

ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES ARCHIVE BALNAVES FOUNDATION AUSTRALIAN SCULPTURE ARCHIVE PROJECT

Interview with Peter Lawrence Taylor 23 February 2010

This is an edited transcript of an interview with Peter Lawrence Taylor on 23 February 2010 in Hobart, Tasmania, by Deborah Edwards, senior curator of Australian art, Art Gallery of New South Wales, for the Balnaves Foundation Australian Sculpture Archive Project.

The project focuses on significant Australian sculptors and sculptural practice. It was developed with a grant from the Balnaves Foundation in 2010, which supported the recording and transcription of interviews with artists and other figures in Australian art.

About Peter Lawrence Taylor

Peter Taylor (1927–2019) is known for his distinctive wooden sculptures and assemblages, combining art, craft and design in eclectic three-dimensional works. He also taught art in Tasmania in the 1960s and 70s, including at the Tasmanian School of Art.

This is an edited transcript of a recorded interview. Some adjustments, including deletions, have been made to the original as part of the editing process; however, the accuracy of all statements has not been verified and errors of fact may not have been corrected. The views expressed are those of the participants and do not represent those of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Unedited audio files of this interview are in the Gallery's archive.

Interview on 23 February 2010

Deborah Edwards (DE): You were starting to discuss what you called your epiphany.

Peter Lawrence Taylor (PT): Yes, well, Geoff Parr and a few other staff members [of the School of Art, Tasmanian College of Advanced Education] had long service leave or study leave and were quite unanimous that New York was the place. Who was I to challenge that? So off I went to New York. That was in 1977.

DE: For your first time? One of the CV sources said that 1977 was your second time there.

PT: No, it was the first, and I finished up going back several times. What I was not to know, and what they were not to know either, was that at that very moment New York was on an absolute high. It was a time when anything that was going to happen was happening. It was magnificent. I was in the Holiday Inn and it was easy for me to get to the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] and that for me was one hell of an education, an absolute education. There are something like 63 galleries in the Metropolitan and even now I've only done 35 of them.

Me and my love affair with Piero [Della Francesca]. Everybody of all my generation and all of my friends went to Europe. I have a thing in my mind that I cannot visit Europe. It's indefensible and I can give no reason except that built into my consciousness is 'no way to Europe'. I am knowledgeable about Europe history but it's no-go to go there. It's incomprehensible to a lot of people but it's a deep thing. It makes no sense at all when I have every reason to go, but, no, I cannot go. So when I hear that the Great War cost over ten million lives, I think but for that I would not be alive.

DE: If we go back to around 1944 when you went to East Sydney Technical College [now the National Art School]. You said that you studied at night. You stayed working and studied there at night. You were doing the introductory course?

PT: It was an introductory course but mostly for the cast room and just occasionally drawing from the model. The head at that stage was Frank Medworth.

DE: Did you have much to do with him?

PT: As little as I could. I saw enough of him, and being a young person I could read his mind, as all young people can, and I did not like the man. He later committed suicide in Mexico City. Jack Kilgour was the night-time drawing teacher.

DE: Was Lyndon Dadswell there? In 1944 he might still have been at war. You did that for a year?

PT: Dadswell was in the sculpture department, teaching during the day time. I was there a year and a half and then I joined up.

DE: Why did you join up? At 17 years?

PT: Why wouldn't you? And I had always wanted to fly.

DE: There would have been a lot of pressure, I suppose.

PT: In what sense?

DE: To aid the war effort.

PT: That had nothing to do with it. This was what I wanted to do.

DE: So you went in as soon as you were old enough to be taken?

PT: Yes. It stemmed from a lot more than that though. I can remember I must have been six or seven or eight years old and aircraft used to drop advertising pamphlets and I used to think, watching that airplane fly, that one day I would be the man dropping pamphlets on people from a plane.

DE: Were you trained in Sydney? Did you learn to fly?

PT: Illegally, later. No, first of all I was sent down to Adelaide. I was put in the signal corps, and then to Point Cook, on the way to Geelong, right on the coast, which was a huge combination of most of the aspects of air-force training. It was a huge signal school and also a flight training school. Whilst I was doing the signals course – which was dead serious, you stick by the rules – there was a night-time thing. You could do night flying if you could chum up with some of the fellows flying, you could go up with them. I would turn up there on Monday nights and get aboard. There was an instructor and a pilot, I was illegally on board. Night flying over Melbourne. I graduated from there. It was the first exam I ever passed. The irony of this was the course that I did was one of codes and coding, which involved numbers and words in disorder, and one of the things was relating the numbers in combination.

DE: How did you fare?

PT: I could do it. I was shown how to do it and I could do it. So when I was certified I was posted from Point Cook [in Victoria] to Cooktown [in Queensland], up the other end of the world. I would have to say that was the honeymoon period of my life because the tasks for a signal there were at the most half an hour a day and for the rest of the time I was an air traffic controller. There was another young bloke like me, but he'd done his flying training but had been assigned as air traffic controller, and I was his offsider, and he and I in that tower, with bugger all to do, day after day, played a million games of chess. I learnt to drive a petrol truck.

DE: Did you do any drawing?

PT: Oh no, this was serious stuff. There was a little unofficial gymnasium in one of the hanging sheds where one of the guys taught me to box. These were things that I'd never dreamed of doing and here were people who could do them. The American air force had been there before the Australian and we used to collect a lot of their stuff, which kept coming to us after they left, like ammunition boxes full of brand-new modern library books. We got them. That was my first introduction to the modern library.

DE: You were there until the war ended?

PT: Yes, it ended at that point.

DE: Brought back to Sydney?

PT: No. The day war ended things didn't just finish. It all went on for another year or so after that. Things were happening, like No 77 Fighter Squadron, flying spitfires, took off from Melbourne to fly to Tokyo. When my signal came in, I got a signal from Melbourne to be alert to the fact that some of them may call in at Cooktown for fuel: send a signal if they do, or even if they don't, call in. That went on for another six months after that, and then I slowly

worked my way down. I was transferred from there to 35 Squadron in Townsville and then eventually discharged.

DE: Did you go back to East Sydney Technical College?

PT: No, I didn't. I was now on my own. I never went back to the people I had grown up with. I could do anything I liked, which was marvellous. I was responsible only for myself, so go for it, boy!

DE: Regarding your CV, we don't seem to know what you were doing between discharge from the army and going to Tasmania. Some of the sources say you went to Tasmania in 1950?

PT: It could have been 50. I met a whole bunch of ragtag and bobtail people who I used to eat with every night. I actually lived in the heart of Sydney, in buildings that no longer exist – they have been knocked down – and one of them was in Phillip Street. I had the top room in a three-storey old sandstone house. At that stage I had an idea. I liked some of the sculptures I saw at East Sydney Tech and I thought, 'I can do that'. There was a vacant allotment next door to the house I lived in, and one day going past, I noticed a big sandstone block and I thought, 'That's lovely', so I went over and I could just lift it, and all I had to do was carry it up three flights of stairs and put it on the window sill of my room, which, being a sandstone house, was quite thick. That's OK, but [I had] no tools, so I strolled around to Nock and Kirby [a hardware store] and stole one big nail. Christ knows where I got the hammer from. The first thing you do, naturally, is a head, so I did a head.

