

The Exact Moment

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Saturday 18 December 1993

THE ELEPHANT'S FOOT

A collaborative work by Maya Starr and Suzannah Barta 1975.

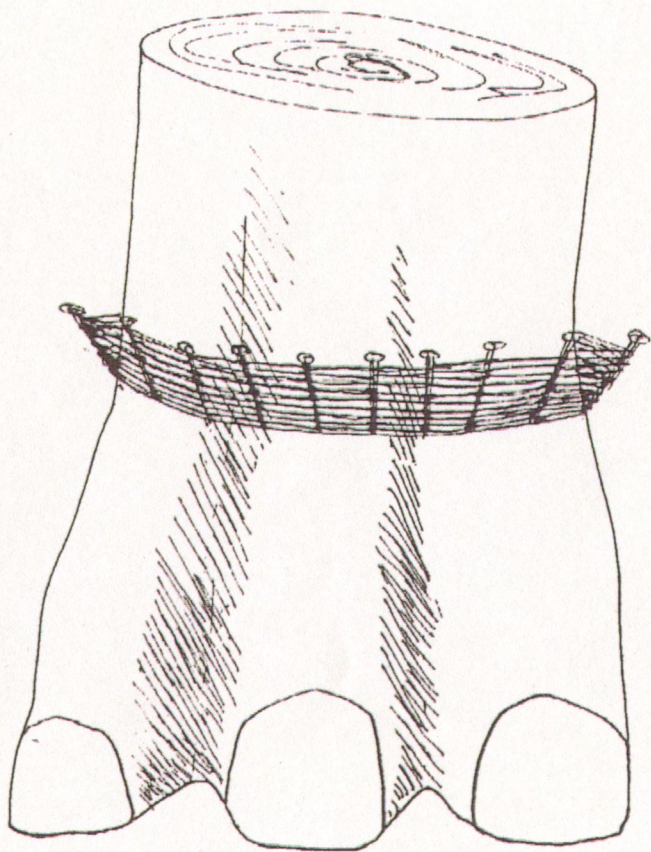
A slice of brownish-grey coloured tree trunk/stump cut close to the base (looking like an elephant's foot) has had a fence of small nails, hitched with brown string, erected around its midriff.

We were playing at the game of making sense/non-sense of the world. When we realized that others didn't understand what we'd made the way we did, we recognised that this was a good way to make mischief. Other people didn't understand the elephant's foot the way we did. We were intimate with it and privy to the stories it held for each of us. Others couldn't possibly understand, only we two special ones, we were separate, we knew what others could not. It felt satisfying to have this knowledge which no one else could have. I felt special, it separated me from others, this object.

I see the object, I see myself. It makes me. It gives me the self. And making becomes the making of the self and the affirmation of the self as separate, as special. And the lesson is in place.

Suzannah Barta, 1993.

The Elephant's Foot.



Executed in wood, brown string & nails. Savannah Park & Maya Starr.

1975?

It was in the most unlikely of places that it first occurred to me that I could become an artist.

I was on the bus and we were leaving the university. Twilight was falling; I gazed out the window at the pearly coral reflection of sky as we circled the artificial lake, the whiteness of the ducks was accentuated as was the greenness of the grass which almost glowed. I was in that receptive frame of mind which comes at the end of a satisfying day; my visual sense seemed heightened with the fading light so that each scene I viewed as we travelled from the outer reaches of suburbia to my home had the clarity of composition of a picture.

I had been attending painting classes in the city whilst studying Fine Art at the university. At this early stage, my paintings could hardly be described as those of a virtuoso, nor had they the redeeming quality of conceptual merit, but within my class of amateur painters I could justly consider my work to have more promise than my peers. Little by little as the weeks passed my handling of materials became more proficient and my technique improved. My inventory of symbols was by now extensive and I felt I could attempt virtually any subject I set my mind to. And so gradually, without my realising it, painting had become the one thing I wanted to do with my life.

