

# STATE LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Transcript of an interview with

**Peter Kendall**

b. 1949 -

STATE LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA - ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

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## INTRODUCTION

Artist Peter Kendall is a twice Archibald finalist, a finalist in the Blake Awards and winner of numerous art awards including the Australia Day Portraiture Award and the WA Book of the Year Premier's Book Awards. He is a renowned portrait artist, children's book artist and educator who is now finding great pleasure exploring landscapes and wildflowers in his work.

Born into an artistic family in Albury New South Wales in 1949, Peter's own talents were identified early and with the support of Legacy, he was educated at the prestigious Peninsula School in Victoria before attending Frankston Technical College, the National Gallery School and Swinburne College of Technology. Peter talks of the early influences in his life, his disappointment with the art colleges he attended, his ambitions to be an artist and his own lack of discipline and focus. This last led him to Scientology and Peter speaks in some detail about his personal experience with Scientology, which he credits with giving him the tools for life.

With wife Lyn, Peter moved to Perth to, as he explains it, get as far away as possible from their families who disapproved of the match. Determined to succeed as an artist, Peter accepted any work that came his way and urges other aspiring artists to do the same. He ran portraiture classes for Fremantle Arts Centre, learning as we went along; he was commissioned to make sculptures, murals, caricatures and portraits. Peter's 1986 portrait of author Elizabeth Jolley was entered in the Archibald Prize but failed to get the attention of judges who were unaware of the West Australian author. His later portraits of racing legend, Peter Brock and boxer Danny Green were Archibald finalists and his work of sculptor Hans Arkveld was selected for the Salon des Refusés. He discusses his portraits of Brock and Green in some detail.

Almost by chance, Peter became involved with children's books artwork, initially in collaboration with author David Lennie and publisher Angus & Robertson with books such as *The House That Sneezed*. Later, through Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Peter was the artist for *A Sausage Went For A Walk*, the original artwork of which is with the State Library. His work

with children's books and as an educator of children has brought him great joy. And it was exploring opportunities for children's books that brought him to Edward Lear's limerick *The Owl and the Pussycat* which has seen him devote a great deal of time bringing the characters to life. Peter explains what the story has meant to him and how it has influenced his work.

Most recently, Peter has turned his attention to the West Australian landscape saying, "I have this massive vocabulary and what I'm painting is what I love. I love these flowers, I love these colours, I love this country."

This is an interview with Peter Kendall, artist, illustrator of children's books and self-proclaimed renaissance man. He is a highly regarded portrait artist and an Archibald finalist. The original artwork for his illustrated *A Sausage Went For A Walk* is now housed at the State Library [of Western Australia]. The interview is for the State Library, today is Monday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2017, we're at Peter's home in South Perth and the interviewer is me, Anne Yardley. Let's start at the beginning, where and when were you born Peter.

PETER KENDALL: Born 1949, Albury New South Wales.

AY: Who are your parents?

PETER KENDALL: Malcolm and Edna. My father, I don't know much about my father, he was a bit of a character from what I gather; he came from a fairly wealthy family near Sale somewhere, Warrigal, and he courted my Mum. He married my Mum; it turned out he was much, much older than he let on to her in fact many, many years older. I'd say probably 15 or 20, could be that much. But he was a charmer, not a womaniser, he was theatrical, creative. He was also a bit of an artist and Mum was an artist. Mum came from a farming family. She had an amazing story where her parents died pretty much on her birth and she was brought up by her siblings and they ran a farm. So she had no experience of being a mother, or being brought up as a child. She was brought up by teenagers.

AY: And yet she ended up raising three sons.

PETER KENDALL: Well, did she raise us? (laughs). She did, look Mum was wonderful but she wasn't a housewife and all that: she was an artist, a creative person, a theatrical person. We were always clean and immaculate, but not a normal childhood that everybody else was having.

AY: You're the middle of the three boys, what are some of your earliest recollections?

PETER KENDALL: Well I have one really amazing recollection which I keep remembering it and then I wonder how I could have had it. I had actually to go back to a farm and research it to make sure it was actually true. Mum was very ill a number of times and we were looked after by uncles. And I have an absolutely clear memory of my uncle; it was winter and my uncle holding me and lifting me up into something and I remember I couldn't move my arms and legs; I remember him putting me into something and I remember looking out and I was looking at the sunrise. The sunrise was just starting to happen in the distance and it was pink in the sky and then I became aware of things moving around in front of me and it was cattle. The cattle were following and there was steam coming off their backs. I remember thinking it was really beautiful, I actually thought that. He was feeding them hay, I remember the hay, the smells. I can bring it all forward now, I can smell it, I can smell the mud on the ground, I can smell the steam coming off them, I can hear them. That's a total memory recall. Now years later, I went to the farm and I found the wagon and I realised I must have been a baby because the spot that he would have put me in was little, like a foot and a half, there was no room for anything else but a baby.

AY: That's an amazing story; when do you remember picking up a pencil or paintbrush and using it.

PETER KENDALL: I can't remember that but I always joke with kids when I talk to them and they say, "Have you always been an artist?" And I say, "I jumped out the day I was born and asked 'where are the pencils?'" (laughs). What kind of parents are you, where are the pencils? I can't remember ever not drawing, not painting or not doing art.

05:00 I even remember at school when I was in grade one in primary school and I was drawing away there and the teacher suddenly mentioned my name so I became aware, there was a little girl up there, and he said, "If you want to learn to draw, go and talk to Peter Kendall." And this little girl came up and showed me her drawing and said, "How do I do this?" And I went, "Oh, well you do this and you do that." And that's my first memory of being pointed out.

AY: You were identified as being talented. Was this just for art or was it across the board?

PETER KENDALL: It was mainly with art but I was very good across the board; not very good, I survived quite well without putting any effort into it. Ahh, I was, it's hard to explain this, I'm a Legacy<sup>1</sup> ward. When my father died—I had no idea I was a Legacy ward until I was about 30 and then I researched why these men were always interested in me. When the war finished, these wonderful men in the country we live in decided to support and help the women who were left with children. It was unique to Australia and other men would volunteer to look after their widows and take the boys out, this type of thing. My brothers and I encountered the same thing. We were often taken out to sport or functions, something like that.

Personally I was tested a lot; I was tested for IQ and abilities and things like that; I was constantly being tested by, what do you call it? Vocational guidance testing. As a result of that—now I'm only telling you this because I discovered it in retrospect—but I was targeted and identified as a person of talent and a person of high IQ.

AY: And this resulted in Legacy, I believe, organising for you to go to a grammar school, is that correct?

PETER KENDALL: Mum had some money from my father when he died but I was going to state school and then all of a sudden I was in grammar school. And that was before Mum met my step-father. Yes, I went to grammar school, so did my younger brother. Mum might have had a little bit of money for him as well. It wasn't until years later that I discovered, as I said, many, many years later, that I discovered that a lot of my education was paid for by Legacy, or the Repatriation Department it used to be called as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Legacy is a charity providing services to Australian families suffering after the injury or death of a spouse or parent, during or after their defence force service. In 2017, Legacy cares for around 65,000 widow(er)s and 1,800 children and disabled dependants throughout Australia. <http://www.legacy.com.au>

AY: It was done behind the scenes?

PETER KENDALL: It was done very much behind the scenes. I think the idea was not to make my brothers feel they were missing out.

AY: You mentioned your mother was something of an artist and how much that was an influence in your life?

PETER KENDALL: Well, Mum was a generation where women were not really appreciated as far as being artists. It was also after the war; men were incredibly dominant. If you thought of an artist, you thought of a man. Mum was a really passionate, dedicated artist and our house was full of art. It was full of sculptures, paintings, pottery. She was always having art lessons and she had art lessons with a guy called Max Bennett. And Max Bennett was trained by a very famous Australian artist who was won the Archibald<sup>2</sup>, called Max Meldrum<sup>3</sup>. Mum was taught what was called the Meldrum technique, now anyone in art who follows the evolution of Australian art will understand that the Meldrum technique dominated the Australian art world, particularly the winners of the Archibald.

10:00 So Mum learnt this technique and she ended up teaching it as well. She ran little art classes and taught people but she was also, in her own way, quite eccentric. I remember her going to a country town and everyone was shocked that she was wearing slacks. I wanted to mention that because I lived in a house full of paintings, full of art. Even the man next door was a full time artist and the smell of oil paint and linseed oil going through the house is

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2 The Archibald Prize is awarded annually to the best portrait, 'preferentially of some man or woman distinguished in art, letters, science or politics, painted by any artist resident in Australasia'. Over the years some of Australia's most prominent artists have entered and the subjects have been equally celebrated in their fields. <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/>

3 Max Meldrum (1875-1955), artist and teacher, studied at the NGV School before beginning work as a freelance illustrator and cartoonist. He won the NGV Travelling Scholarship in 1900, and painted in Paris and Brittany for thirteen years before returning to Melbourne. In 1916 he founded an art school in the city, and many students from the NGV school left it to join Meldrum's. They were the first of many generations of Australian artists known as 'Meldrumites', who were indoctrinated in what Meldrum believed to be the 'invariable truths of depictive art' and the 'science of appearance' relating to tonal and space relations between objects. <http://www.portrait.gov.au/people/max-meldrum-1875>

normal to me. And having nudes and things like this, that was normal. I wasn't offended, or shocked or embarrassed by nudes. Mum painted all of us, we've all got portraits and sketches. I don't know that she did nudes.

AY: How much do you think that influenced you?

PETER KENDALL: I don't know whether it influenced me but it didn't harm me. The thing is that I was dedicated; I was absolutely fixated on art. If I wanted to work something out—I remember as a little kid trying to figure out how to draw a knight in armour and I just went and found books and I copied it exactly and tried to work it out. I learnt at a very early age that if you want to learn something you draw. So I would draw things and Mum would take us out painting and I would draw. A lot of attention went on me and people would buy my drawings from Mum and buy my sketches. I just wanted to put that bit in because Mum was an incredibly creative free spirit full of mischief and fun. Without that I may not have had the opportunities I had. And also I think had my father, I may not have—because I've got the mind that could have gone anywhere really; I could have been a doctor or lawyer or whatever.

AY: Another influence came into your life when your mother did re-marry; she married Major Olle. Tell me about him and about his son [Andrew] who became part of your family.

PETER KENDALL: Well, Major Olle was this incredibly interesting guy. His father was the inventor of x-ray in Australia; he was one of the pioneers of x-rays in the world and the major was a super brain and he told me that he had a high IQ and that he was very bright and when the war happened, they put him. And because he had a super high IQ, they put him in intelligence, so he was in army intelligence. When Mum met him, I remember him; he was an incredibly handsome man. He looked a bit like Clark Gable; the women adored him and Mum was very pretty and very vivacious.

The strange thing that happened, the first night that she dated him—I didn't like him at all—and Mum used to let us do what we liked in our bedrooms. We could draw on the walls, we

just weren't allowed to paint or draw on the rest of the house. So she let us have our own rooms, I shared with my brother. Mum said she came home after the date and I was asleep on the floor in front of a drawing I'd done on the wall and I'd done a seven foot drawing of him as a devil. She said I must have spent all night on it (laughs) and it looked exactly like him she said. She told me years later when they divorced, "Yes, you were right."

Anyway, he was this handsome man; he was intelligent; Mum loved the intelligence. And he had a son. This little boy—it was a sad story in a way because Andrew<sup>4</sup>'s mother didn't want him and it was maybe a war marriage and I don't think they were together very long. The father took on the responsibility of the boy but he was a major in the army so he boarded him out. So Andrew was a boarder from an extremely young age, probably pre-primary, he was always in school uniform, always living in boarding schools. So when we first encountered him, he turned up at our place. I didn't know he existed at all, suddenly there was this boy standing there in the full school uniform, very neat and tidy; which I wasn't. That was my first introduction to Andrew. Andrew was a couple of years older than me but not of the same height, I was a little bit bigger than him physically.

AY: Two highly intelligent boys, how did you get on?

15:00 PETER KENDALL: We hated each other immediately; it was a war. The major showed him off like a performing parrot—because I had this lovely life, I was king of the mountain, everyone thought I was a genius. Not a genius, they just loved me being an artist and I was involved in acting, so I was theatrical. And suddenly there was this person there but he got tested in front of me that day. The major said, "What's the capital of France?" "Paris." "What's the capital of Germany?" "Berlin". And I'm going, oh shit, I don't know any of this and he just went right through the capital cities and then he said what's the German word for blah blah and Andrew just reeled it off like a parrot. And I just thought, I'm in trouble,

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Olle, 1947-1995, became an award winning ABC radio and television journalist. He began his career in as a news cadet in 1967 working on such programs as *7.30 Report*, *Four Corners*, *A Big Country* as well as ABC Radio 2BL, Sydney. He died unexpectedly in 1995 of an aggressive brain tumour (glioblastoma multiforme).

I'm in trouble. But it actually motivated me to get better than this guy so I went to school; I suddenly became a really good student, I wanted to learn everything. And Andrew evidently went the other way. Because there was so much attention on me as an artist, he wanted to be more artistic.

And my mother—she told us years later she may have made a mistake but she felt we were okay but she felt Andrew needed a mother and she didn't want to be the evil step-mother so she put all her attention on Andrew. And Andrew was really looked after and he came out of his shell and he became funnier and he became more relaxed because he was very serious. He was bright, I mean, I'm high IQ but he's much higher IQ, super brain like his father. His father spoke many languages and also knew all about army intelligence and he used to show us how to do codes—I can do codes—his hobby was doing IQ tests and crosswords and all this.

Anyway we went to move to his house, from Albury to Mornington. I was enrolled in a private school called Peninsula School and the other boys were all put in high school. Later on I discovered the reason was because Legacy were paying for my private school education. Andrew was taken out of private school, he was at Ivanhoe Grammar, and he was put into high school. Then he got really shitty on me because he couldn't understand why—there was always fights over it—why was Peter getting this private school education and I'm not, I'm smarter than him.” Because he was dux of the school, he was dux of Ivanhoe Grammar. The major—we used to call him the major—he just had a little house, it wasn't much of a house but he had a little room that was a library and one day I was studying, trying to do my homework, and he sat down with me. He was never a warm person, he didn't hug you or show any affection but he was a warm person in his heart he just didn't know how to—because he'd been a military man all his life, and he's part German. I remember the first thing he got us to do, we had to say at night, “Gute nacht meine Mutter und mein Vater” and then we'd crack up. I think he did it deliberately.

Anyway he sat down with me one day, and this was a turning point for me because he was explaining to me—I was having trouble understanding something and he explained you need

to know what the words mean, and he said, "For example this word here." And I said, "How do you know what the words mean?" He went to his library which had the Webster dictionary, the Oxford dictionary, it had every dictionary, German and everything, and he handed me this dictionary, he opened up the page, he looked up the word, he said, "This is the word, this is what it means." And I just lit up, I was so excited by it. And then he said, "And down here you have the derivation and this is the Latin." And when I understood how the Latin worked, I went, "Oh a lot of words sound like that." He showed me the right way and then he got all excited and he said, "You need to learn Latin roots." He overwhelmed me of course. But he gave a tool of knowledge. What happened then was I completely altered. My brothers including Andrew would all be outside playing cricket or kicking footballs in the back yard, I'd be in that library reading all those books. He had all these how to do books. He had Esperanto; I learnt Esperanto—what a useless language is that. But I thought it was really interesting, I read it.

20:00 AY: But you discovered a love of words didn't you?

PETER KENDALL: Yes, I love words. And how to understand words and how to use words. And I'm still a word fanatic, I just love words.

AY: I'm interested in that because you had a high school teacher, Mr Longley who.....

PETER KENDALL: Not high school, he was at grammar school. John Longley.

AY: Oh, grammar school. You were doing history and you were—

PETER KENDALL: What happened there, I was always drawing. This school they sent me to, it had an art teacher part time but there was no art taught. And I just drew all the time because people would want me to draw and I'd entertain people with my drawing and I was in all the plays in the school because I loved acting. I even got offered a job in a soapie by a guy called Hector Crawford came to my parents and said, "We'd like him," but Mum wouldn't let me go. I was like 13 or 14 and I was playing the role of a 20-year-old in some

play called *The Boyfriend*. Not in the school, in the local hall and Hector Crawford and came backstage and said he had a TV show but Mum was worried it would be full of homosexuals and they'd get me, (chuckles), so it didn't happen.

So getting back to Mr Longley—don't worry I'm good at it, I think—I was drawing all the time and entertaining and a little bit of an influence on the kids, I had little clubs. I was too smart, too clever. Anyway, he pulled me aside and said, "Peter, I'm looking at your history book here and we're doing the Eureka Stockade." And he said, "Look instead of entertaining everyone with your drawing and disrupting the class why don't you draw what we're studying." And I said, "What do you mean, what draw in my book?" And he said, "Yes, you can draw in your book, for example it says here they had a fight with the police, you could draw this. I've underlined it here. So what I've done is read through it and underlined bits and you can illustrate that." And I said, "Can I?" I went away and went completely nuts. I got hooked on it and I would study the whole thing really carefully. The Eureka Stockade, I remember I ended up, on big sheets of paper, I did the whole thing as a project for the school and stuck it on the wall. But I also did it in the book as well so you'd open up the page and see a woman hitting a policeman over the head with a pot, you'd see all these crazy things happening. The thing was that I would study it; I would examine every word of it and look up as much information as I could find and then I'd find where the gags were, or where the punch lines were, or where the concept was.

I also applied the same thing in geography, science, not maths, but all the other subjects I could put it into. I remember we did the Reformation in history and if you looked at the pages, the pages I coloured so heavily they were like blood dripping down red, skulls in the middle, a little bit of writing on the page and then you'd open up a section of the page and it said the priests were corrupt and you'd open up the page and the priest would be chasing a nun, a bit naughty, you know. The point is, he gave me a tool for learning which was if I studied something, if I can draw it, I can get the concept. So, if I'm looking up even a word in a dictionary, I will draw it; I'll think up sentences of course. It's amazing how you can learn that way. Mr Longley went on to America and I heard he won an award, an education award in America.

