STAN HOPEWELL
FACING THE STARS
TED SNELL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANCES ANDRIJICH
WITH PANORAMAS BY HENRIK TIVED

UWA PUBLISHING
TO MARY MOORE. WHOSE LOVE AND SUPPORT MAKES EVERYTHING POSSIBLE.
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Joyce’s hospital bracelets.
This is a love story. It is the story of Stan Hopewell and his beloved wife Joyce, a couple whose lives became intertwined during World War II and remained fused together during sixty years of marriage. Their story weaves through the history of Perth and Western Australia, illustrating how the major changes that transformed a small country town into a wealthy modern city affected working people raising a family. What is extraordinary about their story is not only the ebb and flow of a joyous family life but how they dealt with pain, with suffering and with the agonising reality of severe illness, infirmity and, finally, Joyce’s death.

During this crisis Stan began to paint to express his love for Joyce and his love of God. Despite the fact that he had never painted before and never shown any inclination toward making art of any kind, Stan began to make paintings. This book documents that brief moment of creative focus and energy. While it lasted only a matter of years, it resulted in an outpouring of remarkable images that celebrate the resilience of the human spirit and the impulse toward creative expression.

In March 2007, Robin McClellan, then American Consul General in Perth, asked
me to accompany her to see the work of a local artist, the father-in-law of her driver Tony Scurry. Stan Hopewell had invited her to see his work in the house museum he had created by stacking paintings and painted constructions, top to bottom, on every surface of his home in Bibra Lake. Gradually they had edged out into the increasingly limited traversable space in each room until the house was literally wallpapered and carpeted with paintings. From the moment we arrived it was clear that Stan was 'the real thing', as Mary, my wife, whispered in my ear upon first glimpsing his work through the window.

As we discovered that day, Stan is an extraordinary artist, an octogenarian who developed his painting practice as a solitary activity while looking after Joyce. With few models of artistic practice to work from, he developed a highly sophisticated way of making paintings that describe what is important in his life: his wife, their marriage for over sixty years, his family, memories of his childhood, his experiences in the Royal Australian Air Force during World War II, the Masonic Lodge and his Christian faith.

In 2003 when Joyce was confined to her bed and Stan became her principal carer, he began to write in his journal and make paintings and constructions that recorded important events, that documented their life together and that recorded the ineffable presence of God in everything they encountered. That intimate spiritual relationship guided him through a life that has not been without hardship and challenge. Through it all, his faith sustained him and during the years of his wife’s illness he was driven to give visual form to his love of God.

Stan has an exceptional capacity to create potent images and to re-imagine all manner of events, emotions and activities in his paintings. In this sense his amazing life story acts as a parallel text, illustrating and informing us of each complex work. His years in Egypt as a member of the Air Force provided source material for his retelling of biblical stories, his experience of the beach at North Cottesloe as a young surf lifesaver was the catalyst for paintings about the ineffable presence of God in nature, and his life with Joyce provided the theme of many paintings celebrating the power of love. In one series of pictures he describes the conception, birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, combining the theological with the personal, the
spiritual with the everyday and the ethereal with the banal. The second painting of the series articulately represents Christ’s passage down the birth canal to enter the world and take on his mission of salvation, represented by a golden megaphone protruding from the surface. On the reverse side of this painting, in his idiosyncratic prose incorporated into a beautiful drawing, Stan describes the Miricle of the Birth of Christ and the Mirical of Creation and also includes a personal commentary on the significance of these events for humanity.

Stan’s ability to summon up a visual language from his own resources, referencing what he found in the world around him but digging deeper to reveal new insights, is the essence of significant art and it is what makes these works so powerful, so authentic and so beautiful.

Yet, like others drawn to make images that try to answer the big questions and confront the really important problems in life, the task is so great and so necessary and so profound that it does not seem possible to embark on such a project without assistance. How are artists like Stan, with little or no formal training and little or no relationship to the art world, able to revitalise image making and offer new insights into the power of images to tell significant stories? It is a question Stan asks himself, and his answer is simple. He does not claim responsibility for these works. He is adamant that he is only a conduit through which the works materialise. As he explained in a letter to me, just weeks after our first meeting:

...I have a confession to make to you re my paintings I have done. My hand and arm was guided by an unseen Power on my paintings and the skill
which may be evident in their presentation for any one who likes my art is done by an unseen Angel.¹

