



Face to Face

Clive Murray-White

Words by Melissa Farley. Pictures by Lisa Baker.

For someone who spends a lot of time photographing and studying others, Clive Murray-White is surprisingly uncomfortable in front of the camera.

"I tend to blink a lot when I'm having my photo taken," he apologised early in our meeting. "You may have to Photoshop me later!"

The contrast is one of many that become evident as we talk. In fact, his career as a sculptor has been a journey of juxtapositions—both metaphoric and physical—not the least of which is his trademark use of natural marble for his famous sculptured heads.

"It's traditionally thought of as cold, even corpse-like, yet it is the most balanced material on earth to work with," he explains. "It gives the closest finish possible to living, human skin."

The result is a series of paradoxes in stone, that seem to be simultaneously new and old; the work of an accomplished stone carver, but with roots in some age-old culture.

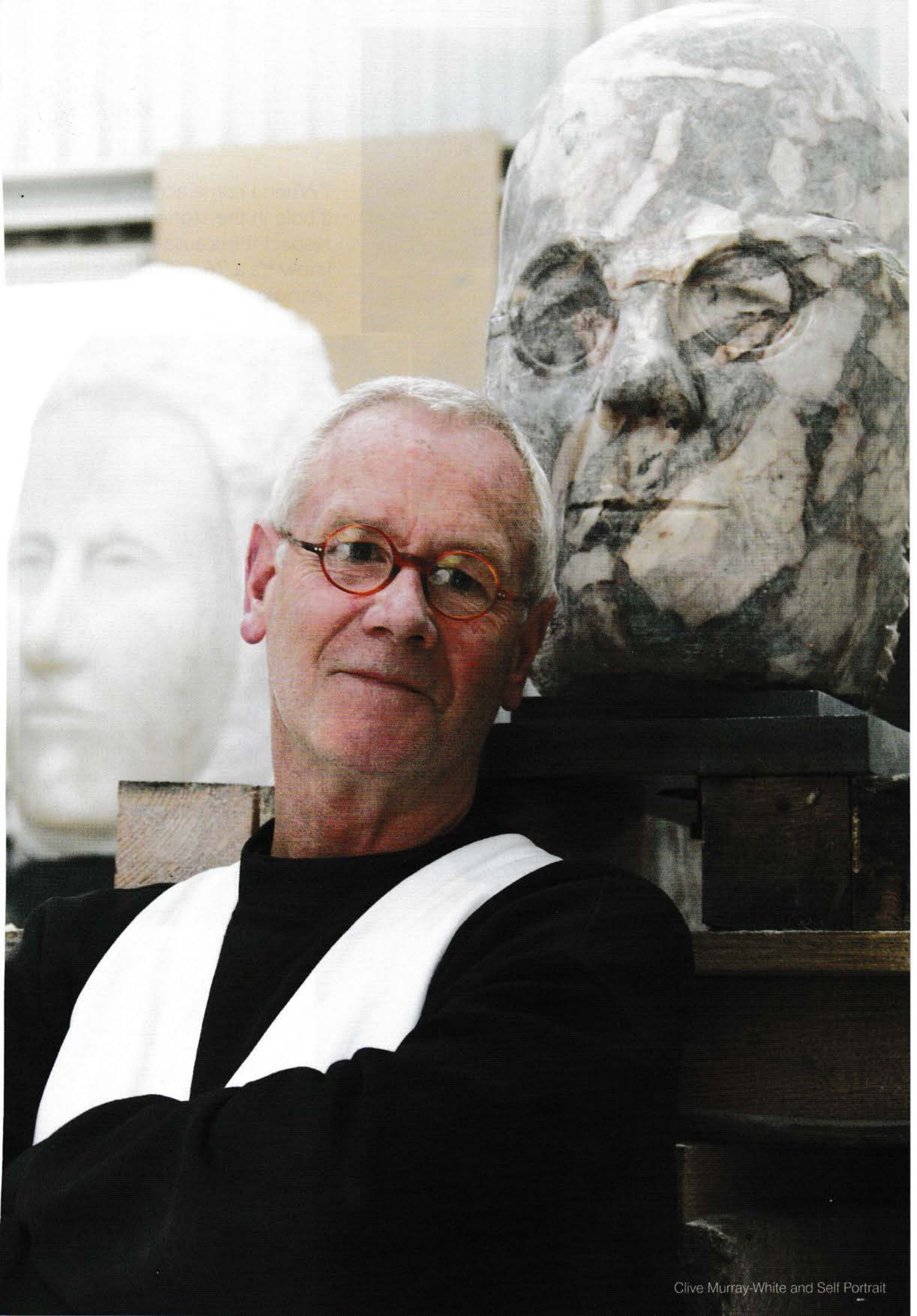
And it's not just the cultural references that are old. The marble Clive uses for his sculptures

comes from Chillagoe in Northern Queensland. Originally part of a coral reef, it was cooked and crystallized by volcanic lava, millions of years ago.