AY: What I was getting at was that although you loved words, the visual medium of drawing still came first.

PETER KENDALL: Well what it was is that I was visually literate. I understand visual literacy. The thing is I can think three dimensionally and I can see a concept that when I can draw it or sculpt it, I get the concept. It can be a very complicated concept, a philosophical concept or whatever, but if I can draw it, I've got it. To me drawing is a tool for learning.

25:00 I've seen many kids in schools and people show me their work and I can see they can really draw, but out of say a thousand that I've seen who are exceptional drawers, probably one or two were artists and they were the girls, both of them, which was interesting. The rest of them were what I call visually literate, they have an ability to think visually and understand visually and that's what Mr Longley, probably didn't intend to do, he probably just wanted to calm down the bad influence in the class, you know, but he did the right thing. He allowed me to use my skill and my tool for learning, which was visual, into the other forms. Does that make sense?

AY: It does. Interestingly Peninsula School didn't do art?

PETER KENDALL: Well they did. There was a lady there but it was like once a week. No, they were a commercial school. It was put together by Reg Ansett and the Barton family, who were the ex-prime minister's family and it was all these political people. And they were going to create this unique school that would be in competition to Geelong Grammar—this was the plan. It was extremely exclusive and when I look back at who was there, it was the who's who. Except for me.

AY: You went to Frankston Tech, was that so that you could do art?

PETER KENDALL: Yes, I got expelled from—oh we don't want to hear about all that. I was a young fellow who grew his hair long and got expelled because I refused to cut my hair. When I reached Leaving, all I thought about was art. I was already selling paintings; I was already entering competitions. I remember people knocking on the door and some guy

would say, "Who are you?" And I'd say, "Peter Kendall." And he'd say, "Are you really Peter Kendall?" And he'd say, "Oh well you're not an adult." And then they'd give me the prize because I kept entering [competitions], my parents helped me, but I was winning all these art prizes.

I became absolutely addicted to art. I was doing murals even before I went to art school. At the local shop, this guy let me do a mural and the mural I did was really revolting when I look at it. The poor guy must have lost so much business. I did flayed bodies. I was trying to figure out anatomy and it gave me an excuse to do anatomy. It was bizarre. I didn't want to go on to matriculation then Legacy pulled some stings I think. They didn't pull strings; they took me in to meet the arts department. In those days you had to do one year of basic art then you had to make a decision whether you were going to be a commercial artist, a fine artist, a photographer, whatever. So the first year you could do at Frankston Tech. They'd only just started and had a nice little art school there. I took my portfolio along of things I'd been doing, pretty weird stuff, and I got in. And I was much younger than the other students.

AY:                      What did you learn there that was useful to you?

PETER KENDALL:      (pause) Not a lot (pause). They had this whole thing going on where you don't praise Peter, they had a problem with me because I was too good. Like I'd walk into a class, I remember when I turned up there I looked at the other people, I checked them out on the first day, they were all doing lovely drawings and I thought they weren't very good. I just blitzed them. I knew I could blitz them so I became complacent. Then I went on to Swinburne College for the second year and the thought was that I might be good at commercial art. I don't know what they thought this, they were just trying to make good decisions for me whereas I just wanted to be an artist. That's all I wanted to be, I wanted to be an artist. I mentioned to you that I was tested early in my life many, many times by Legacy and Vocational Guidance they were always trying to steer me somewhere else.

30:00      When I was eight I realised I was an artist and I do have a very distinct moment of looking in a mirror and going, I know what I am, I am an artist. And I went in to Mum and said, "I'm an

artist.” I never deviated from that; I’ve never thought of anything else. I’ve never gone, what will I do with my life.

AY: Were you more challenged when you got to Swinburne?

PETER KENDALL: No (chuckles). I was sixteen or seventeen or something; I’m living away from home; I’m living in an artist’s house that he rented to do life drawing in. So here I am a seventeen-year-old and I’ve got naked girls wandering around. And I had to look after this house and I’ve no idea how to feed myself. I’ve no idea how I survived. Look they gave me a very small allowance, it wasn’t much but it was enough to get me food and if I needed some equipment, I had equipment. I just went in, did the courses, I loved the photography, I really enjoyed that. I did learn a lot from it; I loved the knowledge. Whenever there was knowledge there but there was kind of a freedom there which wasn’t good for me because I’d never had any discipline in my life; never had a man influencing me. The major was no good whatsoever. So I really desperately needed discipline and I was desperately searching for discipline in my life. I was left trying to figure out how I survived; how I looked after myself. I had to learn all that myself. I know it’s a boo hoo story. It’s not a boo hoo story really. To not be given the basic tools of life is very frustrating and I was looking for those basic tools.

I even got called up for National Service and I thought, oh this will be good for me because I need discipline. I’ll get in there, they’ll show me how to organise myself, how to make my bed, how to do this, how to do that. As it turned out I didn’t get in because I tricked them, but anyway.

AY: Were you in the 1971 intake when Whitlam cancelled our commitment [to Vietnam]?

PETER KENDALL: No, I was before then. What they did, they tested us. But my friend and I turned up covered in patchouli oil and we had really long hair and we looked as bizarre as we possibly could and then when they said read the first line, I read the fifth line. They knew what I was up to. The doctor said, “Oh you’re really fit, you’ll be great.” I thought no,

no. And then they sent me to a psychiatrist to be assessed. At that time I was doing all these drawings and I was back into doing these flayed bodies and I was into surrealism too. I had drawings cats sucking people's brains upwards and their bodies being torn apart. I just enjoyed the drawing, I was just trying to figure out how the body worked. When I went to see him I had my portfolio. He said, "Oh are you an artist?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Could I have a look at..." And I said, "Oh you won't like it." He said, "No, I like art, I collect art. Show me." So I showed him and he couldn't believe it (laughs). And then I got a letter about a month later saying you will not be required for National Service and we suggest you get medical advice (laughs). Sorry that was a silly story.

AY: No, no, it's a good story. It says a lot about you and about the National Service I imagine. Fred Williams<sup>5</sup>, he became an influence—

PETER KENDALL: Not an influence, I encountered him.

AY: Tell me about that.

PETER KENDALL: I went to these schools and I didn't realise—I forgot to mention that we had artists coming in with Mum, we had artists coming in and out of the house all the time. I think Russell Drysdale came into the house, I'm pretty sure it was him and [Max] Coolahan, I think he came in. Yes, I didn't realise who was teaching me in art school. And I didn't appreciate the calibre of some of these teachers.

35:00 I got shifted from Swinburne to RMIT because they had an art school and that's where I encountered Fred Williams and another guy called Andrew Sibley who's quite an important artist. There was a number of them there. One day I swanned in as I'd usually do. I was a young man, long hair and that sort of stuff; a hippy. I was a hippy with no drugs. It was just the era, it was a wonderful era, it was a beautiful time; innocent. I remember coming in one day, did my usual thing, turned at RMIT, started to put up my easel, started painting, was

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<sup>5</sup> Fred Williams revolutionised the way we see and think about the Australian landscape. In the 1960s, inspired by the landscape of Victoria close to where he lived, he distilled the essence of environment in his paintings and works on paper. <https://nga.gov.au/exhibition/williams/Default.cfm?MNUID=6> For Fred Williams biography see <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/williams-frederick-ronald-fred-15774>

talking to other people, joking, carrying on. Next thing there is this guy talking to me and it was Fred Williams. I didn't realise, I didn't know him. I knew he was the teacher and I thought he was an old person so I really wasn't interested in him. He was probably 35 or 40. Then I realised he was talking about me and I got interested and he said, "Peter, you're so frustrating, you swan in here when you feel like, you come in late and you just start flicking away on the canvas." He said, "You've got more talent and more ability than all these guys have put together. And you've got something else that they haven't got." This is the bit that got me, he said, "They can spend their entire life painting but they will never, ever be able to do what you do." He said, "You've flicked away at your canvas there and there's the model alive on your painting." I'd done a portrait of an old lady in a brown hat; I still remember the painting. I remember looking at the painting and looked over and went, there's a model over there. I must have looked at her but there she was on the canvas and she was alive. I didn't even think. I wasn't learning anything; I wasn't listening to what they were saying; I wasn't gaining any knowledge. I still had my techniques and skills I'd taught myself and a few things I'd picked up from Mum. But I learnt nothing from art school, I figured it out myself, how to do it. He said, "You have the ability to give life, other people don't." At that moment I went right I'd better pull my finger out.

AY: You did, I guess, because you found yourself at the National Gallery School. Did you learn something there?

PETER KENDALL: No, not a thing because I was really disappointed. I was absolutely devastated because there was a guy there called Dargie who was teaching, what I desperately wanted was William Dargie<sup>6</sup>. All I wanted was discipline, desperately, and I wanted the basics; I wanted to learn the basics of painting; I wanted to learn how to put the paint on the canvas, what the routine was; how to do life drawing. I wanted to learn all these things. The other schools were just poking around, they were into this sort of free spirit, do your own thing and when I went into the National Gallery School that was the year they got rid of Dargie and they bought in a guy called Jones and another guy and they introduced this whole new revolutionary way of teaching which was you did your own thing.

<sup>6</sup>Sir William Alexander Dargie CBE was an Australian painter, known especially for his portrait paintings. He holds the record for winning the Archibald Prize eight times.  
[https://www.artistsfootsteps.com/html/dargie\\_biography.htm](https://www.artistsfootsteps.com/html/dargie_biography.htm)

So I was given a little cubicle, actually it was like a little room and the whole thing was I was meant to do my own thing. There was no instruction, no life drawing, it was all cancelled, there was no painting instruction, nothing. You were supposed to figure it out yourself so I went from nuts to being more nuts. I didn't know what I was supposed to be doing. I didn't know why I was there; nobody knew why they were there. They reckoned it happened all over the world and there's a whole generation of young artists destroyed by that. Dr Spock kind of rubbish, do your own thing, be a free spirit. The whole idea was if they told you what to do then you're not doing your own thing. I remember one day he came round—you never saw him—but one day he came around and I asked for some advice, I said, "Look I really need to know," he said, "I'm too busy I've got an exhibition to get together." He said, "You need to figure it out." And then one day he came around and said, "Peter we're assessing what everyone's doing," and he said, "What are you doing here?" and I worked out that if you came up with a clever title they think you're really on to something. I was drawing these amoeba type forms in boxes—I don't know why, I was just interested in them—I said, "I'm doing biomorphic abstractions tracked over hard edged reality."

40:00 He went, "That's brilliant," and he walked away. I realised then I totally bluffed them. I wasn't doing anything; I was having fun—I wasn't even having fun. I was lost, completely lost. I would say the National Gallery School was a complete waste of time. I dropped out right at the end of it; I didn't want to be part of it anymore.

AY: And you did find yourself experimenting with drugs, tell me about that?

PETER KENDALL: Just after that, I still had some money coming in from, it must have been Legacy and I was supposed to be in art school but I dropped out. I was also involved in Montsalvat, which is an artist's colony in Eltham and I had a best friend; we were very theatrical, everyone wanted to know us. He was a genius, I was a bit of a genius and we were kind of, what would you say? Charismatic, just the type of people you'd want to hang around. I wasn't interested in drugs, although I looked like an absolute full on hippy. One

day someone handed me a little pill and I did take it and that was LSD. I didn't even smoke pot, I didn't even drink, I didn't like drinking. It changed my reality.

AY: I want to come back to that—the fact that you were someone who didn't have any discipline—because by this stage in your life you'd met your Lyn.

PETER KENDALL: Yes, I'd met Lyn, yes.

AY: Tell me a bit about Lyn?

PETER KENDALL: Well, I'd always been searching for someone and I had lots of girls interested in me when I was young but for some reason—I think I might have had a couple of girlfriends—the phone used to ring all the time. Girls were always turning up on my doorstep; I never asked girls out. And I was always looking for that special person, looking, looking, looking. No, that's not her, that's not her. And then one night when I was at Swinburne Tech with my friend Tim, we were at the university hotel where all the artists go. I was underage but I didn't look it, I had long hair and a beard. I looked across the room, a very crowded room, and I saw this angel, you know, she had this long blonde hair that went down past her bottom and she had a mini skirt on and great legs and I just looked at her and I went, "That's her." A few minutes later, she's coming over with a friend of mine, who I barely knew. This guy came over and what he was doing, he was a real idiot, he was trying to show off to her and he said, "This is Peter and he's a friend of mine." I vaguely knew him from school, and he said, "He goes to art school and he's considered a really good artist." So here you've got this trendy young woman, who's a real mod and into the latest gear suddenly being introduced to someone who's considered an important person. He said to me, "Look, can you look after Lyn because I need to make a phone call." It turned out he was trying to get drugs or something. I'd never done anything like this in my life but I just looked straight into her eyes and I said, "You shouldn't be with him, you should be with me." I'd just fallen in love. Her version is that she saw me from the other side of the room, and within a week we were together.

AY: So it really was eyes across a crowded room?

PETER KENDALL: Yes, and we were together for almost 40 years.

AY: I want to tease out what happened to you because you had times when you were together and when you weren't together, and you became seriously lost.

PETER KENDALL: I was very lost; I was getting depressed. I was just unskilled in life. I didn't know how to survive. I was selling art and I was selling pottery, I was even painting motor cycle tanks and anything I could do. I'm a worker but I just didn't know what to do. I think at one stage I might have been on the dole, but I don't think for long.

45:00 There was a very short period when I worked for the forestry commission but no one would work with me because I had long hair and a beard so they used to put me out in the middle of the forest and I used to sit there and draw and paint (laughs).

AY: But you found something that changed your life—

PETER KENDALL: The thing is I really did destroy my life with drugs. My friends and I were very into smoking pot and listening to classical music and reading art books and talking about art and that to us was a journey; a way of opening up our realities so we would be better. My whole thing was that I wanted to be an artist. It was all I ever thought about all day every day. I never thought about anything else; still don't. So anything I did, if I got stoned, it wasn't to get stoned as a self-indulgence it was getting stoned so it would help me—I thought—with my art. I was trying to open my doors of perception. I was reading all these books like Carlos Castaneda, you know, when he turned into an owl. I thought it was all real. I was really into all these different realities and trying to understand how you can use this. But I smoked so much pot; I never paid for it; it was always provided. I tended to attract people who provided pot and there were always pretty girls around—once I was with Lyn I didn't stray at all. I got seriously stoned to the point that I introverted and I became stuck inside my head; I knew that I'd become incapable of surviving and I knew I had to do something about it.

It started to happen; I knew I was heading towards a problem, then I'd have moments where I was pretty good. So I'd be fine, I'd tick along. I don't know how I survived, it's a mystery. One day a friend got sick of me picking his brains, because I thought he was a smart guy and I wanted to know how come he was doing well in life, because he was organised. He would get up, he would work—he was an artist as well, he did pottery. He said, "Look read this." And he handed me a book *Problems of Work*<sup>7</sup>. I read the book and the first thing it said was, "If you're doing something it's a cycle of action of start: change and stop." And I went, what, no one ever told me that. It was what I was looking for. I was looking for how to organise my life, how to survive, how to do well in life. I felt I was an incompetent person and I was not able to look after people. I was worried about not being able to do the right thing by Lyn, or anyone. I felt I was letting everyone down; I felt I'd let Mum down because everyone thought I was a special person. That was crushing me and I was getting worse and worse and worse. So I read this book *Problems of Work* and I started to apply it. And I got a job with a blacksmith, I was working for him for quite a while and I also started selling pottery in a market. Things started to go quite well from that and I got fascinated on this book. It changed my life because I applied it. The way it's written is read it, apply it, read it, apply it. You don't read it and believe in it. That's what I loved about it; it worked. And then when I was still getting stoned a lot, I was getting more and more stoned. Tim and I, my friend, we'd really get stoned and talk about art; we'd be up till five in the morning, then we got into the magic mushrooms.

I just went inside my head, I went further inside my head and further inside my head until I was psychotic really, not fully psychotic but to the point that I knew I was stuck inside my mind and I had a major problem. And I knew that I wouldn't be good for Lyn, I wouldn't be good for anyone. This guy said to me one day, he got sick of me talking, this is the guy who lent me the book and he said, "Look if anyone can figure you out, the Scientologists could." And I went, "Ooh." That just fascinated me the idea that someone could figure me out.

50:00 To cut a long story short, I disappeared. I got my little car which was a beautiful restored Citroën, and drove it until it blew up and then I hitchhiked and I was sleeping in strange places. People always took me in and looked after me; I was always meeting girls who'd take

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<sup>7</sup> *Problems of Work* by L Ron Hubbard

me home to their grandmother or someone and the grandmother would look after me—not for long. And then I came across Scientology in Sydney—I did a test and during the test—they work out how your dealing with life and the guy started to tell me, “Oh, you’ve got a really bad graph here.” And I said, “Yes, I know.” And he said, “You’re in a bad way.” And I said, “I know, that’s why I’m here.” I said, “Who’s that?” He said, “That’s Ron Hubbard.” And I said, “I’m not worshipping anyone.” Then I said, “What’s that?” And they said, “That’s the Sea organisation.” And I said, “What’s that?” And they said, “That’s people who devote their whole life to working in Scientology, you need to commit fully to it.” And I went, “I’ll join that.” Now the thing was, that I was trying to figure out how to get out of my drug problem, how to get a roof over my head, how to get fed, so I was using them to save me.

AY: Yes, but one of the things that’s sometimes said about Scientology is that they prey on vulnerable people. Were they doing that to you do you believe?

PETER KENDALL: The way it operates now, I wouldn’t get through the door. Someone like that is immediately sent to a drug rehab clinic, or immediately told it’s not for you. No, they don’t operate that way. There are people in every religion who come in and—I’ve seen people who’ve been there all along and haven’t done anything and they turn up every day, they’ve never done a course, they don’t do anything. They call themselves Scientologists and they haven’t done anything. I’ve seen them in other churches too, they attract that type of person. No, it was me using them—I was being clever. I knew that I would have a roof over my head, they had the technology, I call it technology now, but they would give me tools for life. I knew this was where I would re-launch my life.

