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OH 1192

Full transcript of an interview with

Robert 'Alfie' Hannaford

on 5 and 19 December 2022

by Annabelle Homer

Transcript prepared by Annabelle Homer

Recording available

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LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW
ROBERT 'ALFIE' HANNAFORD
OH 1192

FILE 1 of 6

[00:00:01] I'm Annabelle Homer and I'm interviewing Robert (Alfie) Hannaford on Monday, the 5th of December. This interview is being funded by the State Library of South Australia. Thank you Alfie, for being interviewed today. Could you please state your full name and date of birth please?

[00:00:19] Robert Lyall Hannaford 9/11/44

[00:00:27] Which makes you seventy-eight years of age?

[00:00:30] Seventy-eight. Yes.

[00:00:32] Well, you finished your interview with Robert Linn talking about Kate's death, and then you went on briefly to talk about your tongue cancer diagnosis in 2006 and not being afraid of death and mortality. That's where that was left off. Now, let's delve into the eighties a little bit more if we could. During the eighties, what really dominated your time as such? Just briefly.

[00:00:59] Well, try to take my mind back to the 1980s. I was living in Albemarle Street. My studio, I bought a house in 1981, I think it was just after I got back from overseas and I bought the house because it was easier and cheaper to buy a house than to rent a studio. No, I think I covered that.

[00:01:34] Yes, you did. You covered that with Rob. I understand that you taught at the Royal South Australian Society of Arts providing private tuition as well. How did that come to be? Do you remember?

[00:01:47] Yes, I remember. Marjorie Hann contacted me. Marjorie is quite a well-known South Australian artist and she was a member of the Royal Society and taught there and I hadn't done anything like that. But she asked me if I would be interested in teaching, taking some drawing classes at the Royal Society. I think she did it because she was taught by Ivor Hele and she liked my work. So I did, and it was a fascinating few years I had.

[00:02:35] How did you find teaching? I mean, it's a whole different process, isn't it?

[00:02:40] Well, it's something I loved. I found it really interesting. You know, I often thought I got more out of it than the students (laughs) because you come across really interesting people doing these art groups. You know, some had amazing talent, and they were completely unaware of it. And others, you know, basically it was fascinating experience, and it honed my own thoughts about self-education in the art world.

[00:03:21] Did you ever keep in contact with any of the students, especially those that you thought had showed a lot of promise?

[00:03:29] Um I did keep in contact with a number of them, and I still do. In fact, one of my best friends, Eric Mack, he came to my art classes, and he died a couple of years ago. But he and I became great friends, and some disappeared. I often wondered what happened to them because, you know, I mentioned that some I thought had wonderful talent, but they were unaware of it themselves. And I used to point out to them how worthwhile it would be to continue with their work.

[00:04:12] Is that a common trait with artists unaware of their talent?

[00:04:17] Possibly.

[00:04:19] Were you like that?

[00:04:22] No. I think I was always pretty confident about my talent (laughs) because I had success from the time I was a child. People used to, as I pointed out before, they used to praise me for my talent.

[00:04:46] Now, sticking with the 1980s, you bought a disused farmhouse and outbuildings near Riverton, which is obviously the area where you grew up and which is where we are recording this interview today. Why did you decide to do this?

[00:05:06] Well, I - I'll have to go back to my state of mind. I've been living it Albemarle Street where my studio - I had my house and studio and I always loved this neck of the woods, my birth country. I came to live here in 1973, after my stint in Melbourne with the scholarship, I came back home to Riverton and ah, I think I covered this with Rob Linn didn't I?

[00:05:58] Yes, you had the connection with where you grew up.

[00:05:59] Yes. Well, that was so important and that that was probably why I bought this place here at Riverton, I wanted to get back and live in the country, in the country where I knew best , I suppose.

[00:06:14] And this is this is an old dairy facility, isn't it? Like a dairy shed?

[00:06:19] This was this was an old disused dairy - milking shed, I'd say, I wouldn't say it was a dairy farm, but this was the milking shed just previous to when I bought it. I bought it in '86 I think, or '87, and um, as I'd spent that previous time living back here since the 70's, '73 I came and lived up here, played football for the local team, and it brought me back to my roots, so to speak. And at that time, I became fascinated with the nature of the area. I started to look into it in a more intellectual way. I read what I could about the geology and the history of the country, the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area. It was almost like home was where I began from and where I took as my reference for the world. I started to learn about the local nature, birds, plants, geology, geomorphology, and then that extended across the whole world. But this was where I – – – you start at home so to speak, and my conservation interest began at that time. I wanted to preserve the remnants of the bush, the delicate plants that were disappearing, and many of them had already disappeared. Birds. It was where I began with my friend John Smythe - the Bird Atlas Scheme.

[00:08:33] Which is what you mentioned in a in a previous interview with Rob.

[00:08:37] There's some getting around to why you asked me why I bought this place in 19- what was it? 1987? Yeah, that's right.

[00:08:54] That's a pretty good reason. Also in the eighties, I understand you had a fourth child born in 1987 as well. [Tsering]

[00:09:03] Yes, that's right. She was born in '87 and I bought this place just before she was born. Yeah, that's how I remember it best, because she was a small child when I was doing the place up. It was a bit of a wreck, you know, it had sheep running through it and the farmer that I bought it from - the neighbour, obviously thought he'd – – – nobody would ever want to live here. But I loved the old buildings, and I'd bought it very cheaply from him.

[00:09:46] And how long did it take you to do up?

[00:09:49] Well, I'm still doing it up. (laughs)

[00:09:53] Well, going back to Tsering. So, the mother isn't Fran?

[00:09:58] No. Mother is Shirley. Tsering's mother, Shirley Andris. She came from Sri Lanka. Well, her family came from Sri Lanka, but they lived – – – she was born in Kenya. So um yeah.

[00:10:22] Did Tsering grow up here or in Adelaide?

[00:10:26] Well, we started here. Shirley and I separated when Tsering was about four, I think three or four. And I had her here on my own for a year or so. She started primary school living here with me. I'm just remembering that particular time.

[00:11:08] At what age did she start to show signs of that artistic flair? Because she has followed your footsteps in some degree now, being a professional artist in her own right. When did you realise that? Oh, this girl's got talent.

[00:11:25] She always loved drawing from the time she was very small child. I remember when we, her mother and I, took her to Kenya where her family – – – when Tsering was three and she drew all the time and I've got sketchbooks with her drawings in them and mine at the same time. But it kept her quiet while we were travelling. She always loved drawing and she drew amazingly well for a three-year-old, you know, fears of monsters and fairies and whatever kids draw, but I thought they were extraordinarily good, but never thought that, you know, never occurred to me that she would go on and (laughs) become an artist too. It was up to her what she wanted to do. But drawing was a way that she- I knew she was happiest when she was drawing and painting as a small child.

[00:12:33] You proud?

[00:12:35] I am. Yes. He's done remarkably well.

[00:12:41] You did mention Kenya. You went to Kenya with Shirley and Tsering. What was that experience like for you?

[00:12:50] Well, I love Kenya. It's an extraordinary place. This was the time of Moi, the President, and it was a tough time. I remember when we arrived, there was a bit of a conflict going on between certain people and the government. There were crack downs and we had to – – – There was a real danger that we'd have to take shelter in

next door to Shirley's family where we were staying and family members. And it was a very dangerous time and so that affected me very much to think that I'd taken my family into this dangerous situation. Anyway, it blew over but it's a lasting memory of that era. For instance, I used to write a diary every day and there came a time when I – – – there were people being locked up and disappeared and I remember destroying some of my diaries in case they were confiscated at the airport or something. It was that serious. But Kenya itself, I loved. I loved the people. I loved the nature. We travelled through the country and into Uganda and we travelled all around Kenya down to Mombasa and the Island of Lamu, which is a Muslim place in the north part of the coast of Kenya. So, all together, I loved this country. I hated the politics. And I drew all the time, I drew the native people. I did about 20 drawings, portrait drawings of different people all over the country. And so creatively, it was a wonderful period for me, even though we were only there a couple of months.

[00:15:43] Sounds like a full-on couple of months by the sounds of things. How would you compare if you can compare the way that you painted or the way that you took Kenya as opposed to India? In the creative process of what you saw?

[00:16:04] Well, in Kenya I concentrated, I suppose, on the people, the native people particularly, and I'd always ask what tribe they came from because there are many different tribes in Kenya.

[00:16:23] And Maasai Mara?

[00:16:25] Yeah. Maasai, I painted, I drew – – – we went out on the Mara and I asked one of the Maasai warriors (laughs) you know they were dressed in their red outfits and clothing, which is traditional, to sit for me. And he did. And I remember we were out and – – – it was a hot day and other Maasai's shaded him so that I would have a consistent light to do this drawing. And after I finished – – – he didn't speak English, the boy I painted, but I found he was lying down and people were concerned, and he was – – – had his hand over his head and he's obviously distressed. And I asked what the matter and they said, he thinks you've taken his soul in the drawing. And I had to reassure him that that wasn't the case and I had to show him other drawings that I'd done of other people. But that was an example of the type of situation that you come

in when you draw people from different backgrounds who haven't had the same understanding of what I was doing.

[00:18:08] I bet that's the first time that you've heard that, though? You've taken my soul through [drawing]?

[00:18:16] Um yes. But occasionally I've painted people – – – I remember there was one lady, a very brilliant professor from Canberra, and she mentioned to me that I'd painted her - not her psychological depression. She was worried that it showed so much. So that's the same sort of thing in a way.

[00:18:53] Most of the people that you've painted, have they been happy with the result?

[00:19:00] That's an interesting question. Some are. A lot of people are happy if it's appreciated by other people. (laughs) Oddly enough. You know, I don't think everybody looks at paintings the way I might, or somebody educated in art (laughs), you know what I mean, with a background in looking at pictures. Some people, I get the impression are a bit worried about what they see because I'm not, I'm not known for flattering my subjects. I try to paint the character of the sitter, which I find is the most interesting part. So, I do get the impression that a lot of people are not particularly happy, but they are happy that I've painted them because they've heard that it's good to be painted by Robert Hannaford. (laughs) That might be a cynical way of looking at it. But others do respond, and I've had some wonderful relationships with sitters that take it very seriously and comply with the rules of sitting.

[00:20:35] And I guess you would put your heart and soul into a portrait, I can imagine? So, when you get negative feedback or challenging feedback, how do you take that on board?

[00:20:49] Well, you're right I do. I get a great satisfaction from painting, and when I get negative feedback, it doesn't worry me much because I'm basically confident in my approach. So that's why I don't feel compelled to flatter. I know that a lot of men and women prefer me to make them look a bit younger than they are or to – – – but I paint - I'm not like Lucien Freud probably exaggerates the blemishes so to speak. (laughs) I think old age, for instance, is not an impediment, I see beauty in age, and I see beauty in just about everything. So, if you've got a disfigurement or you've got wrinkles or you're fat or skinny, I find beauty in all those aspects of the sitter. And I try to paint

the sitter as they really are and this is what inspires me in painting - to get to the nub of things, the truth. (laughs) It's a difficult concept, there's no such thing, I suppose as a truth, but you try to, you try to get there, you try to paint the true of what's in front of you. Because I often think of the portrait or a landscape, come to think of it or anything I paint, as being my attempt to paint the definitive character of that subject so that if there's a record left of that person or that subject, I've embodied it in a way in my painting, and that's what interests me. That's why whenever I'm painting a picture, a painting, you know, I mean a landscape or anything, but a portrait in particular. It's the, it's the impetus that drives - that keeps me going, to find that defining characteristic of that subject and represent it in the form of paint or drawing.

[00:24:08] You mentioned landscapes as well. Let's go back to your trip because you went onto to London, Paris, Rome, Florence, or that could have been another time. But in 1991, you spent some time landscape painting in Devon, in the Cotswolds. Were these landscapes vastly different to what you usually paint?

[00:24:31] I really enjoyed painting in Europe. The light was different to here, but I loved it. In fact, I even love particularly painting in Europe in winter.

[00:24:48] Why?

[00:24:52] Well, it's light. You know, people exaggerate the differences between Europe and here, you know, we do have different lights and, you know **– – –.**

[00:25:08] Light, softer light over there opposed to harsh light here?

[00:25:11] Well, that's a simple way of looking at it. But, you know, when the sun comes out in Britain in the middle of winter, it is extraordinarily beautiful, with the reflected light from the sky in the shadows. Yeah, I love English light, but light is very different here than up in Sydney or in Queensland. You know, the Mediterranean clear atmosphere that we have in southern Australia is different to the north than every part of England, I mean Scotland is different to southern England and Tasmania is different to here. You do notice these differences of light. But I particularly love painting in England for those differences, I suppose, in trying to capture that wonderful variety of sunlight and form that you find in different parts of the world.

[00:26:31] Now, 1990 was a big year for you. You won the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize with a painting entitled 'Bill'. He's a local from Riverton. And you also painted his dog as well?

[00:26:44] No, my dog.

[00:26:45] Was it your dog?

[00:26:46] Yes. Ochre

[00:26:49] What was his name?

[00:26:50] Ochre

[00:26:50] Ochre. So why do you think this painting was such a standout to receive such notoriety?

[00:27:02] Um I don't know. I guess the judge liked it, I enjoyed it. I had a hundred sittings with Bill. He was working on this building.

[00:27:16] He was a local Riverton bloke?

[00:27:18] Yeah, he was labouring for the people that were helping me when I first moved in up here in '87. (laughs) So I began this studio in about 1989 or something like that. '88 - I can't remember, but Bill was helping with the building, and he was such a character and he and I were good friends roughly the same age. So, I asked if he'd sit for me, right here, under this light. So he would, and I'd paid him what I was paying him as a labourer and it went on and on for about a year. He'd come out and I'd paint him and my dog, Ochre, was here, and halfway through the painting or even later I added him in the background, and it was a wonderful experience. Not often you get to spend such time with the subject, but Bill was very happy to model. He loved it in fact. So it was a painting that I put my heart and soul into and with my dog in it just gave it that little bit of extra meaning for me. So when I got back from overseas, I discovered I'd won the Doug Moran with it.

[00:29:12] How significant is the Doug Moran prize?

[00:29:16] Well, in those days it was a bit different to now. Doug Moran advertises as a traditional art prize meaning realism. (laughs) So that's probably why I went in it because I was painting realism in a way that wasn't that popular at that time. The Archibald, for instance, was deviating towards more outlandish subject matter and technique and as had become quite popular in the western world. Mid-19th – 20th century (laughs). So that's probably why I entered the Doug Moran thinking, oh well, I'm a traditional type of artist that fits Doug Moran's criteria.