I had just handed in an essay on Cezanne, an artist I felt I needed to understand to reach any deeper knowledge of art. After much research and hard work I attained that rare 'moment of enlightenment' at the end of writing an essay when both my theoretical and practical knowledge of painting fused together to bring forth new and meaningful insights. As I sat during my tutorial it seemed that my time spent painting had given me an advantage over the other students who could not imagine the process of how a painting was created...

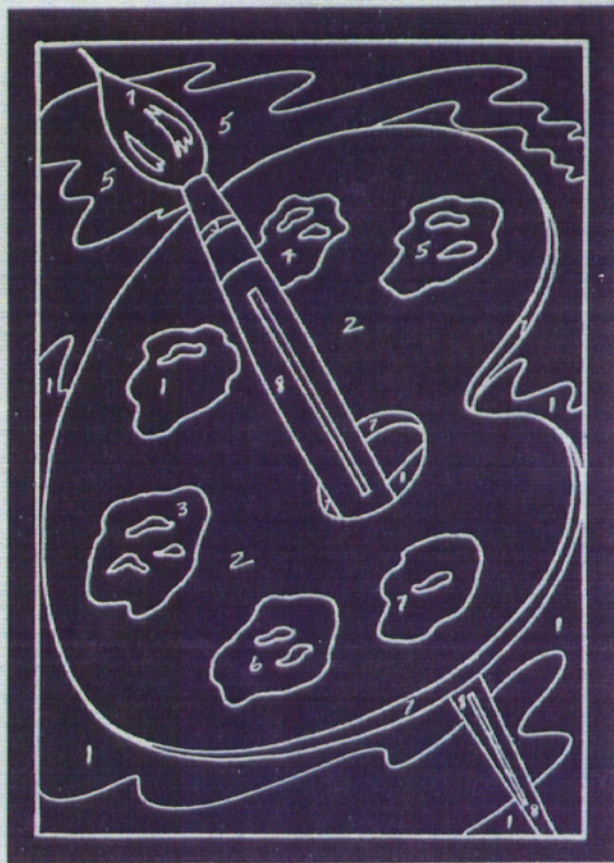
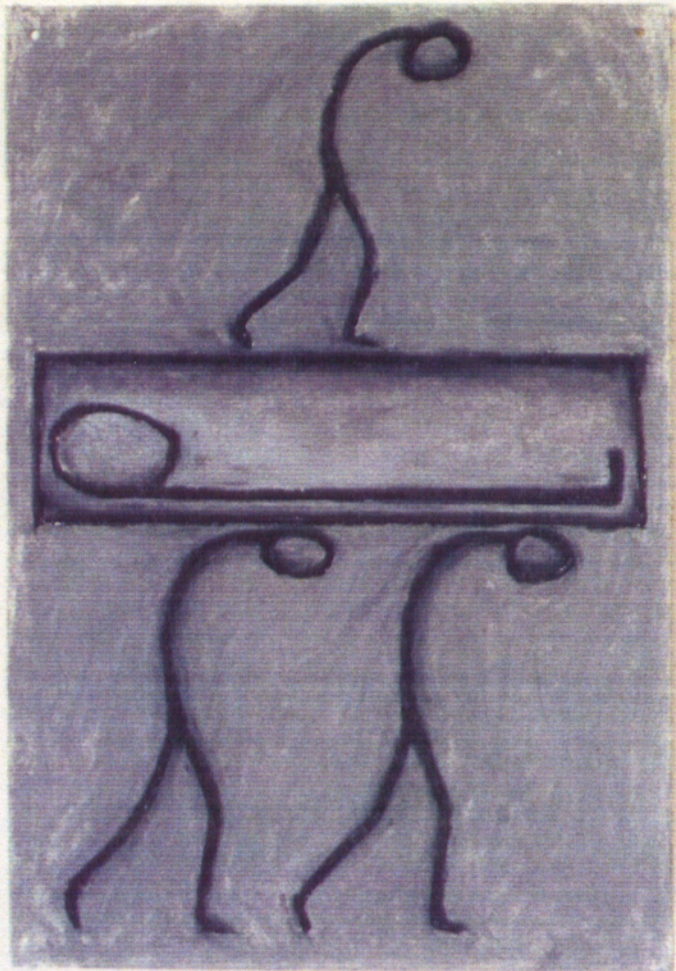
I sat on the bus feeling pleased with myself. I was thinking a strange thought. I thought, 'I am the only person on this bus who is going to become an artist'.

