

REALIST GROUP - KEN SCARLETT.

Born in Brighton 1927, Ken Scarlett was the only child of Janet and Will Scarlett. As an adolescent he wanted to become an artist, which to him meant being a painter. However, as his parents were not wealthy, he accepted an Education Department bond and trained instead to become an art/craft teacher. To his dismay he found the course of training at Caulfield Technical College to be totally inadequate and to have virtually no links with art, past or present. His several attempts to resign were thwarted by the inability of his family to pay the bond.

Nevertheless he has some positive memories of his time at Caulfield Tech. for one member of staff, Stan Brown, allowed him to experiment by making small pieces of sculpture, which were cast solid in type-metal. It was a tentative start.

The year at Melbourne Teachers College in 1949 seemed almost equally sterile except for the fact that he made contact with some left-wing students who introduced him to the Communist Party. The conservative Liberal Party, led by Robert Menzies, was attempting to ban the Communist Party in 1950; it was the year that Ken Scarlett joined the Party.

His first teaching appointment in 1950 was to St Arnaud where he enjoyed painting the dry landscape, the erosion gullies and the stunted gum trees. After a year overseas in 1954, he was appointed to Warragul High School in Gippsland, where the landscape appeared over-whelmingly green. Unable to cope with this ever-present lushness he gave up painting.

For three years, from 1958 he combined study at RMIT with a position as Education Officer at the National Gallery of Victoria. The instructors in the Sculpture Department were George Allen and Len Parr. Allen could be described as an early Modernist, essentially conservative, but a kindly, generous teacher. Len Parr, on the other hand, had just returned from U.K. where he had worked as Henry Moore's assistant. He introduced oxyacetylene welding, which opened up new possibilities, but being essentially a reticent person, he was a somewhat distant teacher.

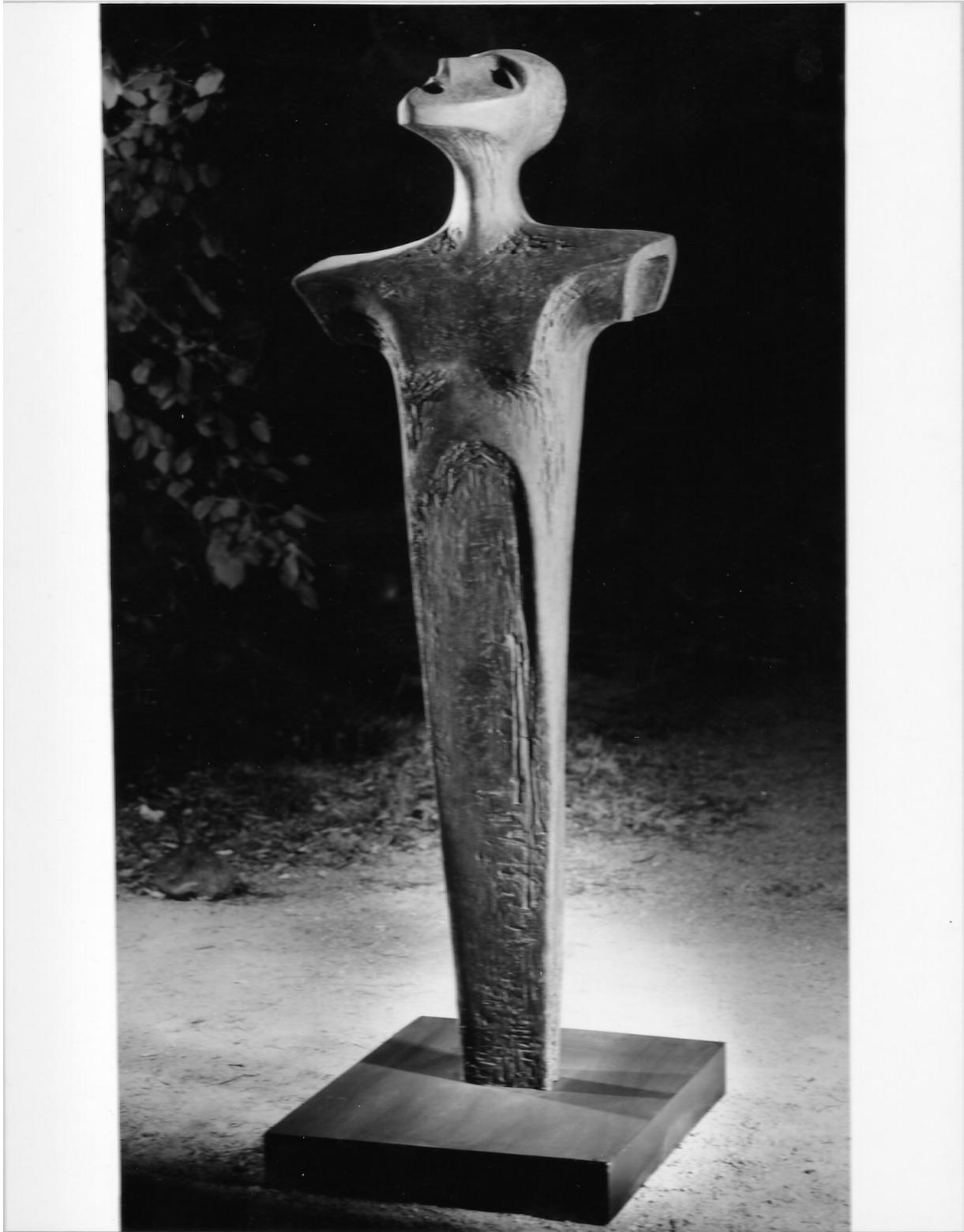
As a Communist teacher Scarlett attended meetings of fellow travelers during the term holidays (fully documented in his ASIO file) and became acquainted with Ailsa O'Connor, also a sculptor. During his time as Education Officer at the NGV he arranged for Noel Counihan, the best known of the Social Realists, to speak at several venues and it was probably Noel Counihan who invited Scarlett to exhibit with the Realist Group. This he did annually from 1963 until 1967. He also took part in an additional exhibition when the group showed at the Newcastle City Art Gallery in 1968.