[00:30:12] And you said – – –.

[00:30:14] The first year I entered it with a portrait of my son, Tom and it was very popular too. And another South Australian, Penny Dowie, won it that year, so I entered it the following year and won it with Bill.

[00:30:34] So that was your second time?

[00:30:35] Yeah.

[00:30:36] Have you entered it since?

[00:30:38] Yes. Once or twice I've put in a painting.

[00:30:45] Just going back to how many sittings you did with Bill. You said over 100 or around 100 sittings. For the traditional portrait that you would do a commissioned portrait, how many sittings would you do?

[00:30:58] Well, I usually have about six or seven, and occasionally I've done them in three or four, but that's difficult. Although I have painted portraits in one sitting, you know, for Big hART and at other times when you haven't got the time. So it's a different type of painting. If you know that you're going spend a long time on it, you work on it slightly differently, but if you've only got one or two sittings, you work very directly and quickly, which has its advantages and disadvantages. But there's certain – – – I love those quick paintings, too.

[00:31:48] Why? Is it because it's a challenge? Gets the heart racing?

[00:31:52] Yes. It's a real challenge to be able to put down immediately and there's that spontaneity and chance seems to happen more often, and you go more directly to the form and character of the sitter. So that's what I did for Big hART, a lot of very quick paintings done, some on stage in front of people, but often with only a couple of hours or an hour.

[00:32:24] So let's talk about big hART while we're on the subject. Why was this such a big project or significant project for you?

[00:32:33] For that reason, it gave me the opportunity to paint directly. And Scott, who ran Big hART, he was very keen that I could paint the character of the sitters. That was the whole idea, to give these often people with lacking opportunity in life, that's the nature of Big hART, is to help these sort of people. And Scott can see the

idea of having a portrait painted would give them the feeling that they were important enough to pursue their interests in the project that they were working on, which was the type of help that Big hART gave to people. It gave them a sense of their own worth. So the portrait was an attempt to help them with that process.

[00:33:39] So how many portraits did you do under that project?

[00:33:44] Well, there's one in the early projects down in Hobart or no, west coast of Tasmania. I think there were twenty-five or thirty separate portraits of these kids that had difficult backgrounds, you know, girls and boys, usually between the ages of about sixteen and twenty-five, who were working on the project. Yes, I found the whole process fascinating and a great challenge for me. And very rewarding in terms of the entering into the lives of these people and trying to portray them honestly as I could.

[00:34:42] And as you see them, because you don't speak to them, you don't get to know them, do you, as part of that process?

[00:34:48] Well, you do as much as you can, they talk, of course, and you – – – but when you're painting, even if– – – I find it the process of painting is so all consuming, look, sometimes I have to ask the subject to shut up, you know. Do we talk too much, although even the conversation can sometimes be so interesting that they take over a bit. I'm thinking of Anh Do, he talks all the time and doesn't paint, you know, on screen. And I wonder whether he's actually does the painting while he's talking. I don't think he does, but I certainly have to concentrate on the painting. So sometimes we don't talk while the actual painting is going on. But then I like the subject to talk because that brings out the character of the sitter. So I often have to ask the sitter in certain words, (coughs) and even to crack a wet joke to make them laugh, to see that a different side of their character. The way their faces move, the way they – – – I love to watch them in repose. When I'm doing a quick portrait I put settle on that pose, that aspect rather early. When I'm doing a long portrait, you try to incorporate every part of the carriage of the sitter. You know, sometimes people even cry and sometimes they go to sleep while you're sitting.

[00:36:41] Do they?

[00:36:42] Yeah. And, you know.

[00:36:45] Do you have to wake them up?

[00:36:46] Yeah. Wake them up sometimes, or if they – – – sometimes I let them nod off while their hand is happily sitting in the right position. So I'll move my attention (laughs) and then I'll gently wake them up and ask them if they'd like a cup of coffee. And on we go.

[00:37:09] It's obviously a soothing process Alfie? (laughs)

[00:37:14] Yes.

[00:37:15] Well while we're on the subject of Big hART, you've been involved with them for thirty odd years and a very long project, at least six different projects, one being you involved in their stage production, the Namatjira production about Albert Namatjira?

[00:37:33] Yeah.

[00:37:34] And you joined the tour, and you actually painted the actors on stage, is that right?

[00:37:39] Yes, it, it travelled around Australia and then it went to London over a couple of year period back in the, when was it? 2012. That was the main year, I think, 2013 is when we went to London with it. So what was the question?

[00:38:10] You painted your subjects on stage?

[00:38:12] Yes, I did.

[00:38:13] They're not just sitting down for you. They're moving and talking?

[00:38:17] No, they sat for me on stage.

[00:38:19] They sat for you on stage?

[00:38:21] And Trevor Jamieson played the part of Namatjira - Aboriginal actor. And part of the show was that they'd opened with me painting Trevor, while the audience sat and watched and then they began the program and then at half time I would paint him again and again. The audience would sit and watch for a while and then the play would continue. So the painting became part of the show. And I did probably ten different paintings of the Aboriginal actors in that way. Some I only did one or two sittings, others, you know, often if you were showing in say Sydney it might go over a period of a week or so you'd work on the same painting for two or three nights in a

row. So you should get a bit more completed. But some of those were only one sitting and some were six or eight. And at other times I'd get them to sit, I remember occasionally, if I got really into the painting, I'd ask to have a separate sitting with Trevor.

[00:39:49] How did you feel painting in front of a crowd? Because usually it's in the privacy of your own milking facility?

[00:39:56] It doesn't worry me. I'm used to painting in public, years ago I used to go to the zoo with my friend Anselm van Rood, and I always had people coming up looking over your shoulder. I used to make out I was deaf and dumb because if they asked you stupid questions, it just distracts you from your painting. But occasionally people would ask sensible questions and it was fascinating as well. But I've never minded painting in public because I concentrate on my work and I don't worry what, how I look, or how I'm coming across because the necessity is concentrate on painting so strong.

[00:40:49] Can we backtrack a bit and go back to the Archibald prize that you referred to? Now you were a finalist for your painting of South Australian historian and writer Hugh Stretton, and you also won the People's Choice Award. What was so special about this portrait? Because this is the second time that you had entered. You entered back in 1971 and this was your first time you made it as a as a finalist?

[00:41:19] Yeah. Well, in '71, I entered a self-portrait. And I thought it was probably the best page I did in that particular period. It was when I was in Melbourne in the scholarship days and it didn't get chosen and that time I was very interested in my work, you know, painting every day. My work was everything that mattered. And I thought, oh well that's a load of crap anyway, I don't know why I bother because at that time, the type of art that was winning the Archibald was extraordinarily weird stuff. I thought, you know, modernist, conceptual was starting to dominate. And I thought that I would just continue with my work the way I paint, which wasn't the most popular way of painting in that period - talking of the early seventies. So after I won the Doug Moran in 1990 - it was yeah, that gave me the impetus to, well, you know, I might as well have a crack at the Archibald, seeing I got a bit of publicity of winning that one and people started to recognise my name. So I entered Hugh Stretton and asked him to sit for me because he's a man I admired very much, he was a terrific

fellow. I just admired him as a human being. And it won the People's Choice and got in tra lalalala, so after that I continued entering every year in the Archibald and got selected. So it just goes to show what a little bit of publicity should do for not only the judges, but yeah (laughs) particularly for the judges, I suppose.

[00:43:48] Oh, you think it was because...

[00:43:50] Because the painting I did in the '70's, when I look back on it now, I think it was a very good painting. One I'm very proud of.

[00:43:57] You've been a finalist 27 times?

[00:44:01] Well, that's what they say. Never counted them.

[00:44:06] (laughs) A three-time winner of the People's Choice Award in 1992, 1996 and 1998. I mean, is the Archibald- is that the pinnacle for an artist? Is being a finalist or even to win that award - does that mean you've reached your peak?

[00:44:26] No. It's a prize, like any other prize. It's worth a lot of money. So it's welcome if you win it, the publicity you get helps you get commissions. It spreads your name as a portrait painter, which helps in the terms of making a living. But I don't hold it as, or any prize, as the definitive – – – you know, people often say you should have won it or how come you've never won it, doesn't worry me to be honest. Anything I'm interested in is the quality of my work and I'm probably the best judge of that. (laughs)

[00:45:29] Why do you think you've never won it?

[00:45:33] Oh look, it's just one of those – – – . It maybe because I – – –. My paintings aren't good enough if you believe that the judges are the definitive arbiters of taste and worth. I don't, I don't think that all. I don't care that I haven't won it because last year I had a self-portrait in and it got an article by Christopher Allen about why I haven't ever won it. So if you want to read that you get a better answer possibly than I can give. But I didn't necessarily agree with what he said either.

[00:46:29] It was very favourable of you though?

[00:46:31] It was very favourable. Yeah, it probably did me better than if I'd won it.

[00:46:37] Exactly.

[00:46:38] And often think how I'd feel if I did win it because the judging of the Archibald or any prize is so much determined by the, I won't use the word fashion, but you know what I mean - the predominant thinking of the time. And at the moment as it always has been, ever since I've been alive, you can almost predict what will win a prize, it's not just the Archibald, it's any prize by being alert to what's fashionable at the moment in terms of values and so on.

[00:47:33] And Tsering has also been a finalist, your daughter, in the Archibald. You both were finalists, this year, in fact, in 2022. First father daughter duo?

[00:47:46] Ah no it's the first we were – – –. Tsering has been in the last eight years, and I've shared that with her about four of those occasions.

[00:47:57] In four of those occasions?

[00:48:01] The first time, yeah, somebody mentioned the father/daughter thing, that was about seven or eight years ago.

[00:48:16] We'll come to your self-portraits in just a moment. But following the Archibald and following the Doug Moran, did your portrait career take off a bit more after that because of all that extra publicity? Did you start doing portraits of well-known politicians?

[00:48:33] It wasn't discernible to me because I had been very popular amongst universities, higher education. I'd done many portraits for the medical, you know, the Royal College of Surgeons. the Royal College of Physicians all long before I went in the Archibald. So I didn't notice any difference, to be quite honest. Although, for instance, I wouldn't have got Paul Keating, unless he had seen the Archibald, he saw my work up there and asked me to sit for him and I must have got a number of commissions because I'd been known from the Archibald. I'm not denying that. But it didn't affect me in terms of the way I paint or.

[00:49:35] Bob Hawke. Was he before or after the Archibald?

[00:49:41] Um, Bob Hawke was probably an example. But on the other hand, I painted lots of people before the Archibald. I can't remember when I painted Bob Hawke. It was yeah after the Archibald, I think.

[00:49:59] Did you have to tell him to be quiet when you were painting him?

[00:50:02] I did. (laughs) He was very chatty and – yeah, yeah, he was.

[00:50:12] And what about Paul Keating?

[00:50:15] Well, I had to tell him to shut up a couple of times, too, though they both very chatty for very different reasons.

[00:50:26] Now, we'll just jump a little bit to understand that Paul Keating was one fellow that told you to stop chewing on your paintbrushes because that'll give you cancer?

[00:50:36] Yes, well he claims that. I do vaguely remember him saying you shouldn't do that. He is very keen on avoiding cancer himself. He wouldn't put his mobile phone to his ear. He pulled out a little earpiece because he thought that it would, you know.

[00:50:57] Yeah.

[00:50:58] Anyway, he was very particular about things like that Paul was. He does remind me about it when we see each other occasionally how he warned me. (laughs) But the fact of the matter is, it's not known what caused that cancer definitively. It could have been the lead and cadmium from the oil page. It did have a habit, as Paul pointed out, of putting my brushes in my mouth and that could well have been a reason I have high levels of cadmium and lead in my blood as I had them tested. But then I, if you look into it, neither of those are necessarily cancerous. I mean, lead doesn't do you any good it probably affects my brain. (laughs) But apparently, it's not, doesn't cause cancer. So the cancer could – – –. There's viruses and so on and there could be a genetic factor. So it's not definitive that it was caused by brushes.

[00:52:18] Did you stop chewing on your brushes?

[00:52:19] I have, I've never done it since. And I even started wearing gloves for a while, but I've abandoned those, and I was my hands now with turps with (laughs) with soap rather than turps, as I used to which is a good way of transmitting the poison from the paint into your bloodstream.

[00:52:44] Well, we'll talk about more about your cancer journey in just a moment. I want to go back to following your Archibald successes. We talked a bit about the big hART community but I want to now look at your next project or another project that you undertook and that was the Black Chicks Talking Portrait series where you painted ten First Nation women, which was featured in the publication Black Chicks Talking, and one of them being Deborah Mailman. But I want to find out more about this particular project?

[00:53:20] Well, it began through the big hART movement I think, because Bain Stewart, who was Leah Purcell's husband and Leah initiated this book - well she and Bain, because Bain was her husband and business manager. And they were in contact with um, Scott Rankin, who is the man behind the Big hART project and he may have even mentioned my name as a possible painter of Aboriginal people because I'd done a lot of painting of Aboriginal people for Big hART. So that's probably why Bain contacted me, and I said I'd be very happy because Aboriginal culture interested me and very loose type of arrangements which I'm prone to do rather than, you know, I've always shied away from contracts and things like that. I'd never initiated them and most of the portraits I used to do were never contracted. These days, I get more people interested in contracts. So I said, "Yeah, I'd be very happy to paint them, Bain." And so he wanted them for the book. I'm sure we did speak about, [that] I'd be happy for them to be photographed for the book and Bain said he would give me certain amount of travel expenses to come up to Sydney to paint some of the women or else to go to different parts of the country where they lived and...

[00:55:12] Can you tell me who the women were apart from well-known Deborah Mailman obviously?

[00:55:18] Leah Purcell, who's the actress. I can't remember their names now, but they were pretty famous women, black women who achieved something or were going somewhere.

[00:55:30] Okay.

[00:55:32] Um, Rachel Perkins was one.

[00:55:40] And the woman, that now runs Bangarra [1][Frances Rings] you know, there were ten different women, and they were lovely. So I enjoyed the project. Sorry about my coughing, I always cough, it's part of my throat condition.

[00:55:58] Would you like a glass of water?

[1] Bangarra Dance Theatre - a company of professional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers who create powerful works of theatre with dance, music, poetry and design. It has been making indelible marks on the Australian theatre landscape for 32 years.

