

ASSEMBLED: The Art of Robert Klippel

23 November 2019 – 16 February 2020

Curated by Kirsty Grant



John Pearson, *Robert Klippel in his Potts Point workshop* from the Robert Klippel archive 12 April 1957, National Art Archive | Art Gallery of New South Wales. Gift of Andrew Klippel 2017.
© Robert Klippel Estate © John Pearson. Photo: AGNSW.

'Everything I see, no matter what it is, I weigh up its sculptural possibilities.'
Robert Klippel, 1948

ASSEMBLED: The Art of Robert Klippel at TarraWarra Museum of Art, 23 November 2019 – 16 February 2020, will present more than one hundred works by one of Australia's most significant twentieth century sculptors, Robert Klippel (1920–2001), the tireless inventor who experimented with unusual materials, techniques and dramatic variations in scale.

Klippel is regarded as a giant of Australian art, having associated with Henry Moore, Eduardo Paolozzi and André Breton in the late 1940s, and during his time in New York in the 1950s was a member of 'The Club', the highly influential artist group founded by Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock.

Curated by Kirsty Grant, the exhibition will highlight three major aspects of Klippel's six decade-long career: the Surrealist-inspired sculptures and drawings made in London and Paris during the late 1940s; the 'assemblage' works including his so-called 'junk sculptures' of the 1960s and 70s; and his late timber works that often used brightly coloured machine pattern-parts.

Grant says a highlight of the exhibition is the focus on 'assemblage', the sculptural technique that Klippel so firmly made his own, utilising mechanical components from cash registers, computers and other discarded machines, and later wooden pattern parts, to create a cohesive abstract whole.

'*ASSEMBLED: The Art of Robert Klippel* will feature a substantial collection of sculptures borrowed from private collections and major public institutions including the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales and National Gallery of Victoria. Displayed alongside his lesser known works on paper, they trace the development of his innovative and utterly unique creative approach which was driven by a dual fascination with the organic and the mechanical,' Ms Grant said.

Seeking to find what he described as the 'interrelationship between the cogwheel and the bud', Klippel drew upon a deep understanding of nature and the man-made world of machines to develop a distinctive three-dimensional language. Drawing on this personal vocabulary of form and shape, he worked intuitively, combining rhythm, movement, weight, volume, proportion, tension, balance and texture in a dynamic dialogue to create a unique body of abstract sculpture.

In his home studio at Birchgrove, overlooking Sydney Harbour, Klippel established individual rooms dedicated to drawing, welding, woodwork and more, each space providing clarity of focus within an interconnected creative whole.

Klippel's major statement using junk metal, *No. 247 Metal construction*, comprises thousands of found typewriter parts, and was created over a period of three years between 1965-68. Regarded as a masterpiece within Klippel's oeuvre and within twentieth century Australian sculpture, it brilliantly displays his ability to convey a sense of the natural world using materials that are entirely man-made.

One of Klippel's largest works, *No. 712 The Train* 1987 is composed of a series of sculptural elements made up of timber patterns which were used in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as moulds for casting metal machine parts. Klippel and fellow-artist Colin Lanceley discovered a cache of discarded patterns in Sydney in the 1960s, but it wasn't until two decades later that he began working with them, responding to their varied shapes and solidity of form, as well as their colour and textural surfaces.

Another exhibition highlight, *No. 1118* 1995, consists of more than eighty small sculptures that exemplify Klippel's constant experimentation and innovation. Working with an array of everyday materials including champagne bottle caps and wires, plastic toys and tea strainers, he assembled a field of tiny forms, none of which measure more than fifteen centimetres in height, painting each element in bright colours, so that it appears like a miniature adventure playground.

Victoria Lynn, Director, TarraWarra Museum of Art, said, 'TarraWarra Museum of Art holds several key works by Robert Klippel and a key curatorial platform is to provide opportunities to show our collection in a national context. With this exhibition, we can appreciate a full survey of the artist's inventive, imaginative and playful oeuvre that continues to be relevant to sculptural practice today.'

'Whilst Robert Klippel's work is well-known in his home-town of Sydney, this will be the first major exhibition to display this breadth of his work in Melbourne since the late 1980s.'

