

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CAVE ART EXHIBITION

DOVER, TASMANIA

June MacLucas

11 Gulfview Pde Valley View SA 5093

In 1993 – while on holiday in the UK – June MacLucas met an English cave artist, Robin Gray, during a visit to the caving area of Cheddar. Robin talked about starting a Speleo Art Club and asked whether June would be interested... and shortly after in 1994, he became one of the founders of the International Society for Speleological Art (ISSA). June has been a member of ISSA ever since and being mindful of the successful speleological art exhibitions that had taken place in Britain, Europe and America under the auspices of ISSA, she was keen to see a similar event occurring here in Australia.

In September 1998, June approached Peter Berrill, in his role as president of the Australian Speleological Federation (ASF) and convenor/organiser of the 22nd ASF Conference at Yeppoon near Rockhampton, to see whether ASF would be interested in hosting an International Speleological Art Exhibition as part of the January 1999 Conference. As convenor of this particular conference, Peter was very receptive to the idea and encouraged June to go ahead and make all the necessary arrangements.

As a member of ISSA, June incorporated their criteria and guidelines for cave art exhibitions encouraging Australian and overseas artists to take part and exhibit their work during the ASF biennial conference at Yeppoon and following on... at the last three successive biennial conferences. During the 3rd Cave Art Exhibition held at Bunbury in Western Australia, John Dunkley – then President of ASF – expressed his interest in making the exhibition a regular feature of the Conference. This is now our 4th International Cave Art Exhibition and with each exhibition the interest on the home front has grown. Hopefully it will continue to expand, encouraging cavers to express their own experiences through an art form.

Speleological art is only one small facet of caving, but think about it, cave art has been around for some 40,000 or more years, especially here in Australia. From the perspective of an Aboriginal person, cave art takes on quite a different meaning. It expresses the rituals of hunting, ceremonial activities and sacred iconography as well as giving a presence of having been there in the form of hand stencils. This sense of being there is also applicable to modern day cave artists, especially when the speleo artwork is commenced and/or completed in a cave. The artist experiences the acts of caving and seeing the wonder of the subterranean landscape mostly unseen by people outside caving groups. Believe me, working directly underground on one's own artwork can be exciting and daunting, at the same time offering challenges rarely experienced by a landscape artist.

These speleological art exhibitions are important. Visual artwork has been around much longer than photography and it can reveal the emotions of the artist and in this aspect, the emotions and feelings of cave artists. Such exhibitions offer



PHOTO: JULIA JAMES

June MacLucas in front of some of the displayed artwork.

a chance for speleo artists to exhibit their work to a group of people who share their love of caving and to bring to the general public an awareness of this awesome and inspiring landscape existing beneath the surface.

This time around, the 25th ASF Biennial Conference offered – for the first time – a chance to have the exhibition in an established art gallery at the Old Dover School, where the display continued for the duration of the conference. You could see that the Dover Art Gallery had in fact been an old school classroom and although the gallery space was small, we managed to exhibit 89 pieces of work contributed by 14 artists: including three cavers from overseas, plus five from around Australia and six local artists from Dover. The art work included oil paintings, watercolour, pastels, drawings and sculpture that either arrived through the post - or was delivered by cavers themselves. Other exhibits from local artists consisted of jewellery, embroidery, photography and a



PHOTO: ARTHUR CLARKE

John Dunkley introducing guest speaker Adrienne Eberhard at the opening of the Australian Speleological Federation 4th International Cave Art Exhibition on 3rd January 2005.

video. Unfortunately, art works by Eve Taylor, although listed, did not arrive in time for the exhibition. This is not the first time that artwork has arrived too late for an exhibition. Disappointed artists should be aware and try to ensure that the work arrives before the due date. One way to do this would be to pass it on to a caver who is attending the conference.

Unfortunately, although exhibiting at a gallery was an exciting prospect for the artists involved, it did pose a problem, because the gallery was situated about ten minutes walk away from the conference venue which itself was also a considerable distance by bus from the main accommodation site. Hence, it made it difficult for cavers attending the conference to just browse through the art work between lectures and at lunch time. Nevertheless, from this collection of work, the exhibition sold 19 pieces in five days, from Monday afternoon to Saturday, the full duration of the exhibition. Given these circumstances – at a location remote to the conference site – it is pleasing that the sales were greater than first expected!

Throughout the exhibition there were many highlights... from an outstanding and exciting opening attended by everyone at the conference, to a personal preview of the art work by the Governor of Tasmania and his wife, the Hon William J E Cox and Mrs Cox, who were accompanied by their aide-de-camp, Steve de Haan. His Excellency viewed all the art work making a comment that although he admired our tenacity, unfortunately caving was not for him.

A few hours after the Governor's preview, the 4th international speleological art exhibition was opened by an accomplished Tasmanian poet, Adrienne Eberhard, who delivered an interesting and inspirational reading from her own work.

Jenny Robson, a guide from Hastings Caves enthralled us with a wonderful rendition of a locally composed song that related the epic construction of the pioneer road to Hastings Cave during the depression years. I am very grateful to local artist Robyn Claire who prepared and donated a wonderful spread of sweet delights with meringues, fruit cake and Greek baklava, along with cherries from the local orchard of Bruce Morrisby and a varied selection of pizza from the nearby wood-fired pizza restaurant... all wonderful to the palate. In addition to the stubbies of Pale Ale donated by Cascade Brewery, there was a varied selection of wines on offer including the special CaveMania 2005 Limestone Coast wines, plus some fruit and flower wines from the local Bates Creek Winery.