[00:55:59] No, I'm right thanks. And then when I – – –. So that all went ahead, I had to paint ten women in different parts of the country and then Bain asked if the paintings could be kept for a while for an exhibition maybe in New York or somewhere. And I said, "Yeah, you hang onto them for a while, I'll get them back later when you've finished using them for your purposes." And after a couple of years, I tried - I reminded him, you know, seemed like the New York thing had fallen through, and he kept procrastinating. And then when I asked him to send the paintings back and then he would say, "Oh yeah, I'll do that." and then nothing would happen. And six months later I said, Oh shit, I still haven't heard from Bain, I'll contact him again. And I started ringing him - "Say listen how about sending those paintings back" - it's been four years or something now and he kept putting it off. And then eventually I said to him, "Look Bain, unless you send them back, I'll have to get legal demand to get them back." And then his lawyer wrote me a letter saying that Bain owns the paintings.

[00:57:32] Let's be clear firstly, you did this project free of charge on the condition that you would get those paintings. You would have ownership of those paintings?

[00:57:40] Yeah, well, it wasn't spelled out in the contract, but it was an understanding.

[00:57:44] Yes.

[00:57:45] And so I was surprised. And I hate lawyers. My father always said, stay away from doctors and lawyers. So I thought, well, look, Bain I'll let you have the painting of Leah, his wife, which was, I thought, was one of the best of the paintings, if you send the rest back. Anyway his lawyer said no, Bain owns the paintings. So it went on again this way for ages and eventually I had to send the lawyers a letter demanding them back. He refused to acknowledge that I owned them, so the case was set in Sydney. It got a bit of publicity; I remember there's a photograph of Bain and Leah walking out of – – – on the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald. And anyway, the long and short of it was, we won the case, and they had to pay my legal fees as well. I won the case comprehensively. It was a fascinating experience actually being in court and watching the proceedings and how it all unfolded, I won't go into it.

[00:59:23] Pretty stressful, though. I can imagine too, the whole process?

[00:59:25] It was very stressful at the time. Yeah. Anyway, I won the case, and I was always assured that Bain had a house and everything, but he filed for bankruptcy, and he didn't have to pay anything and I had to pay my lawyers. (laughs) Came to over $200 thousand, the legal fees I had to pay which [was] because Bain went into bankruptcy. So I paid some with money and some with paintings to the lawyers who did a pretty good job. But I thought they were a bit remiss in not following afterwards to get some type of compensation for my...

[01:00:21] So you didn't get any compensation?

[01:00:23] No, not at all. Nothing. But I won the case and got the paintings back and they were valued at, what was it? $20 thousand each. So, that came to $200 thousand. So it almost paid for it. But what would I do with ten paintings of Aboriginal women? So I donated them to the Murwillimbah Tweed River Gallery who were interested. They'd already got my painting of Bill, so I thought that's a good place- that was still attracting- it was one of their most popular paintings. They were very keen to take them as a cultural gift, which they did.

[01:01:27] Why the Tweed and Murwillimbah area?

[01:01:32] It started with the Doug Moran, that's where they exhibited, and for some reason they received the painting of Bill to the gallery, just why, I don't know. I think it was a donation or something of Doug Moran and the one of Tom, my son, which was in the finalist the first year, they've got that as well. So for that reason I thought, well, this is a place where people go to see my work, I'll ask them if they're interested in Black Chicks, and they were.

[01:02:14] How long did the court battle go for?

[01:02:16] It went for a week or two. Yeah, we were up there for quite a while.

[01:02:22] The whole process, though?

[01:02:24] Yeah. The whole process.

[01:02:27] Was a week or two?

[01:02:28] Well, the court case was.

[01:02:30] Yes.

[01:02:30] Yes, but the process went on for years.

[01:02:32] Yes, I can imagine.

[01:02:34] Waiting to get paid and get the pictures back. And they showed a couple of the pictures in court. I think Alison suggested you should get the paintings on neutral ground before the court case. So we did that and got them retrieved from Brisbane where Bain had housed them. And in fact, not long after we got the paintings brought to Sydney during the court case, there was a big Brisbane flood and Baine's house apparently got flooded. So the paintings would have possibly gone down the river (laughs). So we're really glad that we saved them at least from the flood. That was even before the court case.

[01:03:38] Wow.

[01:03:39] And I showed a few of them in the actual court case. Three of them were shown to the judge, and he claimed that he realised the value of them by seeing the original portraits, and that helped sway his judgement. He came to visit us years later.

[01:04:06] The judge did?

[01:04:06] He retired by then. He said it was such an obvious case to him that I was telling the truth and Bain was lying.

[01:04:15] Who was the judge?

[01:04:17] I've forgotten his name. [Justice Peter Hall]

[01:04:20] Moving on to Lowitja O'Donoghue, the portrait that you did of her, a well-known advocate for Aboriginal rights. Why was this a significant painting for you? Because I understand that you've remained good friends as well. Was this commissioned?

[01:04:40] Yeah, it was commissioned by the newly formed National Portrait Gallery in Canberra. And they asked me if I'd paint Lowitja for them and I was delighted to. And Lowitja and I became very good friends and I've always enjoyed my contact with Aboriginal people and painting them in particular and Lowitja was no exception.

[01:05:24] I've read in a publication that you were quite excited about this commission, or you were excited about the portrait because the light was right,

what she was wearing, everything seemed to fall into place. Do you remember that?

[01:05:43] Not particularly. I mean, it was no different to any portrait I had painted. I always find the painting I'm working on becomes the most important thing in the world at that time. And that doesn't matter who the sitter is. So, Lowitja was a subject for a painting, nothing more than that or less than that because every subject becomes the focus of my wholehearted attention when I'm painting.

[01:06:32] You both became quite close after that to a degree. Is there anything else that you're doing with her in the future? Are there plans to do a sculpture of her, for example?

[01:06:45] There are. The previous government commissioned me to do a sculpture of her for the new Aboriginal Art Centre, to be put where the old Royal Adelaide Hospital was. Then the change of government happened, and they've continued with the project, but it's been put on hold because of something, they're not quite sure what's happening with the buildings and where it's going to be placed. So that project has been put on hold, but they've paid me for the maquette, which I haven't even done yet. The project is still going to happen, I think. I hope.

[01:07:38] And how is she?

[01:07:40] She's not well. Well, she's ninety, and she's in a home and she's not doing very well I've heard. I last spoke to her six or eight months ago, I rang her, and she answered, and we spoke. She took a while to get through who was speaking (laughs) but then the penny dropped. But she said even then she was off with the angels which I thought was a rather interesting way of putting it, reminding me of her education in the Christian School, Colebrook,[2] or whatever it was.

[01:08:31] The problem of getting a maquette might be a bit of a tricky situation, getting that maquette done?

[2] Colebrook Home was a South Australian institution for Australian Aboriginal children run by the United Aborigines Mission from 1924 (named Colebrook in 1927) to 1981, existing at four different locations over its lifetime. The United Aborigines Mission first established a home in 1924 near Oodnadatta, although it was not known as Colebrook Home at that time. The home then moved to a place called Colebrook, just outside Quorn in 1927, where it became known as Colebrook Home. In 1944 it was moved to Eden Hills, just outside Adelaide. That site closed in 1972, and is now the site of the Colebrook Reconciliation Park. The original Colebrook at Quorn is now a small Aboriginal community.

[01:08:39] No it won't be once I know where it's going to go and what size it's going to be because that will determine the shape of the maquette. I can't do it until I know where and what its purpose is and where it would be situated.

[01:08:59] Let's go back a step. I'm sorry we keep going forward and then I need to go back to fill in some details. You undertook a six-month residency at Sydney Grammar School back in 2001. What was that experience like and why did you do it in the first place?

[01:09:17] Well, I was asked, and I thought well, this sounds like it might be a good thing to do. I'd never done something like that, and I think I explained to you how much I loved teaching, so I accepted. The headmaster up there was John Vallance, and he apparently initiated the possibility that I might be the Artist in Residence. It was a wonderful experience, it was a good opportunity to spend a bit of time in Sydney and paint the harbour, which I've always wanted to do.

[01:10:05] You've done the Bridge and the Opera House?

[01:10:08] Yes, every time I went to Sydney, I draw those things, but to spend a bit of time there was really interesting. I liked it.

[01:10:17] So apart from painting the sights of Sydney, how was that teaching experience? Was it any different to what you've done in the past?

[01:10:25] Well, I was a little bit disappointed in the lack of interest from the students. I was ready to carry on, trying to help them develop their artistic endeavours. They didn't seem that interested. Perhaps it was the time. I remember the Art Schools advocated the most ridiculous things like it's more important the research from the photographs and the backup than the actual work. There was ridiculous statements from the Education Department of what was important for them and so I just painted and the Headmaster was encouraging me to do that. He said the students will gain more from observation of me working in my own space, so I did quite a number of portraits while I was up there and landscapes and had a very creative time.

[01:11:42] And do you think from that, the students became a little bit more interested?

[01:11:48] Not really. There was one student, I remember, who was a philosophical student rather than an art student. He was more interested in what I had to say than the

art students. I've been back to the college since and done a demonstration painting a few years ago. And as a matter of fact, I only got a request last week to paint the new headmaster.

[01:12:16] So the relationship between you and Sydney Grammar continues?

[01:12:19] Well, hopefully, I said I'd be very happy to paint it, so whether it comes off or not for I don't know.

[01:12:29] You were commissioned by the Federal Historical Memorials Committee to record the Centenary of Federation commemorative sitting of the Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne in 2001. And that was a mouthful. It was unveiled by Bob Hawke in 2004. It took you two years to complete I understand. Can you walk me through the process of doing it?

[01:12:51] No, it was unveiled by John Howard.

[01:12:54] Was it John Howard?

[01:12:55] Yeah.

[01:12:55] Wow.

[01:12:56] Yeah, he was Prime Minister at the time.

[01:13:02] So walk us through the process of doing this painting because I can imagine this was quite a significant project for you.

[01:13:11] It was a tremendously significant process. It was terribly time consuming, I dreamt about it for months, years. It was an enormous project. I drew all the protagonists in the painting, I mean, I went to the centenary. I was prepared. I wasn't sure how it would go, but I went with an open mind and found myself standing in a position where I suddenly thought this would be great vantage point to do the painting. So I worked hard during the day of the Centenary of Federation Ceremony and then over the next year or two I went back to the building a few times in Melbourne and painted there and drew there. Then I did Parliament House, Canberra. I went back there at least three times and with appointments to do drawings of each of the politicians in the painting. And I had to do drawings of some of the audience for the painting, you know, I had to draw people like Gough Whitlam and Margaret Whitlam, Governors who were all in the viewpoint from where I decided to do the painting. So that meant travelling to different capital cities, so literally hundreds of hours of

drawings. I wanted to do it that way, that was my way, rather than working from photos of the whole thing. And I got as many photographs as I could from video cameras and things of the day. Unfortunately, they shut out the light, they used artificial light and they shut out one of the windows, and then after the ceremony, I went back to paint and they assured me they'd leave them up for me, but some idiot pulled them down so I had to remember what it was like to get the true light affects, but that made the job more difficult. But it was a process that took up my whole life for a long time.

[01:16:08] How many sketches did you do?

[01:16:12] I think it was 120. I know that because the sketch books were stolen about a year afterwards. I showed them at the Adelaide Club, and they were sent back to Riverton one day by courier when I was doing an art lesson amongst a group of students at the railway station in Riverton. And I went to pick them up afterwards and they'd gone. It was a bit of a farce; we contacted the police; the police came out the next day. So whoever took them should have **– – –.**

[01:16:59] They've never been found?

[01:17:03] Never been found despite searching of the area. And it became obvious to me that somebody had taken them. But the police followed up one lead (laughs) from the woman who ran this art group; Dale Kelly her name was, and she was into clairvoyance. She said she'd spoken to her clairvoyant, and believe it or not, the police followed her clairvoyance lead. The most ridiculous thing I'd ever heard. She said it was the house next door to the back of the gallery, the railway station, and it happened to be a friend of mine. And the police knocked on his door and asked him where he was and what he was doing, and whether they want to search his house, I can't remember. Anyway, it was a farce, (laughs) laughable in a funny sort of a way, but I never got those drawings back. So some member of the group must have taken them and I've always intended publishing **– – –**. I did take photocopies of the drawings that I needed for the painting rather than get my painting dirty hands all over the actual drawings, I photocopied them. I've got about three or four of each drawing, so luckily, I got those as a reminder of what the drawings were. There were other drawings in the book, I drew Ned Kelly, his death march, while I was up in Canberra and a few other drawings of the building for the **– – –**. So they were all stolen. But I do have

photocopies of most of them and always intended publishing them so that the person who took them wouldn't be able to sell them because there'd be a publication showing – – –. I haven't got around to that yet.

[01:19:27] Going back to that significant painting that you did, I understand that there's a few local Riverton people in that painting?

[01:19:37] Yes, I had the opportunity to put in the audience. I had to paint a good number of people.

[01:19:46] How many people altogether?

[01:19:48] Oh, there were thousands there. hundreds, I mean, but I did 120 drawings and probably 20 more – – –. I put a couple of friends in, I drew them, put them and a couple of my kids and mom and my dad is already dead. I put them in.

[01:20:16] It was a portrait, obviously, but it seemed like more of a landscape. Would that be correct?

[01:20:25] Yes, it was a bit of a landscape (laughs). That's why I went back to the building so many times to get the feel of the place and get the atmosphere right. And the light, even though it was half artificial light, some natural light coming through the skylights.

[01:20:51] That plays a major part in your portraits, I can understand. Sitting here in the milking shed, which is now your studio, you've got a window with all that natural light coming down on all your paintings. And I guess when you first walked in here, you must have thought, okay, this is ideal. This space is ideal for what you need to do.

[01:21:10] The studio.

[01:21:11] Yes

[01:21:12] Well, I put that skylight in.

[01:21:15] You put it in?

[01:21:16] It opens right up.

[01:21:18] Oh, of course you put the panels over the...

[01:21:21] Yeah, that's south in that direction. So that opens up and I've got another one there. Now I've even got a window on the side to let a little bit of side light in if I

need it. But light, if that's what you're asking, does play a huge part in every painting I do, whether it's an interior, a portrait. I often think if I'm painting a portrait, it's a painting of light as much as the sitter. And it's the same with a landscape. It's a painting of light rather than a tree for instance, or as much. I'm not neglecting, I love form. I love shape. But light is the predominate focus of my attention to capture the light. I find if I can capture the light, you can capture the form, the visual image of whatever you're painting.

[01:22:28] And following on from that parliamentary sitting painting, you sketched the 100-year anniversary of the High Court of Australia, so it led on to that as well?

[01:22:41] Well, whether led. Yes, it did. I think the guy that commissioned it was instrumental in both projects. I've forgotten his name now.

[01:22:53] That wasn't as significant? That didn't take you as long?