Like many artists gathered under a number of mostly unhelpful descriptors such as naïve art, outsider art, marginal art, visionary art, folk art and art brut, Stan believes his work is guided by forces beyond his control. Held within the net of those terms, these artists adopt a similar position on spiritual guidance and reflect a comparable fusing of personal narrative with spiritual imagery and compelling visual inventiveness. Some, like the extraordinary Adolf Wölfli, were identified by psychiatrists Dr Morganthaler and Dr Hans Prinzhorn, medical practitioners who documented the work of their patients. The French artist Jean Dubuffet identified another large group of artists creating ‘raw’ art (art brut) from their everyday experiences. He discovered the work of Henry Darger, Martin Ramirez, Madge Gill amongst many others, all artists with no previous training and no links to the art world, who nevertheless made astonishingly vivid and compelling paintings and objects which they claimed were inspired by spirit guides, angels or other unseen forces. Since Roger Cardinal's book Outsider Art was published in 1972, many other artists with similar stories have been identified. Some have become extremely well known and even adopted by the commercial world, like the Reverend Howard Finster, who was invited to produce album covers for the American New Wave band Talking Heads. Indeed, Finster's Paradise Garden and Simon Rodia's now famous Watts Towers, both extraordinary environments created by men with phenomenal dedication, have become tourist destinations in Summerville, Georgia, and Watts in Los Angeles.

There are also a large number of untutored Australian visionary artists whose work provides an informative context for Stan Hopewell’s work. Henri Bastin, James Fardoulys, Charles Callins, Iris Frame, Lorna Chick, Selby Warren, Harold ‘the Kangaroo’ Thornton, Roma Higgins, Sam Byrne and the Western Australian artist Ivy Robson (Jesus Brush), who believed her hand was guided by Jesus himself, are a few of the better known. Of course, not all of the above believe in religious or cosmic guidance but they do have the ability to summon up extraordinary images from their creative imagination. Added to this selection of artists are a significant
group of Indigenous artists whose work shares stylistic similarities, such as the Carrolup group of Nyoongar artists from the south-west of Western Australia and also H. G. Wedge, Ian Abdulla, Robert Campbell Jnr and, more recently, Billy Benn.

For many commentators, this group of artists does have a special ability to reach into the unknown and to see further. When Henri Rousseau died in the Hôpital Necker in Paris on 2 September 1910 and was buried in the Cimetière de Bagneux, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire wrote a poetic tribute to the artist who had painted his portrait, and this tribute was carved on Rousseau’s tombstone by the sculptor Constantin Brancusi:

We salute you
Gentle Rousseau you can hear us
Delaunay his wife Monsieur Queval and myself
Let our luggage pass duty free through the gates of heaven
We will bring you brushes paints and canvas
That you may spend your sacred leisure in the light of truth
Painting as you once did my portrait
Facing the stars

Facing the stars, looking towards a bright future, towards a world of illumination and possibility, with eyes as old as time, so Apollinaire salutes Rousseau and situates him in history as a person blessed with an extraordinary gift; the ability to forge his own path, to follow the stars of fortune and promise.

1 Letter to the Author from Stan Hopewell, 23 March 2007.
Together, these artists provide a comparison and point of reference that assist us in understanding Stan Hopewell’s extraordinary achievement in finding a way to make sense of the world around him, to answer the important questions of life and to commune with his God in the process. ‘We are all in the gutter’, Oscar Wilde proclaimed, ‘but some of us are looking at the stars’. Throughout his life Stan has shown a remarkable ability to make the best of every situation and to see the best in everyone he encounters. That sense of optimism, of certainty in a benevolent power that will assist and guide, has been the bedrock of his life and his faith.

Exploring how his work fits within these wider art contexts and critically analysing its success in picturing all manner of incidents and ideas provides revealing insights into the creative process and the human compulsion to create images that make sense of the world, by revealing the unseen and decoding the inexplicable.
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STAN’S
LIFE
Stan and family at Araluen. Back l–r: Stan’s mother, sister Winnie, Stan, Mrs Lieper, Lilly, Marcia. Laurie and Phil in front.
Growing up in Western Australia in the twenties and thirties, the beach at North Cottesloe was a sanctuary for Stan Hopewell. The pristine beaches of fine sand stretched for miles and were not only an escape hatch from the Depression but also a concrete manifestation of the presence of God. The power of the unseen force that would direct his life through times of struggle, great suffering and sadness, and during moments of joy and celebration, was evident to Stan in the wind that swept along the beach, in the glorious sunsets, the continuous pounding of the waves and in the sense of connectedness these all brought him. Stan’s favourite hymn, ‘Immortal, invisible God only wise’, heard on Sundays at the Anglican service, was confirmed daily through his communion with nature, on the beach, just a few streets west of his home at 16 Griver Street, Cottesloe.