If I say the name Eugene Kamenka, does it mean anything to you? A very eminent Australian philosopher, he was a young bloke my age. Murray Sayle was another. We all met at the Florentina restaurant at night, and the reason we met was because there, for two shillings, you could get a bowl of minestrone and a plate of spaghetti bolognese.

DE: Was that an artist hangout?

TP: No. Everyone, all kinds of people were there. Kamenka and Sayle were from the university; Ray Price, the jazz man, and his mate Denis; Peter Storey, the architect; hordes of people. So Kamenka ended up buying the head from me. He was my first patron.

DE: Just a generic head? Had you done any carving before this?

PT: I had made my little aeroplane things as a boy, but no. What did I say was the moment of epiphany?

DE: Well, you had one epiphany going to New York but that was 1977.

PT: Here's another one, an earlier one. When I was discharged we were all privately assessed by people to see what we were going to do. One bloke, the vocational guidance man, had us do tests and I had to report to him a couple of days later. He looked at me and said, 'These are the results of your tests', and he folded the note over and said, 'Now I am going to leave this room for about two minutes', and he pushed it across. On the test that had to do with spatial relations and coordinates, I'd scored off the sheet, it went around onto the back of the sheet. When he came back I said, 'What can I do with this?', and he said, 'I don't know. It's a great score but I don't know what you can do with it'. What I realise now – the great German word *gestalt*, configurations – I realised then that I had really been designing things all my life, model aeroplanes etc.

One of the blokes who joined us at night for dinner was Rod Edwards, a jeweller. When I went up to see his workshop, I was amazed. He was sitting in a space [gestures to indicate tiny] but that is all a jeweller needs, working on his precious metals. I said, 'Is that what you do?', and I said, 'Well, where do you get your ideas from?', and he said, 'I pinch them from books'. 'But why do that? Why can't you make them up yourself?' He said, 'I can't', and I said, 'Why not? It's easy'. He said, 'Well, if you can make the first model, a prototype for a piece of jewellery' – and this is in 1947-48 – 'and take it around to any of the jewellery manufacturers around Sydney ...' He said at the moment all they do is get anything that comes out of America. At that stage there was something called a marcasite, something that looks like a diamond but isn't a diamond. Things were very flat, of course, at this time. He said, 'If you can make an original that they can make themselves, it's worth a fortune', so I went home and got some cardboard and Plasticine, looked in shop windows and saw what was in them, and made about four, five models and took them in to him. I made the prototype. I went to the first bloke, I think I took three of them, and I said, 'If I make these, are you interested?', and he looked and said, 'What do you charge for that?' At that time the basic wage was about five pounds a week. I thought off the top of my head and said 50 pounds, and he said, 'Well, I'll have that one and that one', and gave me money on the spot and I went back to my mate Rod and said, 'That works!', and he said, 'That was one and you've got two left, but don't rush it'. Well, that gave me a nice little opening for about a year, I think, just doing designs for jewellery. Then I realised that they had to buy them because he knew very well that if they didn't buy it I would just go to the next one, partly buying it to keep it out of circulation. So I didn't go to him again. I took [it to] the second bloke, but when I got to the third bloke the word must have got around because, when I got there, he said, 'How would you like to join the staff?', and I said, 'You must be kidding. What would you pay me?' It was my only earner. In the services you have what is called deferred pay, so at the end I got a sum of money, though I had to practise frugality. I even went out and lived briefly for a while at Merioola [a house in Sydney's Woollahra in which a group of artists lived].

DE: Goodness, Loudon Sainthill, Elaine Haxton ...

PT: Justin O'Brien, Donald Friend's sister Gwen Friend was there with her mother, and Peter Kaiser.

DE: He seems to have been an interesting fellow.

PT: You are speaking as a woman! He was the most incredibly handsome man I have ever seen.

DE: How did you find your way there? Just people you met?

PT: Yes. It was sort of passed around.

DE: You were running with a kind of bohemian crowd?

PT: I would never have used the word myself. It was much looser. Some of them were academics. Neil McGuinness is another name. He finished up being on a committee that Gough Whitlam put up, as an economist. Paul Haefliger. I remember on one occasion Peter Kaiser and I and someone else were speaking about different kinds of hands, hand characters, someone had produced a book reading hands, and there was a knock on the door and a hand came around the door, and it was Paul Haefliger.

DE: How long were you at Merioola?

PT: Not long [a few weeks]. I heard of a boatshed in Mosman [a harbourside suburb of Sydney], which had been briefly lived in by Oliffe Richmond. I was offered the key money.

You know what that is? Someone who has the long-term rental of the property but doesn't necessarily want to live there. So I was offered it and I paid this bloke, whose name I can't remember, ten pounds, I think it was, for the key to this boatshed. That was a great period in my life. I lived in it. There was no electricity, though it had running water. It wasn't really a boatshed. In turn-of-the-century Sydney it was illegal to bathe publicly, so what the intelligent population did was form swimming clubs and they built their own club houses. There was reclaimed ground maybe 100 yards long.

DE: Mosman Bay?

PT: No. Out of the ferry, walk up Raglan Street and went down the side and then down a zigzag path, steep, which took you down. There were no neighbours. What went with it was a canoe. There was a rock wall, which came to a certain point, and they inserted their iron bars to stop sharks coming in. The pool itself was filled by the tide. There was a concrete path around it, inside this shed, and on the top a wooden platform and a balcony above. I had a bed upstairs. People could dive off the balcony straight into the pool.

DE: How long had Oliffe Richmond been there?

PT: I'm not sure. It wasn't until I saw the book that I realised we had both been there.

DE: When you were at Merioola did you become more interested in art? Were you thinking of becoming an artist?

PT: I could see what art was and also what it wasn't. What was going on at Merioola had nothing to do with anything I was interested in. At one stage Loudon asked to see what I was doing. I'd done some drawings. He gave me the one word which was so helpful. He said, 'That is very charming', and I thought, 'You bastard', and I thought, 'I'm on the wrong track here. This is not what I am about'. I found them all delightful people. I know when I went over there I was doing less jewellery, and Peter Kaiser stepped in and did what I was doing.

DE: While you were living in the shed, you were doing some designs and drawing?

PT: Very briefly with the designs, and I could make it up out of my head. I didn't need to do a drawing first. I could go around the shops, look at the jewellery and discard 90 percent of it because I could do better than that, and then come back and make them.

DE: So what were you doing with the rest of your days then?

PT: Meeting people, incredible groups of people. I spent a lot of time with Ray Price. He lived in a house, long since demolished, known in those days as 'buggery barn'. Ray had a room on the first floor and above there was a promising young poet called Jimmy Somerville [?]. I never heard of him again.

DE: Did you come across what might have been known then as members of The Push?

PT: People would come and go, faces would appear and disappear, and then Murray Sayle got a job as an assistant editor up on the *Cairns Post* – he was a decent bloke – and we were sitting around thinking what a lucky bloke to go up there, and then a few of us decided we would join him – Neil and his girlfriend, June Turner; about four of us – which we did. I remember I went up by train, we went up in dribs and drabs, and finally I ran out of money and so I had to go tobacco grading at Mareeba, south of Turkey Hill. There were several of us, grading from one to 30. You opened up the hand of tobacco and looked at the leaf, the colour, the brittleness. You got paid over how many you did in a day. The best leaf of the day you always kept for yourself and you would roll a cheroot at the end of the day.

