

## **A History of the Association of Sculptors of Victoria Inc. 1932 to 2002**

During the Depression of the early 1930's Victorian sculptors were literally struggling to survive.

Few people understood or appreciated sculpture and even fewer could afford to buy, resulting in some professional exhibitions failing to sell a single work.

The lion's share of the available commissions was going to Paul Montford, a well-known English sculptor who had migrated a few years earlier and was completing the Shrine of Remembrance sculpture.

In 1932 W. Leslie Bowles called a meeting of the Melbourne professionals, Wallace Anderson, Orlando Dutton, Ola Cohn, George Allen and Charles Oliver, to consider the foundation of a Sculptors' Society. The purpose being to promote sculpture within the community and to encourage competitions for major commissions. It was hoped that some of the commissions going to Montford would eventually be shared by the Society members.

The Sculptors' Society of Australia was formed with Bowles, elected as Secretary being the only office bearer. He held that position during the life of the Society. Paul Montford, Raynor Hoff of Sydney and Daphne Mayo of Brisbane were invited to join the Society after its formation and all accepted. Later two younger professional sculptors, Lyndon Dadswell and Stanley Hammond, were also invited to become members.

Over the ensuing decade the Society succeeded in its objective by helping to promote seven competitions for major public sculptures. Of these Bowles won four, Hammond two and Anderson one; none of the other members being successful. Owing to the death of members and the upheaval of war, activity ceased and the Society was not reformed until the cessation of hostilities.

In 1947 Orlando Dutton was President of the Victorian Artists' Society, he encouraged sculptors to join and formed a sculpture group within that society. A special annual sculpture exhibition was provided by the VAS for a few years until the sculptors concerned felt the need for their own society.

Stanley Hammond, practising sculptor, and George Allen, Head of the Sculpture School RMIT were asked to prepare a constitution for the new society to be named the Victorian Sculptors' Society based on that of the Royal British Sculptors.

It was decided that this Society should promote sculpture in the community and conduct competitions for professional sculptors. It should also encourage young sculptors and students and provide opportunities for them to exhibit and gain knowledge by social contact with practising sculptors. To achieve this end it consisted of a President, a Council, full members and associates; and it was to hold annual exhibitions of members' work.

The Victorian Sculptors' Society was formed in 1949 with Victor Greenhalgh the first president, followed by George Allen, Stanley Hammond, Ray Ewers, Andor Meszaros, Jeffery Wilkinson, Lenton Parr, Ken Scarlett and Charles Miller.

For some years the Society achieved its objectives, until problems arose as to who should be full members and who should remain associates. The idea of including all those interested in producing sculpture was threatening the worthy contribution being made by the Society. Around the same time in 1967 a splinter group considering that its interests would be better served by exhibiting as the Centre Five left the Society. The Centre 5 consisted of Clifford Last, Inge King, Vincas Jomantas, Tesutis Zikaras and Lenton Parr. There were common characteristics shared amongst their styles and they felt that exhibiting together would be to their advantage. The problem lay not in exhibiting together, but rather with the fact that they resigned from the Society and in effect set themselves up in competition with it. The result was a severe split in the very small sculpture world of the day the repercussions of which are still felt today. Amongst those who stayed with the Society the feeling was that the Centre 5 could have exhibited as a group and still remained members of the Society to support sculpture as a whole. They gained the support of art academics and critics and because of the competitive nature of the resignation, the Society was left out of most official consideration.

Late in 1967 the Society disbanded and a new body with a simpler constitution, namely the Association of Sculptors of Victoria was formed. Andor Meszaros was its president and most of the practising sculptors from the former society were members, together with some younger sculptors. In this form it struggled for a couple of years, with the Annual Exhibitions the main events.

At a meeting of the Association in 1969, some of the younger members expressed dissatisfaction with the way that the Association was being run and claimed it would be better served if run by younger members. Andor Meszaros resigned to give the young members an opportunity. Clive Murray-White was elected president. The Association lingered on a few months before it expired.

Early in 1971 Charles Miller called a meeting of members of the defunct Association with the intention of restarting the Association. Miller was elected president and a new simple constitution was drawn up. The Association continued in this form until 1981 - some of its presidents being Stanley Hammond, Karl Duldig, Ernest Fries and Michael Meszaros. It continued its tradition of holding an annual exhibition and arranging other occasional exhibitions and competitions. At this time the Association not only met at the Ola Cohn Centre but also ran life modelling sessions and weekend workshops. This level of activity diminished as the CAE, to whom Ola had left her home, increased their usage of the Centre.

In 1981 some of the more professional members felt that the Association was becoming too much concerned with the hobbyist and a new more comprehensive constitution was adopted. This reintroduced the categories of full and associate membership, but on a looser basis than before, and also introduced an executive system of administration.

In addition to its annual exhibition the Association conducts the Tina Wentcher Prize for sculptors under 35 years of age which began in 1976 and now alternates annually with the Andor Meszaros Prize.

1985 saw the first Shell Australia acquisitive prize, initiated and organized by the Association. From 1982 the Rotary Club of Kew developed a sculpture section with significant prizes, conducted by the Association. In 1984, in conjunction with the Library Promotion committee, a travelling show was sent around Victorian public libraries for a year.

Also in 1985 for the first time the Association recognized its own members work by awarding the William Hoggan Thomas Memorial Award donated by member Mrs. Margaret Gunnensen Thomas in memory of her husband. The Mabel Pryde Memorial Prize was awarded in conjunction with the William Hoggan Thomas Award and was first offered in 1990 by Mr. George Pryde in memory of his wife. The Pryde Prize terminated in 2003.

In more recent years the Association has continued the tradition of having its annual exhibitions in the foyers of major city buildings. It has used the Rialto, 161 Collins Street and for the last six years we have occupied the Telstra Building's foyer. Sales have steadily increased reflecting the higher public profile that sculpture has achieved in the last decade. The numbers of people attending and the level of media attention have also reflected this trend.

The introduction of the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show in 1996 at the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens brought the

opportunity to stage our second major annual exhibition. This is open to both members and non-members and puts sculpture before an enormous public, resulting in sales and commissions. It is an example of the Association's policy of working for the good of all sculptors. In the same vein were the submissions we have made regarding commissioning procedures for public art and to the Myer inquiry into the visual arts. The first resulted in a new set of guidelines for the conduct of public art commissions as a result of a letter sent to Premier/Arts Minister Jeff Kennett. These have since had an influence on the project undertaken by NAVA on all aspects of art administration.

The Association continues to offer prizes to both members and non-members. As well as the Wentcher, Meszaros and Thomas/Pryde prizes we have awards from Solid Solutions and money prizes and honourable mentions at the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show.

As a result of all this activity, membership has increased in the last few years to about 140, although there is considerable turnover with members discontinuing and new ones joining.

After nearly 30 years of meeting at the Ola Cohn Centre we had to find a new meeting venue due to the parking problems created by Friday night football at the MCG. Most recently we have been involved in the campaign to prevent the Council for Adult Education from selling the property and at the time of writing we are negotiating the future use of the Centre. We are hoping to regain access for our meetings.

The new computer technology has enabled us to create our own web site and email address and together with our entries in the White and Yellow Page phone books means that we are more publicly accessible than ever before.

We have published a very useful goods and services guide, now in its third edition, which is available free to members and pays for itself through advertising. The services and supplies directory is also accessible through our web site.

Overall the Association has increased its activity in every respect - membership, exhibitions, lobbying, publications, publicity and web site. Its public profile is therefore much increased resulting in greater respect for sculpture.