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The Meszaros family medal tradition

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When I meet people for the first time at social events and I am asked what I do for a living, I reply that I'm a sculptor. They are surprised as virtually none have met one, and they find it hard to see how it could be a living profession these days. Only half believing me, they follow up by asking "What do you make your money on? Can you really make a living on that?" "Yes, but it can be tricky". "I bet. What sort of sculpture do you do?" "Lots of different things, from large public works to little medals". Most people having little understanding of medals imagine I mean souvenirs, gift shop things, or at best military medals. Definitely not 'gift shop things', mainly awards, prizes, commemoratives, portraits (like the portrait on a coin, but larger) and works that are my own ideas in circles which I exhibit and try to sell. "Why would you go to all the trouble of jamming a design into a circle? That must be very difficult". "Sometimes it is, but I get to think that way and I don't find it so hard". "What have you done that I might know?"

This article concerns the inter-generational work of my father, me, and now my niece Anna Meszaros. There has always been a core of numismatic

people, many of them in the NAA, who understand what we have been working at and why it has value; people who appreciate that our ideas and skills are the basis of all sorts of medallic and coin applications. However, our medallic work has been largely ignored by art-establishment authorities who have never really understood how it fits into the whole art spectrum, and medals are generally overlooked in public collections. One significant exception is my father's 'Stations of the Cross' series. Sets of these medals are held in the National Gallery in Canberra, Melbourne, and a number of other State and regional galleries. It is also gratifying that two years ago, the Perth Mint issued a proof set of my father's designs for the original decimal coinage (Fig. 1). It is in this context that I appreciate the invitation to speak at the recent NAA Conference and contribute this article.¹ I have always been happy to talk to and show our work to interested people. The hundreds of commissioners of medals have always been our real support.

What is a medal? It is firstly a work of art. As such, it expresses an idea about something relevant in an understandable



Figure 1.

manner. It uses the benefits of relief – drawing, and some of the qualities of three dimensional sculpture. It can have many layers between foreground and background and therefore it can create its own context and scenery. It can use perspective like drawing and light and shade like sculpture. It changes according to how the light strikes it. It has an economy of expression by virtue of its small size and concentration, but it can convey an idea with the same power as a major sculpture. It is relatively easy to reproduce in large numbers and it is therefore cheap for such expressive power. It is in permanent material and reflects its direct descent from the coins of antiquity. It can utilize different styles, techniques, materials and colours and can be as traditional or contemporary as you like. It can deal with any subject that painting or sculpture can tackle. It can be a one-off or produced in the millions.

In 1990, John Sharples organized a major show of work by my father and me, with medals from the Melbourne Museum's collection, giving our work an historical context. This was combined with the launch of the Royal Australian Mint's only pure art medal venture, my 'Courtship Series' (Fig. 2). This series drew on my own memories of getting to know girls in my youth, which was not as misspent as I would have liked. It shows the first attraction, then dancing as a formal way to show oneself off and to touch, a gift of flowers rewarded with a kiss on the cheek, a tiff where it all goes a bit sour, a gift of jewellery where it is becoming more serious, and finally a kiss. The common reverse is of an apple, bitten by both parties as an expression of the need for both to engage in the relationship in the Biblical sense. The exhibition was a bold attempt to generate public interest in medals as art, as was the Mint issue,



Figure 2.

but the recession of the early 1990's limited its commercial success. The series still sells at auction at little more than silver value.

One of the great frustrations in an artist's life is the struggle to get people who are not interested to take notice. It is a losing battle and after several decades I have reached the now blindingly obvious conclusion that I should concentrate on working for those people who do like it. Perhaps surviving as continuous sculptor and medal practitioners over 72 years has convinced some of those people that there may be something in what we do after all. Internationally there has been much more interest, with seventeen of my works and my father's 'Stations of the Cross' series in the British Museum, as well as works in other collections. We have had four exhibitions at the British Museum, Stockholm, Budapest and Gotha in East Germany during 1988-89.

This formed the basis of the Melbourne Museum show which went to the Royal Australian Mint for a year in 1990-91. In August this year, the American Numismatic Association awarded me its 2011 National Art Award for Excellence in Medallistic Sculpture – perhaps in recognition of endurance. I have works in a number of international collections, and have won prizes in several international competitions.

It is important to remember that medals are only part of a wider range of work which includes major public sculptures, portrait heads, trophies, large reliefs and smaller three dimensional sculptures. There has never been enough work in any one category to make a living, but the versatility to tackle different types of sculpture overcomes this problem which afflicts so many artists. I like doing many different types of sculpture as I feel that my work benefits from it overall.

