

## Hol(e)y Statues:

Some reflections on holes, emptiness and longing  
in the work of two Australian émigré sculptors of the fifties

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*Jane Eckett*

The first hole made through a piece of stone is a revelation. – Henry Moore, 1937.<sup>1</sup>

A striking feature manifest in much early twentieth-century modern sculpture is the recurrent use of the hole, or, in sculptural parlance, 'negative space'. From the late nineteenth century onwards, holes, openings, slits and punctures were increasingly introduced to sculptural forms, with Rodin, Bourdelle, Matisse and Rosso all rejecting the ideal of the smooth and wholesome neoclassical figure, instead favouring pitted and pock-marked surfaces that bore witness to the processes of wax modelling and bronze casting. These 'aberrations' led the way to more radical reconstructions of the figure: from the cubist and constructivist analyses of Picasso, Archipenko and Gabo, to the slightly later open fretwork forms of Picasso, Gonzalez and Smith's welded steel sculptures and Moore and Hepworth's more abstract, pierced carvings of the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> As the phrase 'negative space' implies, holes represent the opposite of solid form, or 'positive space'. Objects, including – traditionally at least – sculptural objects, consist of particles condensed into stable, solid substances. Holes represent the dissolution of that solid matter, the dispersal of subatomic particles into airy circulation, and an effective destruction of form. For all the intriguing ramifications that this language of negation, destruction and dispersal might suggest, a sustained consideration of holes has been largely absent from art historical discourse. Key texts on sculptural theory, such as Rosalind Krauss' *Passages in Modern Sculpture* and Alex Potts' *The Sculptural Imagination* have been primarily concerned with the theme of time as it bears upon the phenomenological experience of encountering sculpture.<sup>3</sup> Yet the act of boring through a piece of stone, wood, metal or other such material, must also surely be seen as highly significant when considered alongside sculpture's recent history, whereby sculpture has been removed from its literal and metaphoric pedestal and brought into the shared space of the viewer.<sup>4</sup> In this

democratisation of space, wherein the distinction between the romantic or allegorical space of the artwork and the mundane space of reality has all but disappeared, sculptural form has been physically punctured, dissected, and opened up. Holes have played an important role in this process.

While historians have, by and large, overlooked this interesting thematic, sculptors themselves have been relatively articulate on the subject of holes.<sup>5</sup> Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth were two of the earliest artists to have incorporated negative space in their abstract, three-dimensional compositions. In his “Notes on Sculpture”, first published in 1937 and frequently anthologised since, Moore recorded his observations of certain sea-washed pebbles, in which a hole had been created by the movements of sand, wind and water.<sup>6</sup> From this observation he extrapolated:

A piece of stone can have a hole through it and not be weakened – if the hole is of a studied size, shape, and direction. On the principle of the arch, it can remain just as strong. The first hole made through a piece of stone is a revelation. The hole connects one side to the other, making it immediately more three-dimensional. A hole can itself have as much shape-meaning as a solid mass. Sculpture in air is possible, where the stone contains only the hole, which is the intended and considered form. The mystery of the hole – the mysterious fascination of caves in hillsides and cliffs.<sup>7</sup>

For Moore, the special significance of the hole is that it “connects one side to the other”, thereby allowing the viewer to apprehend the three-dimensionality of the object, which distinguishes it from painting or other two-dimensional art forms. Moore’s “revelation” makes better sense when considered alongside an earlier passage from the same essay, in which he describes the means by which a sculptor could understand three-dimensional form:

He [the sculptor] gets the solid shape, as it were, inside his head – he thinks of it, whatever its size, as if he were holding it completely enclosed in the hollow of his hand. He mentally visualizes a complex form *from all round itself*; he knows while he looks at one side what the other side is like; he identifies himself with its centre of gravity, its mass, its weight; he realizes its volume, as the space that the shape displaces in the air.<sup>8</sup>

The piercing of form – the creation of holes – was, for Moore, the most immediate way of emphasising the three-dimensional nature of the form, allowing

both the artist and viewer to comprehend the ‘thing-ness’ of the sculpture, over and above the immediate view offered by any one standpoint.

However, the incorporation of holes was not just a formal device for Moore. Far from regarding form as an end in itself, Moore was “very much aware that associational, psychological forces play a large part in sculpture. The meaning and significance of form itself probably depends on the countless associations of man’s history.”<sup>9</sup> Rather than view holes as being merely the result of purely formal experimentation, it seems plausible, in light of Moore’s words, to ascribe a symbolic meaning to these spaces of absence. This is a rather precarious path to follow. Many of the earliest surveys of modern art, written shortly after the Second World War by European émigré scholars such as H. W. Janson, Ernst Gombrich and the Bauhausler, Walter Gropius, focussed on stylistic concerns, avoiding explicit reference to the meaning or message contained within modernist works.<sup>10</sup> The scholars’ traumatic experiences at the hands of various totalitarian regimes meant that they sought ostensibly objective, universalist readings, which were not embedded in a particular social or political context. Formalism, or the appreciation of art in such terms as volume, mass, colour and texture, was a means of liberating art from the propaganda machines of the state. Ironically, such rational, scientific objectivity effectively denatured modernism’s history. Symbolism was deemed suspect, despite its continued usage by vast numbers of artists, including Moore. To write about holes in sculpture as possessing symbolic significance is therefore a delicate task.

To begin with, we must consider what association/s holes might evoke. Moore clearly thought of caves, with their attendant connotations of shelter, darkness, hibernation, hideouts and ancient dwellings. To think of the body is to think of orifices, particularly those of the digestive and reproductive systems. Dore Ashton thought of the holes in Hepworth’s work as eyes:

The eyes are ubiquitous in Hepworth’s sculptures and I think of them more and more as symbols and not holes. Not only do they symbolize the Western window of the soul, but also the Eastern and primitive eye which mythologically survives all history... I know that in Hepworth’s stones, and in her bronzes too, there is the interior vision which transforms a simple circular opening into an apprehensible symbol.<sup>11</sup>

Holes define the shape of precious objects such as crowns, rings and amulets, and in earlier times were dug in the ground to protect hordes of such very treasures as these. These might be all considered relatively positive aspects of holes.

But holes also have negative associations, particularly with absence and voids. Again, referring to the body, we think of wounds such as bullet holes. Lucio Fontana's series of terracotta balls, *Spatial Concept: Nature*, made in 1959 and cast in bronze the following year, were frequently understood as having been wounded with holes; hence, whilst the series was considered "profoundly visceral" and indeed erotic, it was "also deeply threatening".<sup>12</sup> Holes can be difficult places to escape; think of the colloquial expression, 'to be in a hole', or the infamous black hole of Calcutta, from which few emerged alive. They can also indicate an illogical, irrational space; 'to pick holes', or find flaws, is to destroy an apparently coherent argument or plan, whilst the black holes of outer space represent one of the most perplexing conundrums of astrophysics. Holes are by definition an absence and cannot be identified as material matter; at best, we can identify the "hole lining" or "material host", which surrounds the hole.<sup>13</sup> As Kurt Tucholsky poignantly wrote, the edge or lining of a hole is "part of the Something, but constantly overlooking the Nothing – a border guard of matter."<sup>14</sup> In such definitions as these, holes must consist of 'nothing', but they are surrounded by – and may be filled in with or obliterated by – 'something'.

