hold of that?

JAMES GLEESON: What does it say on the paper?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I don't know. Well, you have a look. Who owns it? Who did own it?

JAMES GLEESON: We got it from the Macquarie Galleries.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Did you?

JAMES GLEESON: In March 1967, a long time ago.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: How incredible. Because, you know, I think—now who did buy that? Bugged if I know. Can I use language like that? I have no idea and, do you know, Mervyn's still got that black head that belongs to Donald Friend.

JAMES GLEESON: Really?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: And what is it, an African theme?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. I've had it for years and he's never claimed it back. Isn't he marvellous?

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, that's interesting. So the head really belongs to (inaudible)

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JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. Oh, Merv was a terrible old, you know—

JAMES GLEESON: Justin, we've got on it here, Skiros, or Skylos.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: It's not. Wait till I have a look. Of course it's not Skiros.

JAMES GLEESON: So that's not correct?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, I probably muddled the whole thing up. No. You knew Skiros.

JAMES GLEESON: It is Skiros?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. Well, it's not but I mean I put Skiros. Where did you get that bloody picture from?

JAMES GLEESON: Macquarie Galleries.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Did you? I had no idea you had that picture. No idea in the world you had it.

JAMES GLEESON: No date. Oh, '67.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Was that the date or not?

JAMES GLEESON: Signed O'Brien, top left in red paint.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Really?

JAMES GLEESON: Nineteen sixty-seven.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: How extraordinary.

JAMES GLEESON: Now, had you been in Greece at that time?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh no, I was going to Greece every year then.

JAMES GLEESON: So that landscape scene behind the black figure—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, it's all Greek. No, I'm sure it's Greek. Yes, it is Greek, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Would it be Skiros?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: That's Skiros, yes. That is all Skiros.

JAMES GLEESON: So we did get that right?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, you got that right.

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JAMES GLEESON: Good.

JAMES GLEESON: How we getting on?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Not too bad. I love this.

JAMES GLEESON: The drawing? Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, isn't it funny, you know? Fancy meeting him—

JAMES GLEESON: Now, tell me about the model?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, the model was called Padre Wild.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: He was the Anglican Padre in the prisoner of war camp that I was in.

JAMES GLEESON: In Greece?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No. No, no, in Poland.

JAMES GLEESON: In Poland.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: In Poland. He was a house-master at Eton. Yes. This is most extraordinary, because when I went back about two years ago I went to the National Gallery. Suddenly who should be there with all his kids? And they're all grown up, of course, and his wife. His lordship.

JAMES GLEESON: What's his name?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Padre Wild. Padre Wild.

JAMES GLEESON: W-I-L-D-E?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: What's on there? Can you read what's—what have I written on that? I gave that to Willy Spencer.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, it's Willy from Justin O'Brien.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Ah, yes. I did, I gave it to Willy Spencer.

JAMES GLEESON: So this was drawn in Poland?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I drew it in Poland and I showed it in my exhibition when I came out, you know—

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JAMES GLEESON: Just after the war?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, '30. No, the war was still on.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Thirty-four years ago or something, and I had it there. It isn't bad. I'm just looking at it, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: It's a beautiful drawing.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Willy's given it to the gallery.

JAMES GLEESON: Collection.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Do you like it?

JAMES GLEESON: Love it.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Congratulations.

JAMES GLEESON: Now, this is one that's got you puzzled.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, I don't like that too. Where the hell did that come from? I wouldn't have bought that for two cents. Who bought it?

JAMES GLEESON: Well, *Station of the Cross*; pencil, ink and watercolour.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, gawd.

JAMES GLEESON: Signed O'Brien, so it's yours.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I know it's mine.

JAMES GLEESON: Bought from Beth Maine Studio.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Didn't pay much.

JAMES GLEESON: It belonged to Mrs Winston?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, she's the—yes.

JAMES GLEESON: I think, if I remember.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, I would like to make a few changes on that.

JAMES GLEESON: Do you often feel like that about your drawings?

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JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Do I often? I feel like it all the time. Jimmy, do you ever feel like that?

