

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Frank Watters

Interviewer: John Witte

Date: 11 July 2014

Location of interview: Watters Gallery, East Sydney

Reason for interview: Project 40

Restrictions: None



Time	Summary	Keywords
00030	Born Muswellbrook, Hunter Valley 1934, lived there until 20s Working class family, Mother had a difficult life, Father was a laborer, carpenter, upholsterer. Oldest of seven children. One sister.	Family
00330	At school was quite clever, but left at 15 yrs old to help support the family. Was a tool boy, then got a job at the coal mine.	Schooling
00600	Loved writing and reading at school. Library staff kept him in books to read. Could remember ability to draw. But no inclination towards art/painting in the family.	Schooling
00930	In mining for 8 years, no regrets. Wonderful people, but ended up with lung damage.	Mining job
01020	During miners' strikes, had to go underground to man the pumps (4 mile walk), lots of rats. Would read down there.	
01210	Had no doubts at all that would eventually end up in the arts. In Muswellbrook, got involved in every cultural/arts event. Started painting – became a passion. Had exhibitions. Got artists to come up for talks and exhibitions, e.g. Reeba Hawkins. Started collecting then.	Art Reeba Hawkins
01430	Was attracted to men. But didn't understand anything about sex. Felt protected by a holy innocence.	
01555	Realised homosexuality; decided he would go to bed with the first person who asked; got venereal disease as a result, so then went celibate for 10 years.	
01830	Moved to Sydney and got a job at a factory in Mascot, where he also lived in a room out the back. Machine operator, doing the books. Led a strike at the factory. Bob Differson (?), Jocelyn Plater, was looking for a tenant for their place in Paddington. Costas decided to corrupt Frank through literature (homosexual pornography).	Work Jocelyn Plater Costas
02310	Costas migrant info officer at Commonwealth Bank; gave smart dinner parties, which he proudly paid for by dressing as a woman and prostituting himself out.	Costas
02550	Recounts encounters with the police as a result of Costas's night time shenanigans. Lost his first ever art collection by putting up bond for Costas.	Costas
02905	Worked at Lancaster Motors, working his way up to dispatch manager. Used every cent earned to buy paintings. Used to help Barry Stern to hang pictures and ended up getting a job there as an assistant.	Lancaster Motors Barry Stern Gallery

03130	Governor General came to the Gallery with daughters.	
03355	Grand openings at the Gallery; sponsoring/promoting new artists, like John Bell. Didn't like the way Stern treated artist. Entertaining collectors like Mary Fairfax, Victor McAllister.	John Bell Mary Fairfax Victor McAllister
03600	Used this experience to help him to form Watters Gallery as 'agents for artists'. Lucy Swanton the most important person ever for Watters Gallery. Got to be friendly with collectors like John Lamb, James Fairfax also in that circle. Mervyn Horton was a great friend. Had contacts in Sao Paola who helped him a lot. Came from money – ran Art and Australia magazine. Opened a coffee house.	Watters Gallery Lucy Swanton Mervyn Horton John Lamb James Fairfax Art and Australia
04100	Other galleries in the 1960s: Gallery A (Max Hutchinson, Rua Osborne and Ann Lewis) Rudy's (Rudy Komon Art Gallery) was a top gallery Gallery by Terry Clune in Maclay Street was taken over by Frank McDonald.	Gallery A Rudy Komon Gallery Terry Clune Frank McDonald
04340	Macquarie Galleries in Bligh Street – was the major gallery in Australia. Used to travel from Muswellbrook to go there.	Macquarie Galleries
04445	Geoffrey Legge – lived next door to Barry Stern. Eccentric. Would call in constantly. Took paintings home on approval. Slowly became friends. And then Geoffrey bought Frank his first gallery (a little 2 storey building) in Liverpool Street. 1964 Geoffrey then married Alex Challen.	Geoffrey Legge Alex Challen
05045	Still pretty closeted at that time, and did the Mardi Gras Protest exhibition, which outed him to Geoffrey. But accepted him.	Mardi Gras Protest exhibition
05455	Talks about the early artists exhibited at the gallery. The selection of artists/works was intuitive – it is a gamble on the future. Didn't sell any pictures for a long time and lost money (Alex's) for a long time. Frank received \$10 a week from the gallery.	Watters Gallery
05820	Talks about customers. A specific clientele.	
10000	Patrick White came into the gallery to buy a picture – by Max Watters of a house that Patrick had written about. Invited him to dinner. They just 'clicked'. Could make him laugh. They'd tell each other stories. Remembers a dreadful dinner party at home. Then had to do a 'recovery dinner party' to make up for it. To erase the memory of it.	Patrick White
10430	Caught up in performance, environmental, installation show. Then moved back to 'good old fashioned painting' once the art schools started teaching revolutionary techniques.	Shows
10645	Got involved in anti-censorship activities. Led campaigns against gvt censorship of the theatres.	
10740	1978: Terry Bell asked Frank to get involved in a fundraising show for the 4 th National Homosexual Conference. The works in	Terry Bell

	that exhibition at Watters Gallery ended up getting purchased by the National Gallery, Canberra.	
10950	Did not go to First Mardi Gras, but was in complete shock by the police reaction. Galvanized him more to do the show.	First Mardi Gras
11210	Went on the marches after the arrests. But has never been to a Mardi Gras Parade. On the community arts board funding Peter Tully as Mardi Gras arts director.	
11420	Very involved in Gay Men's Rap. Much of the material from that period now with an archivist. Wrote several articles for gay publications. Smaller sub-group that he was in lasted a very long time. Highly cohesive. Karl Blond, Johnny Allen, David Urquart, Shane Brown in his group.	Gay Men's Rap
11920	Final comments on the Gallery: One of the great causes of my life. Concerned about how it will change without him. Now bringing in a gallery manager to see how it goes.	