

Jock Clutterbuck — Fractal Moon and other Works

Jock Clutterbuck's sculptures and prints have a distinctive aura, one that seems to 'flesh out something from nothing' as if 'naming the nameless by poetic invention.'¹ This enigmatic condition suggests his art is composed of an intangible language of beauty, an oneiric divinity that touches us by incorporating the unknown into our contemporary perception. Clutterbuck admits that his 'imagination participates in a greater field of imagination,' a universe within and beyond its scope of knowability, beyond its colourations, dream fractals, and deep space. This is what we see and sense in his exquisite bronze sculptures and vibrant etchings, where pyramids rise, arc or converge, and where orbs and circles seemingly float or pivot. These enhance the paradoxes of open and closed forms so essential to sculpture. His polished totems transform the archaic into exotic monuments, and like his etchings, they pay homage to moons, stars, the sun and natural phenomena, all emblematic sources that humankind have honoured for millennia. But Clutterbuck is also grounded in and inspired by the Australian landscape—it is ingrained in his psyche and embedded within his art.

Growing up on an isolated farm surrounded by the vast Wimmera plains Clutterbuck was struck by the relationship of the earth and sky. It was pivotal to his daily orientation and imaginative world, and from a young age he developed a psychological geography and visual language that he applied to the terrain, distance and the immense spatiality of his environment. Sensitively alert to how things moved, passed and disappeared, such as thunder, rain and wind, these phenomena informed his imagination, exploration and creative drive; it also gave him a sacred respect for the earth. Such immersive qualities have continued to inspire and resonate throughout his life and oeuvre.

As a young sculpture student at RMIT during the watershed years of the late 1960s Jock was especially drawn to the quiet Lithuanian sculptor Vincas Jomantas, whose meticulous and assured approach to materials and technique matched Clutterbuck's own. George Baldessin was also a major mentor to Jock at this time and certain aesthetic parallels are visible between Baldessin and Clutterbuck, particularly in their etchings. It was the uncompromising Irish printmaker and teacher Tate Adams who noted Clutterbuck's virtuosity in the printmaking medium and invited him to hold the first solo exhibition of prints at Adams' newly established Crossley Gallery in Melbourne in 1966. In his 2003 memoir *The Bright Shapes and the True Names*, Patrick McCaughey recounts how Tate expected a high standard of technical expertise, artistic inspiration and originality and held John Brack, Fred Williams and John Olsen as standard bearers. By selecting Jock as the Crossley Gallery's inaugural solo exhibitor, Tate placed him within this elite artistic fold.

¹ Jock Clutterbuck quoted from his essay in *Listening to the Stars*, an artists' book jointly published by Jock Clutterbuck and Tate Adams, Lyrebird Press, James Cook University, Townsville Queensland 2001.

By 1973 Clutterbuck began extending his ideas through theosophic enquiries and a study of Eastern spiritual philosophies, such as Tantric art and the sacred cosmology of Buddhist and Islamic teachings. He was also influenced by Hilla Rebay, the co-founder and director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, who had begun collecting major works by artists that ‘spoke the language of eternity’, such as Klee, Kandinsky and Max Ernst—in other words, art that was charged with the spiritual and mythical. As a result, Clutterbuck’s aesthetics transitioned towards a new calligraphic linearism and formal lyrical structure.

Myths are timeless and communal instruments that tilt at reality or are reforged to fit our contemporary needs and ecologies, and they inform Clutterbuck’s sculptures and etchings, in particular his recent cast bronze and brass maquettes but equally his large cast metal sculptures from the late 1980s onwards. This spiritual synthesis motivates and transforms his inventive iconography, as in his etchings where dense, dark lines animate the composition and provide cartouche-like boundaries within which colour bursts into glyphic fragments or ziggurat-like steps lead to elevated chambers. While mysticism and the spiritual may have been out of fashion during the post-modern decades, Clutterbuck has consistently developed a profound metaphysical language, and he is arguably one of Australia’s foremost artists working in this genre. Whether in art or in life ‘every generation needs to reinvent the spiritual’ for themselves.²

For over six decades Jock Clutterbuck has maintained an aesthetic integrity and a highly productive art practice. With forty–five solo exhibitions, several survey shows, a Helen Lempriere award and residency in Berlin (2014), and twice winner of the prestigious Shell Fremantle Print Award, and the Victorian Government Bicentenary Sculpture Award, Clutterbuck’s superbly crafted artworks show no sign of diminishing. His emblematic art springs from an informed understanding of nature, antiquity and a highly developed sense of intangible forces, out of which he explores our esoteric and material world. Clutterbuck’s exhibition of new prints and sculptures at the Australian Galleries, Collingwood, 6–24th May 2025, celebrates his established position and his timeless, luminous art.

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² Susan Sontag, ‘The Aesthetics of Silence’ in *Styles of Radical Will*, Picador, New York, (1969) 2004, 3