

Roads from Home

Reflections and Observations

In his short story "Bluff Retrospect", Dan Davin [records observations relating to his childhood memories] during a journey to Bluff in the train followed by a climb to the summit of Bluff Hill. He recalls placenames and legends.

He sat on top and looked out over Foveaux Strait. Three miles away he could see Dog Island with its black and white lighthouse, tallest on the coast. Then Centre Island away to the west, an old burial place of the Maoris.

He could barely make out Ruapuke Island, which used to be Bloody Jack's hideout and could only guess where the Orepuki Cliffs must be. Papakihau was the Maori name, 'Slapped by the wind'.

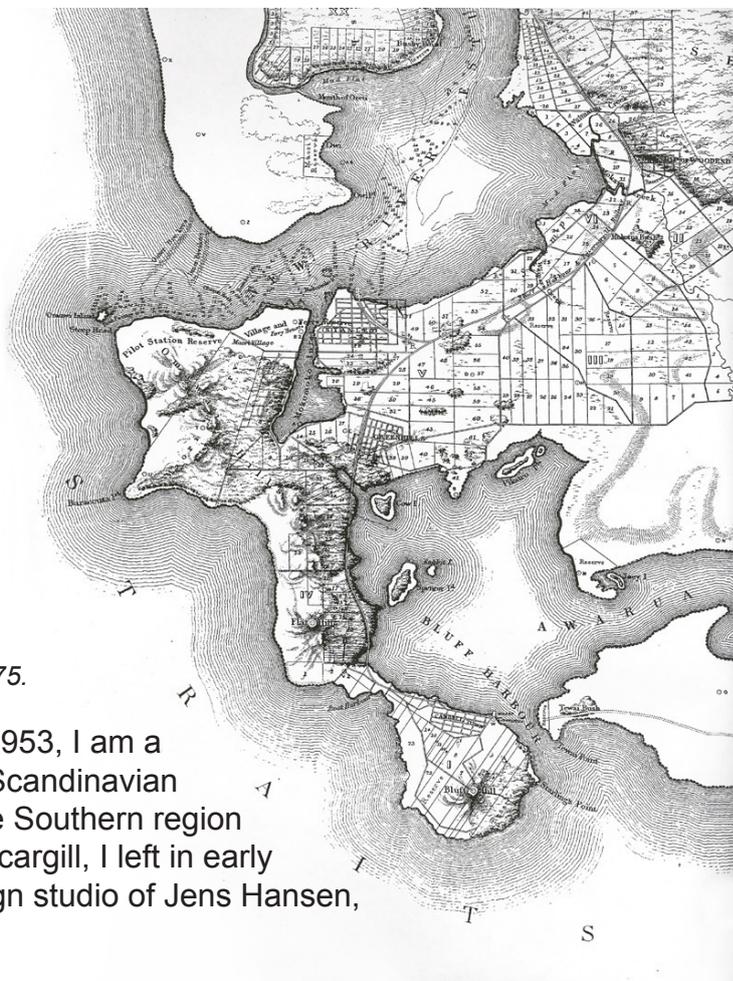
'Bluff Retrospect' New Zealand Short Stories 3, edited by Vincent O'Sullivan, Wellington, Oxford University Press, 1975.

Born in Greenhill on the edge of Bluff harbour in 1953, I am a second generation Pakeha of Irish, Scottish and Scandinavian decent. Having lived the early part of my life in the Southern region and completed a jewellery apprenticeship in Invercargill, I left in early 1975 to work as a journeyman in the Nelson design studio of Jens Hansen, a Danish gold and silversmith.

In 1976 I returned south to live and study at the Otago School of Art, Dunedin and 8 years later [in 1983] established FLUXUS, a contemporary jewellery workshop/gallery with Kobi Bosshard. During this time I began to shift my formal practice from gold smithing traditions with its particular use of precious materials only to a more cogent area of design. New works attempted to combine metals such as gold, silver and alloys of copper/zinc; brass with a number of non-precious materials such as sedimentary stones, paua shell, pumice and a selection of woods. These materials became the vehicle for an exploration of thematic jewellery forms, the substitution of gold and diamonds for non-precious materials was largely a search for a stand-alone aesthetic that could question, and challenge hierarchy and the rather cold products of status, which I had been trained to make.

In 1988 I returned to Southland to teach at the Southern Institute of Technology, a journey that took me back into familiar territory and precipitated a new direction as response to memory and *genius loci*, local sense of place. It was not until 1992 when I took the opportunity to undertake post-graduate studies at the Australian National University's Canberra School of Art that my research and study program developed a clear focus. It began to consider and encompass the relationship between specific sculptural materials: e.g. stone, metal, related text, artefact/forms, their translations and meanings in reference to a regional context. The mythologies of the boat/canoe/waka are embedded in the southern island landscape; they have carved a passage through and into the landscape. Tiwai is a 'dugout canoe' – Tiwai is also the tip of a long windswept peninsula with in Bluff Harbour which 500 years ago was the site of a pre-European Maori adze factory.

In 1969/70 Comalco Ltd built an aluminium smelter on Tiwai. At the prehistoric quarry on Colyers Island located in the northwest part of Bluff harbour, outcrops of argillite, basalt, and granite occur abraded by wind into multifaceted shapes known as ventifacts. These natural phenomena were formed about fifteen thousand years ago in Bluff Harbour - a landscape formed by a receding glacial climate and stripped down soils, loose particles of quarters sands combined with winds, blasted and polished rocks and stones like lenses for a clear reading of the past. These processes led to the placement of text and numbers on emerging works – cast ventifacts; birth and mourning stones as personal memorials.



The pre-European Maori implement makers recognized these stone materials as being very suitable for the manufacture of tools. The stone was quarried and flaked into suitable preforms with granite hammer stones. The preform was then bruised and dressed with grossular garnet dressing-stones to reduce scars left by flaking, with various grades of sandstone and then pumice, the final product was the adze. I began to explore ways in which I could create visual metaphors with the ventifacts, the adze and the canoe; all three interrelate. The ventifact as stone, a source material for the *toki* or stone adze, and the adze, the principal woodworking tool combined with fire in the making of the waka Tiwai, dugout canoe.



Birth Stone. 30.8.53. Cast bronze. 25cm x 20cm x 9cm. 1992.

Sandstones and aluminium became significant materials to symbolise my interaction with the site. The rationale for casting aluminium pertained directly to the function of the aluminium smelter. The casting and exporting of aluminium ingot and billets today is analogous to the pre-European manufacture of adzes for trade and export 500 years ago. Both stone and aluminium have important cultural associations within the framework of my current practice; together they underline the inherent relationship between the changing technologies from stone to metal that have occurred with the harbour location of Bluff over the period of time from pre-European Maori to Pakeha occupation.

Davin's childhood memories reflected in *Bluff Retrospect* draw imagery from regional histories, this autobiographical material constructs contemporary regional fiction and has influenced the manner in which I think about place and cultural identity. *Papakihau*, a placename and poetic translation of 'slapped by the wind' emerges to connect geological time with natural processes of abrasion that amplify visual sound-bites; Aeolean song-stones link natural phenomena (ventifacts) with cultural phenomena (artefacts) and explores the relationship between related text-placenames (Tiwai) its translation (dugout canoe) as a signifier and way of referring to a regional context.

Stephen Mulqueen, 1993