

Inspired and admired artist

OBITUARY

**Peter Blizzard, sculptor,
1940 — 2009**

PETER Blizzard died in Ballarat at the age of 69 following a long battle with cancer. He was one of Australia's pre-eminent sculptors and one of a select few to enjoy a reputation overseas.

Peter Blizzard was an inspiring teacher who will be fondly remembered by a generation of sculpture students at the Ballarat CAE and the University of Ballarat. He was also — and perhaps most importantly — a person whose innate kindness and humane outlook took on a spiritual dimension. He saw the best in literally everyone, and was able to extract the best from the very diverse range of people he worked with.

Born into a working class Catholic family in Brunswick in 1940, Blizzard's path to renown as a professional artist was circuitous. Leaving school early, he trained first as a draughtsman and gained employment at the Post Master General's department in what was effectively a graphic design department.

During the early 1960s he completed his formal education while in the employ of the PMG. He became known and respected as a designer of trade fair displays — a grounding and discipline which he stated, on several occasions, proved enormously useful in making convincing submissions to sculpture commissions.

By the late 1960s he realised a



ABOVE: Peter Blizzard and former Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks, at the Ex-PoW memorial dedication ceremony in February 2004. The centre piece of the memorial was Blizzard's work, *Stone Garden, Journey*. **RIGHT:** Peter Blizzard at his studio in Greendale with *Moorabool Earth Totem*, which has become a major focal point of the Ballarat streetscape.

powerful inner need and began creating his own sculpture, which he exhibited in successive *Herald* Outdoor Art Shows where his works gained some critical attention. His earliest work was mostly figurative, but he soon moved on to working in an idiom of abstract geometric forms constructed from steel plate.

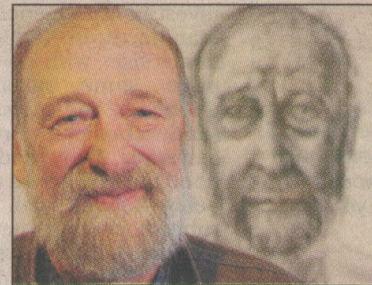
In 1973, Blizzard gained international acclaim as the designer of the official symbol for the 40th International Eucharistic Congress, one of the largest gatherings of the Catholic faithful ever staged in Australia. The symbol that he created captured the essence of the reform that had taken place in the church after Vatican II. It was greatly admired by Pope Paul VI

RIGHT: Peter Blizzard in front of a portrait of himself, sketched by his wife Liz, at the opening of an exhibition in the Learmonth Art Hall.

and he was given a second commission from the Church — the official design for the Papal visit in 1986.

In 1973, Blizzard started teaching graphic design and sculpture at the Ballarat College of Advanced Education. His classes encouraged students to seek direct inspiration from the natural world and the landscape.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw Blizzard achieve a level of critical and peer acclaim. He participated in a number of the



early sculpture triennials and was awarded an acquisitive prize from the City of Caulfield in 1978. In 1984, he was commissioned to construct a monumental outdoor sculpture for the grounds of Ballarat's Gold Museum. The resulting work, *Terrestrial*, is inspired by those geological features of the goldfields — the synclines and anticlines that not only were the source of local clay but also the reefs of quartz from which the gold was extracted.

Retirement from Ballarat

University in 1994 allowed Blizzard to concentrate exclusively on his sculpture which, over the following 15 years, explored some particular theme or concern; exploring the inherent possibilities in a repertoire of forms, signs, glyphs and symbols endlessly recombined like a musical fugue.

Indeed, Blizzard was a talented musician and a jazz player who liked nothing better than jamming with an impromptu group of performers. He was seen thus as recently as his last commercial exhibition at Australian Galleries, last May.

Arguably the work for which Blizzard will be best remembered for is his monumental work, *Stone Garden, Journey*, the memorial to all Australian ex-prisoners of war in the Ballarat Botanical Gardens. Blizzard's enthusiasm for this complex and significant project knew no bounds and to mark the enormous sacrifice made by 35,000 Australians, Ballarat has a sacred precinct that is also a powerful work of art.

Two years ago, just prior to his learning of the reappearance of his illness, the Art Gallery of Ballarat offered Peter a retrospective exhibition. This show, which is currently running in Ballarat until late January, has been realised with the help of his immediate family and his dedicated friends and supporters. It gives Peter a voice even though he is no longer with us.

— Gordon Morrison, Art Gallery of Ballarat director