JAMES GLEESON: I certainly do.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Where's that idiot Horton gone? Is he out—

JAMES GLEESON: Watching telly. Well, *The Stations of the Cross*, you did the whole sequence in this style.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. In a church Cabrini, the Cabrini nuns. You know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: It's a private hospital. Do you know, they did the most terrible thing. Well, the chapel was so awful anyway that you could hardly bear to look at it. But then they even changed that and made it even worse. Because I always think the Catholics are the most terrible, terrible people in the world about aesthetics. They're awful. They shouldn't be allowed to exist. Anyway, so you know what they've done? They've cut all the frames down. Well, they've cut them right down to the edge of the picture and they've put that awful Perspex glass on them, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, no.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, I felt terribly happy about all that.

JAMES GLEESON: They were oil versions or drawing versions?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: They were drawings. I love these (inaudible). Are you listening to me?

JAMES GLEESON: This is one that got away from the Cabrini.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, that wasn't in it at all. How the hell did they get that bloody thing? I've never seen it before in my life. No, I did it. No, I did it. No, I did it, Jim, but I don't know where it came from. I'd love to do it again.

JAMES GLEESON: Is it a version?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, no. I hate all that nonsense that goes on.

JAMES GLEESON: You know, for *The Stations of the Cross* when you're doing (inaudible) Cabrini.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: She's a modern American Saint. She's of Italian extraction, I think.

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JAMES GLEESON: Oh, Saint Merica?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Something Cabrini.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: And there's a hospital down there. It's like St Vincent's here.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: The same thing.

JAMES GLEESON: Whereabouts is it?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: These were all given as a present from a woman who was grateful for something that happened.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I think she became a convert to Catholicism, and she gave all these pictures to the hospital.

JAMES GLEESON: Did she commission them?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. No, no, she commissioned me, which was very sweet of her. But that's not one of them. I don't know where that came from. I couldn't tell you.

JAMES GLEESON: No, but you did a whole—*The Stations of the Cross*—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I did the 14 *Stations of the Cross*.

JAMES GLEESON: But you did other versions apart from the Cabrini ones? Obviously, because this is one.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I must have, yes. I must have gone on doing them, I think. But you wrote it up.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I know. I'll have to look what I said. Well, we come to *The kiss of Judas*.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I hate that. I've never liked that picture. That was Jeffery Smart who posed for that. You can just see; it looks just like him, doesn't it?

JAMES GLEESON: What, he was the Christ figure?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: He's so conceited and pompous (inaudible). Jesus Christ Almighty. There he is.

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JAMES GLEESON: He really did pose for it?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: 'Course he did, and he did the most terrible things while he was posing. Can I say them?

JAMES GLEESON: No.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, he was terrible. He was really dreadful. Well, that's just that. I don't know. They got that from John Brackenrig, did they, or not? It came from—

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, at Artarmon.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: What's his lordship's name over in—he used to live in Rushcutter's Bay and he had, oh, a puppeteer. What was his name, the puppeteer?

JAMES GLEESON: Scriven. Peter Scriven.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: And he bought it. He got it so cheaply, he got it for something like—I was so poor, I hadn't enough money to pay the rent. I think I sold it at 55 quid or something.

JAMES GLEESON: Go on.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, I did. How much did the gallery—

JAMES GLEESON: Six thousand.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: They did not. They're nuts. I wouldn't pay—

JAMES GLEESON: In '69.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I wouldn't give you two thousand for that bloody thing. Awful. Bloody rubbish.

JAMES GLEESON: Tell me. Now, obviously, quattrocento art is behind the sort of image here.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: It's all behind my brain. My brain, I can't think in a modern way. I can't. Sydney is hideous to me. I'm sorry. Where Mervyn lives, when I look across every morning, even when I get up to have a piddle in the morning, I look across and there's the lovely warm sun, you know, the morning sun's rising and those awful ghastly buildings. They're hideous. There's no love in anything.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, it's certainly not quattrocento Sienna.

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JUSTIN O'BRIEN: But there is in quattrocetos Sienna. Oh, of course, there is love everywhere there. Don't you feel that?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: You're not joking with me?

JAMES GLEESON: No, no, no, of course not.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Don't tell him I told you. I tell him every 25 minutes it's all right.

JAMES GLEESON: All your art, I mean, a great deal of it, seems to me to be focused on the quattrocetos, the Italian quattrocetos. Why? The serenity, the surety?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Look, look, I've got an exhibition now in Sydney, and the one thing I want in everything I ever do is peace. It's the feeling of stopping for a second, and just coping with the whole thing in one second.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. Do you know what I mean by that?