When I was a kid and swimming at North Cottesloe and seeing the sun sink into the West, the ever changing colours over the water, and I thought to myself, there is God going to sleep and to awake in the morning. Our Indian Ocean and Rottnest Island rising to the heavens, like a mirage.  

1 Stan Hopewell, unpublished manuscript, vol. 1.
2 ibid.
Stan and his mother in Melbourne, 1922.
Stan’s father Sydney Hopewell met Joseph (Joe) Johnson while working at the fire brigade in 1921 and Joe invited his new friend home to meet his family. Sydney was smitten with Joe’s older sister Euphemia (Phemie) and not long after when he returned home to Melbourne, she followed on the Katoomba in 1922, married Sydney and gave birth to their son Stanley Robert Samuel Hopewell in Prahran on 13 July.

A sister, Winifred, was born on 21 October 1923, and two years later Phemie wrote to her parents asking if they could return to Perth and move into the family home in Angove Street until they could find their own place. Lillian was born on 25 January 1925 just before they left Fitzroy to travel back to Perth. By the birth of their next daughter Marcia, on 13 November 1926, the young family had set up home near the beach at 16 Griver Street, Cottesloe.

Stan was the eldest of five siblings at the beginning of the Depression in 1929, and the eldest of six by 1935 when recovery had been under way for a few years, and times were hard for the Hopewell family. Stan’s father was out of work so ‘... we ate kangaroo and bunny-rabbit meat – Cow Heel pie and bread when we could get it in the land of plenty’, Stan recalls in his memoir. Fortunately, there was the beach and the opportunities it provided for pleasure, adventure and for service.

Running up and down to Cottesloe looking for treasure and lo and behold a wristwatch studded with diamonds. I figured it was a ladies, but no human in sight. Back home with the spoils uncovered by the wind, the Depression on and money what it was, but my mother being honest found out it
belonged to a lady from the pub at Cottesloe and I was ordered to take it back, which I did. She was thrilled to get it back and gave me threepence for my trouble – our newfound wealth. Mother was disgusted!9

While treasure hunting proved less rewarding than hoped, the many hours of pleasure offered by living in close proximity to the beach, together with the opportunity to serve the community through membership of the North Cottesloe Surf Life Saving Club was more gratifying. Established in 1918, the Club was a wonderful outlet for young boys with few other options for entertainment.

How lucky, then, were the kids of Cottesloe, for whom the beach was at most a few streets away. If you lived close enough, you could hear the ocean, and how could anyone resist it, on those bone dry, crystal clear summer mornings, with the sun already burning the sky as you ate your breakfast? Cottesloe kids raced through their weekend household tasks, or cunningly evaded them, before heading for the beach. It cost nothing to get there, admission was free, and you could stay as long as you liked.10

Beach culture had become an important part of the lifestyle for young Western Australians by the first years of the Depression.

It was now more than ten years since the old inhibitions against mixed bathing had broken down, and the young were making full use of the freedom open to them...A Perth tailor reported that women were constantly demanding men’s bathers for their own use and both sexes favoured bright colours such as ocean-blue, bright green, red and orange; stripes were in great demand.11

Though the Cottesloe Council was unsuccessful in limiting Club membership to local residents, most of the members were, like Stan, drawn from the immediate hinterland. As the first community organisation established in the area with a visible presence and its own facilities in the form of clubrooms, it was a focus for
activity in an area ‘otherwise bereft of recreational activities’. Even in the depths of the Depression, the Club retained its membership, the beach ‘more than ever a cheap leisure resource and membership of the surf club an affordable diversion from the generally bleak outlook’.13

They also did an extremely valuable job in overseeing the safety of swimmers, as the number of rescues dutifully recorded in the Club’s annual reports attest. Among the regulars on the beach was an old man known as ‘Shark Bait’, who would swim out of sight and yet still come back, Stan remembers. However, if Shark Bait had no need of the services provided by the fledgling club, many others did. Shark attacks were as feared in the twenties and thirties as now, particularly following the horrific attack at Cottesloe in November 1925 that cost the life of a young public servant, Simon Ettelson.14 For a young man like Stan, the Club was a godsend providing not only entertainment but also a sense of purpose.