ASSEMBLED: The Art of Robert Klippel is only possible thanks to the generous support of major exhibition partner, The Balnaves Foundation, whose ongoing partnership has enabled TarraWarra Museum of Art to present ambitious summer exhibitions over the past four years.

MEDIA RELEASE

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Neil Balnaves AO, Founder, The Balnaves Foundation, said, 'This year marks the fifth year that The Balnaves Foundation has supported TarraWarra Museum of Art to deliver major exhibitions by Australian artists. The Foundation is proud to partner in these major endeavours, providing vital opportunities for important Australian artists to be showcased, whilst providing a broad range of audiences access to outstanding arts experiences.'

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For interviews, images and further information please contact:

Katrina Raymond | 03 9663 3222 | 0417 303 158 | katrina@medialinkproductions.com

Elisabeth Alexander | 03 5957 3101 | 0404 934 779 | elisabeth@twma.com.au

TarraWarra Museum of Art, 313 Healesville-Yarra Glen Road, Healesville VIC 3777

T +61 (0)3 5957 3100 W twma.com.au

Opening Hours: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am to 5pm. Open all public holidays except Christmas Day.

Open 7 days a week from Boxing Day to Australia Day.

Museum Admission: \$12 Adults; \$10 Seniors; \$8 Concession; Museum Members and children under 12 free.



Robert Klippel, *Nos 1037-1126 Eighty-seven small polychromed tin sculptures* 1995, polychromed tin and wire, various dimensions, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Gift of Andrew Klippel 2002, © Andrew Klippel. Courtesy of The Robert Klippel Estate, represented by Annette Larkin Fine Art, Sydney and Galerie Gmurzynska, Zurich / Copyright Agency, 2019.

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Robert Klippel, *(Untitled)* 1949, pen and coloured ink and gouache on paper, 37.8 x 27.7 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Gift of James Mollison, 1981, © Andrew Klippel. Courtesy of The Robert Klippel Estate, represented by Annette Larkin Fine Art, Sydney and Galerie Gmurzynska, Zurich / Copyright Agency, 2019

Robert Klippel was born in Potts Point, Sydney, in 1920. After completing a wool-classing course in 1937, he joined the navy at the outbreak of World War Two, later being employed to carve and build detailed models of aircraft which were used in identification training. He studied sculpture at East Sydney Technical College between 1944-46, realising that 'sculpture must be revolutionised without the figure.' With financial support from his parents Klippel sailed for London in 1947, finding accommodation and a studio at The Abbey in Hertfordshire, and enrolling in life-classes at the Slade School of Art. In late 1948, Klippel moved to Paris where he met André Breton and through his contact with the surrealists, and an exhibition of his work was held at Galerie Nina Dausset the following year.

Returning to Sydney in mid-1950, Klippel joined the Contemporary Art Society and was a foundation member of the NSW Society of Sculptors and Associates. In 1952-53 he undertook a series of night classes to develop his technical skills and presented a joint exhibition with Ralph Balson at Macquarie Galleries. Commercially unsuccessful in his efforts as an industrial designer, Klippel left for New York in April 1957 and began teaching sculpture at the Minneapolis School of Art the following year. Klippel's first solo exhibition in Australia was held at Clune Galleries, Sydney in 1962.

In Sydney from mid-1964, Klippel held various teaching jobs and worked prolifically. He was awarded the indoor sculpture prize at the 1964 Mildura Prize for Sculpture exhibition and exhibitions of his drawings and collages were held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1975 and again in 1983, and in 1987 a retrospective exhibition was mounted at Heide Park and Art Gallery, Melbourne. The monograph by James Gleeson was published in 1983 and in 1987 Klippel was awarded an Order of Australia. In 1984 he began working with the wooden pattern-parts that he had found with fellow artist Colin Lanceley in 1964, expanding a repertoire of materials and sculptural approaches that encompassed carving, casting and assemblage (using metal, timber, plastic and other found objects).

Hailed as Australia's most significant sculptor, Robert Klippel died in June 2001, having produced over 1200 sculptures and many more drawings and collages. The following year, a retrospective exhibition curated by Deborah Edwards was mounted at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.