JAMES GLEESON: I do, because your line has it. Your line is a moment that's arrested.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I only want that. I don't want anything else. I just want that one single—look, you can bash the waves up but, wait a minute, just let them stop and they'll stop. I think you can do that, don't you?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Yes, well, you've done it.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Am I talking rubbish?

JAMES GLEESON: No, you're not. Because this is exactly what—there is a stillness.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: A held moment, I think, in all—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I want this held moment. I've got to have it, and if I don't have it—

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I'd die, I think.

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JAMES GLEESON: It's reaching for that moment of perpetuity.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: It's peace. What I want is peace, that's the point. I think the word is peace. That's a bit of a bore, isn't it?

JAMES GLEESON: Not at all. And you felt that, and I think I probably agree with you—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: What?

JAMES GLEESON: In Sienna or in quattrocentos—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Ah, Duccio. What do you think of Duccio? Oh, for God's sake, they're marvellous. Frank, have you seen the Duccio's in Sienna?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, he has.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh gawd, aren't they wonderful?

JAMES GLEESON: Nice stuff.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, that's right. Isn't it wonderful? It's the most wonderful thing in the world. You know, this is a man who took over Byzantine tradition, all these years—can you hear me?—all these years later, and he changed it. It's like taking over Gothic or Romanesque or something. It's unbelievable how he did it, but he did it.

JAMES GLEESON: You've been accused of being a Byzantine artist. I never really saw that in your art. Your colour was always gorgeous.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Don't you remember when Paul Haefliger said—I think it was Paul Haefliger—he said, 'Byzantine' something or other 'glows falsely from the walls of the Macquarie Gallery'. I love that. I've kept that forever. It's true too, of course. It was rather phoney.

JAMES GLEESON: It was Sienna not—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Now, here we are. Now come back to more modern times now.

JAMES GLEESON: *Tivoli*.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, I love *Tivoli*. Do you know *Tivoli* well?

JAMES GLEESON: Not really. I've been there half a dozen times.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: They bought the drawing and the painting.

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JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, but they bought another one. What was the other bloody one they bought? I can't remember what it was.

JAMES GLEESON: *Still life with landscape?*

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No.

JAMES GLEESON: Seventy-six, from the same show.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Did they?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Did they?

JAMES GLEESON: *Still life against a landscape.*

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Where is it?

JAMES GLEESON: That's either at The Lodge or Yarralumla, I think.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, yes, yes. Now, do you know who painted all this sort of country? Turner, they all did.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, yes, of course.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: They all went, they all went—

JAMES GLEESON: Classical country again.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, they all went to this country. And, you know, just round the corner here there are the most enormous cascades.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh yes, I remember those.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, they're wonderful. And you know that the Temple of Vesta, or whatever it was, was very badly bombed during the war. Of course, it made an awful mess. But this part was never, never rubbished at all, you know. It was charming.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, what part is that exactly?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh dear, oh dear, how can I tell you what part it is? It's the lower part of Tivoli.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

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JUSTIN O'BRIEN: It's not really near the gardens, you know, the fountains. No, it's down below the fountains. It was a terrible pensionne, ghastly, but I didn't mind because I had a little terrace to myself and I painted on the terrace, you know. I loved it.

JAMES GLEESON: You did it actually on the spot, the drawing?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, no, these are all done on the spot, absolutely on the spot, yes. That's the drawing, that's the painting.

JAMES GLEESON: They were both done on the spot?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I am so pleased the gallery bought the two. I didn't even know you'd done that.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, it's very important to do that.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I didn't know you'd done it. I'm delighted about that.

JAMES GLEESON: They were both painted on the spot?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. I did the drawing.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Then I did the painting. I stayed there over a week; about two weeks, I think, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: You did other drawings around Tivoli?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, yes. No, no, no, no.

JAMES GLEESON: Not at that time.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Not that time, no. I just did those two and I stayed in this terrible pensionne.

JAMES GLEESON: What year was that, '76 or earlier?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, dear boy when was—

JAMES GLEESON: We bought it in '76.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Three years ago. Three years ago. What's that?

JAMES GLEESON: Seventy-five.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Is it? Seventy-five.

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JAMES GLEESON: This is '78 now.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Three years ago. About three years ago.