My father was the same, and took pride in his versatility. Our architectural training gives us a different, more analytical, approach than most artists. It also helps make us aware of the importance of sticking to the point, working within a budget, completing a job on time and generally working in a businesslike manner - things which many artists find daunting. It is also important to understand that in doing both commissioned and personal work, the two streams feed on and influence each other. Something I learn through a personal work can reappear in some form in a commissioned work, and vice versa. Our medals have particularly benefitted from being part of a broader output and cross-fertilization. I think they should be considered more as sculpture in medallion form, rather than in the way that other artists who only make medals conceive them. Conversely, our larger work has been influenced by our medal work, particularly in the more precise thinking and economy of expression that is needed for good medals.

I realised many years ago that to survive in the long term, I had to avoid art fashion. It is more important for my work to have some long-term value and nothing is more pathetic than an artist who is still riding a fashion which has passed. The homogenizing notion of fashion ignores the fact that each person is different. The art they produce should reflect those differences of culture, background, life experience, training,

personal preferences and natural talents. Our medals have always been outside art fashion, both with regard to local art dictates and to international medal trends. They have fulfilled a need that stems from a tradition, but approaches it in an individual manner. Art fashion reduces art to the level of female clothing, which changes all the time for commercial reasons. Some art commentators seem to see art as equivalent to skirts in women's clothing. Most people know that what really matters is the legs. Medals have been a constant and vital element in both our inspiration and living. They have attracted enough people to buy or commission our work and keep us busy. In Australia this ranks as success.

For all of us, our work in all its forms has been tackled on the basis of trying to understand a subject, reach a philosophical conclusion and then find a way of expressing that conclusion. This process is much more identifiable in commissioned work than in exhibition work. In a commission, a subject is nominated by a client, and it is often something about which I know nothing. It is an essential part of my job to become interested in the subject and to become sufficiently informed in it so that I can form a conclusion about its most essential aspect. I then devise a design to express this conclusion. I use this logic to sell my design to my client. If it is good, the client can use it to present the work to his public. Some pieces are quite specialized, so that



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.

many works need some explanation for a wider audience. Other works for the broad public must have readily discernible logic and appeal. I have been criticised for being too 'populist', a term meant as an insult, but which I take as a compliment. Getting a relevant idea across is more important to me than pseudo-intellectual obscurity.

In my personal work the same process seems to occur, but at a subconscious level. An idea, apparently out of the blue, can usually be traced to a series of past experiences. Perhaps my mind has been mulling on these for decades until something triggers a condensation into what I call an idea. I can only talk reliably about how my own mind works, but I think my father thought similarly, while Anna is a bit more instinctive in her thinking and responses. I can see how our architectural training has shaped the way we work. Architects work almost entirely on commissions and this process has always seemed more natural to us than to many other artists. My father gained a degree in Building Engineering in Vienna, 1921 - 27 but he also studied sculpture, in Paris at the Academie Julien, during 1924-25. I studied architecture at Melbourne University 1963-67 and I had a Churchill Fellowship in 1969 to study medallic sculpture at the Scuola dell'Arte della Medaglia in the Mint of Rome. This was my only formal art training, but my father's studio was a far better training ground than any art school. Anna has an

Arts honours degree in philosophy, and she learnt her medallic and sculpture skills from me.

But how did we come to the notion of making medals? Europe has a long tradition in medals of all categories, and my father developed an interest in them in the late 1920's when he returned to Budapest from Vienna and Paris. At that time Ede Telcs was Hungary's best medallist. His works include a child's portrait (Fig. 3), an adult woman's portrait (Fig. 4), a self portrait (Fig. 5), one of his annual Christmas putti (Fig. 6), and a pretty girl flirting with a rather crude admirer (Fig. 7).

My father asked Telcs to be taken on as a student. Apparently Telcs was not impressed with him at first, but my father persisted and gradually they became friends and collaborators on sculptural projects where my father did the architectural parts. In time he began to develop his own style and a degree of skill as two portraits of his parents-in-law, Adele Bakk (Fig. 8) and Sandor Bakk (Fig. 9) attest.