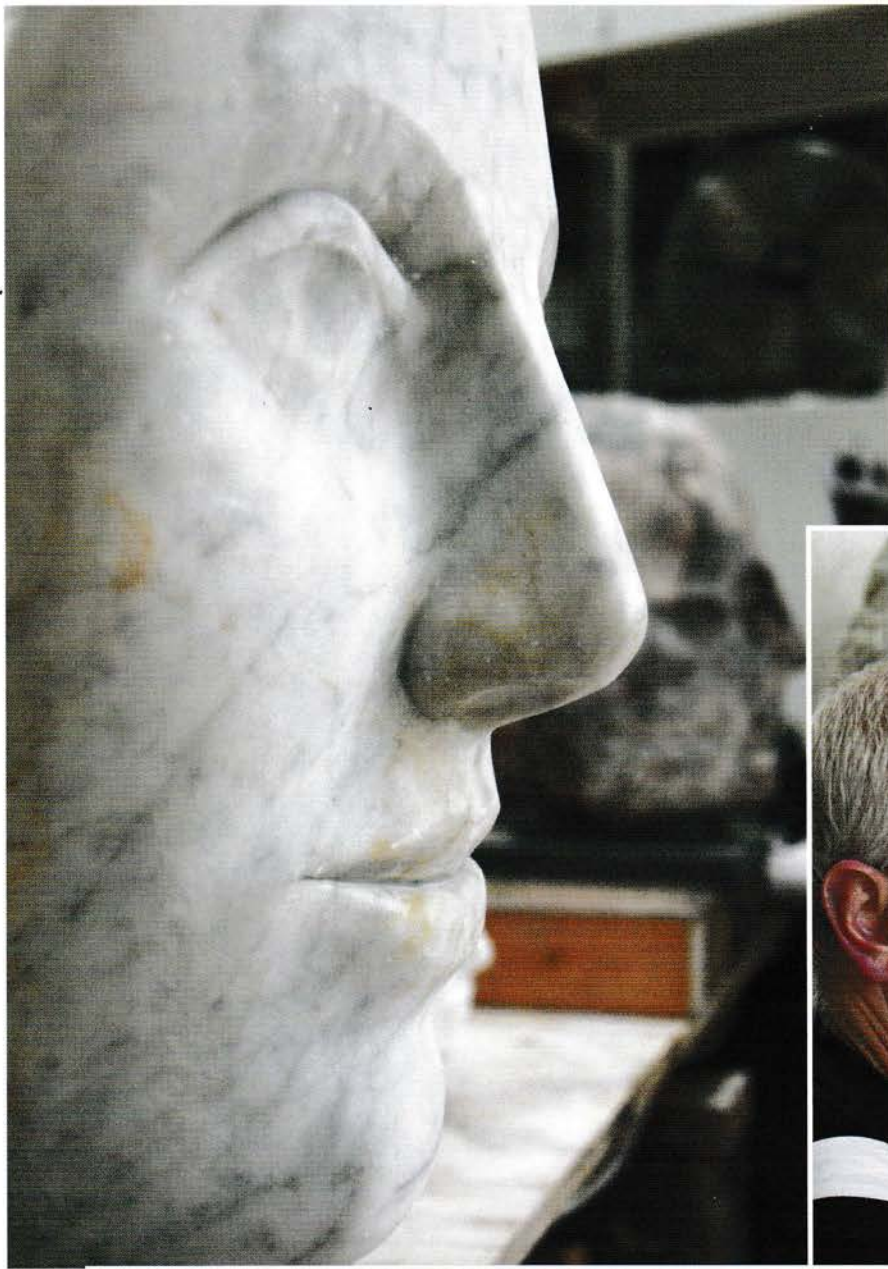
"I work with the naturally occurring patterns and formations," says Clive. "When I come across a hole in the stone, I respect it because I know it's a 26 million year old hole!"

There are also the added benefits of the marble being naturally abundant, relatively inexpensive and environmentally neutral.

