



# ADAM Laerkesen

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Adam Laerkesen

We met up with Adam Laerkesen at his studio in the Ultimo Artists Complex; he has been working there for the past 7 years. It is a great space with high ceilings and a large open door way. At the time he was preparing for a solo exhibition in Melbourne.

Adam Laerkesen is an Australian sculptor who creates works featuring forms derived from nature such as branches and animals. Walking into a room full of his works makes you feel you are entering a dream state. At his last exhibition, the antlers of the several sculptures of white deer, and the branches, were positioned in such a way on the walls of the gallery to create the illusion that they had been swept by great torrents of wind inside the gallery space. His work is inspired by the works of surrealist artists such as Max Ernst; and also surrealist practices such as drawing whilst in a hypnagogic, or dream - like state.

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sult is often menacing and playful, dramatic and visceral, familiar and unpredictable.

People are captivated by his sculptures and since completing his studies in fine art in 1987, he has won the wood section at Sculpture by the Sea in 2000; exhibited widely, and has been commissioned to create sculptures for institutions such as the Australian National Maritime Museum. Adam works on his art in every spare moment; he is highly motivated.

His large studio is filled to the brink with sculptures and materials for his sculptures which range from the conventional epoxies and moulds, to the unconventional - such as bones. What strikes you first about Adam's work is the way he has transformed ordinary objects, such as branches and ones less ordinary, such as bones, and manipulated them to become his wonderful dream - like forms.

There is an understanding of form and materials that comes from constant work and experimentation but also from great training. Adam studied at East Sydney Technical College (now the National Art School) in Darlinghurst majoring in Sculpture for two years; he then took up further studies at the Sydney College of the Arts for three further years



*Holiday Snap*, flock on skull, plaster mould of skull, foam and resin. Photo: courtesy of the artist and the Anita Traverso Gallery

developing his ideas on sculpture and installation.

His studies at The National Art School he claims were invaluable - "that is the backbone knowledge, the knowledge you need to be able to then go on and do whatever you want to do." Sydney College of the Arts taught him about the importance of the conceptual side, the site and positioning of sculptures, as well as the importance of experimenting with form and materials.

His constant experimentation means that he does not like to stick to any particular medium for long. His preference is to understand and master a particular material then to move on and to experiment with another.

One of his works incorporates steam flooding the interior of glass

boxes; the steam is illuminated with coloured lights to highlight the performative aspect of the piece. He also has different approaches in his technique of creating his animal sculptures. His deer heads are created using cartonnage, which is a process where the forms are wrapped in strips of calico soaked in plaster and as a consequence, gives the sculptures an eerie effect and the appearance of a mummy.

His monkeys are made from expanding foam and are produced from the mould of a taxidermied form. He receives the generic form of the monkey and then rearticulates its muscles by adding several coats of forton - a mouldable plaster-like material.

The forms of nature, Adam sculpts are inspired by his Scandinavian heritage. His grandfather was a ranger for the King of Denmark on the Island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea. His deer, he says, are the result of seeing photographs of heads of deer mounted on the walls of his grandfather's lodge on Bornholm Island. Adam also has an interest in Scandinavian myth and his works with monkeys, could he says have been inspired by the myth of the *fyglia* which is like a second ego in Teutonic myth, that can leave the body and take the form of an animal. The human-like behaviour of the monkey, for instance, holding the lantern; and the ghostly appearance of the animals wrapped in white calico, all contribute to the impression that this interest in his Scandinavian heritage and myth, could be the source of these sculptures.

"With the *Sea Bell* sculpture, (featuring a monkey holding a lantern), I did not have anything specific in mind when creating that piece except that I wanted a creature that was searching. By placing the monkey on the undulating form/landscape to me elevated this idea of seeking as did the magnifying glass come lantern".

Art is important to the Laerkesens. Adam Laerkesen's sister, Annie is in charge of the artist in residence programme on Cockatoo Island and she was in-



Page 45: Sculpture of a chamois: Title: *They once cut my heart down the way they cut a tree*, title from the song, 'Go between' by Robert Forster, plaster, foam, wood, cloth and industrial chair. 2.150m (H) x 700mm (L) x 900mm (D) Photo: courtesy of the artist and the Anita Traverso Gallery (ATG)



he says is always difficult for him.

However, the monkey was not meant to appear sinister. The sculpture was inspired by a friend's trip to Thailand where monkeys are everywhere and a source of entertainment for tourists.

He said his thoughts at the time of making this sculpture were of a holiday snap shot a tourist might take. When I told Laerkesen how his monkey reminded me of the 'Day of the Dead' in Mexico, his remark was, "I try to keep work open ended; but you know in Mexico, death is part of life. If you embrace it, the less you fear it." Currently bones are part of his work. A chrome plated hip bone of a cow was part of his last exhibition.

Laerkesen wants the viewer to imagine, to dream and to interpret his works themselves. He wants them to respond in a haptic way rather than an intellectual way first. Even in the studio setting, which is a site that generally prevents the viewer from getting too carried away by the work because of the distraction of the tools and clutter; and also the revelation of the techniques, all tend to cause a sense of disillusionment, like a magician giving away their magic tricks.

However, even under these circumstances I was completely spellbound by the products of Adam's imagination where monkeys swing from clouds, and great beasts, bleached white emerge like ghosts from walls, caught in a wind that no one can feel. His works are truly a delight for the imagination.

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stallation coordinator for the last Biennale exhibition. His father is an architect whose designs have, according to Laerkesen, a Scandinavian influence with exposed beams and earthy colours. Adam's mother also draws. Aside from the eerie theatricality, humour is an unexpected but powerful element in his work. Laerkesen says, humour is essential in art. In his studio, a monkey sits menacingly upon a human skull which is draped in a bright orange cloth, the monkey wears a crown; its eyes are black and appear sinister. I asked him why an orange cloth and not red which would suit the royal theme. He said, red would be too scary. The choice of orange over red also tones down what could have appeared a very sinister scene. Incorporating colour

Sculpture of Stag on wall: Title: *Something in the way*, plaster, foam, wood, cloth and paint 1.5m (H) x 1.9m (L) x 1.1m (D) Photographs: courtesy of the artist and the Anita Traverso Gallery (ATG) 7 Albert Street, Richmond Victoria