AY: What did you do next?

PETER KENDALL: Well, I was interviewed and because they normally don’t let people in like me. I just happened to meet the right person and I stood with him on a bridge, I really remember this, it was just an old fashioned bridge over a little creek. I was so introverted I could barely talk; I was paranoid, if somebody said something I’d be thinking they were talking about me. If somebody in the other room laughed, I’d think they were laughing about me. I was a mess but I knew it. I was smart enough to know it. I remember just

staring ahead with him and saying, "I'm in a very bad way, I know I'm a spiritual being. I'm a very able person, I'm very intelligent, I'm also very creative but I've got myself in a real mess with drugs. If you believe in me, you won't be disappointed. I just ask you to believe in me."

55:00 That guy did believe in me, his name was Norman, he never ever doubted me where a lot of people wanted me out. They didn't want me there. But he always believed in me and I honoured his trust. The first thing they did just made me work. The whole thing with Scientology is to make the able more able and to give you tools for life, to get you into present time. A lot of people aren't in present time; they're drifting in problems. The first thing they do is get you into physical work digging holes, moving heavy things, lifting bricks and all that type of thing. I got so fit and one day I remember thinking, wow, I'm back. They made me do that for months, like six months. I wasn't doing anything for them, apart from cleaning up and cleaning the yard and things like that, they had me as a physical labourer but they fed me and gave me a bed.

AY: You are the kind of person who perhaps would have been very disdainful of all of this, would you not?

PETER KENDALL: No.

AY: No?

PETER KENDALL: I was searching spiritual anyway. I was actually quite religious. Mum went to church and I loved going to church, I took church seriously, I liked the Anglican church and the Presbyterian church. I liked being a Christian. I was drawn towards spiritual things, then when I was about 17 or 18 I had some amazing experiences, prior to drugs, I don't want to talk too much about it but very profound things that made it real to me.

I was searching when I was in art school in the first years or so, when I was living away from home I ended up being drawn towards people who were spiritual. I ended up in groups that did meditation, I was even in groups who did yoga, I was really just drawn to that area and also those people were drawn to me.

AY: I didn't mean disdainful of the spiritual side of it, I was talking about the kind of basic work that they were asking you to do....

PETER KENDALL: No, that's actually what I was looking for.

AY: But would that have been something that in your earlier life you would have had little patience with? Would that be correct?

PETER KENDALL: Not little patience, I'd never been introduced to it. Mum never did any discipline and also the Major never did anything. I had no organisational skills whatsoever. Nothing. I had no idea what money was; I had no idea what work was. I knew you had to do it but I didn't know what the mechanics were. That's actually what I was looking for. I might have found it somewhere else; I was looking for a father figure probably, a mentor or something. My friend, Tim, he had the same thing happen to him, he was an orphan and he ended up doing an apprenticeship as a sculptor and jeweller and he got organised and I envied him, that discipline. Does that answer your question?

AY: Yes, absolutely. In those early months in Scientology, what was more important to you, or maybe it was both, the spiritual side or the organisational side?

PETER KENDALL: I embraced the spiritual. I could see this was what I was looking for as well because it was practical. You didn't have to believe, you had to apply it. It really appealed to my mind. Everything you read, it says, you study it, you apply it. If it works for you, it works for you. It says that in almost every one of the books, and every time I applied it I got a result. So I felt that it was useful in that way and also I aspired to reach—there are spiritual levels you can reach in Scientology, they're like goals you can go for. I had an unusual situation occur which I'm a little reluctant to tell but when I was in the Sea organisation, I wrote to Ron Hubbard and he wrote back a couple of times. I said, "Look my stepfather thinks he knows you."

1:00:00 And he said it was quite likely they met in Australia because he was in Australia and was involved in American intelligence and they got all these guys together and that's where my step father said he met him. Anywhere, so that's a connection there. I got a letter which is extremely unusual, I sent him pictures of my paintings and drawings, and then I got a letter and he asked me to come and work with him on the ship in America as his personal artist. To me that was amazing but I thought I'm too crazy, I wouldn't be suitable and I didn't accept it. I didn't feel right for it; I didn't feel that was what I wanted to do. It was a huge honour by the way. I really admired him, he was just a workaholic, he just studied and worked all the time. He had all this study technology which I studied, it was fabulous.

AY: How did Lyn respond to this?

PETER KENDALL: Okay, I left Lyn when I crashed, I devastated her, she was completely lost. And then we got back together. She was always there in my heart, I wasn't looking for someone, there were girls around, but I wasn't looking for girls. I was trying to sort myself out. One day I was in the Scientology organisation and this lady came in I'd never met before, she'd just arrived from England and Lyn was in Melbourne at the time and I was in Sydney. And she said, "Your girlfriend's out there." And I said, "I don't have a girlfriend." And she went, "I know it's your girlfriend because I can see a golden thread going from whoever is sitting out there and you." She had never met me before; she'd just arrived in the building. I thought it was a load of rubbish but I walked out and there was Lyn. Lyn had caught a train up from Melbourne and came in unexpectedly. So we got back together and then I left Scientology. I realised it didn't rehabilitate me, I became very able, I became capable of organising my life and being responsible.

To give you an example of the change in me, I decided that I wasn't a great value to them there and I wanted to be an artist and I asked to leave, and they were fine. You've got to do ethical things to make sure you haven't committed any crimes or whatever. That was done, then I went out—I was in Sydney—to a job interview, got it and I started working in this job and I was really organised. I'd taken over somebody's job who'd been there 20 years and I got so organised knowing how to do it that I ended up doing the whole job in a morning and then I had the afternoon—I'd sit and chat and read books and the boss called me in one day

and said, “Peter, you’re a fantastic worker; you’re one of the best workers we’ve ever had here but you’ve shown us we actually don’t need a full time worker. We’ve employed someone for years and the other guys are really pissed off with you.” He said, “I’m going to have to fire you.” So I got fired for being a good worker (laughs).

Then I met up with Lyn again and we decided to come to Perth because her family interfered with us and my family had interfered. My family thought that she wasn’t intellectual enough and a lower class and her family thought that I was this crazy art person and they wanted her to marry a good apprentice. So Lyn and I got together, we came to Perth.

AY: We’ll come back to that but there are a couple of things I want to ask before we finish today though. How has Scientology, if it has at all, influenced your art?

PETER KENDALL: (long pause)

AY: That pause suggests maybe not.

1:05:00 PETER KENDALL: No, it’s a good question. I don’t paint Scientology but I use the tools of Scientology to enable me to achieve my goals as an artist. What’s happened is that I’ve become more me. I’ve become more me the more Scientology I’ve done. I consider investing in your spiritual freedom and your ability to contribute to others in life, investing in that is a better investment than a house or a car or something like that. I personally know that it’s real to me that I’ll go into another life and another life, so I’ve invested in Scientology because I believe in it—not believe in it, I just know that I’m investing in my spiritual future. So that in the next life I’m going to be in better shape. I’ve also realised—it only happened about two years ago—I’ve realised everything I’ve done in Scientology and in life has come from a decision I made when I was about fourteen. When I was fourteen, I realised, because I was studying words and language that I thought was so fascinating—I realised the more vocabulary you have, this is a simple way of explaining it, but the more vocabulary the more succinctly you can express yourself and exactly get the point across. I just did that really badly but you know what I’m saying.



PETER KENDALL: So is Christianity, so is, at one stage there, being in the Liberal Party, “This is the only way,” you know. I remember when I was hitchhiking around and lost, I ended up in the Labor Party with all these feminists making me read the *Female Eunuch*. That was like a cult you know. Everyone was called brother and this kind of thing. Look I think there’s a whole thing trying to destroy religions. I concede to a lot of people it looks pretty weird and I don’t know what to do about that. There were a lot of attacks against.

1:10:00 At one stage when it first started up, Australia absolutely boomed but it was all doctors and lawyers and university people and the government freaked out and the government thought we can’t control this and it happened all over the world. I’m not really involved in that side of Scientology. I told someone recently—I was sitting with this lady and she just lit up, she looked 10 years younger, she went away very happy, she’d gone from rambling, she changed forever. I sat there going this is a miracle, she looks 10 years younger and she’s changed forever. That is Scientology.

It gives me tools for life but I can’t defend it, I understand people are scared. People are scared of anything that’s socially unacceptable and it is a bit strange to say you’re a Scientologist. My neighbours have trouble with it but (pointing left) they’re Buddhists (pointing right) they’re Hindus, there are Seventh Day Adventists and atheists.

AY: But you haven’t spoken much about it publicly before.

PETER KENDALL: Yes, if people ask me I’m not afraid to say I’m a Scientologist. I have got heavily attacked in the past. I got attacked by the art world and I got attacked by art critics and I’ve been criticised, “Oh he’s a Scientologist; he does Scientology art.” They’re just trying to pin me down and destroy me. For a long time I was very scared to say I’m a Scientologist, most Scientologists don’t even fill it out on the Census because they’re afraid to be attacked.

AY: And yet you’ve chosen to talk about it now.

INTERVIEW

PETER KENDALL

PETER KENDALL: I'm not afraid. I'm now in a safe place where I don't have to answer to anyone. I don't have to answer to the middle class but it's taken me a long time to get to that. I'm wise in old age or whatever.

AY: We'll talk more about your old age next time.

1:12:30 FIRST INTERVIEW ENDS

This is the second interview with artist Peter Kendall for the State Library. Today is Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2017 and we're at Peter's home again. Last time we were talking about you and your wife Lyn coming over to Perth to live. Can you take your mind back there and tell me what the art world was like in Perth when you arrived?

PETER KENDALL: I don't mix in the art world. I did the same in Melbourne although I knew everyone. When I came here, everything was down in Fremantle, all the artists and that. And that's where I didn't want to be because I thought there might be a lot of would bes if they could be. Also I was struggling to survive. I did get to meet a few people; I did make some friends and there were a few artists I really liked and I associated with them. I'm not very commercial and I wasn't, particularly then, I wasn't a networker. So a lot of people were doing the networking thing. I had this naïve thing that I would create masterpieces and someone would discover me. And that lasted a very long time before I was finally disabused of that. It's not how it happens. But we were of a generation that believed that it would happen to us.

The art world? That's about all I know about the art world. When Lyn and I came over here we had nothing; when we got off the train we had a tea chest, an old fashioned tea chest, with all our stuff in it. I got off the train and I walked out and I saw over the road a shoe shop and on top of the shoe shop was an Aboriginal statue, like a really old one, and I thought, oh oh, I've come to the wrong place (chuckles). We got a little apartment somewhere in South Perth, Vic Park and then I tried to find work. I ended up with a little job as a labourer in a wood place and Lyn was running around looking for work as well. So we were newly arrived and we had absolutely nothing but we were in love. That's all we had.

AY: How did you go about establishing yourself as an artist?

PETER KENDALL: Well I didn't really go about establishing myself as an artist, that sounds like a career choice.

AY: But you had to make money?

PETER KENDALL: I did and I intended to be—I don't know I'm just clever, if I met someone I would say I could paint, I could draw your portrait, or I do murals. Any time I talked to people I told them what I do. I tended to drum up a little bit of business that way. Looking back on it, what did I do? I did murals for different people—I did a whole lot for Miss Maud's. I became her official mural artist. I'm jumping around in time here, I'm not too sure about the time factors here, what happened when.

AY: That doesn't matter.

PETER KENDALL: I had this idea right from the start that I always wanted to be practising my craft, my art. I didn't want to be a person who washed dishes and did art as a hobby. When I first came here I applied for a mature age entry thing to get into the public service to become a teacher and evidently I did very well because they rang me up and said we've got a job in the Premier's department and then they wanted me to go and teach and I don't know, something in my heart said it was wrong. The opportunities were there but I just felt it wasn't where I wanted to go. And I could see that a lot of artists were teaching; it's the standard thing, they teach. But there's that old, what do you call it, that old saw that some people teach and some people do. And I wanted to be a doer. I actually opted for that option and that's what I've done my whole life. I've tried to make a living as an artist but I had to things like paint murals. And some of the murals—I made the best out of every one. Everything I did I learnt, so if I did a mural for Miss Maud, I'd research Sweden and I'd research this and I'd research that and I'd figure out the best way to do it. So it was exciting, but I never repeated what I'd done. One lady wanted me to paint all through her house like an Egyptian pharaoh's tomb, the whole house. It was amazing: I did broken walls and it was spectacular. It was just in suburbia, this little suburban house, it was amazing.

05:00 But at that stage I wasn't doing portraits. I *did* portraits, I went along to some life drawing classes, not classes, I mixed with other artists and we used models. I was really struggling to survive, desperately struggling. I don't know how I survived actually but somehow I did. Lyn ended up with a job and she started to make some money and then she decided she wanted to do her own business. She started up a business and started to generate income and I helped her in that. For some reason I'm very good at helping others and I was really good at

helping her organise her staff so I took on that job of helping her market and promote her business. I remember once she said that she wanted a house and she wanted cars and all that. And I said, "Well, look it's not my dream. My dream is to do my art and if you want that you have to earn it because I don't have a goal to own all that stuff." And so she went out and did it.

One day I got a phone call, from Fremantle Arts Centre and they said, "Peter, we've just heard about you and we need someone to run portraiture classes here. Can you teach portraiture?" And I went, "Oh yes, no problem when do you want me?" And they said, "Well the guy's just left, can you start next week?" And I said, "Absolutely, I'll start next week." I got off the phone and went, oh shit and went straight down to South Perth library and got as many books as I could on how to paint a portrait. I went to the State Library, I researched solidly for a week. Then I went in, started teaching and I always stayed one step ahead of the students. I developed a whole technique of you do this, you do this, you do this. I worked out a routine for how to start because from what I'd studied previously I knew how to organise my thoughts and knew how to organise a procedure. And I realised—I love teaching by the way—I realised it needed to be really simple. I remember one time for an art class at UWA and all these people turned up and I used the biggest words I could think of and I really impressed everyone, I thought. And the next day hardly anyone turned up because I'd overwhelmed them. So then I started to say, "Okay, the first thing I'm going to do is show you which end of the pencil to use." And they'd all go, oh good.

I taught portraiture at Fremantle Arts Centre for a very long time. I think I might have been the first one actually, I don't think there was one before me, maybe they just needed a portrait artist. I was their official portrait artist for a very long time. From that I got commissions. From that I met people, because there would be retired people who had money or housewives who were a little bored—that's an awful thing to say but they were looking for something else. It was kind of like *Educating Rita* syndrome. They were looking, and I ended up teaching life drawing, I also taught basic drawing, I taught basic painting and I taught portraiture. Now the beauty for me was that I was drilling. You know what I mean by drilling? I was practising. So I would come in, for example, in portraiture and I would demonstrate a painting for them in three hours. I would do an entire portrait of someone in

three hours; and I got it down so that I could do it in two hours—and I'm talking to them, I'm talking to them, I'm saying, "Put your stroke here, do this." Using the Meldrum technique as the basis—not really the Meldrum technique, I developed my own—tonal, a whole series of steps that you do: mixing the colours, pre-mixing the colours, boom, boom, boom. The more I did it, the more I taught, the better I got, the faster I got, the more facility I had. I don't know if I mentioned earlier but my goal is to learn as many techniques and methods as possible because it was like a language. If I wanted to paint your portrait, I would look at you and I'll think, now what do I want to use? Do I want charcoal, pastel, oil, which techniques in oil will I use? I'm not going to paint you like I paint everybody else because I could see artists were stuck in techniques. Like Juniper<sup>8</sup> is an artist, a West Australian artist, Juniper always paints—it's like he's got one tune. A bit like Erik Sartie the pianist, you know, Erik Sartie couldn't get out of that—brilliant at what he did. But—so—

10:15

AY: So you were honing your own skills?

PETER KENDALL: Yes, I was using it to learn. I never went along and got bored. I was always setting myself a goal, I would think, right, tonight I'll do this; tonight I'll learn that; tonight I'll try out that technique. I always drew with them; I always did life drawing with the students. I let them watch me.

AY: What are some of the things you take into account when you are deciding how to paint a portrait of someone—what medium to use, what techniques to use?

PETER KENDALL: Well, that probably comes in later maybe.

AY: Okay, we can do that.

PETER KENDALL: Just remind me about that because that's a good question because that's a much more complicated subject. It's a very philosophical thing. It's interesting though. As I said, I taught portraiture for years and I'd watch people and I'd see them

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<sup>8</sup> West Australian artist Robert Litchfield Juniper AM, 1929-2012

painting and I'd look at their paintings. Some of them were like judges and lawyers and doctors, pretty smart cookies some of them. And I looked and I thought, well he's got the likeness there but there's no life in it. And I'd look at all their work and it dawned on me one day, none of them had empathy. What it was is that they were being *interesting*, as beings, as human beings they were *interesting*, but they weren't *interested*. I think the key to a good artist, particularly portraiture, is to be interested. You've got to look inside that person, you don't think about yourself. I get a shock sometimes when people say, "What do you think, Peter?" I'm not aware of me, I'm aware of them, I'm interested in *them* and I think that's the key and that's why I can sketch someone and there it is on canvas, there it is in the painting. I can do it all the time, no problem.

Your original question was about the art world and also about how to survive as an artist. I want to just hone in on that a little bit because this is of value to people. I think you've got to say yes to everything, so if somebody wants you to paint a mural, you have to go, "Yes, I'll do it." And then you figure out how to do it, you study it up and you learn it. Somebody wants a sculpture? I did some sculptures for Nigel Satterley—the guy didn't pay me, he ripped me off actually, I'm going to put that down, it nearly broke me, nearly broke me. I've still got rocks here from his sculptures. But anyway, I went, "Yes, I'll do it." I did all the right things but that's his nature, he's a wheeler, dealer, I didn't see it coming. I didn't know how he did it.