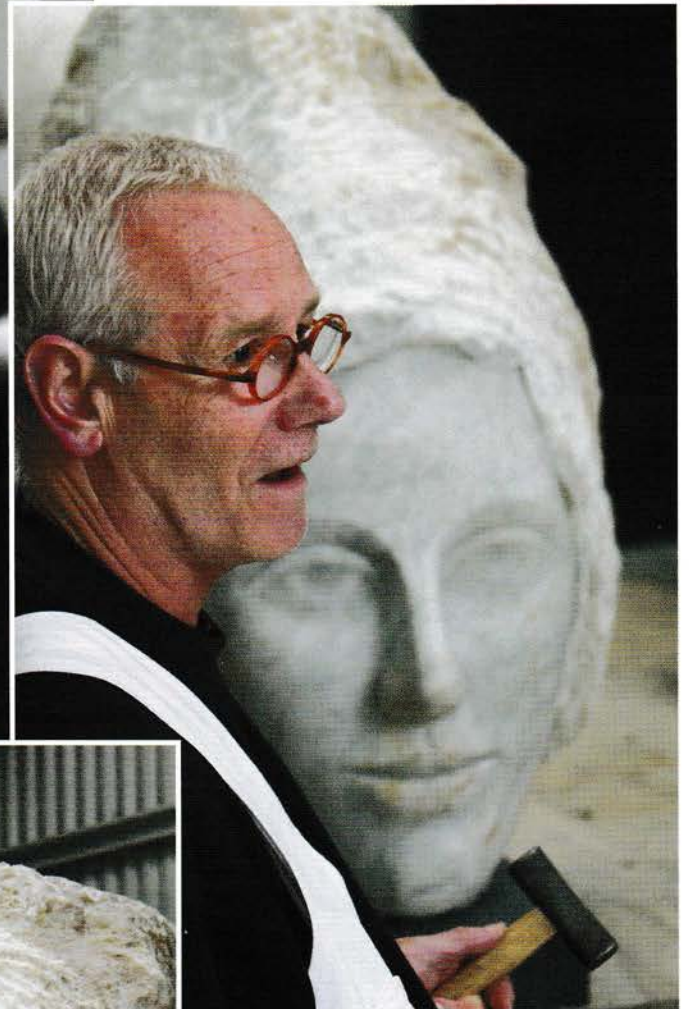
Clive Murray-White arrived in Australia in 1960 and studied at Brisbane Central Technical College, before returning to the UK, to study at the Guildford School of Art. He returned to Australia in 1965, first as the manager of a successful Queensland rock band, and then to commence his art career with a solo exhibition in Melbourne, before taking up a lecturing appointment at Prahran CAE and later at Melbourne State College. He moved to Gippsland in 1983 as Head of Sculpture at Monash University's Churchill Campus.



Clive Murray-White and Self Portrait



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Since beginning his career, Clive Murray-White has held more than 30 solo exhibitions, predominantly in Melbourne and Sydney. His work can be found in many of the nation's leading collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, National Gallery of Victoria and Parliament House, Canberra. He is represented by the Charles Nodrum Gallery in Melbourne.

Today, Clive lives and works in Cowwarr, at Cowwarr Art Space, with partner and arts entrepreneur, Carolyn Crossley. A 1918 butter factory provides a stunning backdrop to Clive's sculptures, many of which are dotted around the rambling gardens. The extensive park like surrounds are home to Clive's Australian Marble Sculpture Studio.

A normal nine-to-five day for Clive starts with paperwork and correspondence, mainly emails and blogs. After two or three cups of coffee from the gallery's café— "I bought the coffee machine for me really, but I'll share it with the visitors if I have to" — Clive wanders out to the studio, where the contrasts continue.