[01:22:56] It didn't. I did go to Canberra, and I went to many sessions at the High Court. I drew each of the judges and some of the audience in exactly the same way as I did. I did a lot of work for that, that rather large painting. It didn't take as much time over – – –. I didn't lose as much sleep over it as I did the centenary painting.

[01:23:26] And speaking of losing sleep over some of the projects that you do, let's talk about the Sir Don Bradman sculpture at the Adelaide Oval. You completed that or did that before you did these parliamentary paintings and the High Court painting, but the Sir Don Bradman sculpture, that was one that you put your heart and soul into. Can you explain to me why?

[01:23:49] Well I think I pointed out, I put my heart and soul into every commission, every painting I do. To some extent, obviously, some less than others. But the Bradman was really important. It was probably my first major structural commission, and it was larger than life and I hadn't had any training as a sculpture, so I had to find out as much as I could about it and I had to get to know clay a lot better that I had and the whole process of casting and I had to educate myself. Because, previous to that, I always sculptured but I just made little things out of carving or clay and I just let them dry in the studio, but this commission meant that I had to really be serious about it. And as it was larger than life, I didn't scale it up because I didn't know how to. I wasn't educated in that respect. So I decided to do it as I do anything, by eye. I had to stand

back. I did it at the Riverton Railway Station, I opened the door and I remember I walked back 50 metres or 100 metres and look at it from a distance and to try to get the scale right. And I measured my own body to get the limbs right for the structure. So I built the structure, my brother John, he welded it up for me. It was a pretty easy process of each limb would be one and a half normal size. Yeah, it was a tremendous project, and it took a very long time. I had hundreds of sittings and people would come along, my son, and I had other people who would pose for me in the Bradman pose and I'd pose for myself, I hired models and I've got lots and lots of drawings. And then to top it all off at the end, the process started. I got the casters John Waffendon from the Adelaide Hills, he and his girlfriend came up to do the casting, I as very lucky they were in Adelaide…there was another lot in Melbourne but being in Adelaide I thought that would be a better situation and indeed they were excellent. After we had taken the mould and everything and ready to go ahead, I went overseas, came back and had another look at the sculpture, which was still in the railway station. I checked it wet during that period, I covered it in plastic, I took the plastic off, I stood back and had a look. And with fresh eyes after six months away from it, I realised that I had to change it. I knew what I had to do. So I rang John and I said, "Listen, mate, I've got to redo it. I've got to redo certain aspects you'll have to do the mould and everything again. I'll pay for it." And he said, "Alright, that's alright, as long as you pay." So I had to pay for that, so I got barely enough money. I remember, it was one $116 dollars I think I got paid from the council and already I'd spent that and then to have that redone, it was 25 or 30 grand. (laughs) So I had to pay that out of my own pocket, which I was prepared to do. And I did work on it again and I'm so glad I did because I made those changes which the fresh eye was able to dictate to me that had to be done.

[01:28:31] What were the changes that you desperately needed to make?

[01:28:35] To do with proportion, shape. Yes, it was a better sculpture through having done that and I'm glad I did it because – generally, I'm quite proud of that sculpture, although there are certain things about it that I'm not so proud of.

[01:29:03] Like what?

[01:29:05] Well, Don Bradman was a small man. He had small hands and feet and I think I possibly put a little bit of my own physicality into the sculpture, which you tend

to do. I remember my mother saying, it doesn't show his quickness and delicacy of movement. She was a fantastic critic and I think she was right. So that's my reservation. But I'm proud of the way it conveys the movement of the pose. I studied everything I could, I read everything I could on Bradman. I knew him, I took the maquette to him and showed it to him. And he told me that he thought it should be leaning back a bit more, and he was right. He said it from the cricketers' point of view, but it worked from an artistic point of view. I did lean it back a bit and I suddenly realised that it made a far better sculpture, so his input was there. He was very compliant and took a great interest in it because I'd already painted his portrait some years, many years earlier so we got to know each other. It took a lot out of me, that project. I dreamt about it almost every night. I'd go to bed and my eyes would just see different images of the pose and yeah – it must have been a hard time for – – –. I was living on my own I think at that time when I did it, so it probably was a good thing (laughs).

[01:31:15] I may have read this wrong, but because you had to get people to come in and do the pose for you, you did it yourself. Did you do an injury, doing that pose? Or have I got that wrong because you had to stay in that pose for a certain period of time?

[01:31:36] No, I think you might have got that wrong. I don't remember an injury. I do remember I had to – – –. Physically it was exhausting – I had to climb up ladders to work on it. You couldn't just stand back and look at it and go forward [like I would d0] normally do with a portrait or a sculpture. I had to climb a ladder to work on different parts of it and so there was always the danger of falling. And I would jump up and I'd go out of the building to look at it from 50 metres away. And I'd turn it, it was on a turntable, and I'd turn it different angles. And I used my camera, I'd take photographs of it from different angles, then I draw on my photographs where I thought it was a bit wrong, so it was a terribly long and time-consuming process.

[01:32:35] When do you know that a sculpture is finished? How do you know?

[01:32:39] Well, when you've sent it off to the caster (laughs). I always quote Picasso on this. He said that people asked him, when do you know that you're finished. He said, "I don't finish, I abandon." I couldn't agree with him more, you abandon it eventually. That's a painting or a sculpture. You're never satisfied that it's perfect. You know, there does come a time.

[01:33:16] Because imagine if you went away for six months and went back to it second time round to see your Don Bradman sculpture, and you probably would see it again in a different light?

[01:33:26] Well I do. I look at it every now and then, about once every five years, I walk past it and go up and have a look and I see certain things. But generally, I'm happy with the sculptural shape of the Bradman.

[01:33:44] That business of the eye, the fresh eye has been what has interested me, you know, coming back after years and months and redoing the Bradman. And this is what happens with paintings. I put them away and you come back after a period of not looking and you see them freshly. That business of seeing it freshly has fascinated me right from the very beginning of my career. So you get that fresh vision. Why can't I find it every day - that fresh vision? The eye gets used to looking at something, and I guess that's why I use a mirror so often to see freshly. I think I explained to you in my podcast about the mirror, the podcast you did for me recently.

[01:34:42] We'll talk about the mirror in just a moment. But I just wanted to touch on the fact you've done a few or a lot of sculptures actually, I should say. But let's take particular note of Simpson and his Donkey, honouring all the health professionals and medics in the Defence Forces of Australia. And then you also did a large sculpture of Roy Rene (Mo), one of Australia's best comic performers, and he's located on Hindley Street in Adelaide. There were two significant sculptures, would you say, in your career or just two of many?

[01:35:18] Well, they're all significant in my way of looking at things. So which one do you want me to talk about?

[01:35:27] I'm very interested in the Rory Rene sculpture. The comic?

[01:35:33] Yeah. Well, that was an interesting project. I only had photographs to work on. I do remember Roy Rene,[3] just as I was a kid, he was still alive then, and his name was very familiar to me, and I'd heard him on the radio. So when I got that

[3] The sculpture commemorates comedian Roy Rene (1891-1954) who was one of Australia's most loved performers from the Depression of the 1930's until the early 1950's. The statue was commissioned by the South Australian Government to recognise Mo's significant contribution to Australian Art and Entertainment.

commission, it was a fascinating one. I wanted to capture that look of his that he trademarked - the Jewish (laughs) painted face, white face, and everything. And to capture the character of the man. It was a fascinating project.

[01:36:24] And his family wrote to you afterwards?

[01:36:27] Yes. I got a letter from his daughter saying how much they loved the sculpture. So I was very pleased to get that.

[01:36:36] Alfie we'll take a break and have a glass of water. And then we'll start again.

END OF FILE 1: FILE 2

[00:00:00] I'm Annabelle Homer, continuing the interview with Alfie Hannaford on Monday, the 5th of December. This is file two. Alfie. Welcome back. How are you feeling?

[00:00:15] Yeah good.

[00:00:16] Let's talk about your family life again and wanting to recap on your family life at this point in time. Now, you are married to Alison Mitchell, who is a successful artist. You married in 2007. But let's backtrack and fill us in as to how you met Alison in the first place?

[00:00:43] Well, she and I seemed to have different memories about this. But my memory is that we first met in '87, the year of Alison's eldest daughter and my youngest child were born on the same day. So we were at the market one day and there's this couple sitting across with a baby and we naturally got chatting. "How's your baby?" We worked out that her baby and our baby were born on the same day. I was there with Shirley, Tsering's mother. And we got chatting and that was the meeting, I remember it very well. Although Alison doesn't remember it quite so well (laughs). But there it is. So that's where we met.

[00:01:50] And you casually kept in contact?

[00:01:54] Yeah, we ran into each other, Adelaide's a small place. The market, for instance, we would see each other there from time to time. So that was '87 and we

didn't get together officially, so to speak, until 2005. That's when we started living together.

[00:02:28] That's a long friendship?

[00:02:30] Yeah, we knew each other during that time. We started a relationship of sorts before 2005, which was rather difficult because we were both with different partners and it was one of those things, we had to keep our relationship as it was, very quiet. But we both, I think, tried not to advance it out of respect for the other's situation, if you know what I mean. But she loomed large in my mind through those years, and we would run into each other occasionally and the atmosphere - the relationship developed. We were attracted to each other, let's put it that way.

[00:03:39] And your common interest in art, was that another factor?

[00:03:41] Yes, that was a factor because at one point, Alison came up to visit me because I think her boyfriend or her partner even suggested that it might be helpful. And she visited me here and I was aware of her work. As a matter of fact, I bought that painting over there at an exhibition, I saw of hers at Greenhill Gallery and I liked it.

[00:04:14] Are they irises?

[00:04:15] Yeah, irises. And she loved painting irises. Her daughter's name is Iris, the one that's the same age as my daughter Tsering. Anyway, we started to realise that there was electricity or chemistry or something happening between us which we tried to keep under cover for a long time. And eventually by 2001, I separated from my partner at the time, and Alison was still with her partner. So it was a difficult time because I didn't want to impose on her life. Anyway, eventually we started seeing more of each other and then Alison left her partner at that time and lived by herself in Norwood for a year or two before we came out, so to speak, together. That all happened in the early 21st century.

[00:05:49] And she moved up here to Riverton?

[00:05:53] Not immediately. Then I got cancer in 2006. We were living, seeing each other openly before that, before I got cancer. And we'd more or less acknowledged that we were going to live together. And then I got cancer, which is a disruption to life generally (laughs). And Alison helped me through that period enormously. She would

visit often and help me, often take me to my radiotherapy treatments, 'cause I wasn't meant to be driving as I was on chemo and radiotherapy and rather ill. But she nursed me through that period even though she had her own life to live as well. It brought us closer together, I think. Then after the treatment for the cancer, we lived together for a while. That's when Alison got her degree, I remember, from the University for Anthropology and we lived together in Bardini Street which was my old house that I passed on to my ex-wife, Kate. She died a couple of years before that. She died in about '97, I think. And so she left it to our daughter, Georgina. So I rented it from Georgina and Alison and I lived there for a year or so in 2006 and '07. And then we moved up here to Riverton and that's when we got married. I asked her to marry me because all the cards were playing in that direction, and I knew that this was the most significant relationship for me. And even though my philosophical – – –. I was no great believer in marriage, in such institutions, but in our particular case it seemed like the right thing to do to explain to the world that we were together after having to keep it under cover for so long. It was like a declaration to our friends and family that this was the most important thing for us both. So we married and lived here at Riverton.

[00:09:23] Also having cancer - did that give you a new appreciation of life and perspective, do you think?

[00:09:30] Inevitably, yes. Everybody that goes through those life changing experiences, say the same thing - that they appreciate - helps them appreciate their lives more, as a result. And that indeed happened to me.

[00:09:52] You said that you had this deep attraction for each other. You're both artists. You complement each other well when it comes to art. Are you both critical of each other's art? How does that relationship work?

[00:10:07] Well, I think it works very well because we've got our studios next to each other here in the same building. And I appreciate Alison's artistic judgement more than anybody, and she helps me with my work. I ask her what she thinks and to me it's very important to get her opinion because she's got such a good eye and knowledge of the game (laughs) that I appreciate her comments more than anybody's. So I'll ask her to come in and look at this portrait I'm doing and ask her to tell me - judge her reaction. I take it on board very seriously because she is a wonderful artist herself and I appreciate her comments they're very helpful to me and I hope mine are to her, because

she asks me likewise to have a look at her work occasionally and make any comment that may be helpful. Hopefully (laughs) I always get the impression that she helps me more than I help her (laughs). She's a very independent painter and has her own way of doing things. Quite different to mine in some ways, but we're very close in the major things in that we both work from life rather than from photographs. We've both got the same passion for our work, which is quite unusual when you come to think of it.

[00:12:05] Why?

[00:12:06] Well, I've never met other people with that same passion. But she's definitely – – –. I admire her work. More than that, I admire her whole life, the way she lives, the way she relates to the world and people, her family. Her mother recently died, and she was wonderful as she looked after her.

[00:12:49] So you admire her as a person?

[00:12:51] Absolutely. I admire her artwork and her judgement and so on and that's why, in a funny sort of a way, we complement each other in that we both realise how important painting is to both of us.

[00:13:14] You and Alison converted a disused Riverton garage into a studio and a sculpture space. Why was it important for you both to do?

[00:13:28] Well, I'd bought the garage before Alison came up here. I bought it mainly because I wanted a place to sculpt, and I thought it would be a good one because the garage had a compressor in it and it was all set up as a wonderful workspace. And then after I bought it from a local friend who tried to sell it, but I wanted it to stay as a garage, in fact I used to take my car there. But nobody wanted to buy it, so he brought the price down a bit, and I thought well, I'll buy it if he's happy to sell it to me and made an ideal studio, working space for sculpture and it was all set up in a way. So I bought it. Then I realised that the front two rooms had this pressed ceiling, you know those old – – –.

[00:14:31] Yes, yes.

[00:14:32] Underneath a new ceiling. So I discovered that and I realised what a wonderful hanging space it would be for pictures. So I spent a year or so developing that, working on it, and I got a friend of mine, Brenton Hann, to do the renovations to

it. And then Alison and I moved up, so we started to use it for our hanging purposes. We tried to keep it going as a gallery to start with. We had different exhibitions - local people - but we both realised that painting was something we'd rather be doing than running a gallery. So we both put our painting first and the gallery inevitably took less of our time, then it took up a lot of our effort to keep it up to scratch. We had to renovate and redo the walls and hanging spaces, and so we both withdrew from the gallery a bit. But we've always appreciated it as a wonderful hanging space. So we show our own work now and we only open one day a month (laughs) although it is open - we will open it for interested people. It's mainly now a hanging space for our own work and it's always good to put your work on a wall and look at it to get a different idea of it.

