

Guy Boyd—defender of nature's beauty

GENTLE SCULPTOR WHO IS QUICK TO ANGER

It's a pleasure — and always a surprise — to find there's a gentle man behind a big name.

Guy Boyd is a gentle man who gives the impression of managing — just — to bear up under an artistically weighty family reputation.

For he is the son of potter and sculptor Merric Boyd and painter Doris; grandson of Arthur Merric Boyd and Emma Boyd, both painters; nephew of Pennleigh Boyd, painter, and Martin Boyd, distinguished novelist and historian. He has two brothers, David and Arthur and two sisters, Lucy (married to potter Hatton Beck) and March (now separated from painter husband John Perceval).

This family has commanded a permanent place in the art of our time — in painting, ceramics, architecture and sculpture — here and abroad.

Guy Boyd's line is sculpture — figurative, imaginative, sensitive, traditional sculpture, mostly bronze figures and often of the female form bathing, showering, standing, bending or dancing.

Sometimes he does large murals, such as those at Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport and Sydney's new International Airport.

His work holds an important place in 20th century Australian sculpture, but Boyd is not very concerned with the prestige that goes with success.

He considers many other issues more worthy of his time and attention — conservation for one.

He spends up to one-third of his working time striving to protect the Australian countryside which has inspired him and his family for four generations.

Sculpture—his main source of income — is often slotted into off-peak times such as nights or weekends; times when the world of commerce and "progress", the world in which Guy Boyd is spending more and more of his time, is at rest.

One can sympathise with his feelings towards preserving the flora and fauna of our beautiful land, but does Boyd really feel he understands the world of the quick buck?

He shrugged his shoulders in answer, then elaborated:

"All I know is that if something is amiss it has to be righted. If the land is being desecrated and degraded, someone has to put a stop to it.

"And that often means accepting labels like 'ratbag' just because one bothers, but all my life I've respected trees and nature and animal life and now I'm a conservationist."

It's only five years since modern change threatened to hurt Boyd personally and it was this which stung him into action.

The Brighton City Council proposed building a \$4 million boat harbour and marina at Middle Brighton beach, near where Boyd lives with his family.

He formed a committee which collected the signatures of 4,000 residents who were against the proposed marina.

He and the committee organised protest meetings which more than 1,300 residents attended.

They were successful and Boyd found himself vice-chairman and spokesman for the Brighton Foreshore Protection Committee.

From there he became foundation member of the Port Phillip Conservation Council which was responsible, with the Brighton Foreshore Protection Committee and the Brighton City Council, for preventing a 24-inch oil pipeline from being laid in the bay by major oil companies.

Some of these issues in which Guy showed leadership caught the imagination of his old Uncle Martin in Rome and when Uncle Martin died last year Guy Boyd found himself named in the will to receive royalties from his uncle's publications.

They're not worth a fortune but they do help a little towards the general upkeep of the Boyds' beautiful 83-year-old home, not to mention the seven Boyd children.

Family life most meaningful thing

Phyllis and Guy Boyd have well formulated and strongly held views on large families and energetically, even passionately, refute the tag of "selfish" which zero population growth supporters would no doubt be quick to level at them.

"Family life is the most meaningful thing in my world," Guy told me in between frequent interruptions from three-year-old Martin and five-year-old Charlotte.

"I respect my wife for her strongly held views and high moral standards and I acknowledge the fact that I'm influenced by her.

"It follows that Phyllis and I are both against abortion on demand and much in favour of better community education on contraception.

"We wouldn't particularly mind if we had more children. It's only the hard physical exertion needed to care for small children which is beginning to tell on us the older we get. (Guy is 49 and Phyllis 47.)

"I am happy to say we are not obsessed with material things, like the compulsive buying of clothes."

Expanding his thoughts on materialism, Boyd admitted that he and his wife had no "social life" to speak of. They never "cultivate" new friends and are flat out keeping up with old and trusted ones. This is mostly done at get-togethers around a beautiful 200-year-old mahogany dining table which came to Guy Boyd from his father and once belonged to the Spanish royal family to whom the Boyds are remotely related.

"That table has been in my life as far back as my memory extends and it's been the scene for many a Boyd reunion, too."

It's true one rarely sees Guy Boyd at Art Gallery first night openings — he's even been known to miss his own! "But

that's not really desirable," he admits, adding that he does try to attend any Boyd family exhibition, just to give "that bit of moral support".

How is it that Guy Boyd is unaffected by the possibilities of wealth and fame?

He summarises his life to date like this: "Very frugal childhood; five kids supported on \$6 a week; lived in Melbourne surrounded by trees.

"Went into the Army at 18 and got into trouble for never cleaning my gun; more in my element when I began to teach pottery as therapy for convalescing soldiers.

"Left the Army when I was 23 and studied sculpture at East Sydney Technical College by day and worked up a pottery business by night. Soon this expanded into a partnership with a big staff. Signed the work 'Martin Boyd Pottery'.

"Dissolved that business partnership in 1952 and came to Melbourne again, earning a living from a pottery business but this time signing myself 'Guy Boyd Pottery'.

"At first I did sculpture in my spare time until I began to earn my living mainly from sculpture.

"Had my first one-man showing in 1965 in Melbourne. Went overseas on Churchill Travelling Fellowship in 1968. Held one-man exhibition at Leicester Galleries, London, in 1970."

The gentle nature of Guy Boyd runs true, right through to his art where, for him, all inspiration comes from the female form.

"Woman has inspired man over the ages," he said.

"When her inspiration has waxed or waned it is reflected in man's art. We're just coming out of a low period of woman's influence now but look at sculpture from Europe and North America and you'll see the renaissance beginning all over again.

"But my work is figurative. I've never waxed and waned. Indeed, none of the Boyds follows arty fashion trends. It's my belief we'd get lost if we tried.

"If you have something to say, express yourself truly and clearly," he says of his art.

"If you have something to say about the world, apply the same principles."

He does, and even his critics — a growing band — admire him for it.

Meanwhile, his sculpture is represented in public and private collections around the world including the New York Sculpture Centre. This year he will hold one-man exhibitions in Newcastle, Perth, Melbourne and next year in San Francisco. In 1974 he is included in exhibitions in London, New York and Montreal.

An exhibition of Guy Boyd's sculpture was scheduled to open on May 19 at the Von Bertauch gallery in Newcastle. The exhibition will be open until the end of the month.

— SANDRA FRANKS
Photographs: Gianni Marzella



Above: Guy Boyd with the youngest of his seven children, three-year-old Martin. The beautiful table is more than 200 years old.

1. Bronze bust of fellow artist Mirka Mora, of Melbourne, done by Guy Boyd in 1969.
2. An example of the work of Guy Boyd's father, Merric, done in 1912. This is a portrait head of Merric's brother Martin Boyd who died in Rome only last year.
3. A Guy Boyd sculpture in bronze, entitled Swimmer. His female forms are usually in motion, either bathing, swimming or dancing.
4. Merric Boyd, Guy's father (a photograph taken in 1940). He managed to support his family of five on not much more than \$6 a week, earned from his pottery and sculpture.
5. A painting done by Guy Boyd's grandmother, Emma, of her children and their nurse (about 1888). The infant at left is Guy's father, Merric. Emma Boyd had paintings hung in London as well as Australia.
6. The female form is Guy Boyd's most constant inspiration . . . this 72-inch-high figure is an example.
7. Sculptured head of Guy's mother, Doris, done by his father (about 1912).
8. Kneeling Figure by Guy Boyd (1971).

