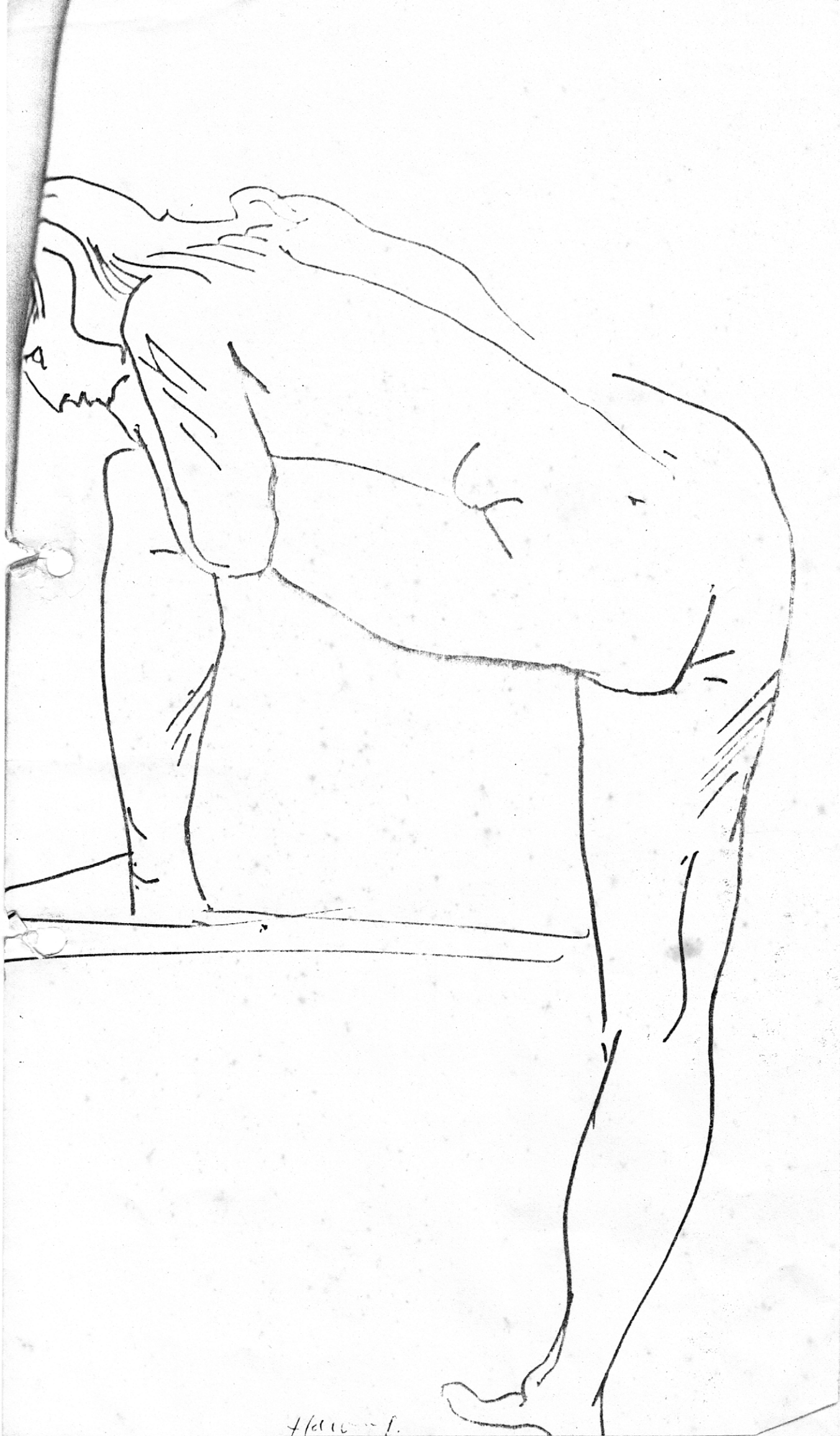


Often during the summer months we would go down to the Domain Baths for a swim after school. We would walk from the Queen Vic., down Market St., past the office of the Evening News, where Tom's old man worked, at the Park end turn left into Elizabeth St., past the Sydney Girls High School. I am sure I remember that high paling fence climbing over an outcrop of sandstone which jutted on to the pavement and the big spreading tree which threw its shade over the pedestrians. David Jones is there now. Past St. James we went, and down Macquarie St., I don't remember any entrance into Martin Place. There was a church there and a charming little theatre fronting Elizabeth St.; the Mitchell Library did not exist.

