



James C. Sourris Artist Interview Series

Madonna Staunton

Madonna: I think a lot of my inspiration's from ... where I get my inspiration from is from things in the childhood, for instance, I was probably four and a half or five and I had a doll that had a soft body; it was just filled with sawdust or something but the exciting thing about it was that I could pin scraps of fabric to it and create all sorts of bizarre and wonderful and fanciful costumes for this doll and that's where I wondered later where I had maybe a career as a dress designer but I knew even at that age as I had a very tactile sense of ... for instance, I can remember the handles on the interior doors were ridged like a beehive and I can almost feel them in my hand today and I seem to be able to make companions out of inanimate things.

I had a very painful period where because my father was sort of moving around from various areas there was no real current of security physically or anything else until we went to Chatswood in Sydney and my father took on a small private lending library and it was quite vast; I think it has about 3,000 volumes in it. From then on I don't think I ever looked back; I could retire up the steps ... this was another terrace building and ... with the latest volumes of ... it might've been *Anne of Green Gables* or something; it was something more intellectual or whatever but yeah, so I think I was always happy with the book.

My father decided that he wasn't going to spend another winter in Sydney so he was going back north to Murwillumbah where I was ... was born in Murwillumbah actually and being sort of catapulted out of that heaven, you know 3,000 books and no other contenders it was like going to a very strict boarding school where all the things which had been precious to me were verboten, you know. So that, I think, is the time when some sort of rebellion set in and I was old enough to sort of become interested in the beatniks and what was happening in poetry at that time.

All my life I've been fighting against fragile health that was left from the measles because it affected my lungs so I started doing collage because I decided that I'd do something that I'd enjoyed doing as a child not because I thought it was a childish activity but something which liberated you in terms of the means ... it was still possible to attain an end through means which weren't so physically exhausting and now I've got widespread arthritis and all of them ... you know to a certain extent we don't realise how much the skill of our hands and our bodily members et cetera are, I suppose, not only products of cerebral impulses and so on but the muscles answer to those input as well.

But then I thought "Well, you know, trying to be positive about these things" and I thought it was a bit strange because I gave up doing large paintings because I couldn't cope with the size and the dimensions of them to do collage; now I'm giving up constructions to do painting but painting was my first love and I can't deny that.

It's only since I've gone back to painting that I realise that cubism has been a very natural development for me and I was very dumb in not realising that it was as important as it has been because it provides that armature to the emotional ... it's a horrible destructive experience painting a ... for me an unstructured work; that's what I, you know like in the big collages with the big ones that I've done; I had to master them, as it were, because otherwise like madness lies in that direction, you know and I couldn't cope with it; I couldn't contend with it, you know.

I've been told on the best psychiatrist authority that I have a very rigid super ego so maybe that's what ... thank God for the super ego. I think the fact that I'm probably as sane as I am has a lot to do with ... but I have felt a lot of ... found a lot of freedom in the last couple of years I think, you know sort of I've shrugged off a lot, you know I don't feel that I have to belong to any school or ideology or ... I don't think at my age of 73 I have any obligation to be anything but who I am, you know it's been a bit of struggle getting here but ...