[00:16:26] Just staying with you and Alison working together, you've travelled a lot together as well and I understand your trip to Europe, I think it was in 2013 or 2010, I should say, you went back overseas to England. But everywhere you travel, you said you paint together and you paint the same thing. And it's interesting getting the different perspectives from each of you.

[00:16:49] Yes, indeed. We've always painted when we travel together, whether it's in Australia or overseas, but that one you're referring to overseas was a wonderful painting trip for both of us. It was a almost artistic pilgrimage to Europe, we spent time in Holland and looking at the wonderful paintings of, well, Van Gogh and Rembrandt in particular, the Rijksmuseum and just experiencing all that was wonderful for both of us. And we painted and drew in different little places where we stayed, and then we travelled down through Antwerp where Rubens had been significant, then to Paris and we rented a little bed and breakfast quite near the Louvre, and we walked across there every day for about a week and spent just about every day in the Louvre and had a wonderful time drawing and studying the great paintings of that wonderful institution. Then we travelled on - I think we had a euro rail pass through Europe - down through the south of France, the Pyrenees. We stayed there for extended period of time and saw the wonderful cave paintings at a place called Niaux.[4] We painted there and extended our time because it was a fascinating place to

[4] The Niaux Cave located in the northern foothills of the Pyrenees, is one of Europe's most impressive Palaeolithic rock art galleries of cave paintings.

paint and study the art of the ancient artists of 40 thousand years ago. (laughs) Forty thousand, that's a long time. So different and yet so wonderful artwork. But then we travelled onto Spain by train, went to Barcelona and then we went to a little town up the coast called Sitges, also an artistic mecca in a way, had a wonderful gallery and we drew and painted there for a while. But we'd previously been to England and done a lot of painting around Scotland, Wales and England. So it was a fantastic painting trip.

[00:19:56] How long were you away for?

[00:19:58] Oh, I don't know. It must have been 2 to 3 months.

[00:20:03] Fantastic.

[00:20:05] I remember we had to put friends in this place while we were away. I think my daughter stayed here for a while. That was a typical painting trip but we have done other wonderful trips around Australia. Whenever I often associated with either big hART or doing a portrait in one of the capital cities we use it as an opportunity to paint and we often travel by car to Sydney or Melbourne and then stop on the way for extended periods to do paintings on the way. So it's been an important part of our

[00:20:59] Let's take a look at your cancer journey now. As you mentioned earlier, you were diagnosed in 2006, so a year before you got married to Alison, an aggressive tongue cancer at the back of the throat?

[00:21:15] Yes.

[00:21:15] You did chemo and radiotherapy and then you went into remission. But your first big piece of art since getting better was the self-portrait with tubes in 2006.

[00:21:31] Yes.

00:21:31] So that highlighted what you went through with your treatment. That was well-publicised, that painting, wasn't it?

[00:21:37] Yes, I got in the Archibald, it got a bit of publicity there. Mainly, I think, because it had the tubes, (laughs) you know, I showed the tubes going into my stomach. I didn't do that deliberately, it's just that I had to have that tube for nine months where I had to feed myself through this tube.

[00:22:04] It was depicting what you were going through?

[00:22:05] Yeah, it was just a self-portrait. As I was in recovery I came to the studio and set up the mirror, and started painting myself as I was. And it was summer, so I had my shirt off and that's how it turned out. So that accounts for that image.

[00:22:28] And then in 2010, you were diagnosed again with tongue cancer in the front of the tongue this time?

[00:22:34] Yes. Yes.

00:22:35] And this affected your speech?

[00:22:38] Indeed, because I lost – – –. They had to cut away a fair bit of my tongue so I have trouble articulating words (laughs).

[00:22:50] You're doing very well, Alfie.

[00:22:52] Ah well, thank you. So that was a result of that particular cancer.

[00:22:58] How did that affect a state of mind, though? One, it affected your speech, but two, it had come back again.

[00:23:06] It didn't affect me particularly. I was glad that they got rid of it because I didn't have chemo after that, I just had the operation. Once you've had chemo and radiotherapy, they don't do it again (clears throat). And as a matter of fact, I suffered more from the first cancer. The effects of the radiotherapy in particular and are still with me as they burnt my carotid artery. I had it on both sides of my neck, the radiotherapy, for a prolonged period of time. They didn't warn me at the time, but that has a negative effect on the arteries. They become sort of desiccated and when you see a scan of them, you can see that they're not healthy looking, they're all knotted and really thin. So as a result of that, I had that stroke in 2018. That's quite a long time after my treatment, but that was because the blood wasn't getting through to my brain as a result of the radiotherapy on the carotid arteries. And I've since found out after tests that one of them is completely blocked and the other is 70 percent blocked. So I'm relying for continued blood (laughs) supply to the brain, if you want to put it that way, on blood thinners. So I take them religiously. And as a matter of fact, I had to have a hernia operation recently and the doctor, my neurologist said, no way can I go off the blood thinners for the operation because they like to stop the blood thinners for a few days while they operate for obvious reasons. I don't want over- bleeding. So I

had to have that with a local anaesthetic, I can't have a major operation because the danger of having a stroke or worse would be very much brought forward if I went off my blood thinners. So that's the legacy of the (laughs) treatment.

[00:26:00] Your vision was affected by that stroke as well?

[00:26:03] Yes. The stroke affected the right side of my brain and the cerebral cortex, some people call it the visual cortex at the back of my brain. It was most seriously hit and that means it affected my vision, that being the visual cortex. I can remember seeing it on the scan, this white patch (laughs) in the middle of that part of my brain, and that means it's dead. And that means that my right visual apparatus doesn't work quite like it should. So I have trouble seeing the left side of things. If I'm driving, for instance, at night-time, I only see the right-hand taillight. It's almost like the car in front's only got a right-hand taillight, the left one is there, and I can see it if I look directly at it with both eyes, but that's the sort of thing that I have to live with now. And I don't see the beginnings of words, for instance, on signs unless I move my head and move both eyes to the front of the word. So even reading, I often misinterpret a word. I can still read books as quickly as I ever did, but it makes you realise how the brain doesn't have to read the letters, it interprets by the look of the word what it is (laughs). It's fascinating really.

[00:28:05] When you first got that news, though, that your vision had been affected. Did you go into a slight panic because of what you do?

[00:28:13] Well it wasn't the news so much, it was the actuality, I was the one that discovered it was affected. And maybe I wouldn't have bothered so much because it's not affected dramatically. I can move around in the world, if I wasn't an artist I might not even noticed it. But because I'm a portrait painter, it's very important to me, not just a portrait painter, but any painter, to see the whole of the image at once. And that's what is now difficult. So when I paint, I have to spend a fair bit of time with mirrors and trying to get that – – –. We talked a bit earlier about that fresh, natural vision, and it hasn't stopped me painting, that's for sure. I'm just as interested as ever but it has made it more difficult.

[00:29:12] So let's talk about mirrors, but also about your self-portraits. You've been doing self-portraits since you were a teenager. Why do you use a mirror?

What's the important facet of a mirror when it comes to portraits or even self-portraits, I should say?

[00:29:28] I'll start off by explaining why I like painting self-portraits, and then I'll explain about the mirror. I like painting self-portraits because it gives me – – –. I'm the only one that I have to worry about. I don't worry about the sitter, I spend as long as I want any part, so it's convenience. To have a sitter in the light and you can work in your own time and space that's a great help when you're painting. So that's why I like painting self-portraits, not because I particularly like painting myself, but because I'm available for the time any time that I wish to spend on any part of the picture. Now I use mirror and I did long before I had a stroke because it helps me see the objective visual scene. I'm very conscious of the fact how the eye gets used to seeing things. We use our eyes not so much to see, but to reassure us that everything is okay. We take our vision for granted and we only notice things when there's movement or something unusual happens in the visual field. That's when we really see what's there. Most of the time we tend to just reassure ourselves, that all is well (laughs) in the visual world. But as a painter, and I think other artists have noticed, you have to scrutinise that visual field a little more seriously. So that's why I use mirrors right from the start of my career to help me get that fresh visual image. And I don't know if you've noticed, but if you see somebody you know very well in the mirror, like your husband or friend, they look a bit different. I've noticed that anyway from the time I was a kid, I remember my father had a wryneck[5] and I didn't even notice it until I saw him in the mirror, standing in the mirror. He had his head on the side and I suddenly realised that he had this wryneck. It was called a wryneck in those days, nobody ever talked about it.

[00:32:23] I'll take more notice next time I look at someone in the mirror. (laughs)

[00:32:27] Yeah, well do because if you're looking at – – –. I've noticed if I sit in a car and I'm looking in the rear-vision mirror, say, in the street that you live in, the street looks far more interesting in the mirror than it does in – – –. You see shapes of trees and colours that you weren't – – –. Because it's in reverse it doesn't register as, oh yeah,

[5] Torticollis or Wryneck- A rare condition in which the neck muscles contract, causing the head to twist to one side.

that's that tree and I know where I am and all's well. You see it freshly, you see the colour, the shape. And it looks as if it's a street you don't know because it's in reverse, so it's far more interesting, and that's what I try to achieve in the painting to get that fresh look as if I haven't seen it before.

[00:33:20] I thought this was a really interesting extract from John Neylon's book, Robert Hannaford Natural Eye. He states that the many self-portraits made across your lifetime reflect your relentless sense of self-scrutiny in its changing moods, from youthful assurance to defiance or uncertainty of middle age and most recently, confrontation with mortality. This body of work deserves recognition as one of the most powerful series of self-portraiture yet to emerge with Australian art. Would you say that encapsulates everything?

[00:33:57] Well, that's a very kind thing for him to say to give it so much importance in the scheme of Australian art. Yes, it's true that scrutiny that I've delivered or exposed over the years is definitely there, but it's the same scrutiny that I use when I'm painting anything else as well. It's just the fact that I've come back to myself for reasons that are explained a bit earlier, gives a bit of the story to the notion of self-portraits and gives them (laughs) something to talk about.

[00:34:50] You mentioned previously about how long it takes you to do portraits. Sometimes you say it takes years. I think the portrait with the tubes was about six months, it took you to do that?

[00:35:03] So the portrait of?

[00:35:04] The portrait with the tubes.

[00:35:06] Oh yeah. Yeah.

[00:35:07] In 2006. It took you about six months?

[00:35:10] Yeah.

[00:35:11] The one in 2022. I just remember how much detail you put into the hairs in your arms. Do you come back again having those fresh eyes on a painting, on a portrait? And to do a portrait of that nature, even a self-portrait, is the length of time extremely important because that little whisker is a little bit longer? Is that all important?

[00:35:43] Well, sometimes you can paint very directly and achieve a good result. For instance, the hairs on the arms, if you look at that painting, they're only indicated. I hadn't painted one hair separately. It's the brush strokes that indicate – – –. It's the

colour and the tone indicate the detail, the mind puts the detail in. They say, "Oh, that's hair." But when I'm painting it I see it as colour and shape and tone. I use those three words because I'm a self-taught artist, and that's the way I taught myself. That's what I use my mind to concentrate on, is colour. And I flip from one to the other. So in my mind, I'll say right, I'm going to look at colour and that means eliminate everything else in your mind so you open your eyes wide and just register colour. And your mind is free to see the colour. And you see it sometimes, wow that is an amazing colour, because your mind isn't occupied with anything else. And then you can flip it to tone, relative lightness and darkness. And then you just see the relative darkness and lightness and then you can flip it to shape so that you become very conscious of the silhouette and the proportion of the masses in paint. So that's just how I talk to myself as a self-taught artist, sort of way I like to think when I'm doing a painting. And of course, the best things happen sometimes when you're actually doing it, you're not thinking of anything. Your mind, your hand is just – that's the ultimate (laughs) state to arrive at.

[00:38:20] What do you find most challenging when it comes to a self-portrait?

[00:38:29] Probably the truth. I've been told that certain people have told me that sometimes I make myself look more handsome when I'm painting a self-portrait than I actually am. I see what they mean, I try to get the angle of the light more interesting and the shape more interesting so that it conveys the form and the light and the character for the painting. So I find it hard to be objective in a self-portrait because sometimes my subjectivity takes over. I think that looks better that way than it does that way. So I'm controlling the way I look, if you know what I mean.

[00:39:37] Yes.

[00:39:37] Maybe because I think I look better that way but it's not, in my mind it's that the painting looks better. It's all about the painting not about trying to be handsome or anything.

[00:39:54] Do you find you're more critical of your self-portraits than your other paintings?

[00:40:00] No.

[00:40:01] Okay.

[00:40:04] No. I'm looking at this painting as we're talking and I'm – – – .(laughs) It's interesting because as we're talking now, I've got this painting in front of me and part of my mind is working on it while we're talking and I'm seeing things in it while we we're talking and I'm interested in – – –. I'm not saying I'm not interested in what we're talking about, but my mind is processing what I have to do on that painting at the same time as we're talking. That's the sort of thing I'm talking about that happens in all paintings. It's a process of finding the real truth of the subject.

[00:41:04] Well looking at that painting now, what's first and foremost that you want to change about that painting?

[00:41:13] Well, I'm not looking at that one so much because it's shining a bit from the light, from the angle I'm sitting at. I'm looking at this one over here.

[00:41:21] Oh, this fellow?

[00:41:21] Yeah.

[00:41:22] Okay. Who is that fellow?

[00:41:25] He's a guy from Perth. I've nearly finished it, I've got one more sitting to go, he's coming back for it. I just see things that I notice and then I got to process it now according to my visual distortion. I don't think they are distortions, that's not the right word, but I see the right hand bigger than the left-hand side. But if I use the mirror, I'll say the left-hand side bigger than the right-hand side. And that's what makes it so difficult to find that truth in it.

[00:42:10] It's like one cheeks lower than the other?

[00:42:13] Yes. Well, he has got - like most people, he's actually got a little bit of a twisted back so his jaw is more prominent on the right-hand side and his left shoulder is higher. That's what I call body language, you've got to catch that body language of every person. They've all got their unique body language. And faces are always so different on one side than the other. Nobody's symmetrical.

[00:43:00] I did ask this question earlier and I wasn't very clear with my questioning. But going back to the self-portraits, how long does it take you to do a self-portrait? I know it varies depending, but on average?

[00:43:21] Well, they tend to take a bit longer than other portraits, not because they should be, but because I'm there all the time and I find it hard to get to that point that Picasso says. When it's done (laughs)...

[00:43:40] You abandon it? (laughs)

[00:43:43] Yeah, I find it hard to abandon it, if it's there in the studio, you tend to want to keep working, as I probably would with every portrait if I had that opportunity. So [self] portraits tend to take me longer.