After the opening, there were over thirty cavers still in "party" mode who socialised over dinner at the Dover Wood-Fired Pizza Restaurant - situated next door to the Dover Gallery. There were more fruit wines on offer, donated by Robyn Claire and Arthur Clarke.

The exhibition was staffed on a roster basis throughout the duration of the conference by Robyn Claire, Brent Fraser, Julia James, Grace Matts, Rhonwen Pierce, Jodie Rutledge, Meryl Moscrop, Howard Whitehead, and June and George MacLucas.

Special thanks must go to these people and also to local members of Far South Regional Arts for their help and support, especially for their help on the evening of the exhibition opening: therefore, many thanks to Jane Thiele, Caroline Amos, Wren Fraser Cameron, Denise Young, Howard Whitehead and his daughter and all who helped to make the opening a great success. Special thanks must also go to Steve Bunton and Arthur Clarke, especially Arthur for his tireless contributions to the organisation of the exhibition. Thanks Arthur.

ARTISTS REPRESENTED AT THE EXHIBITION

BALISTER, Rosemary	Charlottesville, USA
BUNTON, Stephen	Hobart, Tasmania
CLAIRE, Robyn	Dover, Tasmania
CLARKE, Arthur	Dover, Tasmania
FRASER, Brent	Dover, Tasmania
CHANDLER, Ian Ellis	Spain
GRAY, Robin	Cheddar, Great Britain
LARKIN, Brigid	Mount Gambier, South Australia
MacLUCAS, June	Adelaide, South Australia
MOSCROP, Meryl	Strathblane, Tasmania
TAYLOR, Eve	Quinns Rocks, Western Australia
THOMPSON, Coral	Australind, Western Australia
WHITEHEAD, Howard	Surveyors Bay, Tasmania
WINNING, Margorie	Victoria Point, Queensland

Earth, Air, Water, Fire

(A Love Poem in Four Elements)

by Adrienne Eberhard

Read by the author at the Artshow Opening

1. Earth

We carry caves inside us:
the heart's dark chambers,
water-washed cavern of the womb,
limestone pockets of the brain.
When our boy digs himself a mouse hole
and upends himself, hat and all, is he
trying to re-enter his own body, or mine?
There are no real boundaries: this osmosis
of skin, layering of rock on rock - Permian,
Cambrian - tilt and seismic shift of the heart.
Watch our children here. See then beguiled
by the slow, infinite drip of water
with its luminous light making moon-milk,
mother's milk, the breast-like beginning
of a stalagmite that our boy names *scrimbal*,
the tapering stillness of straws, articulate
as fingers, distant as stars, the thick-bodied
pillars like muscled torsos connecting
floor and ceiling, earth and sky.
We are all mythic creatures.
Our children delight in small fragments of stalactite,
broken pieces like statuary they can pocket
or caress, as if the cold stone casts them
in marble, linking them with the ancient past.
If they could they would *take, eat*,
consuming the labours of millennia,
calcium carbonate bubbling in their blood,
quickenening their limbs to the silent flight
of angels, gods. This accretion of coral reefs,
the compacting of dirt, soil, stone,
the percolation of time and water
is our story too. Love begins in caves,
maps its territory with echo location,
spreads velvet wings in the tiniest passages,
then unfolds across desert sands
with the moon an enormous pearl
rising behind a thousand wing-beats.
Bear witness to it here, where our boys race
the translucent stone; trace love's growth
in rock rings, its steady pulse in the unearthly
blue light of glow-worms
starring the dark.

First published in *Island 98*, Spring 2004 and reproduced with the permission of the author.

The Hastings Roadway

Sung by Jenny Robson at the opening of the artshow.

1. In nineteen hundred and thirty-five
We needed jobs to stay alive.
We packed our bags and headed off,
To work the Hastings Cave Road
2. They gave us all a mattock and spade,
With a barrow or two through the mud we'd wade,
Pushing rocks, knee deep in mud,
To work the Hastings roadway

Chorus

- Fillie me oorie oorie ay
Fillie me oorie oorie ay (sung three times)
3. Winter 37 was wet and cold,
Our shoes fell apart, but we were bold.
We asked for boots but were booted instead.
No work on the Hastings roadway.
 4. The scrub was thick and the work was hard.
We struggled and fought it yard by yard.
A man was killed and we'll not forget,
The work on the Hastings roadway.

Chorus

5. A frosty winter thirty-eight,
For a month the frosts did not abate.
But the trucks rolled better on frozen mud.
At work on the Hastings roadway.
6. In nineteen hundred and thirty – nine,
I looked back and the pride was mine.
Six long miles and four years graft.
At work on the Hastings roadway.

Chorus

7. So when you drive to the cave today
Think of the men on a pittance of pay
Who made it easy for you to drive,
To drive the Hastings roadway.

Lyrics adapted by Paddy Prosser from notes taken by Arthur Clarke, in conversation with Handy Jager. The song has been recorded on CD by The Southerly Busters and is available from the Hastings Caves Visitors Centre.