You've got to say yes to just about everything. Can you teach? Yes. Can you do this? Yes. Can you do pottery? Yes, I've done pottery sculpture, paintings, I've done silverware. I worked for a blacksmith for some years, before I came to Perth, I used to work for a blacksmith and learnt metal work. Practice your craft all the time. Any opportunity to practice your craft. I did caricatures. I ran an ad—this is one of the keys actually—I ran an ad in the West Australian and I did it as a kind of a joke but I wrote: *Peter Kendall, Artist. I can paint and draw anything.* That's all I wrote. The phone used to ring all the time.

AY:                      What were people wanting you to do?

PETER KENDALL: Everything, everything. Because they'd see that and they'd go, that's the guy I want. Other people had ads like: I'm so and so and I've won all these awards and I do landscapes. I'm so and so and I'm very important and I paint portraits. I just said I can paint and draw anything. So that's the guy they want to talk to. And I'd have these people [say] "G'day mate, you're the guy I want to talk to." They'd say, "Look I've got this idea—" and some of them had the most bizarre things they wanted me to do but I figured them out; I figured out how to do them. I got many portrait commissions from that, many, many portraits, many unusual commissions—murals, things like that that just came out of the blue. People wanted help designing—I even designed tattoos for people. I didn't say no to anything at that stage. I'd just say yes to anything and then figure out how to do it. That ad, that ad, made a lot of money for me.

AY: Where was your heart at that stage? What did you want to do?

15:00 PETER KENDALL: I just wanted to paint and I wanted to create and not to be doing all that other stuff. I found it really frustrating that I was involved with painting murals for other people, teaching for other people when really I just wanted to paint because I had all these ideas that I wanted to paint and I wanted to explore those ideas because I'm a research artist. So that was really frustrating. Bit by bit, what I did was I would buy time. This is how I work. I would get a commission or get a sale or do some teaching, earn a big hunk of money and then I'd park myself for six months or something like that and live off that and paint what I wanted to paint and draw what I wanted to paint. I went through a big stage of exploring the West Australian bush. I went up to Kings Park—I did a whole series on Kings Park. They sold, they were very successful and very beautiful paintings. And I really learnt a lot from that. What I did is I bought the time. I learnt that's what I do.

Getting back to the survival thing, I had to say yes to a lot of things. Because I didn't want to seem to my wife that I was this bludge. She had regular, good income and she was making, at one stage, quite a lot, and I would suddenly make a lot of money then I'd go through periods of no money. She never complained, she never felt I was doing the wrong thing but I, in my heart, thought I was doing the wrong thing. So I would put a lot of time into her business. She never actually had a [driver's] licence so I'd drive her everywhere, I'd do

everything for her because I wanted it to be a fair exchange. That was a big issue for me. She never asked me to do it and I probably shouldn't have done that. She never ever said, "What are you doing, are you working?" Never. Which is very special. To have a partner who believes in you, no matter what believes in you, is an incredible gift in life. It's a gift to life. But I also did that with her. I believed in her no matter what, I pushed her—what I call pushed power to her. Any dreams she had, I said, "Go for it." And I said, "I know you can do it." And she just blossomed, she absolutely blossomed. So to me she was like a work of art. I nurtured her; I let her grow and she influenced a lot of people. She had very successful business ventures and a great adventurous life. I've lost where—

AY:                               One thing I wanted to pick you up on is about your approach to portraits. Last week you talked about a teacher at art school saying that you had that ability to make people come alive in your portraits. You captured the essence of somebody. Is that what you were saying before about looking at your sitter and you lost yourself in the process. Do you have to be born like that, how do you teach someone to do that?

PETER KENDALL:           (pause) That's a good question. I've had it all my life. They used to make me, as a kid, draw people and say, "Oh this looks like him." Draw a horse, I'd draw a horse; draw Uncle Bill, I'd draw Uncle Bill out of my head. I've just always been able to do it but I think it's because I remember as a child being interested in people. I was always looking at people and thinking about them. Always. I still do it now. You came, I thought about you, she's interesting I wonder what her life is like. It just goes through my head; I've got this whole thing going on.

AY:                               Can you impart that to other people successfully?

PETER KENDALL:           (drums fingers on table) I don't know. I can teach—I could teach you how to paint; I can teach you how to draw; I can teach you to paint as competently as me but I don't think I can take you to the point where you will have that. Look, I actually think it's something else. It's a tenacity of purpose because over the years I've been in lots of schools and the teachers say this boy's really talented, this girl's really talented. And I've looked at all these and I can see they're visually literate which means they can think visually

but I think out of hundreds I've seen I've only seen three that I think could go to another level. What they had was a tenacity of purpose which means no matter what they're going to do it. No matter what. You could drown them and they'd come back up and they'll get back to it. You could whack them over the head, you could cut their arms off.

20:00 It's like that character in Monty Python where he says, "It's only a flesh wound." He keeps coming back (both chuckle). I'm like that, it's crazy. And I think it's that tenacity of purpose. The thing about painting portraits it really is a unique—I'm not saying I'm special or anything, I'm just saying I have this ability that was in me all along. I have nurtured and I have learnt about it and I've learnt how to strengthen it and I've learnt how to make it better. Does that answer your question?

AY: Yes, it does. Well, what I'd like to do is look at a couple of concrete examples.

PETER KENDALL: I love portraiture; I absolutely love portraiture.

AY: You painted Elizabeth Jolley in 1986—

PETER KENDALL: I did.

AY: Before she was well known on the other side of the country certainly. How did you approach someone like? In fact, you're quoted as saying that she was interested not interesting.

PETER KENDALL: Yes, this will lead into something else. If I can just go back a bit. Because I was with Fremantle Arts Centre Press, they decided to do this thing called Art Access. I would be sent to different country towns and I would talk to people about art and about portraiture and I met a lot of lovely people. I developed a lot some great friendships. At that time, yes, this does lead to Elizabeth Jolley. Elizabeth was also doing this but we'd never met. Like I knew of her and then there were a couple of times in country towns where we met up. She was doing literature—this lady who was in her 60s or 70s was driving this

old vehicle and going to these little country towns and giving them this talk and driving all the way back. I was doing it too; I was risking my life, absolutely risking my life sometimes because you're just desperate for the gig. But we never got the chance to really talk; we bumped into each other. And I used to see her at Fremantle Arts Centre and every now and again we'd have a little chat. So we had this thing where we kept bumping into each other.

One thing that happened—and this is important with regard to portraiture—I was doing portraits and getting commissions but I was over cooking them. You know, I'd get the commission and I'd worry about it and I'd think too much about it. The thing with me is that I shouldn't be allowed to do that. You should say, "Peter you've got 30 seconds." And then I'd do a really good one because I wouldn't put all the rubbish in there. But this lady contacted me from Hopetoun, she said, "Will you paint my husband's portrait. Would you come down to Hopetoun?" And I went, "Oh I dunno, where's that?" And she said, "It's only a few hours from Perth." So I said okay. She said, "A bit more than eight hours." I went okay. She said, "If you come down I'll organise a workshop so you'll make money from the workshop and we'll pay you to pay his portrait. How much for a portrait?" And I went, "Oh I don't know, three hundred dollars?" She said, "Alright." I said, "It's a long way to go." She said, "I tell you what, I'll line up some others."

I actually went there. I'm telling you this very quickly but this is one of the great adventures in my life. I went down there and she'd lined up a whole lot of farmers, all their kids. I was there for months. Not months, but there was a period of time I was there. I'd go to one farm, I'd stay on the farm; I'd sketch everyone; paint their portrait; move onto the next one, you know. I arrived at their place and they'd all get me drunk. This is what would happen, the husband would come in, "What's he doing here?" "He's going to paint your portrait." "I don't want my portrait, bloody hell." And then he'd go away. This happened with one—the guy came in, he was really grumpy and he disappeared. Then he came out and he'd shaved, he'd cleaned up and he was in his Mason's outfit, a suit, you know. And I went, "Where's the farmer gone?" (laughs) "Oh, you want me as the farmer, do you?" (said in a grumbling voice) And he went away.

What I used to do is I would sit them up on a table on a plinth kind of thing. They were stuck. I would stand in front of them with my easel and then all the family and friends would all sit behind, all drinking and carrying on. Kids and everything. And I would paint this portrait. And they're joking with him and I would do a painting in three, three and a half hours. I'd go bang, bang, bang, live portrait, have fun, didn't think about it, didn't worry whether I'd made a mistake and I'd move onto the next one. They were some of the best portraits I ever did. I would have been happy to continue doing them for years and years because I was getting better and better and better. I was really enjoying it, I really enjoyed the challenge of it.

25:00 I would be going into these people's lives. I'd be in someone's house, their castle. And this guy was captured, I'd have him up there and then I would ask him about his life. I'd say, "Had you always been a farmer?" "Oh no my dad was a businessman—". And I'd be painting while I'm talking to them and entertaining them at the same time. It was amazing when I look back on it. I'd pre-mix everything. I'd have an idea how his face worked and I'd pre-mix all the colours and that would take me about four hours, maybe five. I'd pre-mix, I'd have everything ready so that then when I needed that colour, I'd go boom, there it is. There's a technique called *alla prima*, which means direct painting and only the best can pull it off. I'm not bragging but the thing is you have to be highly skilled, you have to know what you're doing, you need to go A to B and not muck around. No fiddling. Those paintings out in the hallway, the one of Hans Arkeveld<sup>9</sup>, that's a three-hour portrait. That's a stunning portrait, that's one of the best ones—I would have liked to have done those for the rest of my life. Unfortunately, I didn't get any more commissions.

What happened one day was I was talking to Elizabeth [Jolley] and I said I wouldn't mind painting your portrait. And she said, "Oh really oh." I said, "Can I paint your portrait because I'll enter it in an art prize." I wanted it to enter it in the Archibald, you see. To paint the Archibald you needed to have someone well-known, so I figured it out that she would be

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<sup>9</sup> Hans Arkeveld is a painter, sculptor, draughtsman and printmaker, based in Perth. He has been an artist in residence at the School of Anatomy and Human Biology at the University of Western Australia in Perth <http://trove.nla.gov.au/people/534328?c=people>

good to paint. I went around to her place in Claremont, we had a cup of tea, she chatted. Funny little person, like a little bird, very strange. Have you met her? Yes? I liked her but she was always like—we now know that she had a hidden life and there was something that she wasn't revealing and I felt that. You know, I felt there was something that she wasn't giving me.

I just painted her in her kitchen. I just did a live painting; I pre-mixed all the colours. She had a kaftan on—the painting's here somewhere? Ah, and then suddenly I couldn't paint her. I suddenly went funny, I said, "Look Elizabeth I feel really strange." And she said, "I do too." And I said, "What do you think it is?" And she said, "I don't know, maybe we could have a cup of tea." So we had a cup of tea. And what we realised; she said, "I know what's happening" she said. "I'm looking at you and I'm thinking about you" and she said, "You're picking up on that and you're looking at me and thinking about me." She said, "I need to be passive." She said, "Let's go back. I'll be passive." And she did and it was a different portrait, a different person.

AY:                                So is that a writer and an artist. You were both examining each other from the same sort of perspective? —

PETER KENDALL:        I reckon she was the same as me. She was always observing people and I'm always observing people. I think about everybody. Everybody. The guy over the road; anywhere in my sphere, I will think about them—why do they look like that, why do they do that. And she did the same thing, always analysing, always understanding. She had all these files—boxes and boxes—and she was obviously collecting me. And I was collecting her in a way.

I put it in a Perth prize and it won first prize in the Australia Day art award and then I decided to do another portrait of her and I wanted to do one that really captured her because underneath that she had this little old lady look. You know, "I'm harmless, you can trust me," and I knew that underneath that was a killer. She had this killer instinct, I could see it and I wanted to get that. I wanted to get that cold—she had a steely coldness within her heart that I wanted to communicate. So I went away and it became a project of mine and I

did lots of sketches; I went and saw her again and asked her if I could do it. I said I want to enter it in the Archibald. She said yes. At the time I just wanted to do it. I spent probably four months just working on that painting and I've got books and books of all the sketches I did, all the plans. This is not a commission. This is not making money. This is for no other purpose than to research and figure out how to capture that person's soul. And that's what I'm about. I heavily researched; I heavily sketched. 'There's actually probably 20 or 30 paintings. There's probably a hundred drawings or more all trying to figure out how to get her and I ended up getting a kind of abstracted version of her. I distorted the face a bit because I wanted it to bounce out at me.

30:00 I wanted to catch you out. You're supposed to look at it and all of a sudden you realise that this person's penetrating you. And I did quite a very big head, quite a big head. It's a big painting, I think it's about six foot, might be five foot, I think it's six. It's a magnificent painting, I actually love it. I asked Elizabeth to come and have a look at it and she said, "No, no that's alright I trust you." And then the State Library heard about it. I entered it in the Archibald and I heard from someone in the Archibald, who I knew at the time, who said the painting was looked at and they don't know who she is.

AY: This is 1986 and they didn't know who—how did you feel?

PETER KENDALL: I was devastated. Because I knew I'd created a masterpiece. I knew it was a masterpiece. I knew it was brilliant; I know when I've done something good. All artists feel this, you just think, well this is the best that I can do. I did the best that I could do. I always produce in abundance—it's a policy of mine. You want a little drawing and we agree a hundred dollars, you're going to get a five-hundred-dollar drawing, that's how I work. I knew that I'd really cracked it. I was very excited about it. Unfortunately, it just came back in its box and it was disappointing. Cost me hundreds—sometimes the cost—like the Danny Green and the Peter Brock each a thousand dollars to send over, with insurances and all that. Very expensive and then flying back and forward to the Archibald. Very expensive exercise. They don't give you anything. They screw the artist.

AY: Let's talk about the Archibald—

PETER KENDALL: I want to finish on Elizabeth—

AY: Please.

PETER KENDALL: So what happened with Elizabeth was I decided I wanted to do another one. I decided to have a go at the Archibald, not 'a go' but I wanted to analyse the Archibald because the art people were looking for celebrities and the artist would track down the celebrity. I wanted to do a painting that symbolised that the artist was stalking the celebrity like a big game, to paint them and all this. I gave a talk one day at a portrait workshop that I did and I had a girl modelling there and she was a bit crazy this girl. Someone asked me about Elizabeth Jolley and I said, "Well I'm working on an idea at the moment and the idea is that, you know, maybe I might use this girl's body, Elizabeth Jolley's head." Because Elizabeth would never pose nude so I could do that and I'd put her in a cage—I'm playing with ideas. I'm throwing these ideas out to the group, right.

I forgot about that and then the State Library decided they were going to buy this painting. They were going to buy this particular painting; I was very excited. Then her husband happened to be on the Board of the State Library, or something, and a friend of his approached him and said—okay, just to cut a long story short, it was a nightmare by the way. They decided at the last minute not to buy it. Elizabeth wrote me a really threatening letter saying how dare you paint me and depict me naked with a different head. What had happened, she'd met this crazy lady and the lady told her that I was working on a painting of her with her body. It was not true. Her husband got really upset, he abused me on the phone and the Board abused me, everyone was abusing me, you know, how dare you do this with this icon of West Australia. I got completely destroyed and I crashed. Completely crashed, I went into quite a bad crash because of it and the painting—I've still got, still got the bloody thing. Yes, that was it, I got a threatening letter from Elizabeth, never to show it. I said, "Come and have a look at it, you've never seen it." And she said, "I don't want to see it, I've heard all about it."

That's the type of thing that happens to artists. I was really, really devastated about that. I needed the money because it was a good sale. It put me in the bad books of the art world because of the dealer who was involved, he got into trouble. The media wanted to get all over it and they wanted to make it a big event but I didn't want to do that because that's unethical but it probably would have made me if I'd done it. So that's what happened with Elizabeth.

AY: But you recovered eventually from that to go on to do more portraits that were submitted to the Archibald. I was going to ask about the process [of the Archibald].

35:00 PETER KENDALL: Okay, so to me it's all about how to survive even though you're an artist. If I'm doing—I'm still doing it—back then I'm doing portraits; I'm doing teaching; I'm doing this I'm doing that—and murals—I'm doing a lot of workshops. At that stage the children's books hadn't taken off. I hadn't even entered children's books. None of that had happened. I had a goal to be in the Archibald. My mother was taught by a guy called Jack Bennett who was taught by Meldrum, and in my bedroom was a portrait, a self-portrait of Jack Bennett—I've still got it here—and I used to look at that. He's a sick man actually in a dressing gown, but I used to look at that thinking, one day I'm going to be better than that. And I was a little kid and I used to look at this painting and I knew he had entered the Archibald. It was kind of like a target—one day I will surpass that painting and I will get in the Archibald. I had that goal as a kid.

I continued to have that goal and then I discovered you had to paint someone well know and so strategically what you have to do—it's a rotten game. It's all about strategy and a lot of the artists that enter the Archibald, it's like a chess game. What I've discovered sadly is that it's just a circus and it's really a travesty. They rip the artist off. The artists get nothing; I could really go on about this, but I won't. It is sad, it's very sad. I actually spent a month designing a painting that was a complete satire of the Archibald where it had these people on this rich boat all looking at paintings and all the artists swimming towards the boat with their paintings and then underneath the water was all these drowning artists and right at the bottom there was a painting that said, "Put your signature here" (laughs). It was a real

satire, like a thousand artists at least enter the Archibald. A thousand people are dreaming, thinking this is our opportunity; a thousand people have to find somebody to paint; a thousand people have to spend money on canvas and paint and time and all this type of thing. And they have to send the paintings in. If you live in Sydney, not a problem, you just drive down and drop it off. If you live in Western Australia, you've got to send it across the Nullarbor, it's a big problem; if you're from Tasmania, the same problem. So it's a huge gamble. And the Archibald, they get a thousand entries and out of that they pick thirty, and that's the short list. And then of the thirty you get one winner. Then they tour those paintings. The Archibald make millions of dollars out of it, do you know how much they give the artists? I was supposed to get a hundred dollars for each one, they still haven't paid me for either of them. That's it. You get nothing, nothing, they're screwing artists. Their whole thing is to get bodies into the shop and keep their jobs. It's not about artists, it's not about portraiture because it's judged by the board of directors who are not artists.