[00:43:59] Let's skip to 2015. We talked briefly about how you went to Europe with Alison, but in 2013 you went back overseas and you visited Gallipoli. Now is that because you illustrated the 'My Gallipoli' book by Ruth Stark? Was that the reason behind that trip?

[00:44:20] It was. That was the ostensible reason. But it's always great to see a new country, which I don't get around to doing too much. So Alison and I took that opportunity to see Turkey, Istanbul, an amazing city and we loved Gallipoli. Amazing. It was a real eye-opener to see that place. And of course, I got really interested in the First World War and our troops there, reading about it all, and you know, the life of the local people in that neck of the woods was fascinating. They lived a very simple life, as if nothing had happened in the last 150 years. The house just opposite to where we were staying, an old ramshackle stone building and the animals and the people lived in there together. And they'd be out in the field with hoes the next day, you know, it was like stepping back in time. And that was 2013. And the people that we met; they were fascinating in following that story of the war.

[00:45:53] Quite emotional too, I can imagine?

[00:45:54] Yes it was, it was really a wonderful trip and from there we went to England and did that Namatjira performance on the South Bank. We were there for a few days, no, a week or two and we spent two to three weeks in London, and it gave us the opportunity to paint together, Alison and I, all over the place. We went to the British Museum on numerous occasions and the National Gallery just about every day, and we'd just go into certain galleries. Previous to that, our trips to London or mine anyway, you go to the National Gallery but probably only once and then you'd go to the Tate but this time we could go back. We had time. And we did our own sketching

and painting around London, and we went to different parts of England, then we travelled to Wales and had a wonderful time there.

[00:47:05] Isn't it interesting, because I think previously in an interview you did with Rob Linn, there wasn't any inclination by you to go overseas. You had everything here in Australia. What you saw in front of you was what you wanted to paint and look at you now. You can tell by just the way you speak that the highlights of some of your life are these overseas trips.

[00:47:30] I think I said that with Rob Linn too. I said it was amazing what travel could do to you. I was amazed at how expanding it was to travel and I still think that and yet I don't travel that much. I still would rather work than travel.

[00:47:55] But you're working while travelling?

[00:47:57] Yeah. That's, that's the best thing.

[00:48:01] You sculpted figures for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander War Memorial in the Torrens Parade ground in Adelaide. This was an Australian first, I understand. Why was this so significant apart from that reason?

[00:48:17] Well I don't know, is it significant apart from that reason? (laughs)

[00:48:20] Well, because the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander War Memorial, I mean there wasn't much of that – – –.

[00:48:28] No. I wasn't commissioned to do that. The woman who was commissioned to do it decided it was too much for her and she asked me to take over. I think that's what happened. I'm not sure. Although I remember Sophie Han was asked if she might do it and she suggested that I do it so that it was by chance that I painted that sculpture. But I loved it.

[00:49:01] Full body sculpture?

[00:49:02] Yeah, full body, I did the full body. I did it from knowledge because I've drawn lots of Aboriginal people when I studied physiognomy so many times and I did get a woman to model for the lady involved in that sculpture, but I made the bloke up. I did it in nude to start with, then I put the clothes on and yes, it was a very enjoyable project.

[00:49:38] And going back to when you were referring to the Don Bradman sculpture and you said you'd never done a full body sculpture before or a large

one, and you just did what you had to do to make it work. Have you changed your technique over the years?

[00:49:53] Well, I've learnt a bit about clay. I do understand it a bit better than I did then, so I've become familiar with it.

[00:50:07] Do you still walk 50 metres away?

[00:50:10] No, I do. If can. I look at it from a distance. It's very important to me. What was the question?

[00:50:25] Do you still use that same technique of doing those large sculptures, and have you changed that technique over the years because you've become more familiar with it?

[00:50:35] Yeah, I'll be a little more familiar. But it's interesting, the whole process of sculpture, having never studied, as I didn't study painting, I never went to art school. So a lot of people find it unusual that I should take on these commissions without knowing anything about the craft. But you learn as you go along, and I've become familiar in a way with my process. It's probably different to the way others do it but that's the nature of self-teaching. You find your own way through work and through experience. So, you know, my notion of sculpting Bradman from a visual point of view rather than scaling up a small model is just what I'm familiar with. And most sculptors would say that's crazy. (laughs)

[00:51:39] Well, as you say, there's no rules, are there?

[00:51:41] No, there are no rules.

[00:51:44] Going back to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander War Memorial. You then went on to do a sculpture of the Ngadjuri woman and child in Riverton. So did you start to do more First Nations sculptures?

[00:51:57] No there's no connection in my mind anyway from that. In fact, long before that, I began this idea of the Ngadjuri woman and her child that started probably 30 odd years ago, nearly 35 years ago, I did a maquette [and] the Riverton Council voted for it eventually because they wanted something for Riverton. And then the council changed over, it was amalgamated, and we became the Clare and Gilbert Valleys Council and the whole project got dropped. Even the money [that] had been put aside, but I never found out what happened to that money. But after that happened,

a decade went by, and then a couple of donors who were on the Council then decided to resurrect the idea. I'm thinking of Ian Rohde who was a councillor at the time, he was keen, and he put in money and then they got a bit of grant money. So we resurrected the idea of that sculpture, [and] we had enough to go ahead with it, thanks to those donations. So I was able to execute that sculpture but that was 15 years after my original idea that I put to the Council.

[00:53:51] Why was it important for you to continue with that 15 years later?

[00:53:55] Well, because someone said maybe lets resurrect the idea and I think Gary Davis who was on council helped there and Ian Rohde who put in money. So I thank them for bringing forward it, probably never would have happened otherwise. I kept the maquette I always had that and I did drawings. I went up to Nepabunna where I had been in the '70's to draw the Aboriginal people. It was fascinating to go back there. They remembered me from when I was up there in the '70's, the older people did, and I drew a young woman with a baby because the Adnyamathanha people are the closest relatives, if you want to put it that way, to the Ngadjuri people. When the Ngadjuri left this district back in the late 19th century most of them moved north and they have more in common with the Adnyamathanha people than they do with the Kaurna people, for instance. Their language is closer to the Adnyamathanha than Ngadjuri languages. So it seemed if I wanted to get into the truth of the Ngadjuri people, the Adnyamathanha would be a good place to go. So I did that, and that all happened before [the]commission submission. I had the drawings just waiting...

[00:55:43] So why did you go up to Nepabunna?

[00:55:46] To draw the Aboriginal people for the Ngadjuri sculpture, that was before the commission came through.

[00:55:56] That wasn't part of the big hART project or anything like that?

[00:55:59] No, no. That was in the '70's, just after I got back from Melbourne. I had a friend who taught Aboriginal people at Nepabunna and so he invited me up and it was fascinating. It was my first contact, so to speak, with Aboriginal people in a real way and I spent a bit of time with him at Nepabunna and then he went to Indulkana. A couple of years later I went up there to Indulkana with the Pitjantjatjara people and I

remember my son was four years old, so that would make it about 1974. Nepabunna was before that, so it must've been about 1972. I illustrated a book for the School for Aboriginal kids based on the life they were leading up there then. Yeah, it was fascinating especially the Indulkana trip for me to [have] first hand contact with Aboriginal people. They were living in what they call "wiltjas", or what some people call "wurlies" and, you know, I went out with them on their trips and got a real interest in Aboriginal culture. It extended my interest in Aboriginal culture, very much so, and I've been fascinated with it ever since. So years later when I did this sculpture for Riverton I brought much of the early drawings and fascination with the culture to bear.

[00:58:01] Moving forward to your first survey exhibition, Alfie. Robert Hannaford, The Real Things, curated by John Neylon at Carrick Hill in Adelaide. How much of a big deal are these solo exhibitions for artists like yourself?

[00:58:20] Well, that was a great exhibition, not only because John Neylon did that book, that was one of the real reasons that it was significant for me. But it was a wonderful space, and it brought my work – – –. It was the first time I'd shown my work, apart from the few shows I had in small galleries up until then. It was a more significant show I think, and then the book was done to complement the exhibition. So yes, I was very gratified to have been given that show because it was curated, I didn't have to do anything other than to supply the paintings, and it was a very successful show.

[00:59:09] Do you get to have much of the say, though? Would you prefer to have more of a say of what's being picked for exhibitions?

[00:59:16] Well, I think I chose. You know, they didn't show anything that I wasn't happy with. I think they chose the pictures.

[00:59:28] Oh, you did choose the pictures?

[00:59:30] Yeah.

[00:59:30] I thought they came in, chose what they wanted?

[00:59:33] No, no, no, no, I don't where you got that idea. (laughs)

[00:59:38] I've been getting lots of ideas from so many different people. (laughs)

[00:59:42] That did happen to a certain extent when I had the show at the Art Gallery of South Australia. They came in and looked through my work and decided what they wanted, but I was given some – not entirely, I was able to suggest things and if I really pushed for it, they put it in, but it was basically their decision as to what went in and what didn't. I mean, it was a show about figurative art and portraits, so they ignored my landscapes and things like that. And for the book that they produced to go with the exhibition, that did happen. They chose drawings and things that I would (laughs) never have shown because we happened to go away painting, Alison and I, [we] went up to New South Wales, I think it was, or Queensland and when we got back, they'd already chosen what they wanted for the book. And I'd made a big mistake. They came up here, looked through all my drawings and asked if they could take folders away with them. So they did that and while I was away they chose from these folders (laughs) what they wanted in the book. And I didn't have much say over it. So that was probably the bit of information you – – –.

[01:01:04] Did that bother you?

[01:01:07] Did a bit, I even complained because of their choice. They'd obviously decided on the story they wanted to tell, or the person that was curating. And I thought it was a distortion, so I made a couple of complaints and they did change it. They wanted to concentrate on my ex-girlfriends because I think that tells a story that they wanted to tell. This is what happens with art and one's image and what is known about different artists. I've noticed that. The story that people want to hear is based on what they already know and what they've read about you, or the artist concerned. I mean, they've read about, say, 'The Painting of Tubes', and that becomes the central question that the public want to hear, because they've heard about it before, and they want to know more. You know what I mean? An image gets developed of an artist that becomes the dominant one, and the story gets told usually reinforces that image. So with that book, the image that they were wanting to convey was of me having different girlfriends and relationships. And they wanted to show all of that as if that was the story and I objected to that and eliminated a few of the drawings that they wanted to feature in the book. But that's just the way of saying that this whole idea, that the public learn about – – –. I mean it's not just artists it's everybody. It's everybody that

gets a public profile. You get this notion that dominates and then it gets perpetuated, and it's got nothing to do with the reality from the artists point of view. At least that's the way I feel about it.

[01:03:56] The art gallery exhibition that you were referring to, that was a massive deal for you. It was very popular, people flew in from interstate, and you had big banners of Alfie Hannaford along North Terrace. How was that for you being displayed like that?

[01:04:17] Well, just after what I've just said, it reinforced certain things about me in the public eye. I mean, I was gratified to have my work shown widely so I'm not denying that I didn't appreciate it. But it was [an] a art gallery interpretation and I'm grateful to them for doing it because, I don't know, it did something for my so-called image that I'm talking about. But you've got to take all that with a grain of salt. The reality is that you're still who you are and what you do. You're the best judge of your paintings, not the public (laughs). So it was fascinating on a whole lot of levels, that exhibition. On a personal level, seeing the way it was interpreted and the way the public reacted and the way I reacted and those around me react.

[01:05:34] Do you have an opening night that you go to?

[01:05:39] For that exhibition? Yes, Philip Adams opened the show and we had a ceremony at the gallery. He spoke and the director spoke and it was publicised in the gallery journals and things. Is that what you mean?

[01:06:04] Well, I just think to be exhibited at the Art Gallery of South Australia and despite all the other business that occurred, for artists in this state, I mean it's obviously a significant achievement in itself?

[01:06:22] Yeah, I'm not denying that.

[01:06:27] Would you do it again?

[01:06:29] Yes. If I was asked to show in any gallery, I'd be very happy to. As long as they were prepared to do the hard work involved (laughs), selling it and publicising it and all that sort of thing, the carry on.

[01:06:49] Just as long as you get to choose what's being exhibited too obviously?

[01:06:53] Yeah, but having said that, sometimes artists are not the best chooser of their work. I have noticed that when I've allowed the gallery to have an exhibition and

they choose how they hang it, I often found they hang it in a more interesting way then I could have imagined (laughs). So sometimes artists are not the best choice, don't make the best choices as far as their own work is concerned. Sometimes it needs that outside eye. I am a great believer of that outside eye; I always look for opinions of other people despite the fact that I often don't take (laughs) that advice.

[01:07:48] Let's take a look at the Gawler Pioneer Park War Memorial. This is 2017 - 2018. You did a hand sculpture. Now, why a hand to be the symbol of this war memorial?

[01:08:05] Well, I was asked to do the war memorial and I was given a free run I'm pleased to say by the council up there, which I take my hat off to. They wanted it to represent all wars. It wasn't long after I had done all the Gallipoli stuff and I knew I couldn't do a soldier from the First World War or the Second World War or any world war because that would be too specific. I wanted to represent all wars. I played around with this idea, I just let my mind go to anything but not because I'd done lots of war drawings and everything. And I'd been thinking a lot about Gallipoli since our trip. And I'd been reading. I was in touch with Bill Gammage,[6] who's written those wonderful books of Australian War Experience and... so where were we?

[01:09:25] So you chose the hand?

[01:09:27] Yes.

[01:09:28] After doing all your research?

[01:09:31] Yeah. So for some reason I chose a hand and it became the – – –. I like the idea because mainly it could have been a male or a female. It didn't represent any - had no significant sign whether it was a black hand or a white hand or anybody, and it showed no particular war. It represented the Aboriginal wars which is a big subject at the moment. And as a matter of fact, you know, about having Aboriginal wars represented in the National War Memorial. So Aboriginal stuff was important to me and therefore I didn't want concentrate on Gallipoli or First World War or Second

6 William Leonard Gammage (born 1942) is an Australian academic historian, adjunct professor and senior research fellow at the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University. Gammage is best known for his book *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, which is based on his PhD thesis written while at the Australian National University.

World War. So that notion of a hand seemed to symbolise in my mind something that was common to all fighters in wars. And when I took it to the council, one bloke there who was on the council had been Vietnam, no, no, been to Iraq. And he said, I love that, because when he was in Iraq, he saw a hand sticking out of the sand, you know a body. And I mean, that thought had crossed my mind when I did it. But when he said it, he swayed the [whole council]. The council said, yes, we like that, that it was different and they took it on board. So I did that great big hand, which was a terrific project to work on and I use my own hand, but I got different people to model for it. I didn't know whether I wanted a dead head or live hand, so I did something in between. It had to be sculptural, so I made it rest on those two fingers.