At that time (1927-32) he was employed as an architect, and from 1932 to 1939 he had his own architectural practice. Sculpture and medals were more of an important sideline. It was not until WWII was imminent, and as a former junior officer with experience from WWI would be called up again, that he decided to migrate to Australia. He arrived in Melbourne in mid-1939, and got a job as a draughtsman since his degree was not recognised. My mother



Figure 8.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.

and brother arrived in mid-1940. After a year in an architectural practice he had a row with his employer, left the job, and declared his intention to live as a sculptor. My mother's reaction was to say, "Now we will see who you are".

I think it can be reasonably said that my father introduced the notion of the medal as a work of art to Australia. It is true that both Dora Ohlfsen and Bertram Mackennal did some art medals, but they lived mainly in England and they made relatively few of these. Medals in Australia were mainly military and commemorative, and many were struck in England. Local minting facilities were fairly basic and dies were often made in England for striking here. Dies were hand cut or done on a Deckel pantograph. There was no Janvier pantograph in Australia, the benchmark machine for top quality reductions.

My father's tactic at the beginning of his career was to knock on the doors of local notable people in Melbourne and ask them to sit for a portrait medal. His subjects included doctors, university professors and lawyers; all people with education, money and hopefully, taste. They were put under no obligation to pay for the original work, but they were invited to buy bronze castings. Out of some 50 portraits done on this basis, only one declined to order a casting. There were several benefits of this approach. He became known to the level of society that respected such talents, he sold work and earned money, and he produced a body of work which

allowed him to hold his first exhibition in 1941. These same people introduced him to other similar people who in turn commissioned further portraits and other small works. Helping this process was the fact that the works were truly excellent and without parallel in Australia. I think that the act of making such a large number of works in such a short time, helped liberate him from the constraints of Telcs's influence, and he developed a much more robust and incisive style. Three portraits from his first 10 years are Prof. R. M. Crawford (Fig. 10), Dr. E. H. Molesworth (Fig. 11), Hewlett Johnson, the 'Red Dean' of Canterbury (Fig. 12).

He worked fast. In my childhood I remember him coming back from 2 weeks in Sydney with five new portraits, modelled and ready for casting. It took me years to develop a similar speed of work.

The connections he developed through these portraits soon led to other works - memorials, church works, prizes and awards. Because of the need to support his family, he did very few works for sale at this early stage of his Australian career and he put all his efforts into his commissioned work. I think he saw himself in the mould of the renaissance sculptors who similarly did almost all their work on commission. He also did some war-related work, including with Dr. Benjamin Rank, a pioneer of plastic reconstructive surgery, doing clay portraits of injured soldiers as a surgical guide.



Figure 13.



Figure 14.

Living primarily on commissioned work has led me to realise that the modern notion of an artist sitting in his studio, working for an exhibition or selling work by other means, is a relatively recent phenomenon, stemming from the second half of the 19th century. Before that nearly all art was commissioned. The principle was, and still is, that commissions are works which the client wants; they go out into the world and fulfill a required function. They thus become a part of the fabric of our society rather than sitting in galleries as precious curiosities. This notion is rather discounted these days as being old fashioned and commercial, but I continue to derive great satisfaction from doing such work; it is part of an ancient tradition. As well, I believe that commissions are much more demanding, intellectually and often technically, than self-generated work. One has to address the subject, the client, the form of the work, technical complications, new techniques, budget constraints, deadlines and client approval. This applies to medals as much as to larger sculpture.

I used to be invited to submit designs for Government award medals and for coinage. Since the Canberra Mint set up its own design studio about 20 years ago, there have been almost no outside coin design projects. I have not received an invitation to submit designs for Government awards since I told the Prime Minister's department in 2000 that their conditions were so bad there

was no point in my taking part. As a result of this and similarly inappropriate conditions for other projects, I have instigated, with the International Art Medal Federation (FIDEM), the creation of a set of internationally accepted competition conditions for medal and coin projects— a body to which I have been Australian delegate for 39 years. But I diverge.

The portrait connections led my father to Sydney, where he took the family in 1941 in the hope of more opportunity. There he met Sir Herbert Schlink, the Chairman of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Schlink instituted a programme of commissioning portrait medallions of every retiring honorary specialist doctor. Over the next 20-plus years this resulted in about 70 portrait medals. He was also asked to do other medals- the Maternity medal (Fig. 13), derived from his eight-foot statue outside the King George V Hospital (Fig. 14).

