



Celery

THE HERRING ISLAND EXPERIENCE....

Michael Murray

CELEBRATION OF PLACE

Relatively unknown to many Melbournians, Herring Island is an important environmental, recreational and artistic space just 3km from the city. The park is a haven for nature and art lovers alike containing indigenous vegetation, and providing important habitat for native fauna, and particularly birds.

My first visit to the Island was full of mystique and intrigue. How could a piece of land so close to the Melbourne CBD with a freeway just across the river remain so remote creating a feeling of isolation and filled with serene, quiet beauty? How is it possible to lose sight of the skyscrapers and the seemingly ever present traffic noise of a large city? As I wandered along the pathways gently brushing against the bushes

Are you looking for an artistic experience in a natural environment which doesn't cost an arm and a leg this summer? Then maybe a short punt ride across the Yarra River to Herring Island might be just what you are looking for.

and being startled as yet another bird swooped across my pathway I soon became lost in my own thoughts. It was almost as though I had been transported to another world.

Herring Island is also home to a series of environmental sculptures which are scattered throughout the park to reflect the Island's tranquil setting. The artists have focused upon the history and landscape of the site to create sculptural pieces from natural materials such as stone, earth and wood with each piece becoming

part of the landscape. It was these beautiful works of art that I had come to see but I had no idea that each work would be so integral to its particular setting. I couldn't help but stop and touch and look and reflect on each stone, each shape narrating its own story about place, location and site. As the afternoon passed into evening the sculptures seemed to take on another persona and dimension with some emerging into the soft light whilst others receded into the shadows.

Artists of international standing have contributed artworks to the park over many years. Most noteworthy are the two works by the British sculptor Andy Goldsworthy. What a thrill it was for me to be able to interact with the works of someone so well known. Other artists represented on the Island are Robert Bridgewater, Julie Collins, John Davis, Ellen José, Robert Jacks and Jill Peck.

Two of Goldsworthy's most recognisable sculptures are 'Cairn' and 'Stone House'. Both are located in the only natural valley on the island. The first work is constructed from Castlemaine slate and celebrates his journey to Melbourne and his love of this particular site. Goldsworthy traditionally works with natural materials, such as leaves, sand, ice, and stone that often originate from the local site. He aims to understand nature by directly participating with the environment and by using the materials which nature provides. Goldsworthy regards his creations as transient and ephemeral, photographing each work upon completion.

His second work is titled "Stone House". It was made from Dunkeld sandstone and from his response to the site and objects found there. The artist believes this work is most powerful when viewed from a distance, and that it emphasises the sense of discovery and concealment that an island holds for him.

Goldsworthy describes his purpose in making art through his engagement with nature in the following way: "Movement, change, light, growth and decay are the

lifblood of nature, the energies that I try to tap through my work. I need the shock of touch, the resistance of place, materials and weather, the earth as my source. Nature is in a state of change and that change is the key to understanding. I want my art to be sensitive and alert to changes in material, season and weather. Each work grows, stays, decays. Process and decay are implicit. Transience in my work reflects what I find in nature."¹

Another beautiful and significant piece of sculpture on the Island was jointly created by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander artist Ellen Jose and Wurundjeri Tribal Elder, Joy Murphy. Titled 'Tanderrum' (meaning 'Coming together') they have imagined a vision for the creation of flight. 'Tanderrum' brings together concepts of pride, culture and spirit, and symbolises the coming together of the Kulin nation as one people. Aboriginal culture emphasises the land, water and sky as central to the spirit of the Australian landscape and part of the living spiritual domain. Constructed of Mt. William greenstone, Castlemaine slate, and redbox (the wood). The greenstone was used

for axe-heads by Aboriginals prior to the arrival of Europeans in Australia.

For me Herring Island offered a unique, accessible artistic experience with no one to tell me 'Don't touch please' and 'Stand back from the exhibit please'. The works are so tactile in their construction that they invite both small and large hands to reach out and touch and enjoy. I invite you to download a map from the Herring Island website, pack a picnic lunch and blanket or make use of the barbeques and prepare yourself for a unique artistic experience. Although it is a relatively small space allow sufficient time to follow the pathways and to indulge in quiet reflection with each piece of sculpture, the plants and abundant bird life before finally making your way back to the punt. ■

Endnotes

¹ Andy Goldsworthy

www.morning-earth.org/ARTISTS/NATURALISTS/AN_Goldsworthy.html

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Michael Murray is a practising artist in Melbourne and was a member of the Editorial Committee for this edition.