DE: You did that for a few months?

PT: For about six weeks. I claim that I hold the record for hitchhiking from Mareeba to Sydney – 13 days – and what adventures I had too. At that stage every train outside the city was always met by the police, so if you were jumping the rattler, which is of course what I was doing, you positioned yourself where you could never be seen from the platform.

DE: So you are back in Sydney, and it's now around 1949–50?

PT: Yes, well, I went back to the jewellery design, and I met Meg. She and I decided that it would be good to live together. I think I was 21, 1949. Meg is six months older than I. We got married secretly, in a registry office, because she had wicked parents. Her father was there, an awful bastard. She was working in Mitchell Library, that's where I met her. Mitchell Library was my office for designing jewellery and for reading books.

Have you heard of Jean Arnot? She was a feminist and the deputy state librarian. She had agitated for women's rights for 30 years. Jean really ran the State Library [of New South Wales]. When the vacancy came for the deputy state librarian [Mitchell Librarian], a man, John Metcalfe, got the job, and when that was announced, Jean walked into his office and said, 'You got my job. I'm going on long service leave', and stormed out of the office and went up to Queensland.

DE: Then you decided to go to Tasmania?

PT: No, I loved the north so much, I wanted to go back to Queensland. I'd had a great time there. I thought we could live in Cooktown or somewhere like that, but Meg said, 'I've never seen snow. Can we see some snow in Tasmania before we go up north?', and that was the end of that.

DE: What happened? You fell in love with Hobart?

PT: No, we came down with no reason at all but for Meg to see some snow. We didn't fall in love with Hobart. We knew nobody but we just met some very nice people here. We got a room at the back of an old house in Sandy Bay. We met people and they introduced us to other people and other people. We just kept meeting more and more people we got along with. [This is followed by a short discussion about Tasmania.]

DE: Is that when you decided to go back to college to study? This is around 1950?

PT: Yes, around 1950. No, I worked as a builder's labourer, and then that got a bit difficult so I then got a job on an orchard down in Middleton. We moved down there, lived in a house on the orchard and I became a farm labourer and worked every day of the week except Sundays. It was so hard, they didn't have a tractor, it was 28 acres, apples and a few pears. We had to drag a hose the length of a cricket pitch from tap to tap and at the end of the day after you've done that you are good for nothing. A pound a day, five pounds a week. I thought, 'How the hell can I dig myself out of this hole?', because I was so tired, I couldn't draw or paint or anything. The house had no electricity. I think the only plus was that there were scallops nearby and I could take a big jug and two shillings and get it filled with scallops so the cat and Meg and I ate well. Just when I was thinking I had no idea how to get out of this, a letter came from a friend who we had known well. His wife had died and he wrote asking if we could both move back to Hobart, Sandy Bay, and live with him, and Meg would be the housekeeper, and so we did. So I went back to building labouring and there was a little shed out the back which became my studio so I was able to start work again,

painting and drawing mostly, and a little bit of experimental work with wax, which is where Steve Walker first met wax. This is where Steve's operation starts, because Steve and I met.

DE: You met him then? We are now talking of around 1951–52?

PT: Yes, that's right. I don't know how long Steve had been in Hobart because he came from Melbourne, but Steve and George Davis and Eileen Brooker and a few other local artists ...

DE: You are meeting artists by this time?

PT: Yes. Jack Carington Smith, I met him there, and [Alexander] Leicester McAuley, professor of mathematics at the university, was with whom we were living. It was quite marvellous. He had a very close friend, a younger mathematician called Hans Buchdahl, Melbourne, Jewish, and Hans and I got along like old friends from the moment we met. It was the marvellous antagonism of the mathematical with the creative mind and we would argue day and night. We had huge conversations about the relationship between science and art, and I am still convinced that there is no connection between the two whatsoever.

DE: So in about a year's time you are going to get the Tasmanian Centenary Sculpture Prize, but you haven't gone to the College of Advanced Education yet. So you are working as a builder's labourer and at night-time working in the studio?

PT: And at night-time I was also going with Lester, the older man, my senior by 20 years. He and I would go into the school of art at night where Jack Carington Smith had his night classes and we would both do our drawings.

DE: So that's when you first went to Hobart Art School. And is that where you first meet Stephen Walker?

PT: Probably, it may have been. There was also a coffee shop called Hedi's where we all used to go and people met there. This tiny little art scene. I think a number of us hung our paintings there.

DE: At this stage you are painting and drawing. What are you doing with wax?

PT: Modelling, on a small scale, making portraits in beeswax. And it never occurs to anyone that on a warm day that bees love wax, and I would be in my studio trying to get the bees away from the wax.

DE: Which also sags on a hot day.

PT: But I had an armature inside it. I was seriously interested in painting, doing paintings of the sails drying on the wharfs, but I saw the Centenary Prize and thought, 'I need that money', it's 50 pounds, and that I would put in a painting, but I also thought I would put in a sculpture, one of the heads I did, so I went to a local eminent person, a Dr Giblin, and did a portrait of the eminent person and the portrait won the first prize and the painting wasn't even shown.

DE: How many sculptors were there at the time?

PT: I have no idea. There was an art department at the technical college and Jack Carington Smith was the head of the art department of the technical college.

DE: So it wasn't the Hobart Art School, but the art department of the technical college?

PT: Yes.

DE: What happened to that head of Dr Giblin?

PT: The dog ate it! We had an Old English Sheepdog. The wax was nice for her to chew. That was the end of that, but I got the 50 pounds.

DE: Did that make you think, 'Perhaps I have skills as a sculptor that I should follow'?

PT: No, no thoughts like that at all. I merely thought, 'Well, that is something else that I can do. By that stage I had learnt to do a lot of things. That was a case of what is termed educationally as 'accelerated readiness'. I had it by the bucketful because, being a total failure at school ... I knew I wasn't stupid but I was faced with the fact that I had no qualifications in anything, but then I've always been highly suspicious of qualifications. At that stage Meg decided that she would get a job in the [state] Education Department as either a teacher or a librarian – she had fairly high qualifications – so she went for an interview and somehow my name came up. She mentioned my name and the fact that I had just won that Centenary Prize. She must have been interviewed by the director, I think, because only he could have made this decision. He said, 'That's interesting because art in Tasmania has only ever been taught in the cities, either Hobart or Launceston', and in those days they had an experiment going with country schools, having a farm and running it and they called them area schools, and in Huonville, which was where I was sent, we had busloads of kids coming from Cygnet and Franklin and the whole district to be taught every day. The boys would do farm work while the girls were doing domestic arts. Tasmania did at one stage have a good education centre. [This is followed by a short discussion about compasses and a person's sense of direction.]

DE: So, you agreed to teach?

PT: So that director said, 'What if we put art in the curriculum?', to see if art would go in the country as well. It was an enlightened decision and I was the first teacher in a country school to teach art. I thought, 'Jesus, this is a good deal'. The school already existed, everything right through from kindergarten to Grade 9, a year short of matriculation.