My father grew up in a cultured Budapest home, but with no history of living as a sculptor. His father was a barrister and ran a German language newspaper. I was told that his mother, amazingly for the times, won a scholarship to study sculpture in Paris around 1880, but young ladies of good family could not go gallivanting off to Paris as art students in those days. By comparison, I grew up in an environment where my earliest memories were of medals and sculpture being of major importance and entirely



Figure 15.

natural. Up to the age of eleven, our living room was also my father's studio, which was pushed to one side when we had a party. In fact I thought that anybody could do this work if they put their mind to it until the age of twenty three, when I was assured by an old friend that this was not so.

While my father did some commissioned medals in the late 1940s, it was not until the 1950s that he began to receive more frequent medal commissions. It was then that he really developed his intellectual approach to these works, always having a fully thought out philosophical concept which he then conveyed with an imaginative design. It was this thoughtful approach which helped convince his clients to accept these relatively unorthodox works. It also brings the client into the development process, drawing on their specialist knowledge and working with them as well as for them. This is what I learnt from him more than anything

else and it remains the underpinning of my own career. It is also what Anna has learnt from me. What it does is turn the medal into an expressive work of art, based on real understanding, rather than a formulaic standard product. As mentioned earlier, to achieve this we must become sufficiently educated in the nominated subject to be able to make a valid artistic statement to our clients. With luck we can enlarge their understanding of their own subject by giving them a fresh slant on it. Some typical works by Andor are:-

Matthew Flinders, Australian Academy of Science - Examining the macrocosm and microcosm, the two instruments creating the X, sign of the unknown, and a stylised portrait of Flinders (Fig. 15).

Professional Officers Award - 'Think and do', obverse, a man examines a mineral sample, the thinking part; reverse, a man supervises a construction, the doing part (Figs 16



Figure 16.



Figure 17.



Figure 18.

and 17).

Kodak Film Festival - What the eye perceives as three stages to a movement, film breaks it down into many stages (Fig. 18).

The commissioning process has led me to the thought that initially I am a contract philosopher, in that I am paid to sit and think and learn about the subject, until I arrive at a philosophical conclusion. The design then expresses that conclusion. It works especially well when doing a design for a new subject and a client with highly specialised knowledge. Most people have not done this before. They do not have the experience to think in these terms, or know how such projects should be conducted. Clients have to be carefully guided through the process, intellectually, technically and procedurally. They often comment on how much they have enjoyed the process and how much they have learnt.

Some clients come with a drawing of what they think they want. Mostly this is what I call the 'shopping list approach'. In other words, they try to illustrate the components of the subject without trying to reach some underlying principle. Taking the client through the process is then more delicate because their ego can be bruised. My father was not always so diplomatic and created some mortal enemies. I have learnt from these mistakes. I have also learnt that my job is to give the clients what I think they need rather than what they think they want. If handled carefully, such

clients gradually come to realise that there is more to it than lining up a few standard symbols.

While making his way with portraits and commissions, my father began thinking about a project which would become his medallic ‘magnum opus’. This was his Stations of the Cross series. I am not sure how the idea came to him, but in 1942 he began modelling 7 inch medals on the subject. He was not a religious man in the churchgoing sense. Indeed, he had a horror of the mess that he considered sectarianism has made of Christianity. Rather, he saw the Stations as a humanistic representation of the passage of most people through life, with its temptations and pitfalls as well as the inevitable end. At first the designs were in quite high relief and were intended only to be cast, where relief height is not critical. He made several in this manner before he travelled to England in 1949. There he made personal contact with John R. Pinches & Son, medal strikers. On his return to Melbourne he recommenced work on the series with striking in mind. This caused him to work in much lower relief and the style became far more refined. The first to be struck was the last in the traditional Anglican/Catholic series, the Burial. This may well be his greatest single medallic work and has had a significant effect on many people. One man who met my father when he commissioned him to make a statue for the grave of his young son, declared that he would not have survived the grief



Figure 19.



Figure 20.



Figure 21.



Figure 22.



Figure 23.



Figure 24.



Figure 25.



Figure 26.



Figure 27.



Figure 28.



Figure 29.



Figure 30.



Figure 31.



Figure 32.



Figure 33.

without this medal.

