

REALIST GROUP - GEORGE LUKE

George Luke, who was born in Melbourne in 1920, studied at Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University) from 1936 until 1940, where he had Napier Waller as instructor in drawing. He also attended the National Gallery School from 1937 until 1939, where he met and became very friendly with Yosl Bergner, a young Jewish painter. They were both politically of the left and became part of the group that met at the Swanston Hotel and at the workshop of Bill Dolphin, the violin maker. George Luke became friends with Noel Counihan and Vic O' Connor, later joining the Communist Party. He exhibited at the Jewish Kadema in Carlton in 1939 with Bergner, Counihan and O'Connor.

Luke joined the AIF IN 1940 and served in the army during World War 11, discharged in 1946, he sailed for England, not returning for three years. While overseas he travelled in England, Denmark, France, Italy and Yugoslavia.

Coming back to Melbourne in 1950 he worked as an illustrator for the *Argus* and other newspapers and magazines such as *The Bulletin*, *Woman's Day* and the *Brisbane Telegraph*. Rather than listing him as a painter or sculptor, some references label Luke as a cartoonist. (1) Moving to Brisbane, where he lived for the rest of his life, he worked as a designer in the ABC Television studios from 1960 until 1976.

After showing in several mixed exhibitions in Brisbane, Canberra and Melbourne Luke was invited to exhibit his sculpture at the Victorian Artists Society Galleries in 1963 with the Realist Group. Alan McCulloch gave Luke a favourable mention in his review. 'Luke, who comes from Queensland, endows his semi-romantic heads of Henry Lawson, Maxim Gorki or the more socially conscious The Judge with considerable force.' (1)

Luke built a reputation as a sculptor, showing in the 'Mildura Prize for Sculpture' in 1964 and being included in the prestigious 'Recent Australian Sculpture' exhibition, which toured all capital cities during 1964-65. Luke maintained strong links with the members of the Realist Group and when he had his first solo show in 1964 at the Argus Gallery in Melbourne Noel Counihan opened his exhibition.

In his review of the 1965 Realist Group exhibition, Noel Counihan, writing in the Communist *Guardian* said, 'Luke's child study and wittily observed luteplayer, with its strong inner movement are characteristic.' (3) In the 1966 Realist Group show Luke exhibited *Legal Eagle* in 'Coldcast Metal', which was the current terminology for the new material, fibreglass and polyester resin. Writing in the *Guardian*, Eve Glenn, gave more praise to Luke than most of the other artists, commenting that, 'The two busts by Luke were full of character and had a dynamic plastic quality lacking in the rest of the work exhibited.' (4)

When the Realist Group were invited to exhibit at the Newcastle City Art Gallery in 1968, the Gallery published a Monthly News Sheet, in which it was stated that the group 'emphasises the importance of realistic figuration in art, distinct, as they assert, from the antipodean mythologizing of such artists as Sidney Nolan, Arthur and David Boyd and Albert Tucker.' (5)

Luke exhibited widely in subsequent years: Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra and Mildura but will be remembered in Melbourne by those who visited his solo exhibitions at Australian Galleries in 1966, '69, '71, his 'Legal Studies' of 1973 and a shared exhibition with the ceramicist, Robert Mair in 1977. His fascination with the sculpture of Daumier was evident in his exhibition of legal identities, shown at the Bar Association in Melbourne during 1978.

George Luke died in Brisbane in 1995.

Represented in the following collections.

Art Gallery of South Australia.
Australian War Memorial, Canberra.
Carossa Hospital, Brisbane.
Flinders University, South Australia.
McClelland Gallery+Sculpture Park, Victoria.
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.
Rockhampton Art Gallery, Queensland.
Sandringham Library, Victoria.

References.

- 1 In 1982 George Luke published a book of cartoons by various artists, entitled, 'It's All Quite Legal.'
- 2 Alan McCulloch, 'New talent in field of realism', *Herald* (Melbourne) 5/6/1963.
- 3 Noel Counihan, 'Realist painters' show displays continued vitality' *Guardian* (Melbourne) August 1965.
- 4 Eve Glenn, 'Realist Group's New Art Exhibition', *Guardian* (Melbourne) 4/8/1966.
- 5 *Monthly News Sheet*, June, 1968. 'The Realist Group', Newcastle City Art Gallery.

Information selected from archives held by Ken Scarlett and Australian Galleries.

Ken Scarlett 2016

"Herald" 5/6/63

ART

by Alan McCulloch

New talent in field of realism

IDEAS in art change so rapidly that the prospect of an exhibition of realist art, once quite exciting to contemplate, now seems rather old hat.

However, the present realist exhibition at the Victorian Artists' Society turns out to be more lively than expected.

New recruits have been roped in to the realist fold and some of them spring a few surprises.

George Luke, for example, has done what some local sculptor should have done a long while ago — discovered the sculptures of the Belgian, Meunier.

Luke, who comes from Queensland, endows his semi-romantic heads of Henry Lawson, Maxim Gorki, or the more socially conscious "The Judge" — with considerable force.

Another "conscript," James Phillips, of Sydney, escapes from his more characteristic role of illustrator to produce a fetching impressionistic study of Benelong Point, site of that nerve-touching prospect, the Sydney Opera House.

Serenity

The sonorous, low-toned pictures of Alan Baker, of Perth (10-14), are even less familiar to Melbourne people and in the context of this show establish an air of monumental serenity.

James Cant's impenetrable thicket of spiky twigs (15) finds a competent echo in David Armfield's paintings of undergrowth (1-9) which are too paint-conscious to come wholly to life, and Peter Miller seems to be drifting warily (52, 54) into the orbit of Drysdale's celebrated "Moody's Pub."

and one of his best sketches to date, "The Long Bar" (65).