What I love about the Archibald, it set me a goal. And I wanted to take my portraiture to a level that it had never been taken to before. So each entry I've done—this is not a commercial painting, this is not a painting I intend to sell. This is a painting I want to crack equations, try to work stuff out. This is where I've worked really hard, teaching and doing all the other things I've been doing. Not so much teaching, but commercial portraits and all that sort of stuff; caricatures—I did caricatures for years. People would ring up and ask, "Do you do crak-a-tures?" People would ring up and say, "Do you do Muriels?" (laughs). I'd said, "Yes, I do 'em" (resignedly). So I'd do them, and then I'd buy time to do an Archibald painting. The Archibald was my game, I never exhibited, I was never an artist that exhibited. I didn't like that game, it looked false to me.

40:00 One thing that I haven't mentioned is that one time—where are we going to mention this? (drumming fingers on table). Part of my research into portraiture later, I started to abstract. I was trying to figure out how do you capture the soul and not paint the face. How do you do that? I was exploring abstract concepts and I still do it. I broke it down so that you didn't have flesh there, I was trying to figure out how to do that. One day a friend of mine rang up

and said, “Can I bring someone round.” I said, “Sure, who?” And he said, “Arthur Boyd<sup>10</sup>.” And I went, “Arthur Boyd, are you serious?” And he went, “Yes, he’s here in Perth and I’m looking after him, can I bring him around, I’ve been telling him about you.” Now I studied Arthur Boyd, I studied him. I researched him, he’s an artist I really tried to figure out, I’d look at how he did his landscape painting. I was doing landscape painting using similar techniques that I’d learnt from his videos on TV and I’d read his books. I saw his really wild stuff and I thought, oh well if he can do that I can do that. I had a rule of don’t compromise; didn’t make me any money, but I was able to crack equations.

Anyway, he came around and it was a wonderful experience. I was in awe. He walked around looking at my paintings, I had prices on them and he kept ripping off all the prices and saying, “Too cheap, too cheap.” Then I got out a painting I did of Rembrandt and you’ve got to realise this is like god was in the house. What actually happened, he was standing in the lounge room and I actually did this—I dropped down on my knees, and I said, “I’m really honoured, I’m really honoured” (laughs). I was really crazy, and he looked at me, a very gentle man, and he said, “Peter, that painting out there, the Rembrandt,” he said, “I’ve seen the real one and it looks the same, it’s got the same life in it. He started following me around the house and he said, “I want you to visit me in Shoalhaven.” And when people do that to me I think they’re just being nice. So I go, okay, okay. He kept asking me, “Are you going to come to Shoalhaven.”

He went away and then the next day, my friend rang again and said, “Arthur’s leaving on the train, he wants to say how much he loved meeting you.” He was here in the house by the way for five or six hours. We fed him and everything. Anyway, he said, “Arthur wants to buy one of your paintings.” And I went, “Are you serious?” And he said, “He knows which one, is it alright if I bring the money?” And I said, “Don’t worry about money, I’ll just put up a plaque ‘Arthur Boyd bought here’ you know” (chuckles). He bought a small painting and I

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<sup>10</sup> Arthur Boyd (1920-1999) was an Australian painter, potter and printmaker. Boyd aimed to convey an inner emotional vision through his work, rather than describing the external world. He painted lyrical and emotive allegories on universal themes of love, loss and shame, often located in the Australian bush. These artworks draw on a wealth of literary and mythological sources as well as intensely personal and often ambiguous symbolism. Boyd had a strong social conscience and his paintings engage deeply with humanitarian issues. <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/boyd-arthur/?tab=profile>

was handed a small envelope and I didn't look in the envelope for a few days and it was like four times the amount that I'd asked.

Months later I got this phone call, "Hello it's Yvonne Boyd here, Arthur Boyd's wife. Arthur wants to know why you're not here. He's waiting for you to come." I said, "Oh, I thought he was just being nice." She said, "No, he hasn't stopped talking about you, he wants you to come over." I thought shit how am I going to do this so I went to the Department for the Arts and asked for some money, they made me apply. And then they wrote back, my peer assessment panel, and they wrote back and said they're not going to give me money to go on a holiday to New South Wales. Australia's most famous artist had just asked a West Australian artist to visit, anyway. So what I did was I borrowed the money from some friends and I flew over there. I only had enough to go over for a week and I went over and spent some time with Arthur. It was wonderful. I kept saying, "Oh, don't bother him." But they said, "Arthur's looking for you. You're here because he wants to talk to you." So we talked. One time I was in his studio—is this interesting?

AY: This is interesting.

PETER KENDALL: One time I was in his studio and he was doing some of his Shoalhaven paintings, big paintings. I said, "I've watched you on telly, I've worked out your technique." He said, "Did you?" I said, "Yes, I've got another version to it."

45:00

He said, "Show me, show me." So I showed him what I'd done, I'd created this horsehair brush and he just watched everything I did. I went flick, flick, flick. He was fascinated. When I met him here and he said he'd seen the Rembrandt, I had the strangest feeling that he and I had connected before and that I had been his teacher and he'd been my student. And the roles had been switched. And I really felt I knew him, I felt like we'd been working together for centuries. It wasn't like meeting someone new, it was like I knew him and he knew me. And we really talked, really close, I loved him. He said, "Peter, I want to open some doors for you." He had some guy staying with him and he guy wouldn't leave the room because he didn't want to miss out on the conversation but he said, "Go and write up a letter from me of introduction for Peter." And the guy came back about two minutes later and all it said is, I highly recommend Peter Kendall blah, blah, blah, [signed] Arthur Boyd or

something like that. So Arthur signed it and then we put the letterhead of different galleries and he gave me the names of different connections.

And then I came back to Western Australia and I felt that I'd probably let him down, so I worried about it and worried about it. Then I eventually thought I'd do it. So I borrowed money again and I took all my paintings over to New South Wales and Victoria and went round all the different galleries and they loved the work. The first gallery I went into you, went right you've got an exhibition. And I thought, oh shit. And then I went to the next one and said, "I've already got an exhibition." I shouldn't have said that because that person let me down, that person—I ended up with no exhibition. One guy blew me out of the water he was so rude. I could see he'd probably killed a lot of artists. He upset me so much, the first thing he said, Rex Irwin I think his name was, and he said, "Oh yes, yes, I'm only seeing you as a favour to Arthur." (said in a mock posh voice). He said, "I'll have a look but I'm not really interested, oh, is that what you do, okay."

I went downstairs and I was so devastated, I looked at the paintings in the car, I looked at the car and I thought I'll just throw a match into the petrol tank. I just didn't want to continue with my life. He crashed me. And I sat down and went through every single thing he said and he just blew me out of the water in the first sentence. It was like a battleship and a little tiny paper boat, that's what he did, evil, evil.

And then I went to the Australia Gallery in Melbourne and all these people were interested but I didn't deal with it very well. I didn't handle it well. One gallery in Toorak said, "Look what we'll do is I will get my son and we'll put your work up for auction. My son will buy your work from the gallery because he's got a different name, then we put your work up for auction again and I'll get my nephew to buy some work." And he said, "By the time you have the exhibition we'll have a record of your work going up in value in the auction system." He said, "We'll make a lot of money because you've got artist's connections." And I walked out and thought, I don't want to do this. I was thinking, do I sleep with the devil and become wealthy, or do I stick to my guns? I choose to stick to my guns. There was one little gallery in Canberra called the Beaver Gallery and I liked them so I had an exhibition with them. So that's the story of Arthur Boyd.

AY: That's a fabulous story; let's go back to the Archibald because what I want to know is how you then selected the people you wanted to paint to submit to the Archibald.

PETER KENDALL: Okay, well (pause). My next one was Hans Arkveld; he's a West Australian artist, I knew him, he's a sculptor. I thought he was a very interesting guy, he had integrity. That painting is brilliant, I love that painting, it's an *alla prima*, the technique I wanted to do. I entered it in the Archibald; I did hear that it nearly got in. Then if you don't get in to the Archibald, then what happens is a lot of art gallery and artists then go through them and they pick them for the Salon des Refusés<sup>11</sup>.

50:00

Now to a lot of artists that's actually more important than the Archibald. The Hans Arkveld painting ended up in the Salon des Refusés. And then it came back and I was broke and it became another painting in my collection. It happens to all the artists. Then I had to figure out who to paint next. I thought about it for a very long time, I couldn't think of who to paint because I like to be inspired by someone. People are always saying paint this person, paint that person. What I realised about the Archibald is that it needs to be somebody they know in Sydney. I've been there when they had the Bananas in Pyjamas in the Archibald. I've been there when they had Flaco—if I painted anyone who worked for the ABC, like Norman Gunston, Flaco, all these people, you will get in to the Archibald. If you paint someone from Western Australia, you will not get in the Archibald.

I thought well what will I do, what will I do. There's a lady and her husband who collected some of my work over the years and they bought a beautiful painting I did of Kings Park. They are people who have been there—the name is Bev Young, I want the name mentioned because she has saved me many times. She wasn't there to save me; she was there to get a deal. They don't give you favours but these are very wealthy people, multi-millionaires, but they don't give you favours but they don't screw you. In other words, they want a deal. Her house, it's a three storey house, is full of my paintings and many times she's bought art from me, I've never asked her for money, I've never asked for favours from anyone. The fact that

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11 <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/history-of-art/salon-des-refuses.htm>

she will buy my art and a deal—she gets a deal—she’s ended up with this lovely collection. So anyway her husband was involved in motor car racing and one day I got a phone call and this guy was a businessman. He’d never say, “Hi this is so and so.” He just rang up and went, “Who are you painting for the Archibald?” And I went, “Ah, ah—“ He said, “It’s Trevor, who are you painting for the Archibald?” I said, “I don’t know.” He said, “What about Brocky?” And I went, “Who?” And he went, “Peter Brock” and my first thought, because I’m an art snob, or was then, I thought what, involved with cars and things? He said, “Well are you interested or not because I’ve got a meeting with him today and I think you should paint him.” He said, “He’d be the perfect person to paint.” And I thought well here I’ve got this person who’s collected my work, who’s done the right thing by me for years and he’s very successful at everything he touches. This guy had the Midas touch, he turned a rock into a million dollars you know he found a rock, but anyway. He just said, “Do you want to do it or what?” I went, “Alright, I’ll do it.” He said, “Okay, he’s going to be in Perth next week, I’ll bring him around.” I got off the phone and went, oh shit, what am I going to do because it just overwhelmed me a bit. It freaked me out because I had no idea about Peter Brock.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, Peter came around and he and I just clicked. This was another example of two people who felt they knew each other. We were like soul mates; we just loved each other. I sketched him and painted him. He came here for a sitting; I did a couple of live ones and every time he was in Western Australia, he’d be brought around. I said I’d go and pick him up at the airport, they said, “No you won’t be able to pick him up.” And I discovered why because one time we were standing out there (pointing to the front garden) for like five minutes and then they said have a look on this website and they sent me a link and it said, “Peter Brock was seen in Roseberry Avenue talking to this bald guy. What’s he doing, buying property in South Perth?” That quick. He was that famous; lovely guy. And I wanted to capture him; I wanted to capture this, what I felt was a very spiritual being. I wasn’t introduced to the car thing. I wasn’t introduced to the indoctrination of that world, they did try. I had to go to car races and I did enjoy it. But I liked him and he had something about him, he’s charismatic. I think whatever he did in life, he would have been special. I actually said to him one day, I said, “Had you been born in India, you’d be a guru.” So that’s what I wanted; I wanted to capture the Peter, this lovely being. Am I talking too much about Peter?

55:00 AY: No, no.

PETER KENDALL: Peter had gone back to racing, he'd retired. And then all these people were so upset and he told me that he realised that his karma was and he came back, he said, "Not because I wanted to drive but because I wanted to help others." The phone would ring and someone would say, would you come and sign some books. "Absolutely." He never said no; had no money.

I did the painting, it took six months, almost six months and I sold it in spectacular form just before it went off to the Archibald. That's a story in itself, that's an amazing story, but the bottom line is I sold it for a 100 thousand.

AY: Not to Peter Brock?

PETER KENDALL: No, to the guy—there was suddenly a lot of people interested in it. Word went out about this painting and I played the game. I actually played the game. Oh, I just thought of some other things I haven't told you about like I went to Ghana with mining companies—

AY: No, because what you are going to tell me is about Peter Brock's reaction to the painting.

PETER KENDALL: Long story short: painting is up in the Archibald. I go there and the Archibald people are real snobs. Edward Capon came up and he went, "Oh you painted that car person." (in a mock posh voice), You're that West Australian who painted that car person." Anyway, I didn't care. Peter arrived at the Archibald and he came downstairs—they have a day where all the sitters can come. Often they don't come and sometimes they do, like high court judges, all sorts of people turn up and the media is there to film them you see. So Peter comes in through the packing area.

AY: He had not seen the painting?

PETER KENDALL: He hadn't seen the painting. All he saw were little portraits I'd done, little studies. And he walks in and—downstairs the workers just went nuts, they did, they went nuts, "Brocky, Brocky". And they told me I didn't get the packers prize because they thought it would give it the kiss of death. Because the kiss of death is the packer's prize. So in comes Peter Brock and he's walking through the exhibition with me and he's looking at all these other paintings and he's going, "These are really good paintings, wow, these are really good." But I knew what he was thinking. What if he looks at Peter's and it's a dud. He walked around the corner and he looked at the painting and his mouth fell open. I'm standing next to him, there's a crowd of people nearby, there's cameras and all sorts of things going on. He looked at it; he looked at me; he looked at the painting and he said, "How did you know?" This went on for quite a while and he started to hold his head and he said, "Peter, something's happening. I'm feeling upset. This is incredible." He said, "How did you know that about me? I know it looks like me but you've captured me in there, how did you know?" And he started rubbing his head and holding his head like his head was hurting. And I thought, shit, I'm in trouble, I thought he was having a breakdown, that's what it looked like. I stood right next to him, I thought, I'll look after him. Then he just shook his head, went off for a walk, came back, looked at the painting again, looked at me and he said, "Peter, this is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me." I was silly, I went, "But you've won all those car races." And he brushed it aside, he said, "It's true, I've done this and that, I've been all over the world, I've had an incredibly charmed life but something is happening between me and that painting that I have no control over. It's affecting my body; it's affecting my mind." He said, "This is going to alter me completely. I don't know what's happening, this is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me and I wish my parents were alive to see it."

1:00:00 And I thought, I don't need to win the Archibald; this is it, I've made it. This is what I wanted; this is the effect I wanted to create with my portraiture; this is why I do it. When I looked around, there were people all around us but they had a space between us. We had this sort of private world and that to me is when I felt I'd really done it. It's one of the greatest things that's happened [to me] in this life for sure.

AY: Was it as important to you as it was to him?

PETER KENDALL: Yes. I mean I'd sold the painting for a hundred grand so I'm walking around there like king of the mountain. I was just happy. I'm a happy person anyway, but I was excited to be in the Archibald; I'd sold the painting. Even some really famous artists said beforehand, "Oh you're really positive." (in a grumpy voice.) And I'd go, "You're in the Archibald, come on." (chuckles) "I've been in it lots of times and never won, it's a struggle." "Yes, but it's so exciting." (said brightly). That happened every Archibald I went into, they're all miserable bastards.

Anyway, that's my lovely Peter Brock story and that to me validated all Mum's efforts, everybody else's efforts and this is actually what I'm about. I have had other people do that, I've had reactions to my abstract paintings where people have burst out crying and said it's changed their lives. Great. That's why I do it. If you say that's a lovely painting Peter, you're a really good artist, I think I've failed. But if you go, "There's something there that's disturbing me or doing something to me, I feel that's me." I think, excellent, I've succeeded. That's my drive, that's why I do all the things that I've done my entire life and I continue to do. All these ones I'm doing at the moment I know they're going somewhere. I don't know where they're going; I'm following the thread.

AY: Before we follow that thread, let's go back to the other work that went into the Archibald—Danny Green.

PETER KENDALL: Yes (pause).

AY: It would be impossible to top the Peter Brock experience, but what was that experience for you, of Danny Green?

PETER KENDALL: Oh, it was a great adventure. I became a bit famous then so I was getting good portrait commissions. One thing I am is I'm a good negotiator so I refuse to allow me to screw the artist, because they do. Once I did a gig for the ABC, I was artist-in-

residence<sup>12</sup>. And they're nice people but they had no intention of paying them well. They wanted the art for free and I said, "Not okay, you've got to pay me." And they turned around and paid me. They paid me quite a good wage; I ended keeping all the artwork, I sold them a painting. No one else had ever done that, so I'm a good negotiator, I'm good at that stuff.

I'm on a bit of a run, I'm doing well. I'm making good money from my portraits because I can ask them for the money. I'd cut down on teaching because the portraits were going so well. I was also doing other things, which we'll discuss another time like the kid's books. I was again trying to think of who to paint. I'd worked it out—it's like playing a game of chess—I'd worked out what was needed and it dawned on me that we had a star here in sport. I realise I'd cracked the equation by putting in a sports person because no one had ever really done that. Normally you do other artists or you do intellectuals or something like that and when they do sports people, they don't like them but I did and Peter Brock was more than being Peter Brock.

Danny Green was starting to become quite famous and I thought why don't I do a boxer, that'd be interesting because I've always wanted to paint a god. Someone who's been a god and when someone's a boxer they're being god-like. I can fight, I can take on anyone, send me your best soldiers, the Spartans, all that sort of stuff. So I started to figure out how to get him.