Our isolation was such that the great modern movements in Europe were unknown to us. In class we would listen to Julian discussing the model and heed his advice. "Take the biggest brushes you have and lay in the broad masses", he would say. Murch insists that Dattilo Rubbo was very conscious of Post Impressionism. However, the Royal Art Society School where Rubbo taught, gave no indication of a similar awareness in their painting.

I suppose I had been at Ashton's school for the better part of a year before I discovered that the school had night classes. This discovery was quite a shock.

I met the evening students at the yearly school dance. Fancy not knowing of their existence! Surely the measure of my innocence of the world at large. During the day the Sydney Art School was principally a girl's school; at night the men came into their own. What a bright lot they were, young men who earned their living by day and devoted their evenings to the study of art! Numbered among them were Douglas Dundas, William Dobell, Herbert Badham, Harold Abbot, John Brackeng, Jack Passmore, Arthur Freeman, Jack Kilgour and Coventry.



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except ~~from~~ Brackenre~~d~~ and Coventry we were all destined to teach at the Tech. and eventually to control art teaching there. Together and especially under Frank Medworth, we were to build up a ~~fine~~ school. Its success may be measured by the bitterness of the uninformed criticism levelled against it. One critic complained that the Tech. was run by that old "Ashton gang". The irony appealed to me when I remember the stinging remarks made about the school in the early thirties. Julian informed me that I was beginning to establish a reputation, and would need my income steadied by a few students. This man Raynor Hoff is going to make the full time fees three guineas a year. He will take the bread and butter out of your mouth, and what the devil has a Technical College got to do with Art. Julian was quite angry.

Early in my student days, I became aware of professional bodies like the Society of Artists, to whom the School was spiritually akin. Many of its members had been trained at Ashton's. There was also a parent body, The Royal Art Society with its own school under the somewhat flamboyant Datillo Rubbo.

J.S. Watkins was a stalwart in the Royal Art Society. He was well known and academically competent as a painter. His work had a solid no nonsense quality. He had his own school in an old building in Margaret St. long since demolished. J.S. Watkins' students were very loyal and called their master affectionately Watty. Of all the schools Watty's was the most Bohemian and seemed to cater for those engaged in commercial art or newspaper work.

Watty was a short, powerfully built gnome-like man, as broad as he was long. His relationships with students, particularly those having a bad patch, was very much man of the world. This quality endeared him to them as much as his eccentricities.

His school dances were rollicking affairs. Watty made his own liquor. He had a big bowl, almost big enough to grow a cumquat tree in. It was kept in the entrance passage, a curious glass conservatory-like place, packed with canvasses. He would start the bowl off with a bottle of beer and fruit peelings. Anybody finishing a lunch time apple would throw the core in, or any sort of peeling. At party time dregs from one's glass, be it whisky, gin or anything going, what went into that bowl was quite amazing. I heard that late one night at a dance, a drunken student had widdled into it. Watty swore it was a cure all and any student whom he thought was off colour was forced to swallow a large wooden spoonful despite their struggles. More of that anon.

In the early 1920s I doubt if the student population of Sydney would have exceeded 160. Surely they must number in their thousands to-day.

Every year the Societies would have their exhibitions. Of course the students of Ashtons thought that the Society of Artists Show was way ahead of everything. They had the great Lambert and an interstate membership, McInnes in Melbourne and Hans Heysen in the Adelaide Hills. The exhibitions were held in the Education Department Gallery in Bridge St.. Two or three students including me were recruited to fetch and carry work for the judging and hanging committee, which in those days was the membership who happened to be in town. Occasionally the Society brought out work from London and Paris to be exhibited. A Picasso was purchased by the Trustees of the Art Gallery of N.S.W. from a Society of Artists Exhibition.

On one occasion I and another student carried a very large Brangwyn from S.A. Parker's in lower George St., to the gallery. Mr. S.A. Parker accompanied us. He was short and dapper, always impeccably dressed, his moustache waxed to needle points. He lussed about us fore, aft and amidships,

"careful boys, look out for that tram, watch where you are going." We carried the picture up George St., sometimes accompanied by pedestrians with their head turned sideways to get a better view. Down Bridge St., we waddled, across Pitt. "Careful boys, careful", fussed Mr. Parker. Across Gresham and Loftus Streets, and at last the lift to the Gallery, we could just get in. I have forgotten the value of the painting; you may be sure it was a tremendous amount.

Growing up in Sydney was marvellous in those days. I wasn't very conscious of the flapper, I suspect teenagers were much younger then, and certainly not a recognisable group to be courted by the retail trade. Sydney was still the late Victorian charming sandstone seaport that Norman Lindsay knew and loved.