These medals exemplify his notion of using the circle as a constructive part of the composition, with no ground lines:

Christ before Pilate - Pilate is shown on trial rather than Christ. (Fig. 19)

Christ Accepts the Cross - The hand of God (Fate, Destiny, force of life, depending on your convictions) presents Christ with the cross, the symbolic start of the life journey. (Fig. 20)

The First Fall - for the Sin of Flesh. If the baby is sacred, how can sexual love be a sin? (Fig. 21)

Christ meets His Mother - They meet knowing that the result will be His death, with the dead face in the background. (Fig. 22)

Simon of Cyrene - everyone needs a friend who will support him at his most vulnerable and needy moment. Christ helps Simon to help Him. (Fig. 23)

Veronica - She wipes Christ's face- The whole composition becomes a face of Christ as if to say that at that moment the world was saturated with Christ. (Fig. 24)

The Second Fall - For the sin of temptation. The soldier whipping Christ signifies his submissiveness to punishment even though he is without sin himself. (Fig. 25)

The Women of Jerusalem - They entreat him to use his power to save himself if he is what he says he is. As the producers and keepers of life they

cannot understand the self sacrifice. Only the baby understands and crawls across (Fig. 26).

The Third Fall, for the sin of power - The Roman soldier mocks Christ, little knowing that this wretch will eventually overcome the entire Roman Empire (Fig. 27).

Christ is stripped of His garments - He goes to His death as pure as He came into it. Clothes and earthly possessions are of no further use (Fig. 28).

The Crucifixion - The soldier hammering the nails is superimposed over Christ, symbolically crucifying himself (Fig. 29).

The Death - At the moment Christ dies, the centurion who supervised the execution declares that "Truly this was the son of God" and is thus the first convert. The soldiers play dice for his clothes unaware of the drama. (Fig. 30)

The Descent from the Cross - The mother accepts the dead body, Mary Magdalene is horrified. Joseph of Aremathaea does the gruesome job. (This was the last one my father finalised for striking, a few days before he died. Checking to see if he had finished it, we found that Christ's face was a perfect self portrait in death.) (Fig. 31)

The Burial - A sombre mourning scene, with veiled figures wrapping the body to bury it, while one figure on the left suggests the coming resurrection. (Fig. 32)



Figure 34.

The Resurrection - Nine years after my father died, a church school purchased a large set. They asked me whether I could do a 15th station of the Resurrection to continue the series. I agreed, and made a work in my father's style, but to my own design, challenging people who told me that I could not do low relief like the old man. The idea is that the reason for the Resurrection is that death was so awful, humanity needed a way to believe that it could be overcome. Thus Christ rises above a deliberately awful dead body. I took the opportunity to make Christ's body appear through his gown, one of my father's particular skills. (Fig. 33)

If we look at our output of commissioned medals as a whole, I believe it is fair to say that they represent a significant expression and documentation of what our society holds to be important. Medals have traditionally been a mark of

achievement or commemoration and are often the only survivors of events of which all other records have been lost. American academic Joseph Noble once stated "Nobody ever throws a medal away".

Perhaps my father's best known medal is his participant's medal for the 1956 Olympic Games (Fig. 34). A procession of athletes walks around the rim, following the Olympic flag. It suggests the opening and closing ceremonies, and forms its own arena naturally. The reverse shows the coat-of-arms of Melbourne intertwined with the Olympic rings. I recall averting a major disaster as a 10 year old when I noticed that he had the motto '*Citius, Altius, Fortius*' in the wrong order.

A medal which was used in different forms was for the centenary of the Government of Victoria, done in two sizes, with two different reverses. (Figs 35 and 36). A man holding a flaming torch representing Equality, and a blindfolded woman holding



Figure 35.



Figure 36.



Figure 37.

a sword representing Justice, ride a horse which has broken its hobbles. The reverse on one shows bottlebrush and banksia plants held up by the same stake, representing diversity and central support. The other reverse shows two gold miners working a sluice.

My father also made a medal for the NAV for the same occasion plus celebrating 50 years of the NAV. The obverse shows a man encouraging two boys to do their own but complementary work and the reverse uses aboriginal motifs combined with a Latin inscription to describe the occasion (Fig. 37).

A favourite of mine is a piece for the Australian Academy of Science (Fig. 38), for service to science, using both sides to express the full story, a format he felt fully utilized the potential of the medal. It deals with the change in human interpretation of natural facts. On the obverse, the priest is dominant with the pyramids in the background. On the reverse, the radio telescope is dominant and the man is tiny. The moon remains constant. Scientific objectivity has replaced the subjective religious interpretation.

A prize for the best boy and girl students at Anglican schools in Queensland was 'Jesus Amongst the Doctors', done in 1956 (Fig. 39). It is deliberately humorous, with the man bending down quizzing Christ, another at left, lamenting the precociousness of today's youth. In the background is a lousy desert prophet scratching his head in puzzlement. On the right is the

only one wanting to hear more from the young prodigy. On the reverse is a portrait of Archbishop Reginald Halse, done some years before when he was Bishop of Riverina.