JAMES GLEESON: Do you do much going out into the Italian countryside?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I go up and stay with my darling friends the Hasseys, whom I love, Judy and Charles. Charles is 73, believe it or not, and he's a film director. He was a famous film editor years ago, very famous. Judy was a West End actress. I go and stay. You know my exhibition at the present moment?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, all the doors and kitchens, they're all Judy's kitchens and doors. Do you remember them or not?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes, I do.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, there you are.

JAMES GLEESON: So that you do draw very much on fact?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: He looks like someone going to Mars. I do, I love drawing from life and I must draw from life all the time.

JAMES GLEESON: Now sorry we haven't got that one, *Still life against a landscape*, but that came from—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Nine hundred dollars, that's frightfully cheap.

JAMES GLEESON: It might be a drawing.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I don't know what it is. What is this?

JAMES GLEESON: It's a drawing.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Is it? Oh, good

JAMES GLEESON: It's a drawing. But that would have been done at that time.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Can you tell me, may I just ask you a little question now? Why in the name of hell can't the bloody Sydney Gallery go and look at my pictures. There's a charming man who's taken over the what's a name.

JAMES GLEESON: Barry Pearce.

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JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, we had lunch the other day. He's so intelligent. John Olsen hasn't been in, no one's been in. Nothing's happened. The Brisbane Gallery have and they've never bought a picture of mine in their lives, ever.

JAMES GLEESON: Good Lord.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, there you are and I'm angry, I really am angry.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh yes, well that's ridiculous.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Is that good go into the—

JAMES GLEESON: It's on record.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I'd like to put it in the archives. What's that?

JAMES GLEESON: That's *Wildflowers with fresco*.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: *Wildflowers*. Where did that come from?

JAMES GLEESON: Barry Stern.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, where is it?

JAMES GLEESON: That is either at Kirribilli or Admiralty House or one of the establishments.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Ah, yes, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: But it belongs to us.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I see.

JAMES GLEESON: Comes the day, it'll be—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: It'll be there, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: It'll be in the gallery. Do you remember that painting?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, I think.

JAMES GLEESON: Would that be one of the Greek ones?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I'm having hysterics. It's a Greek one, they're always Greek. No, no, it's not. It's a Roman one.

JAMES GLEESON: Is it?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, it is. It's wildflowers with a Roman—

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JAMES GLEESON: Fresco.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I think it comes from San Clemente. Yes. San Clemente sounds good on (inaudible).

JAMES GLEESON: So it's a Roman?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, it's a Roman one, yes. I'm sure of that. How long ago was that? Oh yes, it is, it's a Roman. It's Roman. Seventy-seven. What's that?

JAMES GLEESON: We bought it in February '76 but we don't have a date for it.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I think you're right. No, I think it is Roman.

JAMES GLEESON: Perhaps you painted it a few years earlier than that?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: No, probably the same. No, about a year before, I think.

JAMES GLEESON: Seventy-five.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Barry Stern, did you?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, it's a re-sale.

JAMES GLEESON: Probably. Probably.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Terrible machine. Awful. You know what it reminds me of, don't you?

JAMES GLEESON: We won't go into that. Just before we finish, we've got all the details now about the works. Now about just background.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: My background? My father was a potato merchant. And a bloody good one too he was, yes. Lovely, we always had lovely potatoes. Tell me the rest?

JAMES GLEESON: Just training. I know you studied with—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Edward Smith. Did you know Blacksmith?

JAMES GLEESON: Of course, he was one of my teacher's too.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: He was not. At the Tech?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

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JUSTIN O'BRIEN: How marvellous. Was he?

JAMES GLEESON: We had Blacksmith and Silversmith.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: That's right, Blacksmith and Silversmith. He was a very good teacher.

JAMES GLEESON: He was an excellent teacher.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: You know where he got all his information from? Julian Ashton.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, Julian Ashton

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Julian Ashton.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Julian Ashton had a background that was wonderful for teaching, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Then what about old Senior Earley?

JAMES GLEESON: Well, I never—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Come on. He was wonderful. He was a marvellous painter.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I know his paintings

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: But he knew old Eddie Smith.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, did he?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I want to tell you something.

JAMES GLEESON: I didn't know that.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Every Friday afternoon—this'll be good—every Friday afternoon I'd go with old Eddie, my teacher—I called him Mr Smith all the time with great respect—I would go to Darlinghurst fair. Is that what you'd call it?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: He would buy fresh fish from a man who came with a basket. Can you believe it? The most wonderful beautiful bream and everything was all

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there? He bought it for a song, I suppose. Do know what I would do? I would take it out to old Ashton.

