



Clive Murray-White Museum.

INVITATION

OPENING

Friday 1 February 6.00pm

To be opened by
Charles Nodrum, Director
Charles Nodrum Gallery

EXHIBITION

26 January to 24 March 2013

MUSEUM is the latest exhibition from pre-eminent Gippsland artist Clive Murray-White to draw from antiquity in order to elucidate the present. Working with his muse Iris Bendor, Murray-White presents a suite of new marble heads, which transcend the tradition of marble sculpture to form an eloquent enquiry into art-making today.



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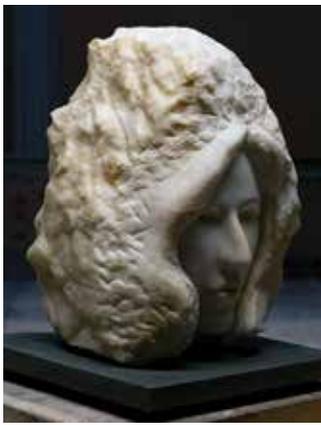
Monday to Friday 10.00am to 5.00pm
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FREE ENTRY



Gippsland Art Gallery is proudly owned and operated by Wellington Shire Council with support from the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria

IMAGE: Clive MURRAY-WHITE, *i-luru*, 2011
Chillagoe marble, granite, corten steel
Sculpture 67 x 45.5 x 83cm; Stand 92 x 50 x 75cm
Courtesy the artist and Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne



PARABLES IN STONE The recent work of Clive Murray-White

Simon Gregg
Curator, Gippsland Art Gallery

Clive Murray-White's latest exhibition *Museum* is anything but. If we think of a museum as a kind of cultural tomb, where objects of aesthetic and historical value go to die, then Murray-White is enacting a reversal of this process. His finely sculpted marble heads restore life and vitality to ancient pieces of stone, returning them from the dead to become active participants in life. Each piece exerts a strange presence; not merely restored to life the marble bristles with a strangely charged energy, as if the artist's application of labour has resulted in some intangible alchemic process.

This said, *Museum* is a most apt title. Once a perpetrator of conceptual events and subversive installations, Murray-White was more of an 'ideas man'. Today the ideas are still in abundance, but his output has become defined by the commanding and austere marble heads that emerge from his Cowwarr-based studio. Once installed into a gallery or other viewing environment, these heads radiate the kind of magnetic aura one associates with antiquities. On one hand, there is the marble itself—millions of years old—with the history of millennia inbuilt into its fabric. Then there are the faces—staring out through eyes that themselves embody eternity.

One of the enduring problems for the artist is how to be contemporary and relevant, while remaining faithful to the history of

art. For Clive Murray-White, the solution is to be found in marble. 'It's pliable, like paint', he says, and indeed few, if any, artists in the world today use the medium in quite such a way. 'Marble is as free as a piece of paper. No-one in history has realised it'. Marble lends a sense of antiquity to his work (we may recall Greek and Roman classical sculpture), while at the same time he invests each piece with a freshness and candour quite at odds with our traditional understanding of the medium. Murray-White retains the minimal materiality of his early works within a mould whose references span centuries, establishing him as a kind of 'Classical Minimalist'.

The muse (in another reference to the 'Museum') for Murray-White's new body of work is Israeli-Dutch author Iris Bendor, a recent resident of the Cowwarr Art Space. Iris' face, to put it bluntly, has many attractions for Clive. He writes: 'I often try to use models whose facial features are under-represented in Western Art, and then give them the same sculptural roles as Venus, Joan d'Arc etc'.¹ In this admission Murray-White makes explicit the theatrical nature of his work.

His 'muses' are always real people—usually women—in whose faces he finds an element of mystery. In carving their features in marble, he allows the different nuances to emerge. In the case of Iris, her

appearance was influenced by the 'misbehaving characters' in her new, as yet untitled book. Her face appears on one block which looks like Uluru—inspired by her move to Alice Springs. In each work Murray-White refuses to repeat himself, finding instead different solutions to each problem. He turns accidents to advantage, and incorporates the inherent characteristics of each marble block into his finished work. One face, for instance, is carved onto a block whose reverse features a large, smooth hole, which by the artist's reckoning is 25 million years old.

The different textures and colours of each marble block gives each face a unique appearance. Some are sharp and wakeful, while others appear more distant and ancient. 'I know I'm onto it when I get the rock almost thinking', Murray-White says. He sees each rock beginning as a 'readymade'. 'It's a slice of the ground we live on. [Working on it] takes you into areas of time, such as how long the planet will last. It becomes an exemplar of something much larger'.

Even in this contemporary application, the history of marble is inescapable. We are constantly reminded of other artists—'Nearly every chisel mark is owned by another artist' Murray-White admits. 'Here—this is Michelangelo. And this—Bernini'. But this inbuilt tradition comes with surprising benefits. Noting the natural

curvature and pockets in one marble block, the artist quips that he has been given 'a free Henry Moore'.

In characteristically subversive spirit, Murray-White presents each marble head on a geometric stand, intended to reference the Minimalist history of his practice. There are many other references—some obvious, others less so—such as Giacometti, whose early twentieth-century work is one of the surprising cues for Murray-White's inclination toward sculptural heads. Giacometti, according to Murray-White, saw humanity as 'eroded to the core', but he gave his works 'intelligent heads to think out of the mess'. In Murray-White's own works today, the body has completely eroded, leaving just the 'intelligent head'; a silent vestibule of thought.

Museum, then, is a history of sculpture, and a sculpture of history. Each work transcends its surroundings, while becoming part of it. This is why Murray-White photographs his works within their surroundings. 'They can dissociate from the environment, but shouldn't. They directly relate to the human beings passing by'. Each work is consistent in its inconsistency; they are all purposefully different, in size, finish, and presentation. Much like the artist himself, these works extend a long artistic trajectory whose path is pre-ordained, but whose destination remains a mystery.

Clive Murray-White: Museum

26 January to 24 March 2013

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Design: Lesley Scott / Simon Gregg

Notes

¹ Clive Murray-White, email to the author, 3 October 2012
All other quotes from Clive Murray-White in conversation with the author, 3 October 2012.

Images

LEFT: Clive MURRAY-WHITE, *y-i*, 2011
Chillagoe marble, granite, galvanised steel
Sculpture 56 x 40 x 46cm; Stand 83 x 60 x 60cm
Courtesy the artist and Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne

RIGHT: Clive Murray-White working in his studio, 2011
Photograph by Angela Lynkushka

Gippsland Art Gallery

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