[01:11:45] So that's why it's facing down opposed to facing up?

[01:11:48] Yes. Well, I wanted it that way. I mean, that would be too, obviously saying something, you know, what does that mean? What does that mean? And so it's hard to define. There's no specific answer in my mind. It's one of those things where when people ask the question is, what do you think? It's up to you to give it meaning. But the council were happy.

[01:12:17] Do you have a fascination with hands, painting hands?

[01:12:22] Yes, I have. I've always loved hands. I've drawn them, I've got drawings of my own hand from when I was a kid. And I've drawn hands all the time because every portrait is a portrait of the hands as much as the face. The hands say so much. And of course, the hand to me, it's almost like your brain, your mind, your painting brain is in your hand as much as in your head. When you're painting freely, it's almost like the hand, the hand is the vehicle as much as the brain. I know that you can't say that the brain determines where the hand goes and all that, but you do get that feeling when you're painting well and you're not thinking that your hand is doing it for you. So the hand is a fascinating part of the anatomy. Just as much as the face and of course you can't say that any part of the body is not just as interesting. I mean, that's why I did that. You know, I love painting nude bodies and you can't say the hand is more interesting than the shoulder or the elbow (laughs).

[01:13:49] Or the ear?

[01:13:49] Or the ear. And ears again, fascinating. I've drawn ears and feet and things like that. And I never tire of it. And I look at them and, I mean, this goes back to childhood. To draw and paint what interests you, what you see... (phone rings)

[01:14:16] We'll take a break.

END OF FILE 2: FILE 3

[00:00:00] I am Annabelle Homer continuing the interview with Alfie Hannaford on Monday, the 19th of December 2022. This is file 3. Alfie in 2020, I understand that you were approached to do a sculpture of the Queen. How did this come to be?

[00:00:24] I was approached by the Governor, Hieu Van Le, [he] asked me if I could do a sculpture of the Queen for Government House. And I said yes, so enquiries were made. I said I need a sitting or two, as in my practice when I do portraits. And in due course, he got back to me to say that the Queen doesn't do sittings anymore because of her age, but I'd be welcome at a garden party at wherever they have it, Windsor or Buckingham Palace, the annual garden party to observe her. And I said, oh well, I told Hieu that I'd rather leave it because my practice is to work from life not from photos. So that was that. And I thought that would be the end of it, but about six months later, I got a message from the South Australian Attaché through Hieu Van Le, that the Queen was willing to give me a half hour sitting. No fifteen minutes I think they said.

[00:02:05] Was that enough? (laughs)

[00:02:08] Well, yes, I'd have to draw very quickly because for a sculpture I needed to draw the Queen in the round from the back and the side. There are not even photographs of her in those positions that are necessary to do a sculpture. So on the strength of that, we decided to go to London to meet the Queen.

[00:02:43] And what did you say when you went through security as you entered the UK? (laughs)

[00:02:49] Yeah, that was quite funny. At the security, they said, "And what is the purpose of your trip?" And I didn't say anything at the time, but Alison said afterwards, you should've said we've come to London to see the Queen, which I'm sure would have brought a bit of mirth into the situation.

[00:03:16] So where did you do the sculpture? Where did you sit her and what was she wearing? Explain that process.

[00:03:24] Well, we did the – – –. The sitting was to be had at Windsor Castle. So we booked a place there and we did it in the gold room and there's a green room next door. I had to choose the dress that she was to wear. And because I asked her to wear her normal coat, handbag, and hat. That was the idea that I had in my mind of how I wanted her sculpted, you know, her everyday look. So she duly came in and we chatted a little bit and then we started the drawings.

[00:04:23] What did you chat about?

[00:04:27] She asked me a little bit where I came from and I asked her if she remembered William Dargie, who painted that famous portrait of her in the 1950s, that was everywhere in Australia when I was young (laughs). And she said, Oh, yes, just as a matter of fact, I'm wearing the same brooch that I wore for that portrait. And indeed, she had a wattle brooch. I thought that was sweet of her to remember that I was an Australian and she was going to make that connection. We chatted a bit – it was mainly for me to do the drawings. She had to stand all that time and turn although I moved around her as well, and I did half a dozen drawings in that 30 minutes or so we had together which were absolutely essential for the sculpture. So it worked out rather well in the end.

[00:05:43] You asked her to take off her hat I understand?

[00:05:48] Yes, at one point I asked her if she would mind taking her hat off and the lady-in-waiting who was standing there throughout the performance said, "Oh, no, she can't do that. We've just spent half an hour doing your hair for this." So I kept on drawing, and about 5 minutes later, the Queen took her hat off, fluffed up her hair, as much as to say, "Well there you are, I can do anything you want." (laughs)

[00:06:23] How did it come to be that you were chosen to take on this project? What was the connection between you and the Royals?

[00:06:40] Well, it was Hieu Van Le that chose me. The governor.

[00:06:45] Prince Philip, was also quite fascinated with your work, wasn't he?

[00:06:50] I was told afterwards that the reason that the Queen relented and gave me a sitting was because the Attaché sent my book, the one that John Neylon did some years earlier, to Buckingham Palace. And apparently the Duke is very keen on art [and] was practising himself. And they liked the book and on the strength of the book, according to Bill Muirhead, the Attaché at the time, that was the reason that she relented and said yes, she'll have a sitting.

[00:07:35] And what was her reaction when you presented her the maquette?

[00:07:41] Well, that happened after the sculpture was erected and we had a zoom meeting with the Queen. It was at the time when Philip was in hospital because I remember we spoke a little bit about that on the Zoom meeting. And I presented her with a maquette of the sculpture on zoom and she was appreciative and said, nice to see you again. (laughs) So she obviously remembered the sitting and as the Attaché said, "It went viral" in England, that zoom [meeting] was played out and also after she died, not long afterwards, a year or so.

[00:08:42] Didn't you see King Charles with the maquette?

[00:08:47] That happened just the other day. The new Governor [Frances Adamson] presented that maquette that I presented via Zoom, apparently. I thought it was taken over at that time, but apparently it wasn't taken until just the other day. The new Governor took it and met King Charles and presented him with it.

[00:09:15] How does that make you feel Alfie? I know that you said, Oh, it's just a person. It's no big deal. But it is the Queen and it is the Royal family. Does it give you a sense of pride? Are you proud of yourself because you've done this?

[00:09:37] I suppose to a degree, but it's not, you know, I'm used to sculpting and portrait sittings with people for the last 50 odd years or more (laughs). So it was nothing unusual in that respect to me. She was a lovely old lady and very compliant and, you know, she was a lovely person as a lot of old women are. So, no, I don't get pride and think this is an amazing situation. You're asking that question now, a lot of people have asked me that same question, I answered them the same way. She's just another human being and she had my full attention as all people who I paint or sculpt do and it was no different with the Queen or with anybody else.

[00:10:53] You mentioned earlier on in the interview that sometimes your subjects, you've had to tell them to be quiet because they're talking too much. I presume that didn't happen with the Queen? (laughs)

[00:11:02] No, no, no. There was the pressure of having such a short time and indeed, we had about 35 minutes of drawing and the lady-in-waiting said, that would be enough. She's getting tired now. As indeed she was probably, you know, she had to turn and stand all that time. So I was very grateful that she gave me a good time.

[00:11:32] Half an hour, what do you usually take to do a maquette or all those drawings for a sculpture?

[00:11:40] Oh, well, you know, you can do a drawing in 5 minutes, and I've done that plenty of times. So it's not so unusual to have to hurry. I've even painted portraits in half an hour occasionally. (laughs)

[00:12:00] Let's skip from the Queen to 2022. And I understand you're about to embark or may have already started a Hans Heysen sculpture? You've come full circle, it seems, sculpting the man that inspired you on this creative journey in the first place.

[00:12:20] Yeah, I was delighted to do this job, so I did it. I said I would be happy – – –. They asked me, the Heysen Foundation, [they're] building a new building up there at his house, and I was asked if I would be on the committee. I've forgotten what my role is to be, I haven't done anything in particular. But I said I'd be happy to do the sculpture of Hans Heysen that they wanted to go up in Hahndorf for free, as a gesture, I suppose, towards Heysen, because he was such an important influence on me and still is. So I was very happy to do that sculpture, and it's just about to be erected in Hahndorf as we speak. So it's just left the casting place up in Tim Thomson's place up in the hills.

[00:13:38] Now, your mentors were Ivor Hele and Hans Heysen?

[00:13:42] Hele

[00:13:44] Okay, I'm going to say that again. Your mentors were Ivor Hele and Hans Heysen. But you remained, I understand, quite determined to learn, and do things your own way and on your own terms. Do you think that determination or that independence sort of led you on a path to be a quite a successful artist?

[00:14:10] Well, it is, what it is. I've chosen that way to teach myself rather than go to art school or be taught by anybody. While Ivor and Hans were mentors, they didn't

give me lessons and say, do it this way. I had to work it all out myself. I wanted to do it that way. In retrospect, I think it's the right way, the correct way and I'm glad it's happened that way. I could probably done with a bit of more education, especially in sculpture because all my sculptures, I've never had a lesson and there's a heck of a lot to learn about sculpture, about procedure, which I could well have done with but it's always been my way. I find the information is there if you want it. There are plenty of very good books and I inspire myself by reading the lives of artists who I admire. And it seems to me that all the best ones have always worked in nature and made their own discoveries. So that's been my way of teaching myself to paint and sculpt.

[00:16:00] Well, that's teaching yourself. Have you taken on a mentoring role for other budding artists?

00:16:05] Yes. I mean, I'm very happy to see the work of any budding artist, if they wish to [have] me look over their work and comment like Heysen did or Ivor did for me. And I have done a bit of teaching at the Royal Society in Adelaide a decade or two ago. So yes, I like to pass on the information that I've gained and the experience to young artists, aspiring artists. And I'm always willing and ready to do that.

[00:16:55] Do you have any aspiring artists that come up here to visit you at the farm?

[00:17:00] Yes. Occasionally someone will want to come. Yesterday I had a young artist who visited before, he came up to Riverton for me to look over his work. So, yes, I find I enjoy that sort of thing.

[00:17:27] And do you still mentor your daughter, Tsering? You obviously were a significant mentor in her early beginnings, has that continued?

[00:17:36] Well, I hope so. (phone rings)

[00:17:40] That's Alfie's phone. We'll take a break for a short moment.

[00:17:46] Right.

END OF FILE 3: FILE 4

[00:00:01] I'm Annabelle Homer, continuing the interview with Alfie Hannaford on Monday, the 19th of December 2022. This is File 4. Alfie going back to my previous question, do you still provide that mentoring advice to Tsering?

[00:00:21] Well, I like to think I'm a mentor for her. Yes, I mean, she shows me her work and I make comments, as hopefully constructive, and I show her my work and she makes comments to me. So it's sort of like, as happens with Alison. She calls me in occasionally to look at her work and comment on one part or another and I do the same. And it's the same with Tsering, when she comes around, I show her what I'm doing, and I'm always very keen to hear what she thinks. Indeed, I've always been that way, I listen to comments of other people and sometimes you learn a lot from outsiders' views on your work. I often ask them directly what they think or what looks a bit weird. I find that sort of thing very helpful in that and with Tsering, we do that to each other.

[00:01:43] So on that, what's a piece of advice or some tips and tricks that you can share with us? It'll be interesting to get a bit of an idea as to what important bits of information one should take on if you're a budding artist in the future?

[00:02:09] Well I guess what I say to everybody who comes to me, is work from nature rather than theories, schools of thought, ideologies, as the art world seems to be flooded with at the moment and always has been I guess?

[00:02:36] Is that a negative?

[00:02:39] Absolutely. In my opinion. I was only reading the other day, you know, our dog is called Ruskin, that's because of John Ruskin. I remember reading him when I was very young and starting out and his love of nature was what he based his whole philosophy upon of art and practice - his own practice. That stayed with me, and it reinforced of course from my reading of the great artists like Rembrandt and Michelangelo, Leonardo, all those wonderful artists, if you read into their lives in their work, they were all students of nature rather than artistic movements or anything. It's the same with Van Gogh or, you know, modern artists who – great ones are ones that get their inspiration from nature. So truth to observation of nature is what I try to give as advice to young artists and that indeed being my lodestone (laughs) from the beginning and it still is. To draw, look carefully, I spent most of my time looking at

and trying to understand what I'm seeing and drawing is a natural way of doing it. Drawing and painting and sculpting.

[00:04:51] What about the intricacies more so, such as the importance of light and shade, and how much the moulds play in the process, and composition?

[00:05:00] The what?

[00:05:01] Moulding and things like that?

[00:05:06] Yeah, well, getting down to the nitty gritty of trying to interrogate your observation.

[00:05:16] That's a good way of putting it. (both laugh)

[00:05:19] Yeah. I mean, sunlight is the source of all our seeing. Understanding light, how eyes evolved to see forms and things, so light and shade is the most important understanding. I remember when I started teaching myself and looking carefully at light and shade, I went back to my physics books from school about light and how the angle of incidence equals the angle of reflection and how light travels in straight lines and how it divides through a prism into its various wavelengths. That was all essential for me in understanding light. Light is everything in observation and to understand it and study it is something I do constantly. It's been with me from the very beginning, and I try to pass that observation onto students if they're interested.

[00:06:54] I bet you didn't think you'd be going back to your physics books when it comes to painting and artistic value?

[00:07:03] No, I suppose it was a bit of a surprise but when you think of it, science is a wonderful tool that we humans have to understand nature. (laughs) And I love science, in some ways I see myself, as in some ways not wholly, as a scientist. To understand what I'm looking at, not just the light, the form, you know, anatomy is part of form, understanding how each organism has evolved, watching it through our scientific understanding from the past. And truth is part of the scientific endeavour. Truth to nature. So I'm far more interested in discovering the truth of an object or whatever I'm painting, even if it's the sky or finding the truth as represented in light and form. For instance, in the anatomy, to understand the evolution of, say, the human form how it evolved through the earliest forms of life on earth into the mammals. If

you look across the animal kingdom, the similarities between all mammals, for instance with a backbone and head and brain and the muscles are all the same and muscle attachments, they just vary according to their different purposes. That sort of thing fascinates me. So that's why I find drawing and painting is my way of discovering about nature.

[00:09:33] What's next for you, Alfie?

[00:09:37] I don't know. I don't think that way. I'm not planning anything. I just hope to be able to continue my studies of nature for as long as I can.