During the period of the 1950s and 60s - the time of the Cold War - there was the constant threat of atomic war. As early as 1950, in the conservative country town of St Arnaud, Scarlett had (unsuccessfully) attempted to secure

signatures for a petition to Ban the Bomb. The combination of left wing politics and activities within the peace movement directly influenced the subject matter of Scarlett's sculpture: *Fear of War*, 1962, and *The Cry*, 1967, are typical of works produced at this time.



Fear of War, ciment fondu, 1962, 102 x 64 x 33 cm. Private collection.



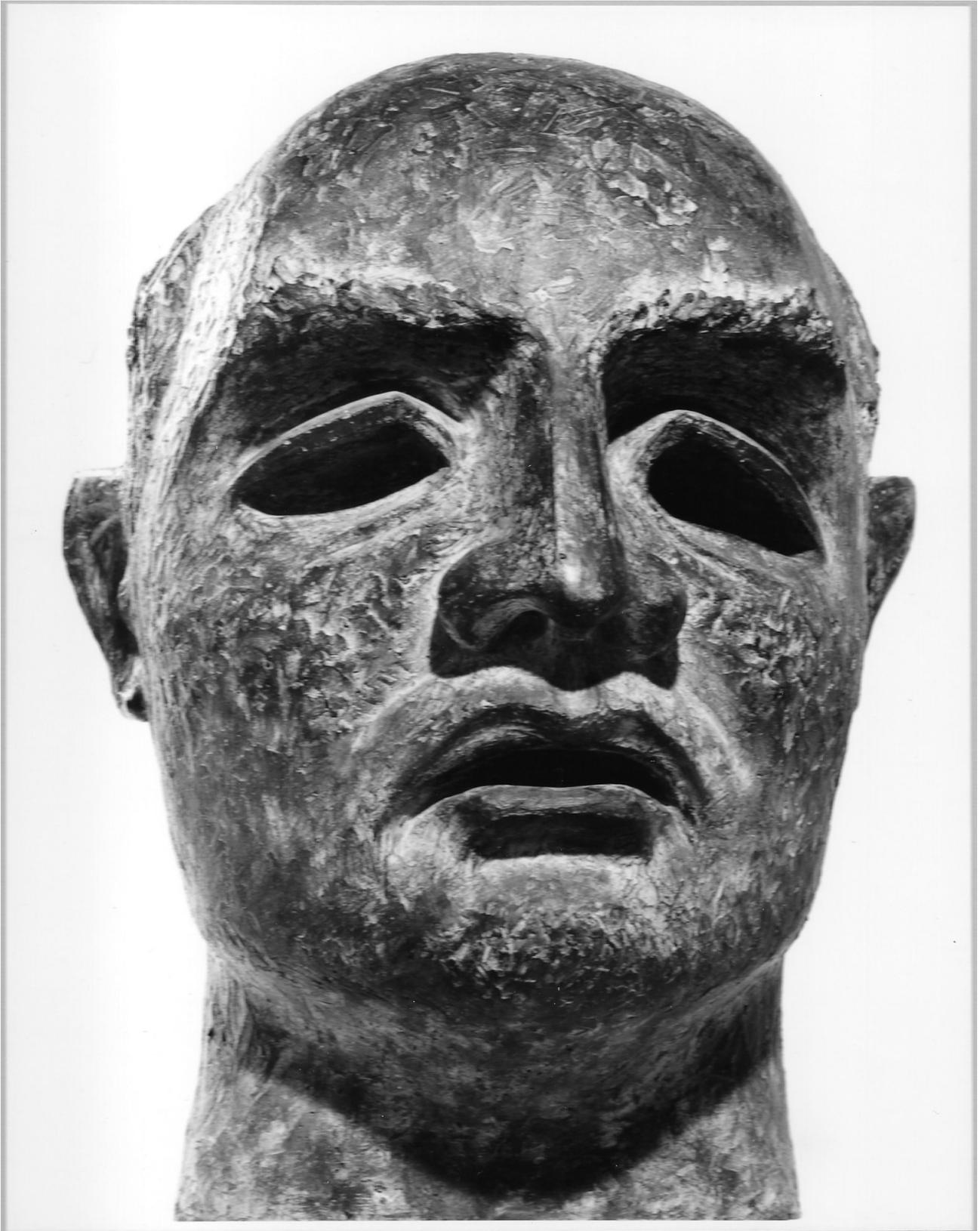
The Cry, 1967, polyester resin and fibre glass, 203 x 68.5 x 25.5 cm.
Collection Ballarat Art Gallery.