I had my introduction to the Pubs. The barmaids would half smile and ask if I was eighteen. "Of course!" As a matter of fact I was seventeen. There were the silly derrin-dooos such as having a glass of beer in every pub from Market St., to the Quay on one side and see how far up George St. could be safely accomplished. At mid day and five p.m. every pub would put on a counter lunch, often vying with each other. My favorite was in George St., ~~near~~ the entrance to Wynyard Station. The pub's door was recessed some two feet and standing guard at each end were two figures in medieval armour. Dear me, have I forgotten its name? The counter lunch there consisted of a clothes basket full of bread rolls, flanked with huge plates piled high with hot sausages, others holding chunks of cheese, pig's trotters and I know not what, condiments were also provided. These counter lunches were free. The commercial community were not that interested. They talked, drank their beer and nibbled, anyway they were going home to a fine cooked

meal. No one need starve in Sydney then, all you needed was the price of beer, was it 5d?, make one last as long as possible and stuff yourself.

There were plenty of cafes where a sustaining meal could be had for 1/6. ^{EVEN} The more expensive ones such as Peasons Fish Cafe in King St. weren't ~~very~~ dear. It was in this cafe that Jack Lang ~~told~~ ^{told} his cabinet that he had been dismissed by the Governor, Sir Philip Game.

~~I am reminded of the~~ ^{One} time ~~that~~ I turned a corner from Macquarie St. at the rate of knots and collided with Mr. Lang. Had the Premier not grabbed me, I would certainly have fallen. "I beg your pardon sir", I said in some alarm. "Look where you are going son, not go where you are looking", advised the "Big Fella".

I was not aware of the political passions of the day, but clearly remember the good fun the caricaturists on Smiths Weekly had at the Premier's expense. What an exciting lot to meet those blokes, Stan Cross, Unk White, the Bulletin lot. I came to know Mick Paul and his wife Dorothy very well. Dorothy had been a fellow student at the Sydney Art School. They lived at Curl Curl near Muir Auld of the Society of Artists, later they moved to Narrabeen. Frequently I stayed weekends with them on my return from overseas. Mick led what some people would think an idyllic life. He would start his ~~weeks~~ work at Wednesday Lunch-time and work until dark on Thursday drawing up his jokes. Mick was very much against browsing through old copies of Punch and Allie Slopers Weekly and giving their jokes a present day twist. Mick averred that editors were mean enough to play the same trick, so he devised a pack of cards. Each one had a drawing of a cartoon character such as the Landlady, the Lodger, the New Chum, the Squatter, the Shearer, the Curate and the Copper

etc. He would shuffle these and deal himself a poker hand. Abruptly they would be turned up. The resulting unexpected association hopefully would suggest a joke, which Mick would then draw up. If not he would re-shuffle with a gambler's like concentration. Eventually he would have a dozen joke block drawings, these he would take to the Bulletin Office in George St., on Friday morning. His day would be spent in various ways including conviviality in a pub. At 4.30 he would return to the Bulletin and collect his money. If a joke block was contained in one column, it paid 25/-. If it went over two columns it paid two guineas ; if Mick sold five drawings he would still be earning more than a good tradesman. Other students and I tried to break into this wonderful way of making money. Our work was thrown out and we were told to learn to draw. Drawing was considered to be the highest of aims.

Mick and Dorothy moved to a huge basement flat in Victoria St., overlooking the 'Loo' ; they held court over week-ends and at these convivial gatherings I met Hugh McRae, Vance Palmer and Hillary Lofting. Art was discussed, particularly their own field, prose and poetry. Lofting was an Englishman and complained of the Australian habit of slurring vowels, particularly melodious Aboriginal words like Katoomba. He thought it should be pronounced as Katoombar. Listening to them was an adventure for a seventeen year old Art student. Mick Paul happened to be the head of a Bathurst family, in spite of his Bohemian life. He was once asked if he were related to them. He drew himself up and said : "I am the Paul of Bathurst."

One cannot speak of Sydney of those days without reference to Mockbells. They were basement coffee houses that preceded

Repins. I believe old Mockbell was a Turk who regarded Art students, Journalists, Bohemians and the like with a kindly eye, and seemed to confine them to his Castlereagh St. establishment, almost next door to the theatre Royal. Castlereagh St., Mockbells was a rendezvous. One could while away the minutes or the long hours talking about art or Love over a 4d cup of coffee, or just while away the time playing dominoes. Friends could keep in touch by leaving books or notes at the desk. Sometimes we would visit other Mockbell Coffee Houses. They catered for the business community, and were strangely different. Our Coffee House society felt most elite, we could hum the Song of India. When Dame ^{Nellie} Melba was in town, Beverly Nichols joined our circle.