Of the others, McClintock's work, except for a single ink sketch, "Politician," is dull; Maurice Carter's "Value" (18) has the frenzied quality of an early Perceval, and two paintings by Ray Jones may be noted for their sombre lyricism.

Neither Keith Nicol's Boydian landscapes, nor Malcolm Cameron's competent transcriptions seem to have a place here. Hymie Slade's "Street Musician" looks like a detailed cut from a Breughel, and three innocuous works by Wigley give little idea of the true capabilities of that highly individual artist.

Jack Freeman, Bernard Rust, Mary Hammond, John Santry, Ailsa O'Connor, Ray Jones, Les Flood, and Ken Scarlet are the others whose works more or less fit the context of the show.

★
CURRENT fashions for primitive art have turned many of the feathered ceremonial ornaments of, let us say, Oceania, into precious *objets d'art*.

Minus their totemic significance, but retaining their patient craftsmanship and decorative charm, these objects have introduced a barbaric note to many a fashionable parlor of the Western world.

An example of this are the sculptures of Antonio Rodriguez, dancer turned sculptor, who hails, not from Oceania, but from the West Indies.

His work is on show at the South Yarra galleries.

His origins don't matter particularly, for the experience of the theatre has adapted him, neatly and choreographically, to fit any primitive art role.

He fits his present role very well indeed.

For while his work is utilitarian in many



"The Judge" by George Luke, Queensland sculptor whose work helps to expand realist horizons at the exhibition at the Victorian Artists' Society.

instances, lacks the weight, muscle and energy of a truly sculptural form, a certain eclect evolves from its primitive thoroughness and balletic spit and polish.

It is at its most primitive in the head study in wax; the large "Salvation" recalls the cycle-of-life carvings of the Sepik River in conception, though not in style, but the best things shown are the wood carvings of naturalistic objects such as sea horses.

A suitable background to the sculptures is provided by a group of paintings which are in effect a hangover from the inaugural show of two weeks ago.

Daws gouaches are probably the most assertive of the abstracts shown, which include new works by Laycock, Rose, Jones-Roberts and Dary! Hill.

★
OVERALL impression of a large exhibition by art teachers, at the Leve-

son Street galleries, is of art evolving from an established curriculum.

Seeing that most of the exhibitors are in fact involved in dispensing a curriculum, this effect is inevitable.

The show thus presents well-packaged versions of: formalism (13,28), realism (35, 36), post-impressionism (42, 57), expressionism (62), abstract-expressionism (6), purism (5), primitivism (8), cubism (54), and formal abstraction (78, 79).

Apart from a well-painted little study by Ernest Smith (59), Alan Warren's formally accomplished "Melbourne Suburbs," and the two modestly decorative pictures by Stewart Wackett (70, 71), few individual personalities emerge.

The way to look at the exhibition is collectively, in which case it leaves us with the comforting thought of students being conscientiously instructed according to the letter of the rule.



EXHIBITION
OF SCULPTURE

BY
GEORGE LUKE

ARGUS GALLERY
SEPT. 21ST - OCT. 2ND, 1964

GUARDIAN 24/9/64

Satire, social comment in sculptor's exhibition

(By an Art Correspondent)

Brisbane sculptor George Luke is showing exciting work at the Argus Gallery.

His first one-man exhibition of sculpture in Melbourne was opened by Noel Counihan on Monday. Those who saw examples of his work in a Melbourne Realist Group exhibition some time ago will welcome the opportunity to see a wide range of his sculpture.

George Luke is obviously greatly interested in his fellow man, particularly the men, women and children he sees around him. Always he observes them realistically, without flattery or any touch of sentimentality.

Even in his Self Portrait there is this sense of realistic honesty—and very few artists are able to view themselves without a touch of self-flattery.

The wide range of his work includes some beautifully sensitive portraits of children such as Penny and Yasmine, a forceful study of a part Aboriginal girl and a very strong head of

Jim Healy. The latter virile study was modelled from photographs after Jim Healy's death, and will be permanently displayed in Healy House, Communist Party headquarters in Sydney.

Vigor, movement and life is apparent in much of the sculpture whether it be the heads, figures or the Bison, which, for all its bulk, appears fully capable of movement.

Strong in silhouette, yet relatively small in size, many of the works carry very well. Don Quixote seated on his horse is first seen at the far end of the long gallery, but is unmistakably the humorous yet pathetic character from Cervantes' novel. The satirical is again present in the freely modelled Cavalier.

Satire and social comment combine very forcefully in such works as *The Judge*, while *Hunger* drives home its message through the free modelling and the simple yet very strong forms.

● George Luke has links with a variety of European sculptors and painters such as Daumier,

Rodin, Epstein and Kathe Kollwitz, yet these various influences are brought together in a vigorous personal style.

It is to be hoped that those who admire the broad humanitarian social vision of George Luke will show their appreciation by acquiring some of his works.

● The Argus Gallery is in the Argus Building on the corner of Elizabeth and Latrobe Streets. Hours 10 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays. Exhibition closes Friday, October 2. Open next Saturday, September 26, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

THE DIRECTORS OF AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES

invite you to an exhibition of drawings, paintings and sculpture by

GEORGE LUKE

AT 35 DERBY STREET, COLLINGWOOD

ON TUESDAY, 12th AUGUST, 1969, FROM 4 p.m. TO 6.30 p.m.

Sherry

Thereafter until 26th August, 10 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., Monday to Friday



George Luke, *The Barrister*, Height 46 cm. Australian Galleries 1969.