JAMES GLEESON: Really?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. He'd say to me, 'Your hair's too long young man'. Oh, he was awful. No, he wasn't, he was rather nice. He was sweet really. But he used to get rather cross with the length and my hair wasn't long at all. I couldn't afford to get it cut every two minutes. He had a very sweet wife. She's a darling. I just vaguely remember them now. It's a long time ago. Do you know how old I was? Fourteen.

JAMES GLEESON: Really? This was when you were studying with—

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Fourteen years old, yes. I was with Eddie for—the old studio, the old stable's still there.

JAMES GLEESON: Is it?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, and young people—I don't know who's living in it but, you know, it's still there. I went up and looked at it the other day and I stood there. Didn't feel much. I wish I could feel a bit more. Do you feel much about your past?

JAMES GLEESON: Sometimes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Sometimes I do.

JAMES GLEESON: As you get older I think it comes in waves.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, I don't know, I just sort of looked at it and I thought, God, I came outside and I sat in the street and I painted exactly the same view down the road. You know, I did, and I was a kid.

JAMES GLEESON: Back in the thirties?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Is it the thirties?

JAMES GLEESON: It must be.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, it must be. It was a long time ago.

JAMES GLEESON: When did you go to Rome to live?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Ah, I went to Rome to live—permanently, you mean?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

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JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh, I went over with old Mr Smart. He's a great friend (inaudible). Very fond of him. I went over and we had about 10 months in Rome. First of all we had five months in Greece and then we—Frank, are you all right? Then we came back and we had Eleanor Rigi's—

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, daughter.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes. By the way, her daughter has just had a daughter.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: So it won't be a princepe, it will be a principessa, which is very nice. I'm very pleased about that. Anyway, we took that and then I came back here and I taught for one more year at Cranbrook.

JAMES GLEESON: What year was that?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Oh. Oh, Jimmy, don't ask me the year.

JAMES GLEESON: Late-ish sixties?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I'll look it up. I can't remember the year. I'm 61, I'm old. How old are you?

JAMES GLEESON: Sixty-three.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Your not.

JAMES GLEESON: In two months.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: You don't look a day over 80. Anyway, so then I came back here and suddenly I thought, I can't bear being here any more. It was awful. I just had to go back. I'm living in a terrible place. They kill each other, they shoot their knees off. They're awful. But I can't live anywhere else.

JAMES GLEESON: For a long time you used to spend some months of each year in Greece.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Not for a long time. For about four years.

JAMES GLEESON: You spent, what, the summer?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I think I spent a whole year, about a year I think I spent in Greece, off and on, you know. Donald and I went to the Island of Lesbos. I was too old. We went for a month, and we loved it. It looked pretty. It was uncomfortable and it wasn't right for us. So then Brian Dunlop came around and joined us and then I said to Donald, 'For heavens sake, Donald, I know you're not happy here. Let's go to Skiros because I know you'll love it', because I knew

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Skiros terribly well. So we went to Skiros and he loved it. But Donald, you know, Donald Friend has got more imagination than any man I've ever known in my life. Do you know anybody in the world who could walk up that path to the Parthenon, to the Acropolis and the Parthenon, and find a coin 2000 years old?

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I don't believe it.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: He did, and it was that bloody size.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, no. And he staked the track?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: I'm telling you, he found it. He did. Unbelievable.

JAMES GLEESON: Isn't that tinny?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Do you know, when we living on the Island of Lesbos and we were living in a place called Eressós, which is a (inaudible) and there was another Acropolis there, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Of course it was mixed up with, oh God, the civilisations that had gone through there, Venetian and everything else. He was unbelievable. He'd come home, his hands full of coins. I came home, but I came home with beautiful bit, I thought was the most marvellous Venetian glass. Do you know what he said to me? 'They didn't have plastic in those days'.

JAMES GLEESON: Monster.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: That's terrible, isn't it? But he really was absolutely brilliant.

JAMES GLEESON: An instinct for finding things.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, that's marvellous. Thanks very much for that.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Well, thank you very much, sir. Am I finished? I hope to God I am.

JAMES GLEESON: I can't think of any other questions. Yes, I think so. Good.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: My bowels work well and I'm all right. My feet are good and I've got big bunions.