This leads us to consider the function of holes in sculpture – as opposed to merely their associations, positive or negative. Contemporary artists Mark Dunhill and Tamiko O'Brien have explored the implicit contradictions of holes in both their collaborative works and written statements. Their comments are particularly pertinent to a discussion of holes in sculpture:

It is in the nature of HOLES to undermine the things they are in, to be a disruption and a flaw. HOLES in sculpture can be seen as an antidote to the sculptural urge to be a 'special' thing. A HOLE in a sculpture may puncture and deflate its status.<sup>15</sup>

Whilst Dunhill and O'Brien define a hole as "a disruption" or "flaw," they suggest a positive use for holes, which can "deflate" a sculpture's claim to be a "special" object, that is, different from all other objects, be they functional or

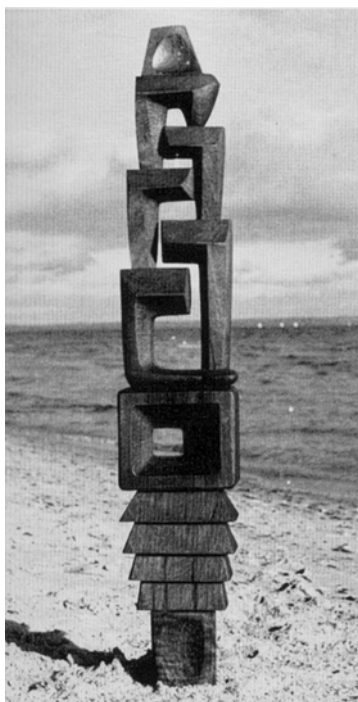
decorative. Sculpture can no longer pretend to possess that unique, set-apart aura accorded to what Sartre once called “the sleek mute creatures” of classical statuary, or the holy statues of church niches, because, as a pierced work of art, it envelops and encloses space that is contiguous with the space surrounding the viewer, thereby establishing a sort of kinship by proximity with the viewer.<sup>16</sup> In this sense the hole works towards demystifying the status of the art object, and brings us closer to a postmodernist conception of sculpture.

In the following essay I wish to propose a further function of the sculptural hole, arising from its association with the idea of absence. It will be argued that in the work of two European émigré sculptors – Vincas Jomantas (1922-2001) and Julius Kane (1921-1962) – who came to prominence in Australia in the 1950s, the hole came to symbolise the artists’ exile from their families, artistic milieu and homelands. Varying from expressions of emptiness, wounds, stigmata, pain and loss of faith, these two artists used holes in their work to describe feelings of distress and melancholy. Caught up, as they were, in the post-war European diaspora – that process of “forced dispersal and reluctant scattering” – these feelings can be correlated with the artists’ status as exiles.<sup>17</sup> However, far from merely expressing nostalgic homesickness, the work of these transplanted artists reveals a determination to engage with their new surroundings. The incorporation of space in their sculptures, framed and made conspicuous in the form of holes, simultaneously enclosed the new environment, their adopted land, whilst also fragmenting or fracturing this space. It thereby created a new perspective on the surroundings, forcing the jaded eye of earlier settlers to accept the dislocated vision of the new émigré.

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In a photograph taken circa 1958, Vincas Jomantas’ sculpture, *Tower of Grief*, rises totem-like from a sandy shore; water is seen lapping close by, stretching diagonally out of the frame, whilst clouds gather ominously overhead (fig. 1). Sand, sea and sky crisply divide the scene, slightly below the golden mean, contributing to a sense of towering monumentality in the foregrounded sculpture. The churned state of the sand suggests that this is a populated place – not the *terra nullius* of the colonial imagination – but, for the moment, the shore is abandoned.

Possibly the weather is cold, the season may be winter, or perhaps it is midweek, when the majority of the populace are occupied elsewhere: at work, school or home. The location is most probably Sandringham, a bayside suburb of Melbourne, near to where the artist had lived since the early 1950s.<sup>18</sup> But in a broader and more significant sense, the location is a liminal space, on the border between land and sea, Melbourne and Port Phillip, Australia and the vastness of the Indian Ocean. It is surely no coincidence that this should be the case. Jomantas, the émigré artist from Lithuania, has situated his work at the very threshold that marks him as an outsider in Australia. He is from 'over there', 'over the water', 'far away'. His work however, is planted in the newly turned ground of 'here' – a shifting, tidal location, where identity is as contingent as a footprint in the sand. Out there, unseen beyond the thin strip of land on the horizon, lies the country of origin of both the artist and the tradition from whence he came: the European tradition of monumental sculpture, of wood carving, of the inviolable and sacrosanct object. Back here, the artist seems to acknowledge his peripheral position, situated on the very margins of his adopted country, positioned at an angle to the mainstream history of Western art.



**Fig. 1**

Vincas Jomantas (1922-2001)  
*Tower of Grief*, c. 1957-58

Carved jarrah, stained and oiled, with hessian and enamel, 123 x 28.5 x 24.9 cm. Collection National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Photograph by the artist, courtesy the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, Pictures Collection, H2007.33/314.

The marginal nature of the work is even carried through, perhaps by happy coincidence, to the medium: jarrah, or *Eucalyptus marginata*, a hard wood that Jomantas no doubt first encountered when he worked in the timber industry in the Margaret River region, shortly after he arrived in Australia in 1948. Named for the pale vein that runs along the outer margin of the leaf, jarrah, or Swan River mahogany as it is also known, is endemic to the south-west coast of Australia – another marginal or liminal place, located on the opposite side of the continent, albeit closer to Melbourne than the artist's former home in Vilnius, Lithuania.<sup>19</sup>

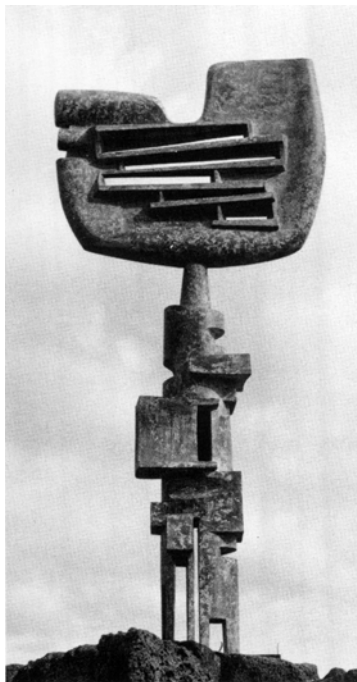
Roger Butler has written that the title of Jomantas' work, *Tower of Grief*, together with the artist's choice of locations for this photograph, suggests that the work was a metaphor for the artist's exile from Europe "and the ever-present grief caused by this separation."<sup>20</sup> Whilst Butler does not elaborate on this statement, it seems reasonable to infer that he is alluding to the personal circumstances of the artist. Certainly, the bare facts of Jomantas' biography would suggest that he experienced more than his fair share of trauma and grief: fleeing his home in Vilnius in 1944 ahead of the Russian army, he was conscripted into a German forced labour camp in occupied Czechoslovakia, before making his way to Munich, where he spent three years in a displaced person's camp after the war. Afraid of reprisals from the Soviets, he never returned to his home country nor saw his family again.<sup>21</sup> Yet the latter half of the 1950s, when *Tower of Grief* was made, marked a change of fortunes for Jomantas, with his work being exhibited with the Contemporary Art Society (1956, 1958), the Herald Outdoor Art Show (1957), the Victorian Sculptors' Society (1958), Peter Bray Gallery (1957), Brummel's Gallery (1957), the National Gallery of Victoria (1958, 1959) and the Art Gallery of Queensland (1958). He also received his first public commission in 1958, for the Australian National University in Canberra. Therefore rather than read a work such as *Tower of Grief* as a reflection of specific personal difficulties, I would suggest that it indicates a more generalised sense of grief. Jomantas himself was later equivocal about the degree to which *Tower of Grief* arose from personal circumstances. In an interview with James Gleeson given in 1979, he at first suggested that the work was "a very personal thing," but almost immediately then distanced himself from this statement, claiming that the work represented a "more

abstract concept; ... grief of the tribe or something like that.”<sup>22</sup> It is still fair to suppose, as Butler does, that this grief might have arisen from the artist’s condition of exile but it should not be read as too intimate a reflection of specific circumstances. Prior knowledge of the artist’s life history is unnecessary, for it is in the sculpture’s hollowed out centre, neatly framing the background view of sea and sky in the present photograph, that Jomantas’ message of loss and emptiness is most poignantly conveyed.