1:05:00 I'm a good hunter actually—I stalk them and hunt them. I worked out how to get to him, it was very clever how I got to him because I couldn't get through to him through his agent or anyone like that because they wouldn't let me near him. They didn't like any of that arty stuff. I found out who created his website because I figured that'd be a creative activity, and I contacted the guy who created his website and said, "Look I'm really interested." And the guy absolutely picked up the ball because he'd created this website, obviously got in close to Danny, wanted to get closer, so by approaching Danny with this idea of a portrait he was able to get up the rung of people who talk to Danny. That was my strategy and it worked.

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<sup>12</sup> In 2007 Peter was artist-in-residence at the ABC in Perth as part of Artopia.  
<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2007/09/22/2040618.htm>

I got to meet Danny and he came round here one day. I took one look at him and thought I've made a big mistake because he didn't have any mass to him. I thought he'd be all muscly and he was quite slim. I didn't know anything about boxing—it was the same with car racing, I didn't know anything about that, but I learnt about it. Same with boxing, I learnt about it and I said to him, "Look, I want to paint a boxer, I want to paint the power." I said, "But unfortunately you don't look very fit." And people said, you said that to Danny Green? And I said, "Yes." He said, "I'm about to do a big fight with Joe Green Junior." He said, "Come over to Sydney when I'm preparing for that, you'll see me looking really big." Okay, that was the deal.

The thing with Danny, he never understood that the Archibald was an honour and they were trying to negotiate that I would pay them a thousand dollars and I would do this and I would do that. I had to say, "No, that's not how it works. I put all this work into it, if it gets into the Archibald, he gains, I gain." The prize is hardly anything anyway.

AY: Did you ever think of bailing at that point and finding another—

PETER KENDALL: Many times, many times. I decided to persist with it and I researched him heavily, read all about him. It was impossible to get another meeting with him and then I went over there and it was a week or two before his big fight and I went to the Raging Bull gym. It was absolutely straight out of a 1930s movie; I stood at the door—I was a bit early—then they arrived; someone had forgotten the key so here are these huge guys, what did they do. What did they do? (chuckles) One went round the back and climbed up all three flights to climb through a window, but the other guy, who was built like a mountain, he elbowed his way through the door. He just destroyed this door (laughs). That was my introduction. They went in and Danny's getting all ready and he's bouncing around and I thought he's an idiot. It's an awful thing to say, but he was joking and being rude. I just thought am I really going to paint this guy, I just can't see it. He was really quite obnoxious and the place oozed testosterone. I think if any woman went in there, her knees would drop. The feeling of men power in that space, I felt this vibration, it started to affect me a bit, I started to get a bit testosterone-y. I tried to sketch him but I had a camera as well. He said, "Okay, all that's over." There were some reporters, some guy called Kochy, some TV guy

he came in and did a piece, and he said, "Now that idiot's gone." That's what he actually said. He hadn't spoken to me at all, he said, "Now I'm going to get in the ring and do a bit of sparring." And he said, "You'll get a chance to take some photos and do some sketching." I went, "Great." He got in there, the second he got in that ring, he turned into a god. I saw this transformation, suddenly there was this god. Outside the ring—idiot; inside the ring—well, not an idiot but he acted like a fool—inside the ring he just turned into a god. You could see he controlled that space and he was sparring and I was watching that.

1:10:00 One person was explaining it to me and he said, "What he's doing now is called the money punch and this is the punch that will probably knock the other guy out." And they explained how it worked. He was practising this one punch over and over and over and over. He practised other punches too and he went on and on and on. I took heaps of photos, heaps of photos and then I did some sketches as well and that was it, it was over. I went home and I (pause) I'm just wondering how I managed to do that in that time (pause), okay there must have been a second fight.

I went back home; he had the fight; within minutes he knocked the guy out and it's a very famous knockout, and he punched with that punch. I went through all my photos, I went through them and went through them; that's what I do, I go through them and through them and try to figure out the message I want to create and I cut and paste them and I rearrange them because some of them were out of focus, some of them were in focus, some of them the colour was wrong. I changed it and adjusted and adjusted. I sketched the painting I wanted to paint and then I arranged the photos so they fitted what I wanted to paint. I didn't realise but I was painting to paint that punch and it took ages and ages and ages but finally I did it. It took months to paint but finally I finished it. I was very proud of it. Danny came round to have a look at it—I think he was going to do another fight in Sydney and I was about to enter it in the Archibald and he came round and he went, "How much is it?" And I gave him a price and he said, "I never spend money on art anyway, art's a waste of money, it's all bullshit, it's all bullshit." This is how he used to speak to me and I went, okay.

Anyway, it got in the Archibald; we went there, it was a great adventure. Danny was practising, what do you call it? Whatever it is he does before a fight and he was only ten

minutes away from the art gallery. Refused to come. Would not come into the art gallery, I think he was scared. He was scared of being intimidated, scared of being out of his comfort zone, you know. He wouldn't come, wouldn't come. I know it's an awful thing to say about a boxing champion. I kept telling him, "Look you've got to come, the painting looks great, I'll look after you." "Oh no I don't want to go there." And people are rude; Edmond Capon came up and he said, (mock posh voice), "Oh you've painted that pugilist." Smug bastard.

AY: (laughing) Apart from Edmond Capon, how was it received?

PETER KENDALL: The same as the Peter Brock. Other artists came up to me and loved it, raved about it. The Peter Brock, that was the year somebody put in a giant charcoal drawing and we all looked at the giant charcoal drawing and we all went, "That's the winner." Because it was clever. The next year, I forget who it was—that's right, it might have been John Olsen or someone like that, and one of the curators said, "Oh it's his turn." So I knew I wasn't going to win; I got a lot of feedback from it, I loved it, it was a good painting. I thought I'd really cracked it. You can see what I do, with the Peter Brock I wanted to capture his spirituality, his gentleness and all that. With Danny, I just wanted to capture the raw power. So I did a totally different technique for Danny Green's painting, series of techniques, than I did for the Peter Brock. Elizabeth Jolley is done in a very free brushy style—the first one I did—each one I work out the techniques that suit the subject so I use the vocabulary I have. And I invent new techniques. I have entered another Archibald, I forgot about it, a self-portrait, I entered that.

1:15:00 AY: Is it collaborative at all?

PETER KENDALL: In what way?

AY: The conscious input of the sitter. I'm thinking of Elizabeth Jolley and the two of you having that—

INTERVIEW

PETER KENDALL

PETER KENDALL: In actual fact no. I'm the one who dominates the game. They are pretty much passive and I take from them. I use the situation, I use them. I try and reflect them, mirror-like in the painting.

AY: What happened to Danny Green's portrait?

PETER KENDALL: It got bought, a dealer sold it. Danny was really mucking me around; he wanted to buy it then he didn't want to buy it. It toured in the Archibald and I was just really upset about the whole thing because of his rudeness. It just made me feel why did I bother, why did I paint this person? Because he was rude, he used to ring me up and I'd get this torrent of swearing because he wanted to be paid, people were telling him I was ripping him off. I didn't even get any money for it. I did eventually. A dealer came to me and said, "What are you doing with the Danny Green painting?" I'd planned to burn it when it came back from the Archibald because I was so disheartened by the whole Archibald thing. He asked, "Can I sell it?" And I went, "Sure." He said, "Well you sold the Peter Brock for a 100 [thousand] so it needs to be higher than that." So he went away and rang me up two days later and he said, "I sold it, 130 thousand." He wanted fifty per cent, and I asked him later and he said, "Well I had to pay someone to meet these people." I said, "What are they fans of Danny Green?" And he said, "Oh no they can't stand him, they're into you, they've been waiting to get one of your Archibald paintings."

AY: And they did.

PETER KENDALL: That's a very nice thing to hear.

AY: That's a very nice thing to hear.

1:17:25 SECOND INTERVIEW ENDS

This is the third interview with Peter Kendall, today is the 5<sup>th</sup> of September, 2017, we're in his house at South Perth again. Peter, last week we were talking a lot about your portraits and your Archibald entries. But there's another side to your work, at some point you became a

children's book artist. How did that come about? How did you go from painting Peter Brock to a sausage going for a walk?

PETER KENDALL: Hmm (pause). My wife and I used to have an open house here on Friday nights and the idea was to encourage people to be creative. It was just an open house, we provided the food, everything. It got very busy, lots of people would turn up; we had farmers and doctors, they weren't necessarily artists. People would come along reading little poems. I remember this farmer would turn up and he had a poem every week and we'd have to listen to his poem. There were people playing guitars and all of that. One fellow turned up and he started to write some very clever poems and he was satirising the world that he was in. He wrote a little poem called *The House That Sneezed*<sup>13</sup> and it was a satire a bit on my house because it's called the house at 17 Roseberry and it's always been spotlessly tidy and neat. And this is 17 Roseberry you see. I read it and I thought I want to encourage him; I was struggling as an artist but I was happy in my goals and pursuing my dreams. I was teaching and I was also doing portrait commissions and ticking along quite well.

Lyn was doing very well as well so we were in an affluent situation but I wanted to encourage him so I said, "Look I've always wanted to do a children's book; it's always fascinated me to do a children's book and there's a technique I've always wanted to try called egg tempera." And I said, "I think this would suit egg tempera." So this would give me an excuse to do an egg tempera painting and explore that. So I said, "How about we do a children's book?" And he went, "Oh great." I went off and I spent months developing this whole technique to paint on a special type of paper for *The House That Sneezed* and I got fascinated about the whole thing. I researched it heavily, I analysed his whole poem. Even the house, I thought I'd made the house up, I walked around looked at lots of houses; I wanted a house that people would walk up to and it kind of went, "Hello." And it welcomed you.

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<sup>13</sup> Author David Lennie, Publisher Angus & Robertson, 1992.

I eventually invented a house—to cut a long story short on the house—my Mum phoned me up after the book was published and she said, “I’m going to send you a photo.” And she sent me a photo of the front of the house that I lived in just after I was born. It’s exactly the same house and it had been sitting in my mind and it had come forward. That’s something I’d discovered over the years that I don’t have to look for ideas, the ideas are there. And all the characters in the book, I invented all these characters but it turns out they’re all relative and my wife’s relatives. There’s one lady who’s a real unpleasant person and she ended up in the book. I like her but she’s got this quality; I didn’t intend it. I didn’t think, oh, I’ll satirise her. It wasn’t till the book came out later that people went, you know you’ve painted so and so and so and so. I did it with the purpose of helping David. And David was here one day—I’m a good producer but I’m really not very good at getting my product out. I never want to part with the things I think is my problem, mainly because I’m always following a line, a research line. I want to keep the earlier work so I can refer to it; it’s not that I’m attached to it in any other way.

David went to Sydney on business of some sort and he rang me up and said, “Can I take your artwork?” and I went, “Sure.” Then he rang me up and he said, “I’m going to go and see Angus & Robertson, is that alright with you? I’ve rung them up.” He went in and saw Margaret Wild at Angus & Robertson and then he rang me back—by the way, I knew the egg tempera pictures would blow them away because they were beautiful, seriously beautiful.

05:00 It’s a technique that requires enormous skill and it’s very painstaking. Each work takes three or four weeks probably, each page, yes. And it’s thousands of little tiny brush strokes, you’ve got to mix the egg—I really enjoyed doing it. It’s a beautiful technique and I knew they would never have seen anything like it. So as soon as they saw it I knew they’d fall in love with it. What I did is I blew them out of the water with my artwork but his poem is also brilliant. He rang me up and he said, “Look I just talked to Margaret Wild and they’re talking contracts.” And we went, oh shit, maybe we’ll get ripped off, maybe we should ask for more (chuckles) because we didn’t expect success. I went ahead and did *The House That Sneezed*. We signed some contracts—which I never read—and I never met Margaret Wild at all and I sat down and designed the entire book, covers, logo, all the lettering and sent it off to them. And she went, “Ah Peter, you’re supposed to have sat down with us and worked out what

you're doing and sent drafts." But she said, "It's brilliant what you've done, we're going to publish it." So I did everything wrong. All the later books, I studied up on how you apply for a children's book and what are the correct procedures. David and I did all the wrong things; we did all the things you're not supposed to do. You're not supposed to go directly to a children's book publisher and say here's the book.

That book took off; it absolutely took off. It sold five thousand copies in, I think it was, months. For Australia, that's huge. Then they re-published it and then they asked us to do another book, and we did another one called *Car-rumba* and then we did another one called *Live and Unplugged* and then Mr Murdoch bought the company, Angus & Robertson, and they stripped out all the old stuff. They stopped working with Australian artists and the whole thing was just stopped. Suddenly I didn't have a publisher, neither did anyone else. But in the meantime, I was enjoying it; I wasn't taking it real seriously. I was still doing the real serious art and be an artist and I did it with such ease. I mean it was hard work but I loved the fun of it. I could put mischief and fun into it.

It was one of the reasons I did go into children's books is that what is lacking in art is humour. I found a lot of art too serious. For example, in portraiture, I love *The Laughing Cavalier* by Franz Hals and paintings like that. I wanted to get into showing life, so it gave me a chance to explore that idea. Also my knowledge of portraiture and my observation of people, which has been an ongoing research line, I have really studied that subject heavily; how people think all this kind of thing—

AY:                                      How did you get into the minds of children. How did you understand what it was that children want?

PETER KENDALL:                (pause) I don't think I got into the minds of children consciously. I didn't go, this will be good for children. I created what was amusing me; it was the child in me that liked it. It rehabilitated the child in me. The other thing is that I never had children. I was unable to have children—we did IVF and all that and I did have a strong desire to have children. And I'm very childlike sometimes, it runs in the family, my brother's the same. I think it gave me an opportunity to have the child re-born in me. I think when people have

children, they re-habilitate their childhood through their children and have the childhood that they possibly didn't have. Does that make sense? I don't know if it does make sense. I've always cartoons; I've always done comics. This is something we haven't discussed but I've designed comic books and I've done lots of stuff in that field, it's always fascinated and I like the fun and the humour of it.

10:00 But I've never, ever sat down and gone, will this be suitable for this age, will this be suitable for that age? I've never done that. It's interesting because there are adults who love particularly *The House That Sneezed*, and there's little children who love it. And the same with *A Sausage Went for a Walk*. It's particularly good for very young children but adults love it. I've seen adults eyes light up when they know I'm the guy that illustrated the *Sausage Went for a Walk*. *The House That Sneezed* is probably the key to it all. Did that answer your question?

AY: Yes, it did because I think what we're discovering is that whatever it is in you, the childlike quality, really does touch a nerve with children because you've had commercial success with these books.

PETER KENDALL: Yes, and it was so easy. I'm basically sitting there amusing myself, I'm laughing my head off; I'm struggling with how to draw and paint it, the technique—I chose egg tempera because it was the right technique for *The House That Sneezed*. I changed the techniques later because it suited it to be different for different books. It did frustrate the publishers, particularly Fremantle Arts Centre Press because I would invent a whole technique, series of techniques around whatever that message was. I have a natural love for children and I get on really well with; I've never felt intimidated by children. I would rather be in the company of children often than adults. So that's how I got into children's book, there's a lot more happens after that.

AY: Are you always working with the same author when you were with Angus & Robertson? What I'm getting at here is the relationship between the author and the illustrator.

PETER KENDALL: Yes, I actually did. With David it was like a marriage although David would have hated that word. But he had a bit of a problem with it because he suddenly became very well-known and I already had that. It wasn't a big deal for me. He suddenly had all these pretty librarian ladies flirting with him and he was married with children. He was suddenly getting a lot of attention and he was a bit embarrassed he was a children's author, he aspired for greater things. He wrote film scripts; he's a genius actually, he wrote all this stuff but none of it took off. He tended to focus on other things, he was on a talent show on TV, he was a singer, he took up comedy. I loved working with David, his use of words. There's probably ten or so books that we never did. There was one I wanted to do—this is the genius of David—I was a bit frustrated with having share this commission all the time so I thought I'd write it myself, I was going to do one called *The Dancing Pineapple* and I planned the whole thing, and I wrote, she tangoed and she did this and she wiggled and she giggled. And I thought, I can't write it. I could see the pictures in my head, so I rang David up and I said, "I'm trying to cut you out but I'm not going to succeed." He said, "What is it?" And I said, "It's an idea about a dancing pineapple." And he suddenly just came out with a whole routine and it was just genius on the phone. A week later he phoned me up, "Thanks a lot, I've spent a week on this." I said, "What've you got?" And he had, what is it? 'She did the tango with the mango, the watermelon did the splits' I would never have thought of that.

There was another one, I wanted to do a character called Ping Pong, and I said, "I've got this character called Ping Pong." And then came out with this poem, "Ping Pong drifted into daydream zone, woke up thinking of an ice cream cone." And I went, "I can't think of that." I loved working with him, he has since recently said that he made a mistake. He went off doing his own thing and he said, "I should have kept doing books with you." I think if David and I had just kept doing books we probably would have made a fortune, but it didn't pan out that way.

15:05 AY: Which books did you do with him?

PETER KENDALL: I did all the first ones: *The House that Sneezed*; *Car-rumba*; *Live and Unplugged* and there's a whole lot we never published.

AY:                               Why didn't you?

PETER KENDALL:       Just, ah slack. I get too interested in the next project and he does too. Like the one with the dancing pineapple, I've got the whole thing, I've drawn it, I've planned it, I've done everything for it. But I sat on it for 10 years. I recently went to Fremantle Arts Centre Press, they actually love it but they think it's not where they're going. It would have been good next to the Sausage. I have a lot of product, they're all sitting in boxes all finished I just never get round to that part of putting it together to market it and sell it. I fail on that area. It's why I'm not super successful because I tend to just go on to the next project.

I'm struggling right now actually, I'm doing a series of paintings and because I'm doing a whole series and I'm doing one after another, each one tells me something I can do with the next one. Now I can see them as a body of work that's really interesting as a body and I'm reluctant to part with them. I need to part with them, I need money but I don't want to part with them because I'm still learning from them. So I'm thinking, will I have an exhibition, or won't I have an exhibition? Crazy world.

AY:                               We can come back to that. In the meantime, you went from Angus & Robertson when they stopped doing children's books. What did you do then with the books, how did you find Fremantle Arts Centre Press?