Sandra Bridie, 1993.



Once bitten,
we advance cautiously;
pigeon toed and shuffling,
puff cheeked and bawling
to stumble and trip at the lip of the trench;
at the edge of the edge of the edge.
Let us sink, let us swim
let us sleep.
Amongst the slow boats and the burning bridges
let us gather as ghosts and drink
a toast to the Best and then,
once bitten,
a toast
to the best of the rest of them
Let us dream, let us die,
let us weep.

Andrew Hurle, 1993.



In grade six I sat next to a boy called David Nelson who possessed, what seemed to me, an extraordinary ability to draw from his imagination. What could be called a heightened sense of visual perception and co-ordination in hindsight, appeared to me then as divine providence, and whilst I watched him manufacture these comic distortions of sporting figures, I would wish for nothing more than to be able to draw like him. His brilliance became a benchmark for determining the value of the drawings I did.

At night I would labour over illustrations for my History homework for hours, challenging myself to draw from my mind's eye rather than copying from other sources. There was always a point where I knew I'd done the best I possibly could within my limitations, that it wasn't a tour de force, but it was good enough for the teacher to admire my efforts. I don't remember whether it was because I would recall David Nelson's drawings, but it was at this point that a sense of failure would overcome me and with it a determination that I could wrestle this drawing into perfection. A rugged battle would begin between the vague image in my mind's eye, my Derwent colour pencils and my rubber. What had once been a delicate and suggestive outline of a figure or scene became contorted, buried beneath layers of pencil colour. When I lost the clarity of an image, I would become feverish with a sense of regret and lamenting the image I'd lost would use the rough half of the rubber to strip the image back to the empty page, and start again adding outlines and more layers of Derwents. The problem then was that the after-image of the previous drawing/s would re-appear from deep grooves beyond the surface of the paper, and so I would press more furiously on the lead to hide these white streaks. Eventually the pencil colour would assume that familiar reflective luster of pure lead floating on masses of pure lead, and I knew that the game was up, that to go on any further would risk putting a hole in the now slim fibres of paper remaining. The paper's strength had defined the limits of my possibilities. With a sigh I would go over lost areas with a black felt tip pen and slink off to bed. At night I would dream of beautiful pictures that I had made, and in the morning would rush back to look at the night's work. Surveying the disaster that lay before me I would think of David Nelson and wonder what he'd done.

Callum Morton
1993



Recollections about a moment.

The year was 1982. I was working alone, in a large studio, having finished art school two years earlier. I recall a gradual, if not careful, emptying/simplification of materials, methods, symbols. In relation to this, an increased feeling of being able to breathe again, as I naively worked my way through the areas that excited me visually/philosophically, in the greater historical scheme of things. This particular painting is a product of that time - a step closer, or at least a step along the way. I would have been pleased with myself, pleased with my restraint. Happy that it resembled something familiar; looked like something I'd seen elsewhere in a book or gallery thus connecting me with a context outside myself and my studio. Excited at the thought of the ongoing possibilities for making more work and sustaining a practice, never looking too far into the future. One moment out of a continuum and perhaps a passing thought of "I can do this".

Rose Nolan, 1993.



- 1A The first moment when I thought I wanted to be an artist is on seeing Robert McPherson's 'Where Are You Now Sylvia Holmes', during the Geometric Abstraction exhibition at ACCA, 1986. I can't exactly remember the text, but it was involved with ideas about art which, at the time was inspiring.
- 1B The first time when I felt I could be an artist was in my second year of art school during the process of casting the shape of a cupie doll in Aluminium. I had cut the shape out of polystyrene and added two runners - also made from polystyrene. When it was cast, the aluminium had melted on one runner into a shape that looked like a penis. I decided to leave it and cut the other runner off, under which there was an unexpected hole. I realised then, the significance for myself, of going with the unexpected or so called 'mistakes', as they added to the character of the work, which has continued to be relevant.

Kathy Temin, 1993.