In addition to raising notions of personal grief and homesickness, Butler likened *Tower of Grief* to a “strange new plant against the backdrop of a moody sky.”<sup>23</sup> In doing so, he evoked a discourse of hybridity to account for the sense of uncanniness evinced in the photograph. This sense of the uncanny, or the familiar yet strange, is recurrent in Jomantas’ work, and may be the underlying cause of the distancing effect that was remarked on by certain critics during his lifetime. One commentator felt that Jomantas’ “severe” and “awesome shapes” tended “to keep spectators at a distance,” despite the otherwise engaging device of the open fretwork, which invites the viewer into a shared space.<sup>24</sup> But rather than suggest some marvellous new form of flora, I contend that both the dimensions of the work – at a height of 123 cm – and its vertical composition, strongly imply a human presence.

How then are we to account for this sense of the uncanny? Several historians have recently suggested that Jomantas was influenced by Lithuanian folk carving, which his father (who was also a sculptor) had prized and collected.<sup>25</sup> Presumably this might lend a sense of the familiar – familiar through a passing knowledge of Eastern European folk art – but ultimately foreign. However, *Tower of Grief* owes, I believe, far more to the arts of the Pacific region, such as the totem poles from the north Pacific, or the fierce presences of Polynesian Tiki carvings, which were widely collected in Australia and the United States after World War II, when soldiers brought them home as souvenirs. Closer still is the resemblance to Tiwi *pukamani* grave markers from Melville and Bathurst Islands off the north coast of Australia. Tiwi *pukamani* are unusual in that they are almost always entirely abstract in form. Shortly after they first came to international attention, in an exhibition at the Pennsylvania University Museum in 1955, they were claimed as sculptural artworks, akin to that of the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi.<sup>26</sup>

In 1958 the director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Tony Tuckson, commissioned a group of Tiwi burial markers, which went on display at the front of the gallery the following year, causing a predictable outcry from those who held that such works were ethnographic artefacts rather than fine art objects. It is possible that Jomantas was familiar with the Tiwi burial poles through Baldwin Spencer's photographs of *pukamani* ceremonies, which first went on exhibit in Melbourne in 1939 as part of the National Museum of Victoria's ethnographic display, and publications on Aboriginal art by anthropologists and ethnographers such as Charles Barrett, A. S. Kenyon and Charles Mountford.<sup>27</sup> The sense of the uncanny in *Tower of Grief* might therefore come from the similarity to indigenous Australian carving, coupled with a sense of distance and foreignness evinced by the hollow centre of the work and its siting – at least in the photograph under discussion – on the very rim, or littoral, of Australia.



**Fig. 2**

Vincas Jomantas (1922-2001)  
*Guardant*, 1963

Bronze, 124.5 x 56 x 18 cm. Collection Mildura Arts Centre, Victoria. Photograph by Ken Scarlett, courtesy the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, Pictures Collection, H2007.33/323.

The motif of perforations in a tall, totemic form reappears in one of Jomantas' best-known works: *Guardant*, 1963 (fig. 2). Awarded the special acquisition prize at the second sculpture exhibition at Mildura, in 1964, *Guardant* was described at the time as a work "of classic serenity" and "a beautifully counterpointed construction of sharp edges, firm curves and compact masses answering to the delicately

adjusted hollows and voids.”<sup>28</sup> This latter comment belongs to art historian, critic and communist, Bernard Smith, who five years previously had come to the defence of Melbourne’s social realist painters in his *Antipodean Manifesto*.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly in one who favoured clear social comment in his art, he missed any message or content in Jomantas’ abstract sculpture, resorting instead to a purely formalist – and in Smith’s world, less essential – appreciation. However, Jomantas’ work as a whole expresses the desire to convey universal ideas and themes. James Gleeson acknowledged as much when he reviewed Jomantas’ solo exhibition at the Rudy Komon Gallery in Sydney in 1974, writing:

He is, in fact, a “public” sculptor of the highest quality. He is able to translate ideas, notions and their attendant clouds of feeling into concrete images of a high degree of communicability. We can read his forms and understand them. Yet he is anything but a simple sign-maker.<sup>30</sup>

In Gleeson’s view, and in many other commentators’ opinions, Jomantas was very much concerned with forging symbols and imbuing meaning in his ostensibly abstract sculptures.<sup>31</sup>

What then, might the “notions and their attendant clouds of feeling” be in a work like *Guardant*? Many years after it was first exhibited, commentators detected metaphoric allusions in *Guardant*, with the work being compared to both “the helmeted head of an armoured figure” and a traditional Lithuanian pole shrine, or *stogastulpis*.<sup>32</sup> The latter connection would seem rather tenuous; *Guardant* displays little to no sense of religious piety, nor does it possess the etiolated form or decorative surface encrustation that characterises the *stogastulpis*. There is also no denying the strongly anthropomorphic associations of the vertical composition, which is nearly exactly the same height – 124 cm – as *Tower of Grief*. The helmeted head therefore offers a more fruitful analogy. To be guarded is to effectively wear a mask, hiding the true emotions from public view. Masks and slotted helmets disguise and protect the face from public scrutiny. They might also be seen as a metaphor for the way in which an immigrant views the world, always at a remove, looking out at the society in which he or she finds themselves, unable to fully participate by reason of cultural barriers such as linguistic difficulties. The horizontal slotted holes in the upper half of *Guardant* are stacked one on top of the other, dependent on the shelf-like projections, or “hole linings,” that border each

slot, for support and stability. The precariousness of their arrangement, by which they constitute what we read as a 'face,' points to the fragmented and reconstructed nature of the exiled identity. As in *Tower of Grief*, the hollowed-out areas in *Guardant* also fracture the view of the surrounding environment, offering us the perspective of the exiled outsider.

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**Fig. 3**

Julius Kane (1921-1962)  
*Equestrienne*, 1952

Bronze with green patina, 92.3 x 75.7 x 32.0 cm. Collection National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Photograph by Roger Adams, courtesy the George Paton Gallery, Melbourne.