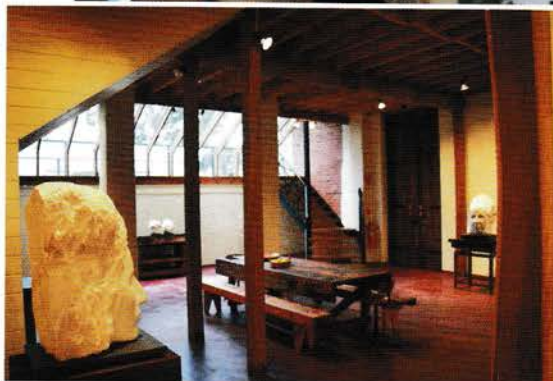
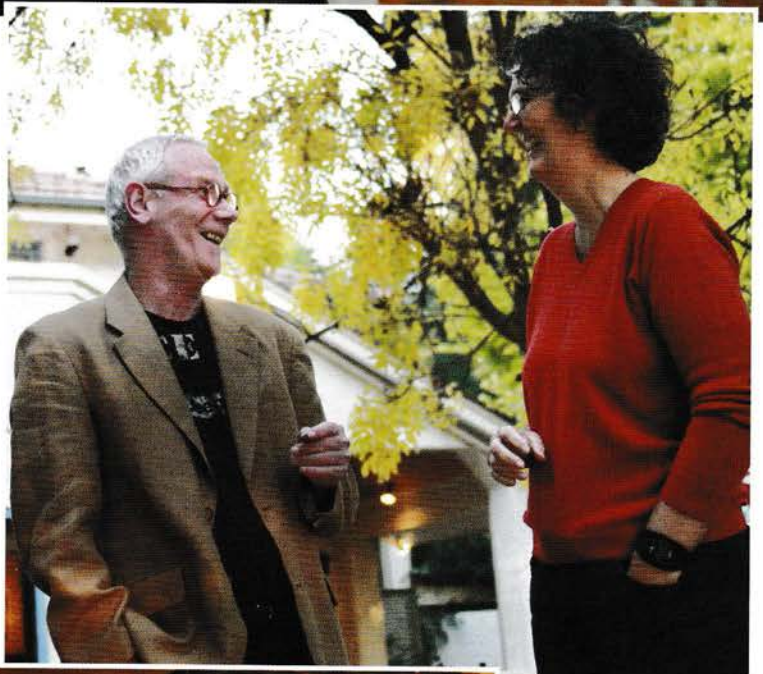
Take his tools. A diamond encrusted Riffler file sits on a dusty workbench beside a wooden satay stick with sandpaper rolled around one end.

"It's good for smoothing," Clive explained.

Then there are the works themselves. An 800kg sculpture, Sara Delaney – *A Head of Her Time*, shares the large, dusty table with numerous finished pieces, some of them quite tiny by comparison.

Sara is Clive's entry in the prestigious McClelland Sculpture Survey and Award, to be announced in Melbourne in November. He is one of 30 finalists, in what is accepted, as the most important outdoor sculpture exhibition in Australia. The selected artists are eligible for the McClelland Award 2010, an acquisitive award valued at \$100,000.

Louisa—with her classic northern European features—is off to the Melbourne Art Fair at the Royal Exhibition Buildings in August. The Art Fair is an international exhibition of leading contemporary



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Clive found inspiration for one of his latest works titled Sara in a waitress from Lakes Entrance.
TOP Clive with his dog Dexter. Carolyn Crossley and Clive have created a unique artspace at Cowwarr.



art, which features the paintings, sculpture, photography, installations and multimedia art works of over 900 artists and attracts up to 30,000 visitors.

Big or small, each Murray-White sculpture can take the same amount of time to create—around eight to twelve weeks of painstaking chiselling and etching.

"I treat the rock as if I'm drawing on it", says Murray-White of the process. "I want people to know it's a rock, but it develops like a drawing, where I can sketch a bit, rub it out, sketch a bit more...stone is supposed to be static, but I treat it as a dynamic medium."

When asked about his subjects, Clive smiles and recounts his humorous, if vaguely uncomfortable, first meeting with Sara Delaney.

An avid fisher, Clive regularly travels to the coastal township of Lakes Entrance to go deep sea fishing with a local charter. It's an early morning trip, with the boat returning to the dock around midday.

"I was having dinner alone at a local restaurant and I was captivated by the face of the young waitress," he explains. "She had such a classical Roman look, exquisite features, like she had just stepped out of the history books."

Clive's biggest dilemma was how to approach the young lady—Sara Delaney—without her questioning his motives.

"It's not often that a man my age approaches a young girl to be his model, well not with honourable intentions anyway," he laughed.

Luckily Delaney's uncle is also an artist, so she was familiar with the idea of modelling and agreed to sit for him.

One of Clive's most intriguing pieces is his self-portrait. The marble is quite dark and the polished surfaces and lines work together to recreate his facial features with startling accuracy. Clive refers to the piece as his very own 'stone cartoon', but the reality is far from comic; it's stunning in its simplicity and realism.

When prompted about the future and whether any change of media or topic is likely, Clive shrugs.

"Why would I change?" he asks. "I'll keep doing this until I fall over...there's nothing better." GCL

www.cowwarr.com

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