The work for the Association of Civil Engineering Contractors compares humanity's efforts at construction to the efficiency and elegance of nature expressed through the spider's web. (Fig. 40)

A somewhat playful interpretation of a mythical beast is the gryphon for Medley Hall Residential College of the University of Melbourne. It is derived from a newel post on the balustrade and is given a book to denote study (Fig. 41).

My father did very few other non-commissioned medals. Some notable pieces, are:-

'The Conversion of St. Paul' - We are inside Christ's face, the blaze of light which blinded Saul showing a fragment of Damascus on the left, and Saul, becoming Paul, shielding his eyes on the right (Fig. 42).

'Eva' - Eve takes the apple from the snake and feeds it to Adam, who is blissfully unaware of the trouble he is getting into. The snake forms the circle as well as trapping the sinning couple (Fig. 43).

Origin series - the Origins of Thinking, Communication, Art and Religion, derived from rejected designs for reliefs for the National Library in Canberra (Fig. 44).

My own medallic career began



Figure 38.



Figure 39.



Figure 40.



Figure 41.



Figure 42.



Figure 43.



Figure 44.



Figure 45.



Figure 46.



Figure 47.

at the age of 13 when I bet my father ten shillings that I could do a portrait medal. This outcome can be seen in Fig. 45. It led to portrait commissions from the age of 14, starting with one of John Gartner (Fig. 46). Some of you will remember him. A later and more sophisticated portrait is this of Prof. T. J. Martin (Fig. 47). At 18 I began to make expressive medals, and I began to get commissions for medals for particular occasions. Since then, medals have been an important part of my career, both artistically and financially. I have always said that I cannot take credit for what I inherited or grew up with, only for taking advantage of the opportunity that presented itself. At the time, familiarity meant that making medals was a perfectly natural activity. I simply made medals as the ideas occurred or the commissions arrived.

I have done many more personal medals than my father, perhaps because the imperative of earning money was not quite as pressing as for my father. Selling was easier as the public acquired more discretionary income and tastes broadened. Also, my father had paved the way by creating a small but informed clientele. The notion of using the circle constructively came naturally and I have come to appreciate the benefits of working in a tight formal framework. Contrary to the undisciplined freedom of much art today, the discipline of the medal provides a direction, and yet within the confines of a circle it is amazing what diversity can occur. Some

examples from a total of about 160 personal works are:-

The Trumpeter - Based on the idea of a sousaphone which is worn as well as played, the little man is popping his cheeks to play this enormous contraption (Fig. 48).

The Kiss II - A completely different approach making almost the simplest possible medal - two planes and a stepped line (Fig. 49).

Slide - Expressing the momentum children generate when climbing, sliding and returning to the base of the slide. (Fig. 50)

Manhattan - An aerial perspective letting the shapes of the elements define the circle. (Fig. 51)

Hill Town - Done at the same time as the Manhattan, it uses retreating layers to create a feeling of perspective, with the outline of the top buildings defining the circle. The central campanile breaks out of the circle. (Fig. 52)

Mouse Munched Medal - Instead of constructing the medal, the mouse is eating it away. (Fig. 53)

Freeway Interchange - A three way interchange creates patterns, levels and directions which remind me of ancient Irish calligraphy as well as reflecting on the aesthetics of engineering. (Fig. 54)

Autobiography - A book with all the pages shaped like the same face suggesting that the whole book is about the one person. (Fig. 55)

Global Warming - The world started as



Figure 48.



Figure 49.



Figure 50.



Figure 51.



Figure 52.



Figure 53.



Figure 54.



Figure 55.



Figure 56.



Figure 57.



Figure 58.



Figure 59.



Figure 60.



Figure 61.



Figure 62.

a sphere, but is now sagging. The hand is trying to hold it together, but it is the heat of the hand which is melting it. (Fig. 56)

Majority - The simplest majority is two against one. The surfaces suggest the differences of opinion. (Fig. 57)

Life Choices - At various stages in life, we come to points where we have to decide on which direction to take. Whatever choice you make, the result will be a mixed bag. (Fig. 58)

Gossip - Gossip travels from mouth to ear, mouth to ear, often ending up where it started. (Fig. 59)

Rain on Water - This uses texture and perspective covering the whole medal. (Fig. 60)

Self Made Man - The man is forming himself out of a rough, anonymous slab of raw material. His back and front materialize on each side. (Fig. 61)

Forestation/Deforestation - One side forest, the other desolation. (Fig. 62)

Commissioned medals are generated

by the purpose imposed by the client. Many artists refuse commissions because of this constraint. I like them and relish the challenge of solving a curly problem. It is interesting that internationally, commissioned medals also have taken a back seat in favour of personal medals. I believe that the only difference between a personal medal and a well-conducted commissioned work should be that the client nominates the subject. I will always do a work which depicts my response to the nominated subject and on which I am happy to put my signature. Some examples I feel exemplify what I aim for:-

Clean Air Society award - A hand sweeps the rubbish out of the air to produce a clear area (Fig. 63).