Julius Kane provides our second case study of an émigré sculptor whose work was typically formed by a process of hollowing-out and removal of material. Born Julius Kuhn in 1921, he studied law and economics at Budapest University during the early years of the war, after which he went to Munich, where he enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts and studied sculpture under Anton Hiller (1893-1985).<sup>33</sup> His teacher, Hiller, was a conservative sculptor of the modelling and carving tradition, who produced mainly figure studies and animal bronzes. To date researchers have not commented on Kane's training, other than to note that "his early work in Australia was a stylised and consciously primitive figuration related to German sculpture of the 1940s," referring to such sculptors as Ernst Barlach and Gerhard Marcks.<sup>34</sup> This is possibly owing to the difficulty of obtaining information – at least, outside Germany – on Hiller and the manner of teaching then available at the

Munich Academy. Yet one of Kane's earliest known works, *Equestrienne*, 1952 (fig. 3), made just a few years after his arrival in Australia, clearly reveals the influence of Hiller's teachings.<sup>35</sup> In particular it shares many features in common with a little-known bronze relief of Hiller's, *Amazonen* (fig. 4), which can be reasonably dated to pre-1945 from the presence of a Nazi swastika in the background.<sup>36</sup> In both works the heavy-set female rider is depicted on her mount, turned side-ways so as to display her naked torso as she grasps an instrument of sorts – in *Amazonen* it is a spear, in *Equestrienne* it is ariding crop – whilst the broad girthed horses have one foreleg raised and the other three legs, heavily modelled, planted firmly on a roughly flattened base. Kane's work is more stylized than Hiller's; he has enlarged the already massive, weighty forms of the Amazonian woman and her steed. In this way Kane has converted an earlier expression of Germanic militarism, in which the ancient myth of the Amazonian women was co-opted for the Third Reich's nationalistic purposes, into a modern work such as would have been publicly unacceptable in Germany a short time previously.<sup>37</sup>



**Fig. 4**

Anton Hiller (1893-1985)  
*Amazonen*, c. 1933-45

Bronze relief, 67 x 97 cm.  
Private collection.  
Photograph courtesy  
Hermann Historica  
auctioneers, Munich.

When contrasted with the bulky form of *Equestrienne*, in which the circumference is uninterrupted by piercing, holes, or use of negative space, *Group* (fig. 5), made the following year, in 1953, marks a radical change and the beginning of Kane's artistic maturity.<sup>38</sup> Recalling Henry Moore's words, we may well imagine the "revelation" experienced by Kane in the creation of this work. The defining feature of *Group* is its incorporation of negative space. Indeed the figures vividly call to mind "the hollow men" of T. S. Eliot's eponymous poem:

We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!

They evoke a similar sense of anguish, arising from modern man's spiritual barrenness, as had earlier been expressed by Eliot in *The Wasteland*.<sup>39</sup> Herbert Read drew much the same analogy in 1952 in reference to the young British artists exhibiting at the Venice Biennale.<sup>40</sup> In *Group*, two figurative forms, consisting only of torso and legs, are positioned on a ledge as though seated side by side. The nipped-in waist and broad hips of the figure on the right would suggest she is female. The chests of both figures billow outwards, like sails on a ship, supported behind by a narrow band akin to a spinal cord. In the case of the female figure, this spinal cord bifurcates at the upper end, whips forward and pierces the chest, appearing as pointed tusks at exactly the place where her breasts might otherwise have been. The replacement of breasts with small tusks is a typically surrealist trope, rendering the figure a classic *femme fatale*.<sup>41</sup> However, it is the empty ovoid forms at the centre of each figure that command most attention. In the barrel-chested male figure, this empty space is noticeably larger than in the female figure, possibly in order to reflect the larger size of the torso, or maybe to signify that the male figure is emptier, or more damaged, than the female. We might also think of these empty spaces as enlarged stigmata, engulfing the body, signalling a crisis rather than confirmation of faith.



Fig. 5  
Julius Kane (1921-1962)  
*Group*, 1953

Plaster, approximately 66.1 cm high. Present whereabouts unknown. Photograph courtesy of McCulloch's *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*.

This is a difficult work to interpret without resorting to rather facile symbolism or cheap analogies, and so it is perhaps best at this point to turn to Kane's own writings on art.<sup>42</sup> Enigmatic in tone and expressed in rather convoluted and, at times, stilted English, Kane nevertheless strove to explain how art is made: the influences at play, the different levels of meaning that operate conjunctively within an artwork, and the role of the artist in society. He began his essay with a manifesto of sorts: "Art is life, irrational and contradictory in all its extremes."<sup>43</sup> As in life, art should combine elements of both "the mythological" and "the material rational," although, Kane cautioned, too much of the latter would lead to a monotonous existence. The artist inherits a degree of "instinctive skill," which he combines with his own experiences.<sup>44</sup> On this latter point Kane was adamant, asserting that the ego accumulates "past experiences, personal truths, [and] values," which constitute the artist's primary source material. These are then imposed on an essentially passive medium, such as clay or wood. One is reminded here of philosophical discussions on the subject of material and its essentially abject nature.<sup>45</sup> The second process or stage in artistic expression, as Kane understood it, is the forging of symbols with which to "interpret the supernatural." Kane described this process alternately as "creative" and "metaphysical," and clearly elevated it above the first stage, in which the artist merely identified and described subject matter. However, the artist is also subject to outside forces, such as "time, objects, races, and religion," which the ego must mediate in its subjective expression. Kane referred to these external factors as "collective truths," calling on Jungian psychology to explain the manner in which the ego strove to "please the group" and "synchronise itself with these collective ideals." Those artists who strove overly to please the group, by focussing on material rather than symbols, were in danger of subordinating their own desires to those of the group. The artist should therefore try to achieve a balance between pleasing merely him or herself, and pleasing the wider community. Once again emphasising the importance of the irrational, Kane declared: "Progress is alive only in irrational qualities where two or more domineering forces not only polish each other but develop and refine the nearest to the best qualities applied at a certain time."<sup>46</sup>

The repeated references to the individual versus the community in this essay lead us back to the openform sculpture, *Group*. The identifiably male and female figures appear to lean slightly in towards each other, as though in tense – possibly antagonistic – communion. Their contraposition suggests a mutual longing for the other or, more accurately, the ‘Other’, for their difference in gender renders them as foreign to one another as a person of different race or ethnicity. Of course this longing for the ‘Other’ may be fraught with danger: on the one hand the Other may be able to edify and improve, “polish” and “refine” them, whilst on the other hand they may also generate “irrational qualities”, or emotions, such as lust, jealousy or hatred. A dialogue between the two figures is evident, charging the surrounding space and, in turn, penetrating the figures. They are clearly subject to the needs of the other, whilst also trying to exert their own subjective will. In this way they demonstrate the play of forces – desire, influence and self-determination – between the individual and the group.

Predictably, in the conservative world of Australian art criticism of the fifties, critics did not know what to make of Kane’s work, tending to dismiss it as “grotesque” or “uninhibited” without further consideration.<sup>47</sup> In November 1952 Kane showed a work titled simply *Female Form*, which may have been one of the figures that shortly afterwards comprised *Group*. Arnold Shore quipped: “*Female Form*, by Julius Kuhn, hadn’t been taught proper posture when young”, but conceded, “she’s an interesting lump all the same.”<sup>48</sup> A month later Kane showed his *Group* at the first Herald Outdoor Art Show, where it attracted notice despite the large quantity of other works, amateur and professional, on display. Cartoonist Harry Mitchell evidently thought it frightful: in his comic strip, titled *Scared to Crow*, he resolved the difficulties of a man whose scarecrow was not sufficiently deterring birds from his vegetable plot, by substituting the scarecrow with Kane’s *Group*.<sup>49</sup> The association of *Group* with the figure of the scarecrow is particularly interesting in the context of *The Hollow Men*, in which Eliot depicted post-war man, stripped of his faith and common humanity, as nothing but a scarecrow, his “Headpiece filled with straw” and with his

Rat’s coat, crowskin, crossed staves  
In a field  
Behaving as the wind behaves.<sup>50</sup>

Whilst this connection to Eliot via the figure of the scarecrow was probably unintentional, it is significant that Mitchell found the hollowed out figures of *Group* as alarming as a crude human effigy erected in a field. The title of Mitchell's cartoon also ridiculed both supporters of modern art, who might proclaim the merits of works such as Kane's, and its detractors, who were scared to mock such work for fear of making fools of themselves.