[00:10:05] You're about to go on tour, I understand, with a big hART exhibition in 2024?

[00:10:13] Yes. Big hART have decided to have an exhibition of my work to coincide with the anniversary of 30 years, I think it might be, and I've been working with him from the beginning. So that's planned for next year.

[00:10:36] 2023 or 2024?

[00:10:39] 2023 I think.

[00:10:42] Is this an international tour?

[00:10:44] Well, venues hadn't been worked out, only Adelaide so far. I think they're working on it at the moment but they're hoping to get it going. It'll probably go to the places in Australia where we've performed; in Sydney, Melbourne, Alice Springs, the Pilbara, Roebourne, Perth, Hobart, definitely because it began down there in Tasmania.

[00:11:23] How are you feeling? How is your health? Because you have been put through the wringer.

[00:11:29] Yeah, well my health is very good, considering. I do have trouble obviously with my speaking voice as a result of the second tongue operation I had about ten years ago and I have trouble with my blood getting to the brain through - the carotid arteries have been compromised by radiotherapy, so they don't work as well. One's completely blocked and the other 70% blocked so it's a struggle all the time. I have blood pressure problems in my brain and, you know, have effects that I know if I'm not getting enough blood to the brain, I have a vision problem and there are other

signs. I'm on blood thinners to keep that happening. But apart from that, I'm really healthy. And, you know, if you look at my track record since my cancer, which is now 15 years ago, I've done really well to have had all that time to continue working has been a wonderful thing.

[00:13:12] Since we are in a period of reflection. I understand that you're donating a lot of your artwork to the State Library and diaries. How is that all making you feel? (both laugh)

[00:13:28] Well, a little bit disconcerted, I'm not sure. I think, why on earth would the library want my diaries for instance, and hundreds of drawings. I mean the impetus I think with that bushfire we had a few years ago and it came quite close to here, and it suddenly occurred to me that this studio has my life work in it and should [it] burn down. And I thought, well, the library did make a suggestion that I leave some work to them, and so that was set in motion a couple of years ago. And we've been collating my work ever since, trying to sort it all out and sending some off to the library, and I'm keeping a lot of stuff too. And of course, I'm still working so I want to keep a lot of stuff so that I can continue working.

[00:14:39] Are you keeping a diary still?

[00:14:42] Yes. I've kept the diary since I was about 20 or thereabouts, and I don't write every day. I just write when I feel like it. I've never really read most 99% of it, but if I do look into it, I see I often right when I'm most conflicted. (laughs)

[00:15:12] How often is that?

[00:15:14] Quite often. It seems to help to, I think anyway, to write out your thoughts if they are important. For instance, last night I had a dream (laughs) which struck me as being rather – – – I woke up and I remembered it - you don't remember your dreams - but it seemed important, and I'll probably mention it in my diary if I write it today. It's one of those dreams that you wake up, and you think, wow, that was a – that dream – it seemed to have meaning. (laughs)

[00:16:14] When you say you write when you're most conflicted, are you most conflicted about life, most conflicted about something that you're drawing or painting at the time?

[00:16:24] Both. I often write about a painting that I'm working on, but when I'm conflicted in life, I write too, because it helps you understand, I think. I'm not sure this (laughs) after having done it over life, I've come to realise that I'm no smarter than I was when I began writing (laughs). So it's not as if I've learnt anything (laughs) of great value.

[00:17:04] They do say each decade that you go through life you start to learn more about yourself. Would you say that's true in your circumstance?

[00:17:13] Possibly. That's what that dream meant to me last night. I think I learnt something about myself that I didn't, hadn't recognised. But yeah, I think there's a thing called insight, I like to use that word rather than knowledge, that you discover about yourself or not just yourself, about the world. And I use that word when I'm painting as well, you get an insight. It's not like an analysis and a result. It's like how you say, I see. And psychologically it's the same, you suddenly get an insight into your problem or whatever it is you're thinking about.

[00:18:08] Epiphany?

[00:18:10] Yeah, well, epiphany means you've really got it nailed (both laugh) I think. But yeah, I like to see the insight fits in with my notion of seeing rather than analysis. It's not an idea. It's not a piece of knowledge that you say, yes, that's how it is. It's more of a non-verbal insight that happens in paintings sometimes.

[00:18:55] Alfie may have answered this question already, but I just wanted to quote a bit of John Neylon. He says that Alfie never set out to be an artist, let alone a portrait painter. Art was more your means of understanding and a way of engaging with the world. You had a passion for nature from a young age. You were determined to observe it, record it, conserve, and preserve it for future generations. Do you still see things that fascinate you? Do you still get inspired, that same inspiration that you got as a young lad?

[00:19:34] Yes, I do. And I think even more so. You know, I mean, I'm looking at my dog as we speak and I'm fascinated by his demeanour, his look on his face. I try to draw it, I carry a sketch book. The beauty of his form. That's the sort of thing that has always fascinated me and that only deepens the more you understand, the more you – – – if you draw, say, a dog's leg and you notice the veins, the way they go over the muscle and you understand what muscle it is. It only it makes you look at your own arm again and you [realise] - ah that's the same vein I'm seeing in his leg. That sort of

thing continues, and you get a deeper understanding all the time. That's what I think John was trying to say in that bit that you just read out. How it informs your life and how it – – – yes, I concur with that now. (both laugh)

[00:21:04] Rob Linn mentioned in a former interview back in the '70's you purchased some uncleared bushland on Kangaroo Island which led you to set up the Bushland Conservation Company. Since then, how much land have you purchased since those early days? And what's the plan for the future? The dog is sitting all over your lap so we should state there's a little bit of interference.

[00:21:25] Should I put him outside?

[00:21:27] Maybe get him off your lap. That might be good. There you go Ruskin. Excellent.

[00:21:33] I'll just put him out.

[00:21:34] Okay. We'll stop recording for just a moment.

END OF FILE 4: FILE 5

[00:00:00] Hi, I'm Annabelle Homer, continuing the interview with Alfie Hannaford on Monday, the 19th of December 2022. This is file 5. Going back to that previous question, Alfie, is there more plans, when it comes to that conservation company you set up?

[00:00:17] Well, yes. I mean, we set that up 30 plus years ago, '74 or 5, five, I think it was, so that's a long time ago. It's been probably one of the smartest things I've ever done. I'm so glad that I put so much energy into it in those early days because it's hard to do things in this world that you're proud of, but I'm unequivocally proud that we began that conservation company, because conservation is central to my love of nature and my endeavour to continue it. I mean, I still propagate native seeds of rare plants in the hills and try to get them going, plant them out around here or at my property in Riverton. I mean it's my effort to continue the nature. There's so many negative forces around, you know, the farming practices, the destruction of the environment. It's happening all over the world and we're all aware of the crisis we seem to be facing at the moment, and that's why the conservation movement that I've been involved in continues.

[00:02:08] Are there plans to expand that footprint?

[00:02:11] Well, our company can only have 50 members. So it's been an inspiration to other companies, I know that for sure. It's not like Bob Brown's company which has increasing numbers of people, the shape of the company is only a 50-member thing. So we're trying to consolidate what we've got rather than expand, although if we got the opportunity to expand we would. We started on Kangaroo Island back in '75 or whatever it was and since then we've bought land up here in the Tothill Ranges, an equal amount of land and it's just as important, and another block in the Adelaide Hills. So where it will go in the future? I don't know. I'm not an active member like I used to be in the company. But we put what we've got under a Bush Heritage Agreement. So that means whatever happens in the future, as long as these governments continue, nobody who buys into this company, when we're dead, will be able to do anything other than keep it preserved thanks to the Bush Heritage Agreement. And I put my personal land, I've got some land on Kangaroo Island, about 600 acres of virgin land down there, I've just recently put the whole lot of that onto Bush Heritage. So whatever happens after I die that will be preserved.

[00:04:17] You said that this company or this act is one of the one things that you're proud of, that you've achieved in your lifetime. Can you highlight any other proud moments or proud things that you've done? Any standouts?

[00:04:38] Nothing stands out. (laughs) Yeah. I'm just trying to think.

[00:04:56] You've done a fair bit Alfie. I can imagine it would probably be hard to pinpoint anything in particular.

[00:05:02] Uh, I don't know, it's hard to say. I guess I'm proud of the fact that I stuck to my basic principles of - well, I wouldn't even call them principles. I tried to not cause too much damage in the world. I've tried to repair some of the damage I made. (laughs) Let's just say I'm proud that I've stuck to my guns. And oddly enough, I think Rob Linn pointed out that I'm probably the same person that I was when I was a kid up here on the farm and loved everything about nature. And the work I've done is probably done bugger all (laughs) but it's my way of contributing. Whether it has any effect that I don't suppose it does, but that the way of things and I hope to continue doing it.

END OF FILE 5: FILE 6

[00:00:01] I'm Annabelle Homer, continuing the interview with Alfie Hannaford on Monday, the 19th of December 2022. This is file seven. Alfie, just going back to the original question I asked you about what you're most proud of. You've thought of something?

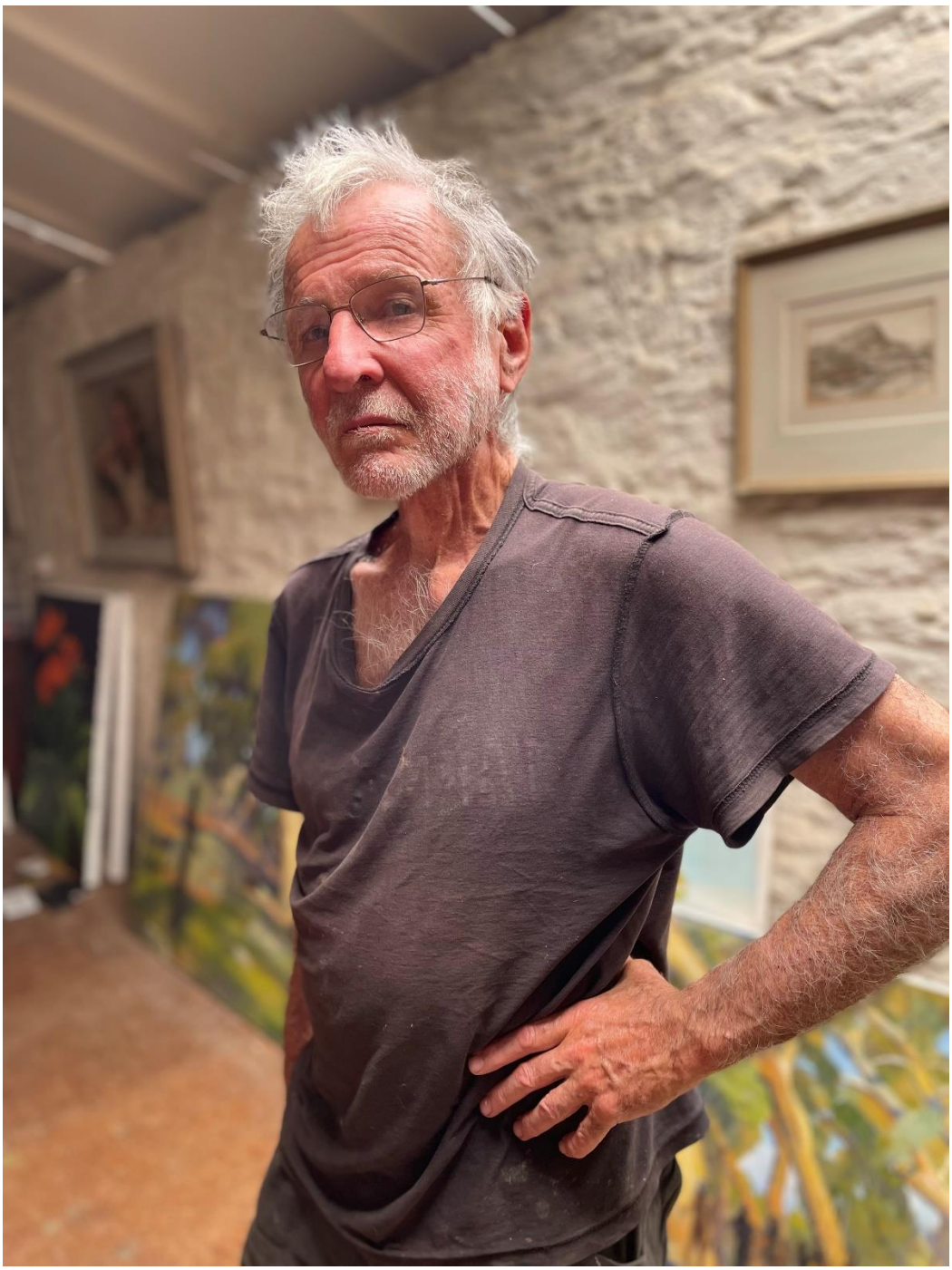
[00:00:19] Yes. Well, we were talking about my conservation efforts, and I couldn't answer you when you said what I'm proud of. I suppose in recent years, I think this is probably what you're getting at. What I'm most proud of - what I'm most grateful for, might be a better way of putting it than pride (laughs), is my relationship with Alison because she, more than anybody, has helped me to see the truth of the world. And as I possibly tried to point out that it's been my inspiration for art and my whole life always to understand it. And Alison seems to have that ability to show me the truth, even when I don't mind to see it. I've talked about how she helps me with my work, and I hope I help her with her work through not criticism, but comments on various aspects. But that extends to life even more so. You know, everyday things happen and she's unflinchingly honest in her own approach to life and it's amazing how it has affected me too. It's made me see things that I've been blind to. You know, you like to think you're not blind to what's going on around you and when I was young, I think I was very confident in my approach to life and everything. But it's not just Alison, but in recent years, life itself has shown you that your previous certainties are not quite what you thought they were. And Alison amazingly has that ability to show me point out through our everyday relationship the truth of things. So for that, I'm very grateful.

[00:03:25] Can you give me an example of some of the things that she's pointed out, or even one?

00:03:31] Oh, well, last night we went to a party at your neighbour's place and the way the conversation went. It was fascinating. We were talking about the Aboriginal Voice to Parliament, a referendum that's coming up and she doesn't say so much as I do in these situations but we were talking across the table and there was a chap who knew a lot about it, who'd worked up in Aboriginal societies for many decades. And on the way home, she reminded me of a discussion we were having between the two of us and a comment that I'd made that may have been interpreted differently. And that's the

sort of thing she points out. That sort of thing and indeed it made me realise, yes, I can see what she was saying and the truth of it. So in that way it helps - very much.

END OF INTERVIEW



Alfie Hannaford, 19 December 2022