

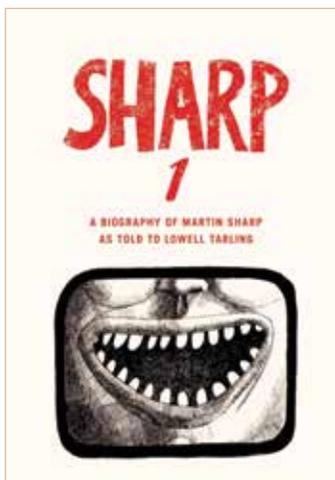


"SHARP/FOGG"

CHUCKS '83



MARTIN SHARP, Road to Abraxas, Part One: 1942-1979, by Lowell Tarling, ETT Imprint, Exile Bay, 2016
Reviewed by Roger Foley-Fogg



On December 10, 2013 as I travelled by train to Sydney to meet Jim Anderson and attend the funeral of Martin Sharp in the little church near Central Station that he favoured, Christ Church Saint Lawrence, I picked up a copy of The Australian to read on the train—to take my mind off the destination. In the letters column was a short letter from Trevor Kennedy, the high profile company director and art collector: 'Having just spent a week in Britain, I do think we underestimate some of our great talents and heroes. Every significant British newspaper carried a lengthy and most admiring obituary of the great Martin Sharp.' Trevor Kennedy, Kirribilli, NSW.

I met Martin in 1966 and we helped each other with various projects every now and then over the years through to his assisting me restore the damage to his painting Abraxas with the view to print some posters. Abraxas, painted on both sides of an acrylic sheet in 1971, came to have a stronger meaning and resonance for Martin after his experiences with Tiny Tim and Luna Park. 'Twixt God and the Devil. The word 'psychedelic' was first used in a letter from Humphrey Osmond to Aldous Huxley in 1956. As commonly used the word has two meanings. Mind manifesting, expanding one's knowledge and awareness, an epiphany, and more commonly, it refers to the use of bold abstract images using vivid contrasting colours. In my view Martin Sharp was and is the world's greatest Psychedelic and Pop Artist. This book will explain why.

This book about Martin's life, the first, is an extraordinary work of love, dedication and scholarship, forty years in the making. A second book is planned to continue the story. Lowell Tarling was a close friend of Martin Sharp and other Yellow House artists for over 40 years and has been recording interviews and discussions with Martin and the rest of us all that time.

When Lowell first met Martin he found him recording everything, particularly everything to do with Tiny Tim. Lowell, who also loved Tiny Tim, wrote the book that Martin illustrated: 'Tiny Tim: Tiptoe Through a Lifetime'. And took that cue to record Martin recording. This book is also an autobiography of Martin Sharp's own words telling his life story over hours of recording tape. And in the recorded words of dozens of Martin's friends and relatives. There are some 200 hours of recording tape. This is an extraordinary archive of primary source material of those heady and life-changing times.

Constructed and linked together by the author so as to form an easy to read flowing narrative, this book also tells the story of a journey taken by Martin Sharp from his birth through to his ecstasy and happiness in bringing Tiny Tim's World Non-Stop Singing Record of popular song to the stage at Luna Park ... through to his agony and sadness after the Luna Park fire. Reminding him of the meaning of his painting Abraxas, the painting which Timothy Leary wanted for the cover of his book 'The Politics of Ecstasy'.