DE: So did Meg go into the Department of Education?

PT: No. We decided we'd have another baby instead.

DE: So you both travelled to Huonville and were there for ...

PT: Forever, a long time, 20 years at least, at Huonville Area School, later on it became Huonville High School.

DE: So you became the art teacher without your Dip Ed [Diploma of Education]?

PT: That's right. I didn't think of it like that. The other thing was that the department, knowing that I didn't have a Dip Ed, kept saying, 'Get your Dip Ed'. I thought, 'I will not do it. I am teaching in a school, I am learning on the job'.

DE: Do you think you had a natural capacity for it?

PT: I wouldn't say that. What was so is that my interest and my dedication to the subject was infectious and I think only once or twice did I ever have any problems with discipline. I found out that the moment you got off the topic you were lost, but if you kept on the topic and the

kids could understand you, there was no discipline problem. So the secret of success is preparation. You know your topic bloody well.

DE: Were you teaching in all mediums?

PT: Just painting and drawing, but at first there were no facilities. The average class size was 25 to 30 kids [art was compulsory for all children], but there was no art room. I managed to get a tin plate for every child and we would carry these things from room to room, and enough paintbrushes and palette paints. You would have kids anxious to be paint monitors. I believed what I was saying, I believed in my topic.

DE: Yes, but for some kids even your enthusiasm isn't going to ignite a corresponding spark in them.

PT: Yes, you're right. You remember Ern Malley and the hoax? Another good friend of mine was Harold Stewart, the co-author. The other bloke was James McAuley, who later came to Tasmania. Harold, he and McAuley had been in New Guinea in the army together and it was under those marvellous conditions that they fell into writing. A lot of the Ern Malley poems were based on little things that they'd had to deal with in the army. Harold was a hell of a nice bloke. Harold one day gave me a lesson in Chinese calligraphy, which was marvellous, getting that beautiful tapered stroke with a frayed end [gestures, draws], and I gave that to the kids. It was how to get them into calligraphy. And there is another marvellous one, where you take your brush and load it well and then using the tip – 'te', 'na', 'ta' – using the tip.

DE: So you really enjoyed it?

PT: Yes, I did I was suddenly on a regular salary and I was doing something I liked. There was an issue of credibility with the subject [of art] down there, so I immediately had to apply my other skills.

DE: I assume that the principal was impressed, though?

PT: Reluctantly, until certain things happened and then he realised it was going well. But then I realised there were other things there I wanted to do. I had always liked cricket so I trained the school cricket team and I had always liked football so I trained the football team.

DE: Perhaps unusual for the art teacher.

PT: Not necessarily in Tasmania. I got a really good basketball team going too. The headmaster, by the way, was a Pom – the worst example – and hated sport for a start. He'd been an officer in the British Army in India. [This is followed by a short discussion about the school cricket team.]

It seemed a lifetime, but it finished in 1966.

DE: You established a bronze foundry around this time?

PT: Yes, but hang on. I was on the bottom of the list of art teachers in order of seniority because I didn't have any qualifications. It didn't matter that we were doing all these things. Every now and then a bloke named Haywood, who was the inspector of art, would come down, every couple of years, and would say, 'Are you tired of this? Do you want to leave? Do you want to go to Hobart and teach?', and I would say, 'No. Why should I?' My kids were going to school, we liked the country life.

DE: You loved the country? Were you a bushwalker?

PT: I lived off the land. I was still getting the lowest wage in the country.

DE: So you are shooting rabbits?

PT: And duck and swan. The family ate well. Someone has to do these things. So a whole episode of my sculpture has to do with my duck-shooting enterprises and, more particularly, my swan shooting.

DE: There are a lot of mythologies that appear to swirl about your works. One I remember hearing was that you were a professional duck shooter turned sculptor [laughter]. But you would have your shows and sell decoys for duck and swan shooting at them.

PT: Yes, When John Hayward came down at one stage and said, 'Would you like a move?', and I said, 'No, not particularly. Why should I?', and he said, 'What about teaching sculpture at the art school?', and I said, 'Are you serious? What do I have to do?', and he said, 'Nothing, just turn up. You can be on the staff if you like'.

DE: What made him do that? You were getting results down at Huonville?

PT: Yes. The bronze stuff. Go back to when I was living with McAulay in Hobart and had the shed out the back and I was modelling in wax. Steve Walker came and saw what I was doing. He was doing some wood carving in Huon pine. I was never interested in the technical process of bronze casting, but he got interested in it. He went away and did all of that, learnt about it all.

DE: On the Italian Government [Travelling Art] Scholarship?

PT: Yes, and then came back and set up a little foundry where he was living.

DE: I thought he didn't do that until the 1970s in Campania [a township in Tasmania].

PT: Before that, he came back and made a little foundry at where he was living. It was a serious professional one, but it was only a little shed out the back. It was in a suburb and he couldn't have too much ostentatious fire at night, but when you get these things going you have to stay up all night. Lost wax casting. I went along to give him a hand, to stay up all night, talking and whatever.

DE: This is when you are with Leicester McAulay?

PT: No, this is when I was teaching.

DE: So you came back to Hobart periodically? This is the late 1950s?

PT: Yes.

PT: At that stage Robbie, the headmaster who knew little about art and cared less but realised he was onto a good thing, all his teams were winning sports etc, and I put it to him that one of the worst things he could do was to let me put in a bronze foundry at school. I said, 'It won't cost anyone anything. We'll scrounge', so Steve [Walker] came down and we organised the foundry and everything that went with it. We got a burn-out kiln. You make a wax model, that wax model is then put inside a mould, and then the whole lot has to be burnt out, with the mould upside down, allowing the wax itself to completely melt out, but in order to make that happen you really have to have a 50-hour continuous burn – [at] a country school! The kids would come in, they/we had built the brick kiln themselves with a fire box

underneath with enough fuel to keep it going for a couple of days, which we got from country sawmills, all their off-cuts. And one of the kids actually found out that you can burn green timber, because the temperature has risen to such a degree that it doesn't matter that it's green. The kids did it. We also had perpetual watches. We would light on Friday morning and keep it going until Monday. The kids would camp at the school, on the lawn, to keep it going. Their parents would bring them in food. They had two nights and then a day to cool down. That only gives us part one. The other operation was melting the metal. I had the classes in two groups, A and B. This only happened maybe once a term. It was a big deal. So at one time group A would do the mould work and group B does the metal work, next time they switch over. I was running it, so I had one bloke helping me, mixing the crucible with the molten metal. I have all of this down in photographs. We better do upstairs and I can show you.

[Break in interview]

DE: We got up to the 1950s and the firing of the kiln at Huonville, and then John Hayward offering you the job around 1967 as the first sculpture lecturer at the Tasmanian School of Art.

PT: Yes. Up until that time sculpture had been a minor adjunct to what I was doing. Yes, he offered me the position of lecturer/teacher at the Tasmanian School of Art – at that time it existed as the Tasmanian School of Art, free from the technical college – and, because I was on the bottom of the list, every art teacher in Tasmania objected. But I went from the bottom to the top in one jump. It was unheard of. You are talking about the public service.