I think it was in 1934 that Phil Lindsay decided to become a writer. He had dabbled at it a bit, and a number of us at Julians illustrated his short story "The Paths of Life" by Phillip Lindsay. I still have the original mock-up complete with illustrations. Phil retired to the flat he and Ray shared in Kings Cross. All the blinds would be drawn in Phil's quarters which would be littered with books and manuscripts on every available surface, together with the dregs of wine in glasses. Phil would be discovered huddled over his writing in an overcoat and scarf. The place would be blue with cigarette smoke. "Come in, Harvey", Ray would say, "Don't mind Balzac." This was rather cruel and unlike Ray. I knew how much Phil hero-worshipped Balzac. I would hang my hat on a plaster nude, there were several and invariably by Norman, and settle down to conversation, aided by wine and cigarettes. Eventually Phil got a job with Becketts Weekly and gained valuable practical experience. At this time a reporter I knew told me that the Labor Daily were looking for cubs and I was just the sort of bloke they wanted. He said

they were a terrific mob to work for. I wasn't impressed and did not tell my parents in case they got ideas.

Ray and Phil had moved from their Mother's flat to be on their own. Ray would have been twenty two and Phil seventeen. I had often visited them when they were with Kate. I liked her very much. She always made me welcome. She was a drably dressed woman, dark and beautiful, though somewhat silent and sad. She seemed so very much alone. Ray refused to travel abroad while his mother lived.

The Artists Ball of 1924 set Sydney on its head. The Ball was held in the Town Hall, upstairs, downstairs, corridors and all. The Press came out with banner headlines, calling it a Bacchanalia. The wild twenties we hear about so much, apparently were getting into its stride. I suspect that a great deal of liquor was taken into the Town Hall. I was there as a member of a student committee and very much an innocent abroad. George Finey (cartoonist), paraded around dressed only in a napkin fastened only by a huge safety pin. I fancy the newspaper editors decided to shock the town.

Jack Lindsay (Norman's eldest son) preceded Murch and me to London. Jack and another Australian called Kirtly started the Frankfrolica Press. Their first publication was a translation of Aristophanes "Lysistrata" which Norman illustrated. Apparently Jack's attempts at publishing failed. He was to concentrate on writing.

Phil arrived in London to make his mark. In a few years he produced a number of gutsy historical novels. He married and became the father of a daughter. Phil gained a reputation as an authority on the Tudor and Stuart periods, and as such was sometimes employed by the film people as an historical consultant. He performed this task for Elstree

in the making of Henry VIII. Charles Laughton was the star and clashed with Phil repeatedly. On one occasion they were filming a banqueting scene, Laughton grabbed a serving wench, pulled her violently onto his knee and bit her neck. Turning to Phil he asked : "Is that in the period Mr. Lindsay?"

Sydney had a brief spell of affluence following the war. Those were the grand days of the six o'clock swill. I don't suppose the licensees have ever had it so good as in the opening and closing 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Alcoholism, however, was something we had never heard of. My student friends and I believed in drinking because we were followers of Dionysius, Bacchus and jolly Silenus, were we not! I fear drinking became too much of a habit with Phil and Ray. Phil died young, and Ray could not have been much over fifty when he went. There will never be another Raymond Lindsay. He was unselfish and kind to a rare degree.

My other friend, Tom Hubble, married the red-headed, charming and beautiful Doreen of Art School days. They had a son. Tom, like Ray never went abroad, and died in his mid-fifties. Tom's old man was something in advertising, with the Evening News. The News office was just around the corner in Market St. opposite Farmers. Tom carried on in advertising from his own office in Castlereagh St. It was a very handy place to call for a cuppa or to take Tom out for one. A strange collection of visitors called. It was there that I met and came to know Don Atholda. Don was a "strong man" professionally, and pulled cars along with his teeth. His muscular development was unbelievable and so was his shortness of stature. His pet belly ache was his inability to find a girl. I am sure he did eventually, he was a nice bloke.

It was Tom^{who} persuaded me to contribute to the Museum

Magazine, best two bob around, he reckoned. "Every time some smart Alec in a pub challenges you on the difference between a crocodile and an alligator, or between a dolphin and a porpoise, you've got him." I contributed for twenty years.

Ironside succumbed to social pressures, probably of his own making. His younger brother was earning his living, perhaps this made Herbert feel he was a drag on his parents. He left Julian's, and got a job, passing out of my life completely. I wonder if we lost someone who could have contributed to Australian painting. Vale, Friends of my Youth!