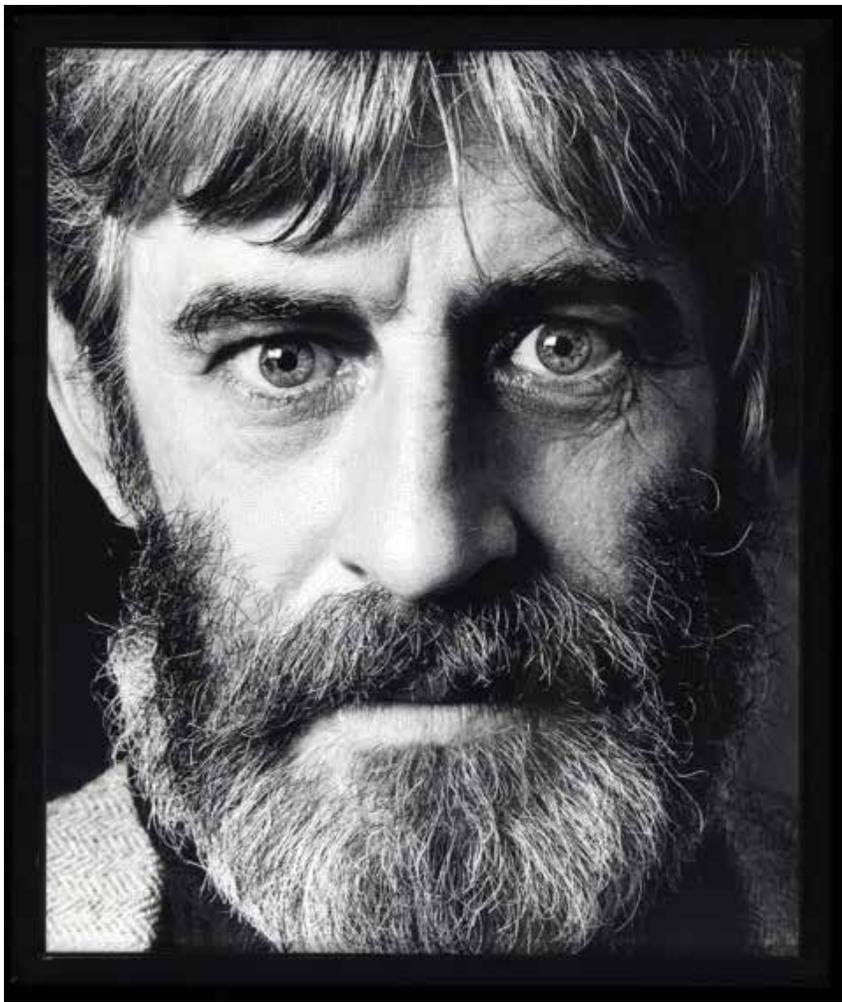
To quote Lowell quoting Martin and Kingo (Peter Kingston): 'Abraxas—God and the Devil in their counterpoint. Darkness/Light. The tide going in and out at the same time. Terrible Abraxas. To look upon Abraxas is blindness. To know it is sickness. To worship it is death. To fear it is wisdom. To assist it not is redemption. I don't know what it means. I've never been able to work that out. It's not for man to know Abraxas. When you're locked up in it, I suppose it destroys you. Abraxas is the Sun, but at the same time the terrible sucking gorge or the void.'⁽²⁴⁾ Kingo summed it up: 'Martin never stopped feeling guilty about the Ghost Train fire.'⁽²⁵⁾

As is the case with true life stories, everything is subjective. There are a few minor differences of opinion between contributors that do not disturb the overall sense of who Martin Sharp was. For example, the owner of the building at the time, Ian Reid, refers to the Yellow House as including #61 Macleay Street, when most people knew the address as #57-59. Only a few people knew, as Greg Weight reminded me, that a hidden door in the Stone Room led through the wall into an

Top: Lowell Tarling, photo Konrad Lenz
Right: Martin repainting his interpretation of Phil May's 1888 cartoon "a curiosity in her own country", which he named 'Australilia' - the last photograph of Martin taken by Lowell Tarling

Opposite page top:
Martin Sharp and Roger Foley-Fogg,
photo Jon Lewis, 1983
Centre: ABRAXAS by Martin Sharp, 1970, print restored by Roger Foley-Fogg and Martin Sharp, 2010





Portrait of Martin Sharp by Jon Lewis from the exhibition 'Face to Face' - 200 portraits 1986-1988. The collection was purchased and is on permanent display at the National Museum of Australia's Eternity gallery.

apartment next door above #61, where Martin lived. Lowell sticks to the recorded facts, what people said. The book also describes who all Martin's friends were, what they did and how they met. Who did what and to whom at the Yellow House in Sydney. How the Yellow House began, thrived, and how it ended. As well as being a history of Martin, the book is a history of that heady counter culture era when it seemed the world was becoming FREE and in that sense makes a great pairing with Albie Thoms' book 'My Generation' and is just as essential reading for everyone interested in the various truths and facts of that rapidly disappearing era.