Stan attended the Eric Street Primary School15 until grade four, then daily made the trip to Fremantle to attend Fremantle Boys’ School,16 while his sisters attended the adjoining Princess May’s Girls’ School. Fortunately, in his spare time he was also able to find work at the Astoria Tea Rooms, which had been opened by Ormond (Pop) Lucas in 192517 on Swanbourne Terrace (renamed Marine Parade in 1932). From the reports in local papers this was a very sophisticated venue catering to the flourishing beach culture developing in Western Australia:

The modern Astoria tea and refreshment rooms at the North Cottesloe beach promenade are replete with the choicest confections, best brands

9 ibid.
11 Geoffrey Bolton, A Fine Country to Starve in, University of Western Australia Press, 1972, p. 65.
13 ibid.
14 In a cruel twist of fate in November 2000, Ken Crew was taken by a shark off North Cottesloe 75 years to the month of Ettelson’s attack.
15 The Eric Street Primary School was opened in 1913 and is now North Cottesloe Primary School.
16 Established in 1854 in splendid stone premises on Queen Victoria Street, it merged with the Princess May’s Girls’ School to become John Curtin High School in 1954.
17 Lucas sold the business in 1960 to John and Mary Riddett, who a few years later sold on to Alma and Philip Harris. The Harrises lived there for a while but the noise from the Surf Club Stomps with bands like Johnny and the Strangers was too much and they leased the building to Michael and Tony Grove and Lucas Schumi, who ran a successful restaurant called the Copenhagen on the site for many years.
of tobaccos and cigarettes, and supply the daintiest afternoon teas and light luncheons that visitors could desire. All perishable foods and summer drinks are kept to an even temperature by modern methods. Hot water served with pleasure.\textsuperscript{18}

Stan was grateful for the work, which helped in the family’s fight for existence through a terrible Depression. With many surviving on the sustenance allowance (known colloquially as ‘living on the sus’) of seven shillings a week for a single man, fourteen shillings for a married couple and seven shillings for each child under fourteen up to a maximum of five children,\textsuperscript{19} any contribution to the family income was welcome.\textsuperscript{20}

Cottesloe was developing rapidly and the conversion of the Perth–Fremantle Road into Stirling Highway in 1930 brought new activity, the population growing to 3,628 by 1934, yet despite these changes Cottesloe remained a small community. Families living in the wooden houses on Griver Street were a close-knit group who looked after their own. Stan recalls with fondness young Dick Wright, who suffered from Down syndrome and used to run up and down Grant Street making a noise like a motorbike and hopping on his invisible vehicle to ride to Garside’s store. ‘...Then he would come back up Grant Street to view the Indian Ocean and back home to Lyon Street. A regular performance, one never forgot this lad’s application’, Stan concludes.
At fourteen, Stan began an electrical apprenticeship with J. L. Mattinson. It was hard work with additional study required after a full working day. Two nights a week from 7 pm until 9 pm he attended Perth Technical College in St Georges Terrace, then rode his pushbike home to North Cottesloe. He passed three subjects in the Preparatory Industrial Course with credit in 1936 (English, trade mathematics and woodwork), and technical electricity in 1938. Fortunately for the family he also earned ten shillings a week to contribute to the coffer.

Also by good fortune, the family lived next to Mrs Lieper ‘...who owned a car and often took them on outings, one being to Araluen in 1939 when Phillip was four with blond curls and blue eyes. The Hopewells didn’t have much money, as the song goes, they had a lot of fun!’ reported Marj Cook, a cousin of Stan’s. The photograph of their adventure shows them all neatly turned out, Stan a handsome young man standing resolutely at the back of the group.

In the same year the seventeen-year-old went looking for adventure. Even though on the cusp of unimaginable exploits ahead, he and a mate were seeking a challenge and decided on a real escapade, a one-day bike trip to Mandurah.

The trip in 1939 with a cobber on pushbikes, riding down the old dirt roads to sleepy Mandurah, where we fished off the Old Bridge with our hand lines. Really a wooden structure that had seen its time, the two palm trees alongside of the bridge and tiny store, the crabs that we could pick up without a scoop net, the land that could be bought for a song...One bike pump between the two of us and our families worried if we could make it.
Stan on enlistment, 1940.
Only a short time in old Mandurah because of the hazardous ride home, the bushland on each side of the dirt track with no cars to worry us. West Aussie in its pristine state and the cry of birds to help us peddle back home. From 6.00 in the morning to late at night, just as the sun had gone down. The joy of having achieved something!

Typically, Stan sees the opportunities and happily reinterprets the hardship and distress – ‘the hazardous ride’ – into a positive, ‘...the cry of birds to help us peddle [sic] home’. This snapshot of his experience encapsulates his approach to life, an approach based on optimism, fortitude and a belief in an unseen force that would guide and protect him. It also illustrates his visual acuity and his attentiveness to the details of the flora and fauna around him. Although there is no evidence Stan drew or wrote an account of what he saw at the time, it was stored away and became the bedrock he would mine for his paintings sixty years later.

The outbreak of war presented another opportunity, this time a chance to serve his country with the added bonus of further contributing to the family’s monthly income. So on 24 September 1940 Stan enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force.