PETER KENDALL:       They found me because I used to teach portraiture with Fremantle Arts Centre so I developed a friendship with some of the people there; they'd got know me over the years. And Fremantle Arts Centre press had started up and they were successfully publishing, they had Elizabeth Jolley and A B Facey but they'd never done a children's book. One day I got this phone call, from Clive I think it was, and Clive said, "Are you interested in doing a children's book for us? Will you come and have a look, we've got one we really think will suit you." So I went down there and they handed me this little page that had, I think it was 15 lines on it. You've got to realise I'm used to David's ones. David would actually work out the poem so that a father could read the poem, anyone could read it, it would teach

them how to read. David was the same as me, he was into educating people at the same time as entertaining them. So the books I did with David are educational as well.

Anyway, they handed me this story for *A Sausage Went For A Walk* and I read it and I said, "I don't get it." And then Ray Coffey, the editor, took it from me and he read it out loud, and I went, "Ohh." (Understanding dawning, he laughs) And I pictured the sausage in my head, I pictured the whole thing in my head and I went, "I'll do it sure." So that was that, I met Elisha<sup>14</sup>, she's the writer and she's this tiny little lady. Evidently, she was terrified of me because I'm this giant and I was over confident. At that time of my life I had—because of the kids' books—I had a TV show, at the same time I was doing a lot of schools, giving presentations at schools and I was doing portraits. I had my fingers in a lot of pies. And murals, I was doing them too. It was crazy, I was flat out. I said I'd do it so I moved across to Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

AY:                                    You're developing a relationship with a different writer—

PETER KENDALL:            I didn't develop a relationship.

AY:                                    Ahh—

PETER KENDALL:            What happened there was they gave me—in fact all the books after that I didn't get the opportunity, because what happens normally with publishers is they have a script that's given to them. If you write a story and send it to them, then they will find the artist. That's how it's supposed to be done. The idea that you have this relationship, well they don't seem to like it or understand that. Unfortunately I lost that, I lost that lovely relationship I had with David.

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<sup>14</sup> Elisha Majid was born in Kuala Lumpur but lived for several years in England, the US and Melbourne. She now lives in Perth, teaches at a high school and enjoys reading, yoga, good food and the outdoors. She has two adult children

20:00

I never met Elisha again until the book was published. I did exactly what I wanted to do. I actually think it's a work of art. I had heavily studied Matisse earlier and people like that, the great colourists. I was really into understanding colour and simplicity. I have a really strong philosophy of reducing whatever I'm doing down to—I figure out what I want to say and then I reduce it and reduce it and reduce it. Matisse did it. He would re-draw it and re-draw it and re-draw it until he got three lines which communicated something. I've been following that line since I first read that about Matisse, I'm always stripping down, always stripping down. Even though the work I'm doing now looks complicated it's actually stripped down. It's reducing it down to only the elements that are necessary for the communication or the message. Now in *A Sausage Went For A Walk*, I absolutely did it. The spaces are correct, the light and dark was correct, the colours were correct. I even looked up every single work that was in that poem and I defined every word to make sure I clearly understood.

She just sat down in her workshop and wrote this funny little story—it was a workshop at Tresillian—she didn't intend all this stuff that I took out of it. For example, it said that the sausage slipped so I looked up slipped and I made sure I understood it so when I had the illustration, I wanted the child to look at it and get the definition of the word. It's so subtle that no one's picked it up but I've had people say to me, "My child learnt to read from *A Sausage Went For A Walk*." I've had that said to me many, many times. And I'm really pleased, there's one scene where the baked beans clamber out of the sauce. They are really clambering, they are not running, they're not jumping, they're clambering. I defined the words in the pictures. There is so much philosophy in that book that I wanted to express. I got friends to pose for me for the little boy, I went down to their house and I sketched him and took photos and came back and worked from them. That's my portraiture doing that. Okay that's my sausage stuff.

AY: The book was successful—

PETER KENDALL: It still is.

AY: —so perhaps it's correct to say that at a conscious level people weren't understanding that you were analysing every word—

PETER KENDALL: They don't need to.

AY: —but maybe that was part of the appeal of the book do you think?  
That effort that had gone into it?

PETER KENDALL: I see what you're saying. I don't expect people to get it, to analyse it and go, oh look he's done this, he's done that, because if they do that, I've failed. If you look at one of my paintings and you go, "Oh Peter, you're so brilliant, you're really clever, I love the way you colour," I've failed. As far as I'm concerned it's a complete failure. But if you look at that painting and you go, "There's something about this painting that just holds my attention" like Peter Brock did. I've had people cry in front of paintings.

I know that the cover of the book of the sausage is reduced down. I drew that sausage probably 80 times, I re-drew it, and re-drew it. I worked out the negative spaces and everything. Who cares if I did that? I enjoy doing that; I'm a research artist, I like to research, I like to balance composition. I'm a perfectionist. It looks really simple; it's so brilliantly done it looks simple. I'm patting myself on the back because I know that I pulled it off but don't expect people to think that's really brilliant the way you've done that. You look at the sausage, it has a certain presence, you look at the sausage and you smile. I feel that a lot of the characters are me. Actually I think all portraits, all art, all landscapes, everything I've ever done have all been self-portraits.

25:00 If I paint your portrait, it will be a self-portrait of you in my world. I will reflect you mirror wise but it will be you and people will say, "Oh there's Anne," but it's still a self-portrait.  
Does that make sense?

AY Is this common to portrait artists do you believe?

PETER KENDALL: No. There's a few that have picked up on it. I think I've heard it before somewhere, I don't know where, it might have been Picasso who said that all art is a self-portrait. To me it really makes sense so that when I'm doing the sausage, I'm really doing

me. I don't sit there and say, "Now I'm going to do me." would I know there's my sense of joy and love and mischief and fun in the world and liking people. I like people a lot so if I didn't like people it be in the artwork and it would come across. You'd go, "I don't like that sausage."

I designed the colours, everything. Everything down to what yellows to use, what blue to use. I wanted this ambience; I wanted the egg to look happy and fly away. When they first printed it I was so disappointed. I was so upset; I didn't speak to them for months. I told them I was upset because they'd taken it to a printer and the printer had used a technique of colour mixing, which is three colour, or something and it had lost the effect I wanted. To me the sausage looked a bit burnt. The egg looked like it was smug. It changed the whole tone of the book. Now the book was a huge success; people loved it, they thought it was great. I was always apologising for it. I was always saying it was not the communication I put out. I was really upset about it.

Some years back Fremantle had a new person come along, Susan, oh I can't think of her name and she said, "We're going to re-print the sausage again." They just keep re-printing of it but we want to do a whole new version of it and brighten it up. And I said, "I've got a big upset I've been sitting on for a long time." And they listened to me and they said, "Well no one told us." And so I took in the original artwork and the *Sausage Went For A Walk* that's out there now is an absolute duplication of what I intended. If I show you the two, you can see the difference. One looks like a burnt sausage, the baked beans look like the cheapest nastiest baked beans you could possibly buy where I was looking at Heinz baked beans, it was a certain look about them, they look healthy, they look good. I was so upset, so upset, I sat on that upset for years. It was a minor thing to everyone else.

AY: It's not a minor thing, correct colour re-production isn't a minor thing. So, a big question, the success of a children's book, how much of it is the author and how much of it is the illustrator.

PETER KENDALL: Well, it depends on the book (pause.) I think with David, I think it's 50/50. Everything he's ever written amazes me. Because it's a children's book, people go,

“Oh it’s only a children’s book.” There are whole lines that he’s written (mumbles through some lines) that I think are Shakespeare; like, “he finally found and fought the only fight he couldn’t win,” or something like that. He just came out with this alliteration and I went, “What? How did he do that?” I loved working with David because what would happen is that he would give me the words and I would look at the words and I would play with it and I would say, “You can probably take that word out and that sentence out because I can—” “I don’t want to illustrate—I never consider myself an illustrator. To me I was always an artist, this is silly probably. In the early books of *The House That Sneezed* it actually says ‘artist Peter Kendall.’ Because to me an illustrator is a person who duplicates something.

30:00

I’ve got this from somewhere else, but it did explain it very well, it said in a scene that if the girl comes into a jungle clearing and the baleful eye of the tiger moved towards her in the dark. Right. An illustrator will draw the jungle, the girl, the tiger, the night time. It will be an illustration of the words. An artist may just do the baleful eye of the tiger with a slight reflection of the girl in the eye so your imagination just goes berserk. That’s an artist. I really liked that when I read that years ago and it really made sense to me. I would sit with David and I would say, “Look I think we can take out whole words here.” And then he’d see and would say, “I see what you mean, well in that case, I’ll put this in.” So he would work out what he would put it. I put in what he couldn’t put in and he put in what I couldn’t put it. We married it together. I loved working with David; with the other ones I had to take them somewhere else. *A Sausage Went For A Walk*, many, many people have said to me that *Sausage Went For A Walk* would not have been as successful if it wasn’t for my artwork. When people think sausage, they think of my artwork. Elisha wrote a brilliant little story, if I didn’t have that vehicle I wouldn’t have been able to do it and she gave me a beautiful vehicle. We had a lovely marriage there but we never discussed it, we never talked about it and I don’t think we ever could. She actually tried to write a second version of it and it was terrible. I don’t know what happened—they went to the beach and the crabs ate all the sausage and the eggs and it was a horrible massacre. She missed the point (laughs). At first, oh they all go to the beach, that sounds good. Argh.

Then I did *Caar Caaar* which was really good. The guy<sup>15</sup> that wrote *Caar Caaar*, I couldn't work with him but mainly Fremantle didn't allow me too. It wasn't until afterwards that I said to him, "We could have pulled out whole words here." And he said, "I wish I could have talked to you." So he wanted to. There've been a couple of books I've done; one I did called *Little Tree and the Everlasting Forest* and that was Shirley Shackleton<sup>16</sup> her husband was killed in Balibo and she was considered a pretty important person because of him. I was given it, I didn't meet her, Greening Australia gave me the book to do, I researched it, I took a lot of love and care into it. It was launched and when they launched it here, they didn't even acknowledge me. They brought her over and treated her like a celebrity and when I met her she went, "Oh yes it didn't look anything like I imagined it." And that was all she said to me. But that book sold out.

So there have been a couple where I haven't really enjoyed working on, I wish they hadn't done them. But any that I did with David and the one I did with the guy<sup>17</sup> who's in the news at the moment, the one called *The Dregersaurus*, he wasn't very nice to work with but I liked the story. But he was already a celebrity and Fremantle were trying to capitalise on his celebrity status.

I used to hide—in *The House That Sneezed* I hid a mouse on every page. I re-did my childhood and I used to love those books where you had to find something. I put a mouse in every page and people found them. And then in the next book I didn't do it and I had so many complaints. I had people ringing me up—mainly adults—they were really upset. If I said to someone, even now, this is *The House That Sneezed* there's a mouse on every page, they don't read the words, they look—adults and children—go through it. In every adult, you asked me before, in every adult there's a child. I don't care if they're 99 years old, if I say there's a mouse in there, they will play the game. Am I talking too much?

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15 Author Geoff Havel is a primary school teacher <http://www.thelitcentre.org.au/author/geoff-havel>

16 Shirley Shackleton, widow of one of the Balibo Five, the journalists based in Australia and killed in Timor-Leste in 1975

17 Kim Scott is a multi-award winning novelist and a member of the Noongar community. He received an Australian Centenary Medal and was 2012 West Australian of the Year. His most recent novel is *That Deadman Dance* (2010) for which he was awarded his second Miles Franklin Award.

AY: Not at all. You've said that you loved children. How did you go from there to working in schools as an educator because that's something that's important to you isn't it?

35:00 PETER KENDALL: I'm a natural teacher. I love teaching the adults portraiture and drawing but when the children's books started up. I'm saying we—David and I—started to be invited to libraries and suddenly we were like celebrities of some sort, well, we were well thought of and then I'm a natural performer and um, I don't even know how I started. I knew how to capture children's attention; I'm a good storyteller, which is probably obvious, I'd weave stories, I'd plan the whole thing out. I'd give a little talk and I didn't drily read the books, I'd tell them stories and I'd draw and they'd watch and they'd be mesmerised. I'd orchestrate them, I loved doing it watching their faces lighting up and you'd tell a little joke. I had all these silly little jokes I used to do. I loved the schools in fact it got ridiculous, the demand on me.

It started off with one week of Children's Book Week was fully booked and then it got to a point that I was in such demand that I got instantly booked for next year and I'd be already booked. And I'd say, "I'm sorry I'm already booked." And they'd say, "Can we have you the week before, the week after?" It ended up I'd be doing three months of Children's Book Week. It nearly killed me but I loved it, I was also making a lot of money too. I got a bit professional about it, I promoted myself, I marketed it. And I just loved it. It's a pity it's going to disappear because what I did was so amazing. I'd have 60 kids in front of me, maybe more, and I'd absolutely have them in the palm of my hand from the moment I sat down, I'd just have them mesmerised. I'd do a quick little drawing and they'd go, "Ohh, he's not even looking." (laughs) And these are kids up to year seven and they'd be fascinated. I'd be going, "What?" I'd be looking at them and drawing at the same time. I'd go, "Oh no, it's just the pen, the pen draws. I don't trust that pen." And they'd say, "Why, why?" And I'd put it up there and it would start drawing again, and they'd say, "It's drawing again." And they'd be screaming and yelling and little kids would come up and say, "IT'S DRAWING." And I'd go, "What, what?" And they'd whack me over the head and turn my head towards the

drawing. And they'd never met me and they'd be absolutely mesmerised. I did it in every school, I could do pre-primary's all the way to year seven.

I did like the high schools, but that was more work but those little kids were wide open. I got away with murder. The things I would say which were technically politically incorrect. I did caricatures of teachers, they didn't know I was going to do it and I'd say, "There's a funny looking guy just walked in the room." And they'd go, "Oh that's Mr Tiddlesmith," or something, "He's the principal." And I'd say, "Mr Toad in his pants." And they'd go, "No, no." He didn't know it was going to happen either and the kids would be shocked. I'd start to draw him, I'd say, "Trust me, I'll be gentle." And I'd wink at the kids (laughs) and I'd start to draw. I'd draw a huge nose, I'd do absolutely bizarre drawings and the principal would be sitting there laughing as well but not be able to see the painting but loving it because he's the brunt of the joke, the kids are laughing at him but also with him.

40:00 So I orchestrated it in a way that I'm not making fun of him—I am, but I'm not. With a male principal I'd draw them in a bath and I'd draw nipples. The kids would scream and then I'd draw hairs coming from under his arms and they'd scream more (laughing). I'd make him look really weird, if he had a big nose, I'd give him a huge nose. I was really over the top but I got away with it. He'd be in the bath and I'd put a rubber ducky in there. And the principal still hadn't seen it. Then I'd say, "You know what I forgot?" And they'd go, "No, no." I'd say, "The bubbles." And I'd do little bubbles and they'd go, "Because he's farting in the bath," (laughing). If it was a female [teacher], I had a rule, if she had small breasts, I draw big breasts, if she had big breasts, I'd draw her with small breasts. And the ones that had tiny little breasts I'd give them a real big cleavage and put a hula skirt on. The kids would be laughing their heads off; no one was offended. The schools used to collect them; I used to go to schools and they'd say, "You came to our school last year, you didn't draw me, can I have a drawing." I got paid to do this by the way.

But I was clever because I had a whole routine that entertained them but educated them. So I'd talk about visual literacy, I'd talk about how I'd do drafts and I'd show them drafts. And I'd say, "Yes I don't just do a fantastic drawing straight away, I have to do that and I trace it and I draw it again." And I wouldn't talk, I'd do it. Like I'd draw a roman soldier and start off with

a stick figure and trace over that and draw something else and trace over that. Every school I had the teachers, the principal would ring me up, many times, many, many times and say, "Peter the whole school's lifted." I'd go to Aboriginal schools and they'd say I wouldn't be able to hold the kids' attention for more than five minutes. An hour later they'd still be there mesmerised. I remember one school I went to, this was an isolated Aboriginal school and the teacher said, "You're not going to believe this—have a look out in the playground." And there's no one there, and he said, "You know why, they're all inside drawing." They were all drawing.

This is an example, I had one mum, she said, "Peter I've got to tell you this." This is a country school, and she said, "I drive my son to school every morning it takes an hour and I pick him up from school and I say, 'how was your day' and he says nothing. It's been like that for years." She said I picked him up today and before he got in the car he was Peter Kendall this and Peter Kendall said that." She said, "He's been drawing all day, we can't stop him and we went into his room last night and he was still up drawing and he couldn't keep his eyes open." They said, "What are you doing?" And he said, "Peter Kendall said if you want to be a good drawer you've got to force yourself to draw," (laughing). I said, "I don't just draw, I make myself draw. I sit there and say I don't want to draw."

AY:                                 Alright I want to talk about something that does make you feel good and you're still working on and that's *The Owl and the Pussycat*<sup>18</sup>.

PETER KENDALL:         Okay, just to quickly end off on the kids' books I ended up with a little television segment because I can naturally perform. So a lot of doors opened but it was never a career move. What happened with *The Owl and the Pussycat*, in the meantime I stopped creating the children's books, I was doing schools, I was doing portraiture but I was right into my abstract painting and I was trying to explore portraiture and I was trying to make portraiture more abstract because I was disappointed with the fact that the physical body was there all the time and I wanted to capture the soul and the spirit and how would I do that.

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<sup>18</sup> *The Owl and the Pussycat* is a poem by Edward Lear, words here: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43188/the-owl-and-the-pussy-cat>

45:00 Everything I do buys me time to do that research. So I was doing that. Ah, what was your question?

AY: The importance of *The Owl and the Pussycat* was that it started out as a children's concept—

PETER KENDALL: Yes, yes.

AY: —but it's grown. Tell me about that.

