



## THE PAPIER MACHE ART OF JANE LENNON

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Michael Leunig ... as well as the visuals of the cult  
UK still frame animation, The Clangers*

It is sometimes said that dog owners start looking like their pets. But, in the case of the non-animal owning sculptor Jane Lennon she has started looking like many of her own artistic creations.

I first met Jane twelve years ago when we worked together at the National Trust's popular Norman Lindsay Gallery and Museum in Faulconbridge. My first impression was that of a fun-loving, red-headed, woman with a deep love of art as well as someone with a strong work ethic. While she loved a joke there was also a serious side to her character.

At the time I knew little of her creative impulses apart from admiring her brightly coloured homemade papier-mâché bowls and platters which occasionally appeared at work parties. These functional wares were decorated in Jane's distinctive high-key fuchsia palette of colours. These contemporary designs made a dramatic contrast with Norman Lindsay's dated rococo aesthetic.

We lost touch until mid 2013 when we rekindled our friendship prior to an exhibition we shared at the Sheffer gallery in Sydney. I was delighted to discover that in the intervening years Jane had made her name as a sculptor with a unique approach to art-making using her early experience in making paper objects.

At our 2013 show Jane exhibited a series of sculptures of couples. These works reflected the strong bonds of partners and the push-pull tensions between them. Unlike most of her objects in the exhibition, *My Right Hand* [2013] was decorated white and silver-grey rather than in her own trademark palette. The contrast in colour from her other 'couples' on show was arresting. It seems that colour for Jane is as considered as the shape of the form.

While many sculptors have a preconceived design for their forms, Jane's sculptures—as observed in *My Right Hand*—take shape during their construction. According



Opposite page, *Bowl Me Over Rover! 1&2*  
This page, *Sacrificial Earn, My Right Hand*





to her this particular work *evolved from a combination of pulp covered boxes and containers which were worked until they stood alone and embraced.*

On a recent visit to her home I was drawn to a pair of elongated pink dogs in her kitchen which were being used as fruit bowls. This pair of dishes—*Bowl me over, Rover! 1&2*—reflects her quirky sense of humour while serving a practical domestic need. Jane loves the idea of many of her pieces having a functional purpose because simply, *there is far too much stuff in the world.*

In *Feeling Ratty* [2010] we see a torso in cross section which is populated by a family of rodents. For the artist this work is about *fear of environmental degradation and genetic modification*, seemingly a popular theme in her non-functional works. Many of her objects have hollowed out sections—voids revealing a sense of emptiness, infertility, attacks on the body. Often the conceptual idea comes from her own life as she has been physically assaulted.

While there are few direct influences on her images the work of contemporary English artist Tracey Emin finds resonance with Jane's own creative process, although their approach is quite different. Jane fondly remembers a long conversation she had with Emin where they discussed their mutual interest in *total revelation* of their lives in their art. I must admit I find Jane's work far more appealing than the work of her famous idol.

Art historians love finding influences in an artist's oeuvre and while Jane's imagery is distinctive I see the subtle presence of Australian cartoonist Michael Leunig in many of her works as well as the visuals of the cult early-1970s UK still frame animation, *The Clangers*. Both Leunig's images and those of the long forgotten animation series are both disarming with their whimsical gentleness, but suggest a grittier sadness and truth. This is very much the case with Jane's own work. Sure her sculptures are superficially fun but there is a melancholic side to her objects.

Environmental art has a history that goes back to the 1970s. While most environmental artists are content working outdoors Jane's images are focused within the domestic sphere. This works well for her as she shares her Blue Mountains home with her sculptor husband Tony who works with sandstone and installs his finished forms outdoors.

While Jane's art is very different from that of her partner, they are inspired by each other and try to avoid being distracted by domestic pressures. Interestingly, Norman Lindsay once described 'Domus'—the house—in a 1919 letter to a brother, as being a *domestic monster* that had *killed more artists than death.*

While much of Jane's art is designed for the home she is well aware of the importance of an artist having large works, especially when impact is needed for a gallery setting. One such piece is *Meat and Greet*, a 2 metre high minotaur-like black beast with udders, a work which she has been working on for many years. The colossal size of this piece demands both attention and a smile.

As well as her hollowed women, animals are an important theme in Jane's work. She is a vegan and passionately believes that we humans are brutal in the way we care for our fellow creatures. An inspiration for her is Eckhart Tolle, author of *Power of Now* and *A New Earth*. She credits Tolle with helping her become connected to the universe rather than being a complete outsider. *His influence on my work comes partly from his message of acceptance, enjoyment and enthusiasm. So when I am in my studio and keep this in mind all things go well.* While she has worked in other media, Jane prefers working with paper as it reflects her core philosophy of treading lightly on the world. Rather than using toxic materials she gets great fulfilment reworking a once discarded resource.

Good art, in any form, is rarely understood completely at the first reading and Jane Lennon's forms repay the observer intellectually again and again. Luckily for us, she is a self motivated artist with an enviable imagination and I'm sure her development as a sculptor will unearth many more thought provoking delights.

**Silas Clifford-Smith**

This page,  *Holding Hen*

Opposite page,  *Workshop Birds*

Main picture,  *Self Portrait as a Useful Object*