In the face of miscomprehension, some critics, such as the architect James Birrell, simply dismissed Kane's work as meaningless. Birrell reproached Kane along with painters Ian and Dawn Sime and architects Harry Seidler and Robin Boyd for their lack of engagement with "contemporary values."<sup>51</sup> He believed their work displayed "disconcerting tendencies" that appeared "to sidestep the primary obligations of art," namely, to interpret "contemporary reality in emotional terms."<sup>52</sup> Whilst he conceded that their work was competent, and possibly of great personal significance, Birrell felt it failed to communicate with a wider audience: "here again we see the artist talking to himself, or at most to those closely associated with him."<sup>53</sup> Kane's art, Birrell believed, was ultimately "devitalized ... sterile, and drawn from international stylishness."<sup>54</sup> Of course, as Kane's own writings reveal, he was vitally concerned to communicate with his audience. The main difference in attitudes was that where Birrell wanted art that directly reflected the contemporary world, presumably in the manner of the social realists, Kane wanted to accommodate his viewer, allowing them sufficient imaginative space so that they might "introduce his [or her] own emotions through the inspiration of the work and have a chance to develop and incorporate that emotion with the art and complete the work through partnership with the original creator."<sup>55</sup> Writers such as Birrell fell far short of any such partnership, leaving a yawning gap between the sculpture and written 'critiques.'

In 1954, just a year after he had first exhibited *Group*, Kane carved a work known simply as *Vertical Form*.<sup>56</sup> Reminiscent of a sea-creature with splayed legs and tail reaching upwards with callipers or lobster-like claws, this was the first of a series of works made by hollowing out a length of tree-trunk – a process that would occupy Kane for the rest of his days. In the same manner as *Vertical Form* Kane made *Metis and Zeus*, 1958-59, *Thetis*, 1959, *Group Organism*, 1960-61, *Untitled*,

1961, and *Organic Forms*, 1962.<sup>57</sup> In each case he cut away sections of the wood as if attempting to reveal some inner skeleton. A friend of Kane's, who observed him at work, noted that he used both axe and adze to carve his work with great vigour, displaying almost an "abusive attitude to wood."<sup>58</sup> It was as if Kane wished to inflict bodily harm on his work, by wounding it with his axe. His technique led him to over-carve some pieces, which collapsed from sheer lack of internal support.<sup>59</sup> In those that survived, the resulting forms were as convoluted as Kane's writing, leading one reviewer in 1975 to refer to them as "gum tree baroque."<sup>60</sup>



**Fig. 6**

Julius Kane (1921-1962)  
*Group Organism*, c. 1960-61.

Wood, 254 cm high approx.  
Formerly private collection,  
California; present  
whereabouts unknown.  
Photograph by Mark  
Strizic, courtesy the George  
Paton Gallery, Melbourne.

One of the largest and most complicated works of the series is *Group Organism*, c. 1960-61 (fig. 6). This is a highly allusive work; its various vertical forms, arrayed uniformly in a line, are suggestive of human, animal and plant forms. Margaret Plant likened it to a group of Aboriginal grave posts, a comparison that, as has been seen, can also be made with Vincas Jomantas' tall totemic forms.<sup>61</sup> The 'figure' – for this is how each vertical form inevitably reads – nearest to us in the photograph, appears to consist of linked vertebrae, denying its origin as a single, fused length of wood. Next to it the tallest 'figure,' or element, in the work appears to reach upwards with paddled hands or perhaps splayed antlers, displaying

below a set of ribs, through which we glimpse the glossy shrubbery of the theatrically composed photograph's backdrop. The third element along the row reads most clearly as a figure. Its 'torso' is composed between two enormous forms, shaped rather like hipbones, with a central void in the place of an abdomen. Even more disconcerting is the 'face,' which is also empty, other than for a small, hollowed-out sphere that stares out blindly in the manner of a Cyclops. The other three forms on the farthest side of the photograph are difficult to discern, but confirm the sensation of bones, skeletons and petrified wood. The work as a whole might well be described as 'ossicular abstraction' – a strange parade of skeletal and metamorphosed life forms.<sup>62</sup>

For all that it evokes idea of ossified bones and peculiar presences, *Group Organism* is, I would argue, essentially a work about the individual in society. Each of the six forms is – at two and a half metres or slightly less – approximately human in height, which enables us to identify with them as human substitutes. However, like the figures in *Group*, 1953, they do not intermingle or touch. The dialogue, as such, is established through the precisely defined spaces in between each figure. In their proximity to, yet isolation from, one another, the figures seem to represent the loneliness that one might feel in crowds. They may also represent the subjective nature of experience. "Everyone sees the world through different eyes," Kane wrote; "we see things as we want to see them."<sup>63</sup> In light of his having lived in Hungary and Germany in the 1940s, and his subsequent arrival in Australia as an émigré, is it surprising that Kane should view people as blinkered and prejudiced? The hollowed-out forms are not, I propose, a gruesome reminder of concentration camp victims – for one thing, they appear almost indecently alert and alive in the sense of their swaying, striving movement. Instead, Kane offers us a view of humanity in which each person strives after their personal ideals but is ultimately constrained by the dictates of the group to which they belong; they must, in effect, 'toe the line,' and adhere to the dictates of society as a whole.

However, like the entire series of hollowed-out tree trunks that Kane made from 1954 until his death in 1962, *Group Organism* is also, without question, a work concerned with absence. On the base level of material, the work deals with the absent core, the removal of matter that is known only through the strangely shaped voids thereby created. As in *Group*, there is a strong sense of loss, though

whether this be physical or spiritual is hard to say. Philip Hensher's comments on absence as a theme in contemporary art, are revealing in this context:

The representation of absence is one of the most recurrent ambitions of art; an ambition, however, which has always been doomed to failure. Absence, the is-not, the lost and the unbodied are things which may be evoked, but only, effectively, at the cost of turning them into the present, the rediscovered, the bodied... Absence is an unattainable prize, aimed for and never achieved, never achievable.<sup>64</sup>

If Kane attempted to represent loss or absence he was bound – Hensher's words imply – to fail. Perhaps this explains why so many of Kane's works collapsed under the strain of his "frenetic" carving; he had always to continue removing material in the circuitous and futile attempt to convey a sense of what he had lost.<sup>65</sup> In light of his suicide in 1962, it is perhaps now possible, in retrospect, to better appreciate the degree to which he struggled to communicate his feelings about exile, loss and longing.

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Vincas Jomantas and Julius Kane incorporated voids in their sculptural work for differing but connected reasons. Jomantas' totemic works, with their strong sense of human presence, operated as virtual ciphers for the artist in his position as 'outsider,' whilst also encouraging the viewer to empathise with the immigrant. He achieved this through the use of holes that punctured the otherwise solid object, enabling us to grasp the three-dimensionality of the work and, more significantly, fracturing our vision of the surrounding land. Faced with the perforated head of *Guardant*, we find ourselves viewing the space beyond through a series of slotted holes, reminiscent of Ned Kelly's armoured helmet. We are effectively allowed to stand in the shoes of the besieged immigrant. In *Tower of Grief* the hole is a vast hollowed out emptiness at the core of the work. Whilst we can never know exactly what this hole might represent, we can appreciate what fills the space: the external environment, whether that be the beach at Sandringham or a white walled gallery. The 'new' space of Australia invades and subsumes the 'old' space of the émigré. The uncanny sense of familiarity that pervades the work, and the sense of human presence that it shares with *Guardant*,

may relate to the degree to which it echoes Aboriginal grave poles, which in Sydney and Melbourne in the 1950s, were just beginning to come to wider public attention.