DE: Who was the head?

PT: Jack Carington Smith.

DE: That's right. Who you already knew, who supported the appointment.

PT: I guess he would have had to.

DE: So are you making lots of sculptures throughout this time, when teaching in Huonville?

PT: No. I was painting and I was also exploring the landscape. Down towards the Huon [Valley] there is a large mountain called Sleeping Beauty. When the school holidays came there was no way I needed anything other than R&R, so every holidays I organised a couple of other blokes and we would climb to the top of that mountain. It usually took us a day to get up there, which meant then a couple of days at the top. It was great. And on one end of it was a small plateau with a host of dead trees. You could push one over and simply light a fire.

DE: And camp there? But at the same time were you doing sculpture in your holidays?

PT: No, the kids were doing their stuff and I was teaching. You can't do both because to be seriously at work on sculpture it needs full concentration, everything else can go to hell.

DE: One of the questions I was going to ask you was about how one resolves a teaching practice and an artmaking practice. Can you resolve them?

PT: You can't really, not if you are doing a serious job. Actually I truly enjoyed teaching. The boys at the sawmill – I had taught them as boys and when they grew up I worked with them – they ran a sawmill and when they found a tree in the forest that they thought would interest me they would come and get me, take me out and show me. On one occasion there was a

huge flood on the Huon River and a bloke rang me up and said, 'Are you still interested in old tree stumps?' I said, 'Yes', and he said, 'Well, I have one here that will set you back'. Bloody big. It was three quarters of the way up another tree. The flood had been so dense. We got it to the mill.

DE: Once you got to the Tasmanian Art School, though, you were teaching sculpture. You were teaching bronze casting? Were you teaching modelling? Did you set the sculpture course up?

PT: Yes, the course was whatever I said.

DE: What did you do? Did you go back to drawing from casts etc?

PT: No, I inherited ... In teaching you can never tell the ingredients of the class you have. That's a social phenomena. In my entire teaching career I had three waves of brilliant students, in between troughs of three to four years. I have had phenomenal students. I was very blessed. I finished with a good reputation.

[Break in interview]

PT: Dolly Dalrymple [the subject of an early sculpture of the same title] was an Aboriginal woman married to a white man, who had to receive a special dispensation for them to be married in the 1830s, 1840s. They were married and lived happily ever after. He was a carter, carting objects around the place. They did so well with that they bought a hotel and were thought highly of by everyone.

DE This work was a commission?

PT: Yes, I think by the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board, but I don't know whether it was the first public commission by them or not. I started bits of it, that collar, perhaps the birds, in the 1970s, before my first show, after I had resigned, when I was working on sculpture full-time. The work is hollow, otherwise it would weigh too much.

DE: Is that why you left teaching after ten years? To work on your sculpture full-time?

PT: Yes, but only on the strength of the trip I made to New York. New York was the thing that set me. I wasn't the least intimidated there. I looked at it all and thought, 'This is just what I can do'. The whole visual arts scene was wildly exciting. The other thing was the incredible way in which the scene went off in New York. There were no boundaries. Only one month there but I came back on fire, put in my resignation, and said, 'I'm off'.

DE: And not very long after that you had your first show at Watters [Gallery, Sydney]. How did that come about?

PT: Frank [Watters] actually came down to Tasmania – I don't know how he heard – to have a look and see what I was doing and then suggested an exhibition.

DE: That was your first solo show anywhere?

PT: Yes.

DE: Could Frank have been told about your work by Leon [Paroissien] and Bernice [Murphy]?

PT: He may have, but do you know John Armstrong, the sculptor in Brisbane? John had nearly a year with us at the college. When John came back from his trip overseas, Leon was running the whatever [Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council?] and he arranged for John to come down to us as an artist in residence, and he was there, if not for a year, very close to it. It was marvellous. John showed with Frank. I've got a feeling that John told Frank. [Looking at a photo of the Dolly Dalrymple work] This sculpture is life-size and there's a plug inside and it can never fall over; it lifts off like a peg.

DE: These are articulated hands here. You are already carving these?

PT: Yes, she's called Dolly Dalrymple because originally Launceston used to be called Port Dalrymple. Her tribe came from that area. Her face is obliterated [in the artwork], and superimposed on it is a map of the whole place, with Port Dalrymple on it. She is in the clothing of the period.

DE: And what had happened with the eyes?

PT: I brought back about half a dozen of these from New York and one of those is each set in there at the back. They make the most beautiful eyes. Isn't that beautiful? The work is in Devonport Library. The hand is articulated; it's on a hinge. I showed the bloke there how to tighten the hinge. They bring little Indigenous kids into the library and they have a pamphlet they give them about Dolly's life.

DE: Before this are there any other figures like it, or is it the genesis of what you went on to do?

[This is followed by a short discussion of Taylor's paintings.]

So *Dolly Dalrymple* is not the first of the wooden figure works. *Octavia*, inscribed with text, gilded, life-size, still held in TMAG [Tasmania Museum and Art Gallery] is. It is not made of Huon pine but King Billy wood, and hollow, and is of approximately the same period as *Dolly Dalrymple*, a year or two between them. So the curator at TMAG before Hendrik Kolenberg came down to Huonville to see you, after you had come back from New York, to see what you were doing, and snapped *Octavia* up?

PT: Yes. It's never been shown publicly. See the seams of different sections? I had a good student working with me, one of those people gifted with very little imagination but with great technical skills, so when I had problems I would ask him, 'How am I going to do it?', and he would do it.

DE: Has TMAG purchased others of yours?

PT: They have three swans which they drag out occasionally, but it wouldn't occur to them that the swans are useless stuff, but *Octavia* is a ripper.

DE: It seems to me that you sprang onto the national art scene rather rapidly, that is, that you went from relative obscurity in the early 1980s, on the mainland at least, and over four years became one of Australia's best-known sculptors. Did it feel like that?

PT: Not at all. I was never looking anywhere than what was the next piece I wanted to do. I was not aware. I was just working and I realised that I had a lot of time to make up, that I had had years of not having been able to work. The analogy is that I was like a steam engine, under pressure, and it all came out.

[This is followed by a short discussion of books while looking at artworks and books, including Robert Musil's *The man without qualities*.]

My first words to any art student is: 'Get yourself out of the story because you are not in it'. Now apply that to the visual arts: 'Get yourself out of the picture'. That's what troubles me about the arts, even people of my generation, we have made ourselves appear so much in our artwork. Mike Parr. How long can they keep it up? I have huge admiration for the early and middle periods of Imants Tillers, but I find him boring now ...

DE: You did a coat of arms for Parliament House in Canberra. That can be seen as bread-and-butter work, I suppose.

PT: But I knock back the things that I'm not interested in. I was interested in doing that.

DE: Are you interested in the constraints or challenges that such public commissions bring then?

PT: I love it.

DE: There would be a lot of sculptors who would see such public commissions as a pact with the devil.

PT: I've never struck that. One reason is how you approach the design of it. A lot of people are uncomfortable with my work. They are so rooted in the idea of single media. The idea of mixed media people find troubling.