My only criticism is the lack of Martin's illustrations, his vast and varied body of work. The University of Wollongong's Michael Organ has most of his art online which illustrates the book (see <http://sixtiessharp.blogspot.com.au>). Some women have felt left out of this history and so Lowell has also recorded the many contributions by women to The Yellow House, using the recorded words of Martin Sharp and the words of Albie Thoms from his book. Women such as Julia Sale, Gillian Jones, Antoinette Starkiewicz, Bliss, Karen Hobby, Moth, Sue-Ellen, Lyn Fuller, Slavka Jovic, Wendy Whiteley, Arkie Whiteley, Julie Clarke, Trisha, Collette St. John, 'Little' Nell Campbell and others. It was not just run by men.

Men such as Martin Sharp, Richard Neville and Albie Thoms, with women such as Wendy Bacon, Vivienne Binns and Germaine Greer were leaders and an inspiration for this

movement toward freedom and self discovery in Australia and in the world.

There is a complete list of contributors, artists and influences printed in the Yellow House Catalogue of September 1, 1971 by Albie Thoms, illustrated by Dick Weight and reprinted recently by permission for those interested in the facts. We are reminded that the era was both sacrilegious and religious/spiritual. Lowell writes: 'The early-mid 70s has been touted by the media as a hedonistic time, famous for things like LSD, public nudity and free love. There was another side ... it was a religious period. Young people rejected organised religions in droves ... They celebrated gods, gurus and Gaia. Atheists were people with science degrees.'

The Road to Abraxas is the subtitle and is explained through the words of Martin Sharp and his friends. His ecstatic approach to Luna Park and Tiny Tim clashing with the devastation and evil made manifest by the real fire coming from a fake fire, making horror of a place of fun ... the strange coincidences of that night ... and how the fire changed Martin's life on a night when the only train running in Sydney—due to a rail strike—was the Ghost Train at Luna Park.

Martin found meaning in everything, there was no such thing as a coincidence to him. The Luna Park fire was an event of corruption and greed made manifest by the face, that face, the face devouring the children.

The book includes the full story of the creation of the Yellow House told at last by its creator, Martin Sharp and Albie Thoms' importance to that creation, backed up by interviews with all the artists who were there. There are still controversial issues after 45 years with protagonists almost coming to blows and restraining orders sought as recently as this year, 2016. I don't think any of Martin's family and friends would have known all that he was thinking or all that he did, but now, through Lowell's book, we will have a good idea. And we will know what Martin's friends and family thought about him and did with him, through primary sources. The horse's mouth. He is clearly the most loved of Australian artists. What would he have made of recent events: the Dreamworld deaths by another of the four elements - water - water in a dream world. He was fond of quoting Poe: 'everything that we see or seem is but a dream...' And this great book of Lowell Tarling's was launched at Gleebooks, 'GLEE!' on the 11th day of the 11th month, at 7 hours past the 11th hour. What would Martin have made of that? Read all about it.

**Roger Foley-Fogg is a friend of the author
Lowell Tarling and Martin Sharp**

Lumino kinetic artist, Roger Foley-FOGG (aka Ellis D. Fogg) was an early proponent of the counterculture movement in Australia and FOGG LIGHTSHOWS became a popular phenomenon. In the 1970s, he was a member of the Yellow House, Sydney, an influential artist collective led by Martin Sharp and filmmaker Albie Thoms. His first gallery exhibition was an installation at Watters Gallery, Sydney in 1971, 'WOOM' with Vivienne Binns. Foley-FOGG exhibited at VIVID WALK Sydney 2016 curated by Anthony Bastic with the installation and exhibition, 'LIGHTSHOWS - 60s to NOW' curated by Sarah Breen Lovett.