Julius Kane may well have drawn on the same source material a decade later, when he created his masterpiece, *Group Organism*. Like his earlier work, *Group*, it explored desire between individuals, and the tension that exists between the self and the community. In *Group*, where the two hollowed-out figures lent towards one another, Kane dwelt upon feelings of attraction, fascination and otherness. Like the figure of the scarecrow, whose straw-filled head and tattered clothes may be seen as a parody of the shallow and soulless nature of humankind, and with which *Group* was once jocularly compared, the two figures comprising *Group* at once illustrate the emptiness of modern existence and quietly satirise it, in their mutual longing for each other's strikingly hollow form. How can relations exist, Kane seems to ask in despair, between such facile, emptied-out vessels? This sense of the isolated and self-gratifying ego, surrounded by other striving, wilful creatures, was explored on a larger scale in *Group Organism*, where separate lengths of wood were by turns bored, tunnelled and axed. Negative space, for Kane, was thus a means of alluding to the inner life of humans, and of condemning the apparent absence of inner substance, or metaphysical awareness as Kane would have most probably expressed it.

Both artists explored the potential meaning of the sculptural hole, using the dichotomy of absence and presence to evoke a rich range of emotions. In the case of Jomantas, these emotions can be seen to have derived from his awareness of his own position as an outsider, viewing the Australian landscape through the guarded eyes of the foreigner. For Kane, the emotional resonance of the sculptural void was connected to the inner life of humans: their expedience in reconciling the needs of the self with those of the community, and perhaps – as Eliot's writings suggest – the failure of religion or the lack of spirituality in post-war modernity.

Significantly, the symbolic function of the sculptural hole has been largely overlooked in both contemporary and subsequent interpretations of their work. Formalist readings have predominated, in part owing to the artists' own relative silence on the degree to which their work was conceived on a personally symbolic level (I am thinking here in particular of Jomantas' telling admission and hurried

retraction concerning the personal nature of the emotions expressed in *Tower of Grief*). Just as so many émigré art historians sought to protect art from nationalist agendas by effectively quarantining it in the sterile discourse of formalism, so too Jomantas and Kane emphasised universalist readings of their work, which struggled to embrace a form of symbolism that was, at some level, ultimately personal.<sup>66</sup>

Nor did the many sculptors who studied under Jomantas at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology during the 1960s and '70s embrace the potential symbolism of the sculptural void. Instead, the work of artists such as John Davis and Peter Cripps took the dissolution of sculptural form as their starting point, and went on from there to explore ephemeral, site specific works; a literal “dematerialisation of the art object,” to borrow Lucy Lippard’s phrase.<sup>67</sup> Where the pierced forms of Kane and Jomantas had engaged the viewer’s eye, enticing it across, around and through the object, thereby staking a claim for an intimacy based on shared airspace, the earthworks and installations of Davis and Cripps invited one physically into the site, implicating the viewer as a necessary presence or part of the work. The formal possibilities of the sculptural hole were thus radically developed, but the symbolic meanings that might be attached to these same features were, in the main, disregarded.

At a time when narrative is making a widespread return to the realms of both art and art history, as reflected in the renewed interest in photorealist painting and the rise of ‘blockbuster’ art exhibitions that present tightly constructed accounts of artistic genius, and at a time when formalism is being reconnected to the political and social spheres whence it arose, it is fitting that we should re-examine the works of such late modernists as Jomantas and Kane in terms of symbolism and allusion. As the work of these two artists in particular demonstrate, an ostensibly simple formal device, such as a hole, can evoke a wide gamut of emotional responses. Just as the sculptural hole opened up the previously inviolable art object, reframing the surrounding landscape, creating new vistas, and creating a space in which to explore feelings of homesickness, otherness and spiritual aridity, so too a more nuanced, poetic reading of these works cuts a swathe through the opaque dogma of formalist accounts and allows us to draw new meanings and sustenance from the forever intriguing absence of solid form.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Moore, "The Sculptor Speaks", *The Listener*, 18 August, 1937, 338-40. Repr. as "Notes on Sculpture" in *Modern Artists on Art: Ten Unabridged Essays*, Robert L. Herbert, ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 142. Citations are to the 1965 publication. See note 6 below for further details of reprinting.

<sup>2</sup> On the sculpture of Rodin, Picasso, Gonzalez, and Matisse see William Tucker, *The Language of Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 15-40, 59-106; on the boring of holes in Moore and Hepworth's work see Penelope Curtis and Alan G. Wilkinson, *Barbara Hepworth: A Retrospective* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1994), 25, 36-8, and Christa Lichtenstern, *Henry Moore: Work, Theory, Impact* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008), 52-66.

<sup>3</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), particularly her accounts of time and the rejection of narrative in early modernist sculpture, 23, 26, 28-30, 41; Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), particularly xii-xiii, 3-4, 9.

<sup>4</sup> The act of placing a work of sculpture on a pedestal has long been considered a means of extricating the artwork from the mundane space of ordinary things, elevating its status to that of a special object. When Anthony Caro first exhibited his large steel constructions on the ground, without any pedestal, it was seen by many as a radical act that undermined the object-based nature of the work; see, for instance, Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood", *Artforum*, June, 1967, repr. in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, Gregory Battcock, ed. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 116-47, particularly 138.

<sup>5</sup> As mentioned, a discussion of holes is largely absent from such texts as those by Krauss or Potts; similarly Tucker was more preoccupied with gravity and materiality, whilst Herbert Read promoted tactility above all other considerations. See Herbert Read, *The Art of Sculpture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), particularly 69-72.

<sup>6</sup> Moore's essay, "Notes on Sculpture", was first published under the title, "The Sculptor Speaks", in *The Listener*, 18 August, 1937, 338-40. It has since been reprinted in such anthologies as *The Painter's Object*, Myfanwy Evans, ed. (London: G. Howe, 1937), 21-9; *Art in England*, R. S. Lambert, ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1938), 93-9; *Letters of the Great Artists, from Blake to Pollock*, Richard Friedenthal, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1963), 250-5; *Modern Artists on Art: Ten Unabridged Essays*, Robert L. Herbert, ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 138-49; and *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, Herschel B. Chipp, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 593-8. The essay has also been included in several catalogues and books on Moore including *Henry Moore: Sculpture and Drawings* (New York: Curt Valentin Gallery, 1944); *Henry Moore: Complete Sculpture, Volume One, Sculpture 1921-1948*, David Sylvester, ed. and Herbert Read, intro. (London: Lund Humphries, [first edition 1944], 1988), xxxiii-xxxv; Philip James, *Henry Moore on Sculpture: A Collection of the Sculptor's Writings and Spoken Words* (London: Macdonald, 1966), 62-8; and Alan G. Wilkinson, *Henry Moore: Writings and Conversations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 193-8.

<sup>7</sup> Moore, 143.

<sup>8</sup> Moore, 142. Emphasis is per the artist's statement.

<sup>9</sup> Moore, 145.