DE: But surely not anymore. Do you mean at the time of works such as this [coat of arms]? Because mixed media is now the name of the game.

PT: I designed the central shield, glass, and the whole work, the lot. Warren Langley ... The star up at the top was causing me problems. I wanted the star to shine. I made the prototype star and Warren cast it twice for me and then put it together so people can see a star shining from front and back. I went around to most of the major glass people on the east coast of Australia and no one would touch it, and then someone told me to get in touch with Corning glass, and someone from Corning glass did the glass casting. I think I had budgeted something like \$1000 to do the work, but he charged me something like \$100 and was a little embarrassed that he was charging that for something so easy. And it really came home to me then that ordinary tradespeople can do things that the best designers and glassmakers couldn't. The commission took about two years. Those are hollow [gesturing to part of the artwork in a photograph].

DE: How does that work?

PT: You know the way you cut the top off a boiled egg, eat the egg and put the top back on.

DE: So that is what you have done? So you take that solid piece of wood ...

PT: Yes, joined lengthwise down the body. Anything to keep the weight down.

DE: And that's what you are doing with *Dolly Dalrymple*.

PT: Yes, she is simply hollow, otherwise no one could lift it. It has to be hollow.

DE: And you fix the hands that you have carved, and the neck and head onto that.

PT: Yes.

DE: So that and *Octavia* started to lead to ... We are talking 1977–78, aren't we? And by 1978 you have a room full of sculptures called *Sculpture and mythical creations*.

PT: Yes. Let's go through the photographs [looking at an album].

In Tasmania for the last 20 years there was floating around in the art world a shonky lawyer, who is now doing eight years in jail. He bought various works of art, but it was always very hard to get the money out of him, but he commissioned me to make a desk for him.

DE: In the 1980s?

PT: Late 1989, I'd say. It was the most beautiful piece of timber I had ever seen, a piece of Huon pine, and I made the desk from that. As a mixture of design and sculpture, I would have to say that it is bloody beautiful. The main desk part goes along to the end and then it cascades into a curve and that becomes a zigzag, repeated here. There it is horizontal, and here, vertical, and this is a wedge shape, in steel, that supports the [wooden] part.

DE: This person became a patron of your work?

PT: Of everyone's work. Every artist in Tasmania.

DE: You were already polychroming wood in the late 70s?

PT: Yes.

DE: Do you have photographs of the works you had in your first show at Watters?

PT: Um ...

DE: Tell me, we are up to you starting to make works for what becomes your first solo show. How many works in that show?

PT: Ah, when I resigned, 1977 I put in the resignation, and then out of the blue, I got a communication from Deakin University, which had just opened in Geelong, commissioning me to make a piece of sculpture, anything I liked, that fitted within a circular staircase. I found out later that the architect had recommended me – someone I'd never known anyway, Darrel someone – so I chose the theme of Lawrence Hargrave and I organised these poles to go up into the circular staircase. You can see there is Lawrence Hargrave and Mrs Hargrave and vacancy for you to put yourself in.

DE: You designed and did the engineering for these kinds of almost kite forms?

PT: Yes, but it was quite easy. You or I could do it. I got a sailmaker to make the little sails and to put the rod through so that they were always perpetually standing up.

DE: Is it still there?

PT: I assume so, although I think they had problems. How do you clean these things?

DE: Peter Travis was doing a lot of kite works in the late 70s, early 80s and had the same problems.

PT: It is a good work. I like that work. You know from your reading of the Ancient Greeks that the first thing done after a battle was that the battlefield was surveyed and a white tape put around the chest of all the dead, both to identify them and as an honour. Then think about that terrible Australian habit of ringbarking trees. So instead of white tape I've used folded lead. The mask itself is that of the Greek god of comings and goings, and often in some Roman villas and some Greek ones there will be heads of the Greek god of comings and goings.

DE: Does this lead us into saying that in New York part of your enthusiasm was for historical or classical sculpture as well as contemporary work?

PT: To me it was all one. I made no separation.

DE: Yes, but at that time, sculpture was being radically changed in terms of traditional definitions; there is a huge spectrum of work in New York. You were looking at a large field but you were holding to a particular view of sculpture, yes? And this work, I guess, makes the point that mythology was imbued in your work from the beginning – is that right ?

PT: Yes. That letter of Benjamin Franklin's – before I die I have to make the equivalent, in either a painting or a sculpture, of what Franklin wrote. What beautiful English and what a beautiful sentiment, how true and how accurate. This [pointing to a folder] is in the collection of Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston, and I followed it up, this little challenge, and that will never be shown again. It is beyond the ability of any curator to re-assemble it, unless they are prepared to devote a lot of attention to it. That wing lifts off. They didn't have hang gliders in 1981. This precedes hang gliders.

DE: I am thinking of Tom Arthur's work [from 1975] in the Art Gallery of New South Wales collection, *The fertilization of Drako Vulen's cheese pizza*. It strikes me that there are a lot of flying machines or fantastical machines which appear to have a great deal of potency amongst Australian sculptors in the late 1970s, so did the 1978 show at Watters have a large impact?

PT: Oh yes.

DE: For you? For the audience? Was it a sell-out show?

PT: A total sell-out, and it gave me the ability to work for another year, to plough ahead. Somewhere about Bicentenary time [1988] a number of us around Australia were invited to design a piece of work.

DE: To do what?

PT: I can't quite remember. But these three tables go together. They were made in Melbourne by a firm to my specifications, in wood. These are chainsaw cuts, at least they are meant to be but they cheated and used microcosmic things. I would put as many cuts across again, but they were half-arsed, tentative. But the pieces toured the world. Six Australians matched with six international designers, but mine never returned, they never turned up again.

What happened, I used to talk to the people making it over the phone, and I said, 'For god's sake, don't be gutless on that'. It started with a piece of wood that I had. I used to get my assistants to test the wood, to check that the chainsaw was really sharp and cutting clean. We had one bit of wood that we were testing all the time, and after about a month, with the four of us testing the chainsaw, the thing was random, and that's what I wanted. I wanted the top to be useless, with so many gouges and cuts through it that you couldn't use it. The

other thing: the top itself is tapered. I wanted them all tapered so that when they came together they didn't fit.

DE: Did the distinction between sculpture and design worry you?

PT: No, never, because I do both.

DE: But is there a distinction between them?

PT: No, I don't see it. See that one [pointing to a photograph]. That was taken in the backyard of where I lived. All of it was duck-shooting country. There were lots of swans and water holes.

[Pause in interview in which a commission for a crucifix for Launceston General Hospital is mentioned]

DE: So you had the solo show and commissions started to pour in?

PT: Yes, but not pour. They came like links in a chain. Never more than I could handle.

DE: And you are working still down at Huonville and you had enough commissions to have fairly regular assistance?

PT: Full-time assistance.

DE: From the beginning?

PT: Yes. They were students I had. People who knew me, knew what I wanted and were comfortable with working with me and stayed for years. There was no coming or going.

DE: There would be few sculptors in Australia who could have left their full-time teaching work and manage to have established the same set up. What would be your best decade in terms of commissions?

PT: It wasn't just public commissions. In the 1983–4 [Biennale of Sydney] exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales ...

