



James C. Sourris Artist Interview Series 2015-2016
Item 30602/10: Lawrence Daws Digital Story

Interviewee: Lawrence Daws (LD)

Interviewer: Bettina MacAulay (BM)

Date: 26 February 2016

BM: Lawrence, in your early life in South Australia, how did you first become interested in art?

LD: When I was quite young, my father was a builder, and he used to get a magazine called Great Paintings of the World. And it always included one colour reproduction on grain paper, which he would pin up around the house. So I became interested—visually aware of [Piccoro 00:00:45] and Velasquez and people when I was about fourteen.

BM: So you could say you had your own in-house gallery.

LD: Sort of, yes. I thought I'd have a go at painting when I was about sixteen. I bought a small little watercolour tin outfit and took myself up to the hills. We lived at the foothills of Glen Osmond. And started painting. So from that moment on, I became interested in watercolours. I had a motorbike and I'd drive up to Hahndorf for the weekend. And that's when I met up with Heysen, and he became a mentor. And he convinced my father that I might make a go of it, and that I should go to the National Gallery in Melbourne. Which I did. Studied there for four years under Dargie. And Dargie, of course, is very strong on tone, so Heysen's words came through very quickly.

BM: A number of Australian artists have explored philosophy, literature, and psychology, but your interest in these areas is particularly deep and lifelong. How did these cultural interests affect your responses to the numinous in art?

LD: Oh, they—all that evolved very gradually. At the age of thirty, I won a scholarship to Italy for two years, Flotto Lauro. And I went on to London after the two years in Italy, and I was there virtually for another ten years. Soon after I arrived in London, I started reading a book about Jung. And it fascinated me, the collective unconscious idea that we all have a deep, deep, down—a similar feeling about certain things. You mention a king and everyone thinks of a king visually. But I liked the idea of the unconscious. Images started coming out after that. The mandala paintings came out quite accidentally. I worked in the studio and I had these large canvases, and I started working out in red, and then I decided just to scrape a shape. And I got really excited by the image that came out. And I realised from what Jung was talking about that it was a mandala. A mandala in Jungian terms could be anything—it could be a square, it could be something in a garden, in a particular shape. And the concept is that it makes one feel whole and complete.

BM: Themes to do with anxiety, freedom, regeneration occur in many of your works from the 1980s. Did you regard this as a necessary process to arrive at a state of calm?

LD: They probably were, but I didn't recognise them as such. I didn't think that I was anxious at that time; I didn't think that I was getting any anxieties therapeutically out of me.

BM: More relates to the state of the world.

LD: Yeah, I think—man's inability to handle freedom is a fact. A Kafka—Kafkaesque nightmare of things. They all join the same golf club and behave the same way and dress the same way and so on. So the cage and the running figures has a great deal to do with that. And there are always a few straight running figure paintings. Quite large. I didn't actually count them, but there would have been six or seven thousand figures running.

BM: You were one of Australia's first computer-literate artists producing computer-generated prints. How did that interest in the computer as an art form for making art come about?

LD: I must have seen a computer somewhere, maybe out at Griffith University. They had set up an etching workshop—which was a community access workshop. Anyone could go and do etchings there. I think I saw a computer there somewhere—pretty primitive one. So I went off and bought myself an Omega that had a memory of 1.4 megabytes. And started teaching myself how to use it. And it had a simple form of Windows that later became very fashionable and useable computer. So that was back in 1986; it's a long time ago. And to this day, I now use a computer more than I paint, in the sense that I resolve images on the computer. It's a delightful thing, because you can lift things, strengthen, lighten, move them, all over. What would have taken me a week of doing little pencil studies; I can do in half an hour on the computer.

BM: By the end of the 1990s, you've said that you were approaching the stillness and simplicity that you'd searched for. Did this assessment come with any caveats for your work?

LD: Uh. I'd started painting some waterlily paintings—just a few at that time—not a lot, just a few. I guess there's not too much dark stuff coming up from inside like there was earlier on—that could just be an age thing, or it could be that I've finally found a slightly peaceful state of being.

BM: Thank you very much, Lawrence, for talking today about your life and art. It's been such a career of great artworks—it's wonderful to hear something about the background of what inspired some of them.

LD: Oh, thank you, thank you. You helped me unravel some things that just sit there for a long time, unravelled.

BM: Thank you.

Transcription is exacting work and we acknowledge that occasional errors may occur. You may also wish to consult the original documents when undertaking research using this material.

© The State of Queensland (State Library of Queensland) 2016



This transcript is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial 3.0 Australia licence. You are free to copy, communicate and adapt this work, so long as you attribute State Library of Queensland. However, you may not use this work for commercial purposes.

For more information see <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/au/>