<sup>10</sup> In Steven Mansbach's words, "At base, the [émigré] authors ignored, or at least downplayed, the historical 'facts' of the avant-garde's own advocacy of revolutionary politics, social reconstruction and utopian dogmatism. Instead of attending to the artists' social radicalism, stentorally proclaimed in hundreds of manifestos and advanced by engagé critics, the émigrés concentrated on the dramatic formal innovations and the free experimentation that were the results, rather than the sources, of classical modern art. In essence, the original ideological force of avant-garde art, which was the very philosophical base from which so much of progressive art derived, was denatured in favour of a controlled celebration of its superficial, though visually compelling, attributes", "The Artifice of Modern(ist) Art History", in *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, Kobena Mercer, ed. (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2008), 102.

<sup>11</sup> Dore Ashton, "An Appreciation", *Barbara Hepworth: Conversations*, exh. cat. (New York: Marlborough Gallery, March – April 1974), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony White, "Art Beyond the Globe: Lucio Fontana's Spatial Identity", *emaj*, 3 (2008 [accessed 11 June 2009]), 5-6, <http://www.melbourneartjournal.unimelb.edu.au/E-MAJ/currentissue.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> This has been the subject of considerable philosophic debate. See for instance Robert Casati and Achille Varzi, "Holes", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (5 December 1996; revised 5 January 2009 and republished in Spring 2009 [accessed 20 July 2009]), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/holes/>.

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- <sup>14</sup> Kurt Tucholsky, "The Social Psychology of Holes", in *Germany? Germany! A Kurt Tucholsky Reader*, H. Zohn, trans. (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1990), 100-1.
- <sup>15</sup> Mark Dunhill and Tamiko O'Brien, "Notes on Holes in Sculpture" (excerpts from a lecture delivered in 2007 [accessed 22 July 2009]), <http://dunhill-obrien.org/artworks/68>.
- <sup>16</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, "The Search for the Absolute", *Alberto Giacometti: Sculptures, Paintings, Drawings*, exh. cat. (New York: Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1948), reprinted in *Modern Sculpture Reader*, Jon Wood, David Hulks and Alex Potts, eds (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2007), 187.
- <sup>17</sup> Paul Gilroy, "Diaspora and the Detours of Identity", in *Identity and Difference*, Kathryn Woodward, ed. (London: Sage, 1997), 318.
- <sup>18</sup> Jomantas arrived in Australia in 1948 from Lithuania, via a refugee camp in Munich, and worked initially at a timber mill in the Margaret River region of Western Australia. He moved to Melbourne in 1951, settling at first in Sandringham, before moving to the neighbouring suburbs of Cheltenham in 1952, Highett, 1953-59, and Mentone, 1959-64. In 1965 he returned to Cheltenham, remaining there until his death in 2001. See Robert Lindsay and Ken Scarlett, *Vincas Jomantas Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Langwarrin, Vic.: McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park, 2003), 14, 25.
- <sup>19</sup> Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, *Eucalyptographia: A Descriptive Atlas of the Eucalypts of Australia and the Adjoining Islands* (Melbourne: John Ferres, Govt. Printer, 1879-84 [accessed 21 July 2009]), [http://www.archive.org/stream/eucalyptographia00mueluoft/eucalyptographia00mueluoft\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/eucalyptographia00mueluoft/eucalyptographia00mueluoft_djvu.txt).
- <sup>20</sup> Roger Butler, "Tower of Grief" (catalogue entry on National Gallery of Australia website, 1997 [accessed 20 July 2009]), <http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=45190>.
- <sup>21</sup> His father, Vilius Jomantas, a painter and print-maker, died in 1960. Jomantas' friend, compatriot and fellow member of Centre Five (the group of Melbourne sculptors who exhibited together from 1959 until 1984), Teisutis Zikaras, eventually visited Lithuania in 1975, more than thirty years after he had fled. His father, Juozos, also an artist, had committed suicide in 1944, shortly before the Red Army advanced on his home in Kaunas. See Graeme Sturgeon, *The Development of Australian Sculpture, 1788-1975* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 175; Ken Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors* (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 723; Lindsay and Scarlett, 2003, 25; and Juozas Zikaras Museum (Lithuanian Museums Association and the M. K. Ciurlionis National Art Museum [accessed 25 March 2009]), [http://muziejai.mch.mii.lt/kaunas/zikaro\\_muziejus.en.htm](http://muziejai.mch.mii.lt/kaunas/zikaro_muziejus.en.htm).
- <sup>22</sup> James Gleeson, *Interview with Vincas Jomantas*, taped interview and typed transcript, James Gleeson Oral History Collection (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia library, 15 October 1979), 7-8.
- <sup>23</sup> Butler, 1997.
- <sup>24</sup> Bill Hannan, "Introduction", *Centre Five: Contemporary Sculpture*, exh. cat. (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 6-24 October 1965), n. p.
- <sup>25</sup> Lindsay and Scarlett, 2003, 10, 13-4; John Stringer, "Two Decades of Innovation: Highlights in Australian Sculpture", *This was the Future... Australian sculpture of the 1950s, 60s, 70s and today*, exh. cat. (Bulleen, Vic.: Heide Museum of Modern Art, 4 October – 7 December 2003), 8.
- <sup>26</sup> James House, Jr., "Tiwi Burial Poles as Sculpture", *Expedition* 2.1 (1959), 14-6.
- <sup>27</sup> A selection of books that would have been available to Jomantas at the time include Charles Barrett and A. S. Kenyon, *Australian Aboriginal Art* (Melbourne: National Museum of Victoria, 1929 and reprinted in 1943, 1947, 1950, 1952 and 1958); Australian UNESCO Committee for Museums, *Australian Aboriginal Culture* (Sydney: A. H. Pettifer, Govt. Printer, 1953); Aldo Massola, *Australian Aboriginal Art* (Melbourne: National Museum of Victoria, 1956, published to accompany an exhibition timed to coincide with the 1956 Olympic Games); Charles P. Mountford, *Art, Myth and Symbolism* (Melbourne: University Press, 1956); and Charles P. Mountford, *The Tiwi: Their Art, Myth and Ceremony* (London: Phoenix House, 1958).
- <sup>28</sup> Alan McCulloch, "Mildura's Boston Tea Party", *Herald*, Melbourne (22 April 1964); Bernard Smith, "Australian sculpture gathers strength", *The Age*, Melbourne (25 April 1964).
- <sup>29</sup> Smith's defence of the social realists is one of the most discussed events in Australian art history, featured in all texts on the period, but for some earlier, contemporary comments on the affair see Franz Philipp, "Antipodeans Aweigh", *Nation*, 29 (August 1959), 18; and Barbara Blackman, "The Antipodean Affair", *Art and Australia*, 5.4 (1968), 607.
- <sup>30</sup> James Gleeson, "Sculpture with polish", *Sun Herald*, Sydney (7 April 1974).
- <sup>31</sup> Patrick McCaughey considered Jomantas a leading protagonist of symbolic abstraction in Melbourne in the sixties; see Patrick McCaughey, "Two Versions of Melbourne Humanism in the Hattam Collection", *Art and Australia*, 1.6 (June 1968), 47. Others who have commented on the use of symbols in Jomantas' work include Noel Hutchison, "Australian Sculpture in the 1960s, Part 1", *Other Voices*, 1.3 (October to December 1970), 14; and Lindsay and Scarlett, 2003, 10, 13, 16, 18, 20-2.