DE: 1984. [Australian] Perspecta was in 1981 and you were in that.

PT: Well, it must be that one then. Was Ian North [in it]?

DE: No, that's 1984.

PT: OK, 1984 then. At that point, that was just after the Ray Hughes [Gallery] show [in 1983], and he was delighted that I was going into the Biennale so the work could be labelled 'courtesy of Ray Hughes', and that was fine until Eileen Chanin of Macquarie Galleries [Sydney] bailed me up. I [had] said to Ray that you [Ray] have to sell at least one piece just to cover expenses, two pieces and I will be set for the next year. Eileen bailed me up and asked me who represented me and I told her and she said, 'Well, if I sell the lot, will you come with me?', and I rang Ray up and he said, 'Well, if she does, I guess I'll have to eat shit'. Isn't that entirely Ray?

DE: And so she did?

PT: She did. Those were the ones in the State Bank [of New South Wales] in Martin Place [Sydney].

DE: They were there for a decade. They must have started off that bank art-buying spree, I think. I think they caused quite a ripple in Sydney at the time. They were behind floor-to-ceiling glass looking out onto Martin Place.

PT: The bank went into receivership as it ceased to exist [in fact, it was part of a series of banking takeovers] and those works just disappeared. There was a blue figure with arms, the face painted in an abstract way, a beautiful figure, with all kinds of things happening. They were in a prime position. Anyway the upshot is that a bloke named – ah, I can't remember – having seen them, gave me a commission to do a series of sculptures at Southbank in Melbourne, but I would have to come and see the site, so I went across, and he said, 'The problem is that the foyer of the building will be four times bigger than this room', and it was pierced by gigantic concrete columns, glass fronted. It was a really intimidating space architecturally, and he said, 'I don't care what you do here, but do something that gets people to put their heads up'.

DE: And did you do that?

PT: Yes, I did. I did that [gestures to a photograph of a work]. The point of the story is that firstly the works in the 1983 show, all of those sold. It's leapfrogging all the time, from one thing to another, commissions, exhibitions etc. The ABC made a film of me down at Huonville. I also got a commission from an advertising fellow in Melbourne who wanted his office livened up. [He had seen the ABC film.] I was doing Cape Barren geese, decoy, light grey with black marks, with pink feet and green etc, at the time. I said I could do him half a dozen, eight, ten, 12, so I did that. That was worth a few thousand dollars. They had their beaks down, feeding. You can pick them up and move them around.

DE: Did you do more private commissions than public ones?

PT: About 50/50.

I had just finished a figure called *Birds emerging*, the first of my figurative sculptures, and *Figure without triumph* [now in the Art Gallery of New South Wales collection] came after that. Patrick White included the Art Gallery of New South Wales one in the exhibition he did of the works he liked at the Gallery. I thought that was neat. Patrick had previously been to the show at Frank's [ie Watters Gallery] and Frank told me he looked around and said, 'All that blonde wood!', but the blonde wood had gone by this time.

DE: Just to go back a little. When you were in New York you have said that classical sculpture 'wowed' you, but were there particular artists who engaged you?

PT: I'm not that clever with my hands. I went to one particular private gallery in New York; he had just taken delivery of a whole lot of metal sculptures, small ones. Apart from a few major figures, I didn't know many artists then. I walked around for half an hour. There would have been 50 or 60 small sculptures, and I picked the one I thought was the best, and I turned it around and it was by David Smith, and I realised then that I had an eye. That gave me huge confidence. People couldn't understand why I had done this disastrous thing. People on staff, they thought it was ridiculous, though immediately three of them thought they would have do it, and went onto .5 of their job, but they couldn't make a go of it.

DE: But to be a full-time sculptor in Australia is a very difficult thing.

PT: You have to back yourself.

DE: Yes, but you not only have to back yourself, you have to hope there is patronage, and Australia has an appalling history for patronage. You have managed, it seems to me, to do exceptionally well on the patronage front.

PT: Well, it all started out for me with the decoys.

DE: Where is this coat of arms? [Looking at a photo]

PT: That's in the Supreme Court in Hobart, 1976.

DE: Where the decoys were first made for use?

PT: Yes.

DE: And you continued to make these for use as you were making sculptures and you had been doing the decoys for a long time?

PT: That's right. Those are black swans, if you can believe, they were commissioned after the first show at Watters [in 1979]. An American curator was passing through Sydney at the time [and saw the Watters show].

DE: Ah, this is the Milwaukee collection [in the USA] I have seen a reference to.

PT: Yes, the SC Johnson Wax collection, Milwaukee [owned by the SC Johnson company, which makes floor wax and other products]. Now each one of these [points to works in a photograph] sold individually, one of them was purchased by Tony Bishop, I think. He took it back as personal luggage on the plane, and when the luggage came out on the belt, there was the swan sitting up on the belt! There came a commission from the Johnson Wax people to do six more [variations on the black swans decoy sculptures] for them, which was very good.

DE: Who was it who came out? That was 1979.

PT: Yes. They had hired a New York art dealer to go around the world to where they had their various branches and the branches would pay for the works he chose. That led to another commission, a later one, *For the term of his natural life*. It showed a couple of times, the last time at the Sherman Galleries [in Sydney]. I was with them for a while.

DE: You had shows with Eileen at Macquarie through the mid 80s. After that what happened?

PT: I had to give her away because there were a couple of times when she organised, quite reasonably, different architectural things. I remember one. There was a family law court being built. We had a meeting up here, Hyde Park, as the family law court wanted another coat of arms. It was going to be a too-complex thing. Then Eileen rang again about six months later to say that the commission was back on and they wanted to see samples of my work, so I brought some of them up. I had some magnificent pieces of bronze I had cast. I think they were swan heads. They were sexy things. You could actually cast a turd and people would like to hold it, wouldn't they? It's the material, isn't it? Anyway, so the deal was going to go ahead, worth millions of dollars, but Eileen insisted that every enquiry I got had to go through her. It would take her up to two days to respond. I thought, 'I can't go through all of this so finish the whole thing up'. It was so bad.

[This is followed by further discussion regarding Eileen Chanin and also Taylor's assistants.]

DE: So what would your assistants do precisely?

PT: Well, we would all do everything together.

DE: But are you drawing up a design that they work to or would you attack it together?

PT: We would attack it together. I'd have an idea in my head of the way we should be going, and so I'd say, 'Fellows, I want to do this. How should we go about it?'

DE: It is a carving and assemblage practice, isn't it? So how would you describe the marriage between the two?

PT: It's my vision of what sculpture is. There is an interweaving. It's like what I was speaking to you about: the two halves of the brain, where on the one hand you have an instinct ...

DE: When you first started, assemblage was a dominant practice, and for many sculptors carving is starting to wane away, but you are committed to carving also and to wood.

PT: *Dolly Dalrymple* represents the marriage of them both, where the carving can be critical to the detailing and the carpentry is crucial to the major forms. No matter how beautiful the carcass is, it is the details that make it.

DE: As things move on though, you start to become more rough-hewn, don't you?

PT: Mmm, to a degree.

[Looking at a photo] The workshop itself was down here, and this is out in the open, under a huge frame that I had, where things could roll backwards and forwards.