GlaxoSmithKline Hospital Pharmacy Medal - The criteria for a medication are quantity, quality, means of administration and frequency of administration. Then it has to go to the right patient. The gold inserts on the silver medal trace a path through

these possibilities for a particular case (Fig. 64).

La Trobe University Psychology Honours Prize - A personality is formed by the influence of many factors. Wavy lines flow and intersect to form a profile made up of parts of many of the lines (Fig. 65).

Beecham Infectious Diseases research award - An infection moves across a population. The researcher examines the leading edge of the infection to see how it progresses (Fig. 66).

Vellar Memorial Lecture for cancer research and treatment - A hand separates a mass of uncontrolled growing cells which do not die, from the normal process of cells being created and dying, expressed by the negative and positive dots across the top. (Fig. 67)

CSIRO medal - This began as a single award for research in any field and now has seven categories using the same design. Each scientist takes a single thread from the tangle of the unknown and describes and defines it. Another project overlaps and interlocks, which is the way inventions occur. (Fig. 68)

Victorian Railways Apprentices Medal - The railways had 23 different apprenticeship courses, all essential for the running of the railways. They are symbolized by a jigsaw puzzle where all the pieces contribute to making a picture of a railway. The hands fitting the last piece suggest



Figure 63.



Figure 64.



Figure 65.



Figure 66.



Figure 67.



Figure 68.

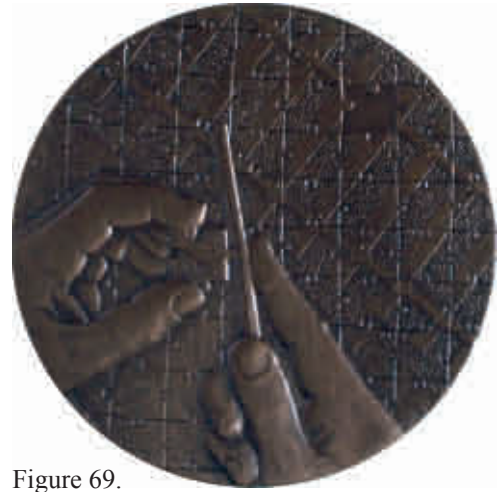


Figure 69.



Figure 70.



Figure 71.



Figure 72.



Figure 73.



Figure 74.



Figure 75.



Figure 76.

craftsmanship. (Fig. 69)

University of Tasmania Distinguished Service Medal - Everybody is expected to perform up to the level of the water surface. The distinguished recipient is the one who has bloomed above this level. (Fig. 70)

2006 Commonwealth Nations Bridge Championships - In bridge, you know your hand and you have to deduce what cards the others are holding through their bids and tricks. The others' cards are hazy with only some of their details visible. (Fig. 71)

Bicentennial Schools Memento - A line of diverse children holding hands walks up a stairway to a horizon. Education can take you a certain way, but then you are on your own and the sky is the limit. (Fig. 72)

Official Bicentennial Souvenir Medal - A crowd of people coming from all directions gathers around an Australian flag. We have nearly all come from somewhere else, but have come together to form the Australian nation. (Fig. 73)

Genazzano 120th Anniversary medal - A Catholic girls' school which treasures its original neo Gothic building and prides itself on both its religious education and how it prepares its girls to go out into the world and do something worthwhile. On one side we look in through a Gothic doorway to a chapel and on the other we look out through the

same doorway to the wide world. In each case the work is done on the girls' minds. (Fig. 74)

University of Tasmania W.O. McCarthy Award - This design is used for two different awards and thus deals with the idea of fewer and fewer people achieving higher and higher levels, until only one remains at the top. (Fig. 75)

Anna spent most of three years (1995-98) in my studio learning the basics of medallion sculpture after she finished an honours degree in philosophy at La Trobe University in Melbourne. She has undoubtedly absorbed a great deal of the Meszaros' influence. Working with me and in my father's old studio would make this inevitable. Her work shows an interesting variety of pieces clearly reminiscent of my work, while other pieces are quite distinctly different. This seems to me to be a good characteristic, indicating that she can take and use inspiration from different sources without feeling bound to any of them. She has learnt good basic modelling technique in both plasticine and wax. Each material has its advantages and she uses each to take advantage of them.