PETER KENDALL: Yes, I forgot that. Artists are always looking for something to (pause) they want to paint and they want to create but sometimes you need something to create about. Often you go off on tangents and you get a bit lost, if that makes sense. For many years I've loved *The Owl and the Pussycat* I just thought it was a lovely little story and I was considering doing a children's book and I thought I'd do a children's book on *The Owl and the Pussycat* and for many years I'd pick it up, draw it, plan it. I've got books and books and all the journals I've done and all the notes I've made. I was never happy because it was a bit corny, I don't want to do a sweet little one. Even when you hear people read it, it's blah. It bothered me and then one day I just had this revelation, I was thinking about the owl and the pussycat and I thought, it's a love story. Of course it's a love story but I saw it as a love story that goes down to the depths of our soul. It's the true love story and everyone is searching for the soul mate. They're searching for that person. It's just a thing that we do on this planet. I thought about it so much and suddenly it opened up this whole reality for me and I was thinking about how two people come together. They're actually completely alien to each other because they have had different histories, different lifestyles, different realities, different values. Everything's different. And they come together and they connect and they want to be together and they don't want to be together and they want to be together. They want to love and nurture that person, but they don't want to love and nurture that person. That person's neglecting me, well that person's neglecting me too. There's all this stuff that goes on and I went right into that. I went into the whole thing

about being in love, finding that soul mate—and I think it's possible to find soul mates—I wanted to explore that.

It's not that I intellectually thought this is a good idea I will follow this and it will be a clever thing to do. Because I've had artists do that; there's artists who do *Alice in Wonderland* there's [Charles] Blackburn I've got a friend who did *Taming of the Shrew*, I love him but no one knew what it was. It is true that artists hit on something like Sidney Nolan, he could have a million things and then one lady he was having an affair with said, "Why don't you put a figure in the landscape." And he put in Ned Kelly and then boom. He had an icon, that's what happens.

I really got into it, I absolutely immersed myself in it for years and years, to the point I wasn't making any money. I couldn't crack it, I couldn't fully get it, it was corny. I'd had these moments where revelations would happen to me. One morning I woke up and about three in the morning and thought, went to sea, the owl and the pussycat went to sea. That's like a watershed where people make a decision to do something they've never done in their lives, like people who come from one country to another country, how brave are they?

50:00

Then it dawned on me—I hope I'm not waffling on too much here but I'm very excited about the owl and the pussycat. The owl is a predator, flies around at night. The pussycat, we assume the pussycat is a female. I've just thought of this now actually, maybe I should switch it. Oh yes, he plays his small guitar, so okay the owl is the male. But he's a predator who flies around at night killing things. And the cat is a predator, the cat creeps around killing things, it kills birds and things. So these two should not come together. They should never meet, their parents wouldn't like them meeting, everyone would be against the marriage, doomed to fail, they're not the same religion—(laughs). That's what I love about it, this disparate sort of thing, through all those mechanisms of society and all these agreed realities that we operate within, there's something that sits deeper that goes, "I want to be with that being." That's amazing.

Anyway, they went to sea. I'll cut this short because I'll talk about this for hours, it's one of my favourite subjects. I've spent ages trying to figure out the owl, I drew the boat. What

would the boat look like? And then I was struggling with the owl, I couldn't figure out how to do the owl, I was struggling with the cat because I didn't want it to be corny. One day I was thinking about the dancing sequence. There's a sequence where they dance to the light of the moon. At the time I thought, what would they dance. At that time I was doing it more like a children's book, I was thinking a minuet, a very poetic at the court of Versailles, or something like that—poetic on the beach, I thought that would be beautiful. It suddenly dawned on me that it need a dance of love and I thought the dance of love is the tango. So what I did, I decided it was going to be the tango, then I took up tango dancing lessons (chuckles). I researched the tango (responding to my disbelieving face)—I did. Can't dance for nuts and I really tried hard; but boy, these women, I tell you what, when you dance the tango, the women—especially the female instructress—she grabbed me and shoved her breasts into me and her crutch was against my crutch and I went holy shit (laughs).

So I researched tango, I studied tango, I looked at every Youtube clip of tango. I played with this idea that it was a very simple line drawing that I was doing of two people in love. I put it away in a drawer, I thought, well no one will like that. And one day my wife Lyn was looking through the drawer and she said, "What's this?" And I said "It's just a drawing I was doing. I was playing with the idea of two people dancing and being connected." And she said, "Well that's mine now, go and get it framed because we're going to hang it up." I said, "Oh I don't think it's that good." She went, "Just do it." So I did it and I put it up and immediately everyone wanted one, immediately. And I thought okay and I started to explore the idea. It gave me a licence because sometimes you do something and if people don't say I like it, I love it and give you money, because money gives you energy. Then you go, why am I bothering if they're not getting my communication. It's the same with what you do, if someone says, "Anne that's really good, I love the way you do that," you're going to think it's not the money, it's the acknowledgement of your communication. I realised I could do figurative work as well. That opened up a new door to me. So I started to just let it happen, I'm just not going to analyse whether it's an owl or a pussycat. Whatever comes into my heart I'll do.

Then I had the tragedy, my wife died in very tragic circumstances and very unexpected. I don't want to go into the how or what. The morning she died, it was four o'clock and I was

walking round—I was just lost, I was by myself and I was lost—I walked up to my studio and I was looking at some of *The Owl and the Pussycat* stuff and I thought well I've got to keep painting, I've got to keep painting and Lyn believed in *The Owl and the Pussycat* and she believed in me and I don't want to let her down. I was thinking all those things and she'd gone. It was so weird.

55:10

Now, I have a big tree in my backyard called a tuart and in that tree over the years there's been falcons, there's been owls, there's been all sorts of creatures living in that tree. I had heard a mopoke in the area going 'boo book, boo book" and I had not seen it. I walked out of my studio, it was just as the sun was starting to tint the sky and I was walking towards the house and I walked under that little tree and something touched my neck and I looked down and an owl touched its wing against my neck and it came down—I've got to explain this properly—what had actually happened, the bird had flown down and touched my neck with its wing, it came in front of me, I could look down on its back, I could see all its wings, all its feathers. It seemed to hover, it probably didn't but it seemed to hover and it just lifted up and went over the house and disappeared. It was one of the most magical experiences of my life. And I thought, I'm definitely going to do *The Owl and the Pussycat* and from then on I started to do—which you can see around here—I started to study owls and I studied everything about them. I studied how the wing goes through the feathers, you don't need me to explain all this, the thing is I researched them heavily.

I started to sculpt them; I sculptured them in plaster and I thought, no too heavy. And I wanted to get that feeling of lightness like I did with the *Sausage Went For A Walk*, I had the egg flying. I knew how to create that illusion that it was flying, I was thinking how to create illusion of flight with sculpture. I explored with lots of different material and I ended up with a material that I got absolutely addicted to. I spent two years creating a whole body of work, I did a whole lot of owls and I did a whole lot of paintings. Basically after Lyn died I was grieving and I was lost but I was working like a dog and I was spending my money. I wasn't making money. I lost the plot as far as earning money, I just decided I was willing to basically burn it all to create. So I created for about two and a half years and then I had an exhibition of *The Owl and the Pussycat*. I was really proud of the work. Most people loved it, unfortunately the exhibition was a disaster, it was devastating actually. Because I'd really put

everything into it and I did a lot of promoting, I got everyone along. Somebody said to me, they said, "Peter, this work should be in New York. This work should be in London, not in a little gallery in West Perth where the guy doesn't care." It was pretty obvious he didn't care. I think he had a problem at the time, the gallery owner. And he didn't really make any effort at all. He didn't sell anything, oh he did, he sold about three works, but they were to my clients. He took his percentage. No there was more than three sold anyone what actually happened was he ended up not paying me and it broke my heart. I felt very disheartened and stopped painting for another two years.

AY: Do you think this work was more—

PETER KENDALL: Miserable end to a story wasn't it? Just for the record, most of the owls have sold. All the best ones are gone; the lovely drawings that I do I sell them all. I send them down to a gallery down south. Every time I do a dancing drawing they're gone. They're called *Embrace* or *Love Entwined* all that series. I don't get the feeling that I've given up but it's not commercially viable and I've had to—sorry were you going to ask me a question?

AY: Was there something you needed to do, was it more for you after losing Lyn or was it a commercial venture?

59:50 PETER KENDALL: No, no I didn't do it consciously because I'd lost Lyn. I did it because I was already doing it. The situation came about that I made a choice to focus totally on that and nothing else. I thought this was my life and what would Lyn want me to do? That's it; I wasn't creating through grief or try to handle my grief. I ended up developing a whole new technique of art; I ended up using hessian. It was revolutionary work that I did where I reduced everything down like I talked about in the sausage book. I de-constructed painting and I decided that canvas—you'd have to go through the whole history of art to explain this but basically the principle of painting is that you create an illusion on a surface. You create an illusion of something on a surface. I decided that every part of what I'm creating has to be part of the communication. So the paint is part of the communication, the line is part of the communication, the colour is part of the communication. I concluded that the material

that I'm working on has to be part of the communication. I then started work on my idea. I was going to have bits of string and stick paint on it and gradually build from there, create from nothing. But that didn't work and I ended up using hessian, stripping hessian apart. Then I started to paint in amongst the hessian and let it come out so the hessian, the warp and weft, of the hessian was part of the communication. And that was revolutionary and there's a self-portrait that I did which is absolutely, I have no doubt is a work of genius. It's an absolute leap. People who've seen it are absolutely mesmerised by it and love it, unfortunately I just haven't been able to get it out and about to the right people. And also it was done during that time when I was exorcising my grief, I didn't realise it at the time. So it has elements of that in it. It's a powerful piece, it's the best portrait I've done, to the point that I haven't done any portraits since. I just thought I've achieved my goal, I've arrived.

Then I evolved into the owls and I started to have some fun and then I was lost, I was completely lost. I didn't know what to do and I was devastated because I got ripped off by the gallery. It really broke my heart, broke my heart deeply. Then I had a relationship with a lady which was far too early and it didn't work fully and I kind of grieved that again. And then I thought I've got to re-invent myself. How much time have we got—

AY: I wanted to lead into where you're going now because you've said that you feel as though you've come full circle in a way. What's that about?

PETER KENDALL: I moved on from the loss that I had and I celebrate the gains from that relationship and I look at all the knowledge I've got and I've been searching for. I don't need to search any more. I don't need to look up techniques anymore, I don't need to figure things out anymore. In the past I'd done a whole series of landscape paintings way back—how can I explain this (pause)—with *The Owl and the Pussycat* what I was struggling with was the landscape and the bush. I was fine with the characters and the water and all that but I just didn't have a world for them. I even went to Canada and went to a really unusual place and thought this is the owl and the pussycat land. And I was thinking where else could it be and I was trying to solve that. Many years ago, way back in time, I was doing landscapes.

1:05:00 When I first came to Perth I was doing Kings Park paintings and I loved it, I loved the Australian bush and then I accepted a criticism by others that it was corny and that it was not art and I remember one day thinking trees were just overgrown parsley, why would I do that? And I actually stopped. I went away and had some help with my loss and I did some counselling and really helped. I came back wanting to re-launch but I didn't know where to go and I was standing in my studio, on my decking and I was thinking well I love this place. I love being here. And I love my little tree here and I was looking at the leaves and I thought, I love those leaves, I thought I should do a drawing of that. And I just started to draw. I did this drawing of a leaf and twigs and the whole day went, because what I hadn't realised is that I don't need to think. That's what I realised because I'd been thinking, researching, structuring. *The Owl and the Pussycat* is way ahead of its time, way ahead. It will take probably 20 years before people get it. I won't give up on it, I'll continue the project because I think it's revolutionary what I've done but what I realise is that I want to communicate. I want people to get my communication now.

I realise I also need another 30 years in me, so I thought, oh shit I'm probably going to live another 30 years, bugger. And I need to keep creating. The pure research line is not generating income and so I had to think how do I generate income? I looked at it as a problem of communication. And I was thinking about how I'm creating something with *The Owl and the Pussycat* that's totally new. I remember somebody said, a new communication gets the longest lag in acknowledgement. That's a very interesting thing; if you look at van Gogh took a hundred years, he predicted a hundred years. A lot of these people, even when you hear music for the first time, you know, a new song on the radio. I remember when I was young—because you all listened to the radio—you'd hear the Beatles—no, no, you'd hear it again and again and you'd all be humming and singing it. You get used to it. You see it's a new communication. And I realised that a lot of the things I'd done like *The Owl and the Pussycat* were a totally new revolutionary communication. There was going to be a big lag.

When I did the leaves, people would say, "I love that, that's exactly what I see." And I thought that's interesting, and I thought it's so easy to do. Then I went and did some more. I'd sketch, I'd walk out and I'd just paint and people would come up and say, "Oh is that for sale?" And I'd struggle with it because it was so easy for me, it was without struggling with

concepts and giving myself a hard time. I've got this thing that if I'm not struggling and trying to solve problems, then it's not real, you know, it's not real art. Like all the caricatures I'd draw, I did them without thinking. The best situation for me is to be really busy because then I go wish and do another one. If I sit there thinking, I do solid.

AY: Why does it have to be difficult to be good?

PETER KENDALL: It's just my research thinking. I've gone out of that now, I've dropped it. Some friends took me out because they knew I was unhappy and went on a trip around the wildflowers and I was looking at the wildflowers and I was thinking, I like these, I like flowers, I like beautiful things and look at all these people looking at these beautiful things. I was really going through a catharsis, is the right word? Trying to figure it out, well I like these things why don't I just paint them. I see something in them, I'm inspired by them, I see something in them. So I started to paint these wildflowers paintings and I had an exhibition here and all these people came along and I was fascinated because I had men standing in front of paintings.

1:10:00 The men were more emotional than the women and the men would stand in front of paintings of that series, I had boabs and I had burnt trees. I had actually done two paintings based on the Yarloop fires, so I had re-growth. I wanted to communicate re-growth; I wanted to show that there's been a fire but this beautiful country seems to come back to life. I want to show that we don't live in this organised world, I wanted to put in the knowledge I'd gained from my studies of Fred Williams. These fires had shown me how to see and Fred Williams has shown me how to see. I wanted to put that in the paintings, I wanted to communicate that. What amazed me is that men were standing in front of the paintings, very emotional, "I've been there, I know that place." I'd invented it. Women were looking at the smaller paintings and saying, "I love that." And I was thinking why do you love that? I'm expecting them to say because it's a beautiful painting and I'd like to have it. But they're saying things like, "I love that because it reminds me of my childhood," or "I've been there." Everyone was saying things that and I really thought a lot about it and I suddenly realised it's a whole area of art that is neglected. What I'd been doing is, I'd been indoctrinated into thinking I'd create art and be recognised and then people would give me

money then I'd create more original art. I was taught that. That was the paradigm, but it's not.

The very big area of art is the beholder, the person who looks. What art does is it hits a chord, or a thought, or something in the mind of the beholder. So if a person looks at my two figures dancing in *The Owl and the Pussycat*. I've had people say, "This reminds me of my husband when we fell in love." I didn't put that in there. They come out with all this stuff and I don't tell them, they say, "Well what is it to you Peter," "Oh, I don't know I just painted it," because I don't want to put anything there. They tell me all about all this stuff about them, it's hitting a chord in them. I thought, okay, this is where I'm at now. I realise I have the ability that I have with portraiture to look at somebody and something comes out of them and ends up in my canvas. I don't know what it is. I can't put it in a bottle. I've laboured over technique and all these things but I had it anyway, I can draw without thinking. But no, I decided to go on this huge journey of technical knowledge, probably didn't need to. Where I am now is that I have this massive vocabulary and what I'm painting is what I love. I love these flowers, I love these colours, I love this country.

It's simple stuff. The art world is very suppressive, there's a lot of critical people. My work would be considered corny by some people; it would be considered pretty. People would get stuck into it. I don't give a shit because I realise I'm on to it. I've cracked it; it's what Monet cracked, I think it's what van Gogh cracked. If you paint what's in your heart and if you see what you love with integrity then for some people, it will hit a chord in them. If I go into that bush and I think, wow, I love this and then I have the ability to duplicate it. You walk out there with me at the same time and you go, I love this, but you haven't got the ability to duplicate it. Then you look at my painting and think, that's what I saw. Then I've succeeded. That's where I'm at now.

AY: To finish our interviews Peter, is there something you want to add?

PETER KENDALL: (pause) I think where I'm at now is that I'm very comfortable with being a spiritual being. I've no doubt about that. I'm not fixated on it; it's not a problem to me; I don't think a lot about it. But what I do feel is that being creative is an innate state.

It's a native state to be creative and I find the more I create the happier I am, the saner I am. It's very strange that the forms under and around me. When I'm in there creating, I should be thinking about paying bills. I should be thinking about being a proper little citizen; I've never been that person. But whenever I've got serious or I worry, things go wrong; when I'm creating I'm in touch with who I am and what I am as a being and I'm embracing that more and more and more. It's almost like Ayn Rand<sup>19</sup>— she wrote a book called *The Virtue of Selfishness*. I don't know if I believe all her stuff but I love that line about the virtue of selfishness. People who really focus on their passion, focus on what they believe, I think the world does come to them. I live in a nice place, I have a beautiful world, I have lovely friends, I'm reasonably health, I'm a happy person. I wake up happy, but if I'm not creating I'm not very nice. I'll say one thing, Mum used to ring me up years back—we lived way apart and hadn't seen each other for years—occasionally she'd ring up and I'd ask. "How are you Mum?" She'd go, "Oh Nigel he's not doing the right thing and Gary and—" and she'd go on. I'd say, "Mum, you're not painting are you?" And she'd say, "You always know, how do you know?" And I've created on friends too, they should do this, they should do that. I don't do that now; I just do my own creating.

AY: I hope you do have another 30 years' worth of creating to do.

PETER KENDALL: Thanks.

1:27:26 THIRD INTERVIEW ENDS

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<sup>19</sup> Ayn Rand was a Russian born novelist and philosopher who developed a philosophical system she termed objectivism. <https://www.aynrand.org>