DE: Did you build a huge workshop down at Huonville after 1977?

PT: No, because I already had one down there.

DE: You had a huge workshop even though, before this, you hadn't done much of your own work?

PT: Yes, but every bloke needs a shed.

DE: When you started to teach in Hobart, did you start to do more sculpture in Huonville?

PT: Yes, I had to. As I said with the kids and the brushwork, if you showed them the intricacies of the brushwork they all got caught up in it, and so when I started to do what I was doing, the students also took the lead and extended their own skills, and some of them were doing it so well that I wanted them to come and work on my jobs.

DE: Art students and your teacher colleagues would be expecting you to have a body of work, wouldn't they? Geoff Parr, for example, would have been producing work and want you to look at it, wouldn't he? And you likewise?

PT: It was like surfing and we were all catching a series of beautiful waves.

DE: Did you find there was a substantial shift up in awareness of contemporary practice when you went to the school? Were you reading international art magazines?

PT: Yes. I took no notice of what was going on in Australia. As far as I was concerned there was no sculpture in Australia.

DE: You had a few sculptors in Tasmania! When did Bob Jenyns come down? And what about Stephen Walker?

PT: Well, Steve was going one way and I was going another.

I got David Hamilton. [Looking at a photograph of a work, possibly for Launceston General Hospital] This work was originally placed by the architect himself outside the room, near a glass wall. There was what is called an inter-denominational committee, the chair of whom everyone else hated. He was backing me because he had selected my work, and they hated him so my work had to go. They all objected to my work. They said the face was screaming and we hate it; it has to go. The architect's solution was, I thought, quite good. He said, 'I will erect a transparent screen, for those who don't like it'. The room itself was only half as big again as this room, where people can go in private in a hospital if they are feeling desperate and just be in the quiet of a church circumstance. Kevin Perkins made all of the furniture for it and it was ravishingly beautiful. To draw a curtain on it was the obvious solution, but no, they dug the whole thing out with a bulldozer, lifted it out and carried it around to a place out of sight.

DE: And in the weather, and there it has remained.

PT: Yes. [Indicating with a gesture] There is a photo of all of those finial figures that I was making at the time.

DE: The finial figures fit between *Octavia* and ...?

PT: Yes. I had figures which tapered to a point, like a bucket shape, then I had a metal frame made to receive the figures, to make figures and shadows.

DE: I thought the 'figure and shadow' work was much more in the 1980s, but these are circa 1978–79. How did they come about? You were interested in this as a philosophical theme?

PT: Yes, I was.

DE: Can you talk a little about this?

PT: Well, Richard Strauss wrote an opera called *The woman without a shadow*.

DE: What were you wanting to investigate? What did you want people to understand by the work?

PT: I never think in terms of people understanding. That's an intellectual process. I want people to have a sense of a feeling. In German there is the word 'doppelgänger'. Haven't you ever felt that? We have no equivalent in English. There is also the word 'freundschaft'. How do you translate that into English? There is a male singer, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. We have all thought up to now that he is the greatest singer of the 20th century, but there is now a man, Matthias Goerne ...

DE: In the 1990s you were making furniture.

PT: That was for the dreadful lawyer.

[Break in interview]

PT: [Looking again at his albums]. On my visit to the Metropolitan Museum, New York, in the musical section, I saw handmade pianos. This is my invention, but it was inspired by what I saw there. Unfortunately it broke in transit, somebody jumped on it, everything broke and it doesn't exist anymore. Here is the one that I claim will defy any but a dedicated curator. The long part here is a rowing four, a skiff, with the front and back cut off. You can see struts with just a touch of the abstract hand on each strut holding.

DE: Is this one called *Flying machine*?

PT: It's called *About flying*. I think it's one of my best works. Here are some details. The skiff was fur-lined.

DE: What kind of fur?

PT: It was cow fur actually. There was no face, just the helmet, making the suggestion. As you can see it's on tricycle wheels there.

DE: *About flying* was in your first Watters show?

PT: Yes. Now this one is in the possession of Geoffrey Parr. The boys at the mill used to get me all sorts of scraggy timber. This is called *Uncivil furniture*. It was beaut, it looked great. I only wished ... It was all about the absolute improbability. That one weighs half a tonne.

DE: Were you exhibiting more furniture-type works down here as well as your sculpture?

PT: Yes.

DE: So Parr would have bought that from a show?

PT: No, I gave it to him. He's a mate of mine.

DE: I haven't asked you about Mildura but that might have to be next time. Now, you were involved in it, weren't you?

PT: No, I don't think I was.

DE: I have you listed as exhibiting in it in 1976.

PT: Perhaps I was but I truly can't remember. Now this one I gave to Bernice and Leon. That's it in their house at Canberra. Partly made of Huon pine, then a long ceramic dish with holes punched in it. It was one of the *Arch* series. That was probably in one of the last shows I had with Eileen. It would have been the early 1990s because it was after I'd done the works for Parliament House.

Now here's the one called *Birds emerging*. That's the one that Suzi Gablick wrote about in *Art in America*. That's the one that came before the one that is in the Sydney gallery [Art Gallery of New South Wales]. If you look at this, this contains elements of the head, but if you look carefully that is a blackwood-carved bird emerging. There is no bronze in it.

I've done a number of Tasmanian tigers. There was a City of Hobart Art Prize perhaps ten years ago and I entered this [Tasmanian tiger] in it. It was made of very heavy Whatman paper, which I soaked briefly in warm water and then bent it over a form and it remembers its shape. At that time there was a lot of shit flowing in Hobart, about lawyers playing games, and banks. Everyone was in deep trouble. So all of these [plaques] you could lift them all

out. They are all connected. The details are concealed, written inside the cavity [underneath]. It was politically red-hot. Jörg Schmeisser won with one of his ravishing watercolours [actually an engraving with pencil and watercolour]. Pat Sabine was the director [of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery] at the time and she arranged them in such a way that the tiger and Jorg's work were close together, but I was pissed off because this tiger was easily the best thing in the show. I gave it to the first person who told me that the work should have won. You should ask, 'Why the chain?' When there was a bounty on the tiger a lot of the serious tiger hunters used a chain around an iron bar in the ground and that was the only thing that the tiger, if caught in a trap, didn't bite through.

[This is followed by a discussion, including a reference to differences between the creative and the scientific minds.]

That excerpt from Robert Musil [*The man without qualities*]. It really is about that . Scientific method. I mean I couldn't prove anything, any operation of mine. In terms of scientific method, there is no methodology. I have an instinct and I know now that my instincts are right.

[Referring to a book by Julian Jaynes, *The origin of consciousness in the breakdown of the bicameral mind*] At what point in human development does the bicameral mind emerge? For example, the Ancient Greeks had no real sense of consciousness, everything was the gods. Ajax drew his sword on Agamemnon, Agamemnon had interfered with his wife – 'the gods told me to do it!'

DE: Yes, but were those partly rhetorical devices?

PT: No, that was real life. As Jaynes points out, there was no independent thinking among the Ancient Greeks. All birds were messengers of the gods.

DE: What are we going to do with Plato then?

PT: Well, where will you place me? I am outside any stream, aren't I?

DE: Well, yes and no.

[End]