Portrait of my mother, Anna's grandmother. (Fig. 76)

The Tree - Modelled in wax as a two sided work and is cast by the lost wax method. There is a fine expression of the movement of the leaves and the tree is composed to naturally form the circle. (Fig. 77)



Figure 77.



Figure 78.



Figure 79.



Figure 80.



Figure 81.



Figure 82.



Worms - A very different kind of work, verging on full sculpture but maintaining the essence of a medal. The vessel containing the worms is implied. It is impossible to make a mould of this, so each time she needs another casting it has to be uniquely modelled in wax from scratch. (Fig. 78)

Appreciation medal for Robert Gribben, Ormond College, Melbourne University - This celebrates his support for the famous college choir. The choir is grouped around the college with the tower as its centre, the tower projecting beyond the circle and emphasizing it. (Fig. 79)



Sunflower - The flower forms the circle by its nature. Much attention has been given to the different shapes and textures of the different bands of petals, stamens and centre point. (Fig. 80)

Growth Spiral - This expresses the way some plants grow by adding leaves in succession in a spiral sequence. Much care has been given to keeping the leaf shapes constant with different sizes expressing growth. (Fig. 81)

Acrobat - A piece where the border between medal and 3D sculpture is blurred. It is in relief, but is freestanding and double sided and mounted on a base. The strained shape of the figure forms the circle. (Fig. 82)

Figure 83.



Figure 84.

Sleeping Boy - An interesting

expression of the body exposed and half concealed by the sheet. The reverse side shows the underside of the bed, with the tucked-in sheet and the legs. (Fig. 83)

Sunrise, Sunset - This is about as simple as a medal can get. It is cast with a small foot at the back which allows it to stand. The polished disc expresses the title exactly. (Fig. 84)

All this is a just a sample of the huge amount of work by all three of us over 72 years of continuous sculpture practice. All we could ever do, and continue to do, is to apply our minds and imagination to try to express what we see and understand in ways that others might comprehend and appreciate. The fact that work has continued to come and sales continue to be made over all these years leads me to hope that we have not got it all wrong. As in all matters of art and taste there is no accounting for it. Some people get it and others do not.

Biographies

Andor Meszaros was born in Budapest in 1900, the son of a barrister and newspaper owner. He served in the Hungarian army in WWI in the last year. During the communist regime in 1919, the family moved to Vienna where he studied architecture. He broke his course in 1924-5 to study sculpture in Paris. On his return to Budapest, he worked as an employed architect until 1932, when he set up his own practice. He married Elizabeth Bakk in 1932.

Son Daniel was born in 1935. In 1939, with WWII looming, he migrated to Australia, his wife and son following in 1940. After a year working as an architectural draughtsman, he began working as a medallist and built a career as a sculptor until his death in 1972. He produced hundreds of medals, major public works and a wide range of sculptures. Some of his most noted works are an altar for Canterbury cathedral, the 1956 Olympic participants' medal, the Vietnam service medal, the three stone statues for the King George V Hospital, RPAH, Sydney.

Michael Meszaros was born in 1945, in Melbourne. He spent much time working with his father during his school years, and studied architecture at Melbourne University. After graduating in 1968, he was awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 1969 to study medallic sculpture at the School of the Art of the Medal in the Mint of Rome for one year. On his return, he began working as a full time sculptor and has done so ever since. He has produced over 500 medals, 36 major sculpture commissions and hundreds of other sculpture works.

Anna Meszaros was born in Melbourne in 1972, daughter of Daniel, and grew up in an atmosphere where sculpture was common. She spent a lot of her holidays in Michael's studio and gradually learnt how to finish and mount medals. She did an Arts degree (Hons) at La Trobe University. After finishing her course in 1994, she decided that she wanted to be a medallist and

sculptor and spent most of the next three years working and studying in Michael's studio. She has lived mostly as a sculptor since then with Michael continuing to mentor her. She is now fully occupied with both sculpture and medal work.

Notes

1. Previous articles on my work in this Journal are: Ray Jewell, 1986 (Vol. 2): 4-24; Michael Meszaros and Peter Lane, 2000 (Vol. 11): 1-16.