

**Dadswell speech – 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024**

**Outside 21 Trelawney Street, Woollahra 11am**

**Thank you Councillor Carmichael, for giving such a comprehensive outline of Dadswell's career and his links to Woollahra and the Eastern suburbs of Sydney. I can think of no more appropriate artist deserving of a plaque to commemorate their time in this municipality than Lyndon Dadswell. It is wonderful to stand here today in front of this beautiful house where he lived with his family, made many artworks, and throughout the week left each day to work at the National Art School, or East Sydney Technical College, as it was known as then.**

**Sadly I never met Dadswell myself, but in my capacity as historian at the National Art School, I have interviewed his students and colleagues, and have met his son Peter, and his daughter Penny on many occasions when she donated some important archival material, sculpture and sketchbooks to the National Art School Collection. These materials have broadened the scope of our archive of the period, and have already been used many times by researchers and in exhibitions. Dadswell's influence on students and colleagues at the National Art School is still felt today, and he is one of our most esteemed alumni.**

**As mentioned, he studied sculpture under British born sculptor Rayner Hoff from 1926 –1929, and his sculpture instruction consisted of the study of antique casts and the life model, casting methods, architectural design and human anatomy. This early instruction gave him the skill base needed to expand his practice in later years, helping him formulate his own practice and teaching methods. Rayner Hoff recognised his talent, and even though he hadn't as yet completed his Diploma, Hoff encouraged him to leave East Sydney Tech in 1929, and to take the opportunity to assist on the commission for the *Shrine of Remembrance* in Melbourne. Dadswell assisted sculptor Paul Montford to create 12 large panels on this nationally significant work, which can still be seen today on the interior of that Memorial.**

**Critical response to the *Shrine of Remembrance* was positive, and the work proved to be a great boost to his career. Dadswell returned to Sydney after**

working on this commission where he won the Wynne prize in 1933, only the third sculptor to do so.

He used the prize money to travel to London for two years further study at the Royal Academy. Here he saw the work of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, travelled widely and began to experiment with new sculptural forms.

When Dadswell returned to Sydney in 1937, Rayner Hoff remembered his early talent and offered him a teaching position. He was indeed one of the many students at the National Art School who came back as a teacher in later years.

Only a few months later, Hoff died suddenly at the age of 42, and Dadswell was given the mammoth task of running the sculpture department. He became Head of Sculpture, a position he held for almost 30 years.

As we have heard, Dadswell's teaching career was interrupted by WW2, and he was badly wounded in Syria in 1941. After pressure from friends and colleagues in Australia, he was removed from active service, and worked as an Official War Artist in a studio with another well-known war artist Ivor Hele in Cairo.

Although not fully recovered from his war injuries, Dadswell returned to teaching at the National Art School in 1943. He gained a reputation as a progressive teacher at the art school, and supervised the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme students who returned after serving in WW2 themselves. They were given scholarships to study at the National Art School. Many in this group later became influential sculptors and teachers, and they included Robert Klippel, Oliffe Richmond, Bert Flugelman, Owen Broughton, Alan Ingham and Tom Bass.

By 1950 Dadswell had widened the scope of the sculpture course to include assemblage, wire and tin construction and in 1955 he introduced oxy acetylene welding. Much loved by the students, who called him 'Dadsie' he participated in art school balls and parties, even dressing in a tutu in 1951 for an absurd ballet performance by sculpture teachers in front of some amused students and other staff members.

He also made close friends amongst his fellow teachers at NAS. As mentioned he worked in a studio behind colleagues Douglas Dundas and Dorothy Thornhill's House in Woollahra, and was also close to the teachers Frank Hinder and Paul Beadle. Both the latter teachers participated in the dance concert with Dadswell. Also in tutus.

Despite the levity, he was a hard working teacher, and became a senior lecturer at NAS in 1953, and Head of the Division of Fine Arts from 1966 to 1967. Effectively Head of the National Art School.

Ron Robertson-Swann was a student of Dadswell's from 1957-59, and he found him to be an inspiring teacher, who ran an experimental sculpture course, modernising the traditional subjects at NAS, introducing a critical aspect to the course and exercises that made the students think imaginatively.

Dadswell's interest in contemporary art education was rewarded he was awarded Fullbright, Smith Mundt and Carnegie Scholarships. He left Australia for a year in late 1957 to study art schools in America, returning with a new energy and plan to introduce a more Bauhaus like and inclusive course to the National Art School. Students such as Ian McKay and Peter Powditch responded well to the spirit of enquiry generated by Dadswell at this time.

It's hard to believe that, as well as contributing so much to the development of the sculpture department at the school, at the same time Dadswell established a career in Sydney as one of the most progressive and visible of Australia's public sculptors. His sixty years of activity spanned most of the developments in twentieth century sculptural practice, and he is widely credited as a pioneer of modern sculpture in Australia. Margel Hinder would claim that there was 'hardly a sculptor in Sydney who was not indebted to Lyndon in some measure.'

By the 1950s his work was becoming increasingly more abstract, and he continued to gain large commissions for public works throughout Australia.

**After he retired from teaching in 1968, Dadswell re-committed himself to studio sculpture instead of large commissions, and concentrated on a series of freestanding abstracts that he'd begun in 1963. These critically acclaimed works formed the basis of his first solo exhibition in 1968 in Farmer's Blaxland Galleries.**

**Due to ill health, Dadswell could not continue working as a sculptor after 1974, but he made around 1500 drawings before his death in 1986, some of which we have in the National Art School Collection.**

**Because of his long association with the art school, his vision and his encouragement of the personal development of students, Dadswell is remembered as a much loved and respected teacher at the school. Many thanks to his family, who have worked so hard to keep his legacy alive.**

**I hope that once this plaque is unveiled, the residents of Woollahra will be more aware of the influential and talented sculptor who lived and worked amongst them for so many years.**

**Deborah Beck OAM**