<sup>32</sup> Graeme Sturgeon, 1978, 177; Lindsay and Scarlett, 2003, 10. Lindsay and Scarlett also illustrate a *stogastulpis*, which is a traditional Christian shrine with three gables arranged vertically on a pole, found throughout the countryside in Lithuania.

<sup>33</sup> The little that is known of Kane's early life comes from a brief article that was issued by the Australian Department of the Interior to publicise his becoming an Australian citizen and his change of name from Kuhn to Kane: Joan Leyser, "Sculpture", *Arts Newsletter, News and Information Bureau*, 108 (October 1955), 1-2; a copy is included in Clifford Last, *Julius Kane 1921-1962: A record of his work in Australia compiled by Clifford Last* (1963, State Library of Victoria, MS 8110, Victorian Sculptors' Society papers, box 3808/4).

<sup>34</sup> Sturgeon, 1978, 139. See also Margaret Plant, *Julius Kane, 1921-1962: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exh. cat. (Parkville, Vic.: George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, 6-30 May 1975), 8.

<sup>35</sup> The National Gallery of Australia have catalogued this work as *Equestrian Group* (accession no. NGA 71.48), but for the purposes of this article the original title, under which it was first exhibited at the Victorian Sculptor's Society in November 1952 (catalogue no. 22), has been retained.

<sup>36</sup> *Amazonen*, bronze, 67 x 97 cm, private collection. This work was offered at auction in 1997 and illustrated in the sale catalogue: *Geschichtliche und Militärhistorische Objekte* (Munich: Hermann Historica, 10 May 1997, lot 7460), 138.

<sup>37</sup> In July 1937 the Nazi party staged the exhibition, *Entartete Kunst* (or 'degenerate art'), which consisted of modernist works by 112 artists.

<sup>38</sup> A bronze cast of one of the figures in *Group*, measuring 66.1 cm high, was exhibited at the Kane retrospective exhibition under the title *Seated Abstract* (catalogue no. 4, private collection). Plant, 1975, 14. The bronze is now in the collection of the McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Victoria.

<sup>39</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Poems: 1909-1925* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), 123. *The Hollow Men*, 1925, is frequently coupled with Eliot's earlier poem, *The Wasteland*, 1922 and interpreted as extending Eliot's earlier theme of souls lost in purgatory.

<sup>40</sup> In Read's words, the young British sculptors had "seized Eliot's image of the Hollow Men, and given it an isomorphic materiality. They have peopled the Waste Land with their iron waifs" – Herbert Read, "New Aspects of British Sculpture", *The XXVI Venice Biennale*, exh. cat. (Venice: The British Council Fine Arts Committee, June – October 1952), n. p.

<sup>41</sup> The tactic of substituting body parts with incongruous anatomical forms was perhaps most memorably performed by René Magritte in his painting, *Le Viol (The Rape)*, c. 1934, in which a woman's face is replaced with elements of her torso: breasts replacing eyes, navel standing in for a nose, and her genitals appearing in place of a mouth.

<sup>42</sup> Julius Kane, *Contemplation on Art and Life*, undated manuscript, reproduced in typescript in Last, 1963, n. p., and reprinted in Plant, 1975, 6-7, and Scarlett, 1980, 305-6.

<sup>43</sup> Kane quoted in Plant, 1975, 6. The following quotes in this paragraph are all from page 6.

<sup>44</sup> His repeated insistence on the importance of inheritance suggests Kane himself was descended from artists; this may prove a useful avenue for future research into his background.

<sup>45</sup> See for instance Georges Didi-Huberman, "The order of material: Plasticities, *malaises*, survivals", in *Sculpture and Psychoanalysis*, Brandon Taylor, ed. (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006), 195-211.

<sup>46</sup> Kane quoted in Plant, 1975, 6-7.

<sup>47</sup> "Sculptors' Experiments", *The Age* (2 June 1953); see also an unidentified newspaper clipping from June 1953, in Last, 1963, n. p.

<sup>48</sup> Arnold Shore, untitled review of Victorian Sculptors' Society exhibition, *Australasian Post* (3 December 1953), 28.

<sup>49</sup> Harry Reuben Mitchell (1906-68) was a cartoonist who worked for the Melbourne newspapers *Sun Pictorial* and the *Herald and Weekly Times*. In 1939 he took over Jim Bancks' comic strip, *Mr. Melbourne Day By Day*. *Scared to Crow* is included in Last, 1963, n. p.

<sup>50</sup> Eliot, 1932, 123-4.

<sup>51</sup> James Birrell, "The Need for Content", unidentified journal article (1953), 26; inserted in Last, 1963, n. p.

<sup>52</sup> Birrell, 1953, 26.

<sup>53</sup> Birrell, 1953, 27.

<sup>54</sup> Birrell, 1953, 28.

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<sup>55</sup> Julius Kane, *Contemplation on Art and Life*; this statement also appeared in the catalogue to the *Recent Australian Sculpture Exhibition*, organised by Gordon Thomson and the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board (Melbourne: Aldine Press, 1964), n. p.

<sup>56</sup> *Vertical Form*, 1954, wood, 142 x 68 x 29 cm, private collection. Illustrated in Plant, 1975, 18.

<sup>57</sup> *Metis and Zeus*, 1958-59, wood, 228.5 x 160 cm, coll. National Gallery of Australia; *Thetis*, 1959, wood, 182.9 cm long, destroyed; *Group Organism*, 1960-61, wood, 254 cm high, present whereabouts unknown; *Untitled*, 1961, wood, dimensions and present whereabouts unknown; and *Organic Forms*, 1962, wood, 213.2 x 51 cm, coll. National Gallery of Victoria. Each work is illustrated in Plant, 1975, 23, 26, 28, 19 and 24 respectively.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce Watson, fellow student at the Ontario College of Art and Design where Kane held a fellowship in 1961-62, as recalled in conversation with Ken Scarlett in 1997 and recorded in a memo from Scarlett to the Trustees of the McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park, filed in the State Library of Victoria's Australian Art and Artists (AAA) file on Julius Kane.

<sup>59</sup> This tendency of Kane's work to collapse has been noted by a number of people including Alan McCulloch, who in his foreword to the Kane scrapbook, compiled by Clifford Last, wrote, "A certain technical ineptitude made its presence felt; there was a sense of urgency in what he produced at this time accompanied by a feeling of expenditure of vast and sometimes futile effort. Large works by him in plaster and wood were only too often apt to crack and even fall apart before taking their place on the exhibition stands". Last, 1963, n. p.

<sup>60</sup> Bernard Boles, "Kane, the wood-carving grouper", *Nation Review* (23-29 May 1975), 834.

<sup>61</sup> Plant, 1975, 9.

<sup>62</sup> I have adapted this phrase from Noel Hutchison, who detected a strand of "ossicular symbolism" in the work of a colleague of Kane's, the British-born sculptor Clifford Last. See Noel Hutchison, "Australian Sculpture in the 1960s", *Other Voices*, 1.3 (October to December 1970), 14.

<sup>63</sup> Kane, *Contemplation on Art and Life*.

<sup>64</sup> Philip Hensher, "How Deep Is a Hole?", *Modern Painters*, 11.2 (Summer 1998), 42.

<sup>65</sup> Boles, 1975, 834.

<sup>66</sup> On the effective quarantining of art historical discourse from nationalist agendas after World War II, see Mansbach, 2008, 96-120, particularly 100-3.

<sup>67</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (London and New York: Studio Vista and Praeger Publishers Inc., 1973) 5.