In 1963 George Wallace, Governor of Alabama in USA, stated that he stood for 'segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.' He led the ultra-conservative campaign in favour of segregation while progressive forces in USA attempted to de-segregate the schools and to allow the black population equal

educational opportunities. Acknowledging that there are innumerable monuments to kings, queens, politicians, military leaders, poets, but none to political bastards, in 1966 Scarlett modeled a massive, over-life-sized head in ciment fondu. This was mounted on a very high structure with a bronze plaque: Monument to a Segregationist.



Monument to a Segregationist, 1966, cast ciment fondu, Head 61 x 47 x 51 cm. Total height including base 218.5 cm.



The head was later cast in bronze and mounted on a granite base. It is now in the Collection of McClelland Gallery+Sculpture Park.

Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Congress in 1956 had shocked Scarlett, but he optimistically thought that the Australian Communist Party could avoid the dreadful mistakes of the Soviet Union. Subsequently, however, the divisions within the Australian party destroyed any chance of political success; the utopian dream of a co-operative society collapsed and Scarlett let his membership of the Communist Party lapse. He continued to make sculpture, but moved towards abstracted versions of the human figure. The last exhibition of his sculpture was held in 1975 in a show called the 'Artists for Labor and Democracy' at Toorak Art Gallery, South Yarra.

In the following years Scarlett transferred his interest to writing about Australian sculpture and to curating numerous exhibitions of contemporary sculpture.

Publications.

- 1979 *Australian Sculptors: Exhibition Lists*, Melbourne State College.
- 1980 *Australian Sculptors*, Thomas Nelson (Melbourne)
- 1983 *The Sculpture of John Davis*, Hyland House (Melbourne)
- 1993 *Contemporary Sculpture in Australian Gardens*, Craftsman House (Sydney)
- 2003 *Rhythms of Life: The Art of Andrew Rogers*, Macmillan (Melbourne)
- 2004 *Elgee Park: Sculpture in the Landscape*, Macmillan (Melbourne)
- 2005 *Limited Recall: a fictional autobiography*, Macmillan (Melbourne)
- 2009 *Elgee Park: Sculpture in the Landscape*, Macmillan (Melbourne)
Second edition.
- 2014 *Max Lyle. Journeys With Sculpture*. Jointly published by Max Lyle and Eastgate Gallery. Text by Ken Scarlett.

Represented in the following Collections

Melbourne State College (now University of Melbourne)
McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park
Art Gallery of Ballarat
Gold Coast City Art Gallery
Mildura Arts Centre.

Ken Scarlett 2016