

"I passionately hate the idea of being 'with it', I think an artist has always to be out of step with his time" Orson Welles

oneMANband

Story - Sharyn Rosenberg
Work in Progress Photography - Penny Tweedie
1998/1999

The loading dock is open. Curiosity hasn't killed this cat. Lush tropical plants, waterfalls, birds and fish everywhere! Eve would have felt right at home in this modern day Garden of Eden. Is it possible an earthling has created such a sanctuary? I am about to find out.

David Humphries runs to get the door, introducing me to Jacko his black red-tailed cockatoo as he ushers me up the stairs to his office and his home. The interior of this massive warehouse is crammed with an eclectic collection of paintings, mosaics, ceramics, sculptures and mobiles, yet interestingly enough the sense of space has not been compromised. My eyes are drawn to the ground.

Defining this domain, albeit subtly, is a terrazzo floor spanning the entire top floor. Humphries does not seem surprised when I literally get down on my hands and knees to inspect his ingenious and imaginative enterprise. Using his honed skills and artistic eye, Humphries' careful combination of pigments, marble chips, rare coloured glass, shells, decorative inserts of mirror-backed glass, has avoided the potentially, slightly impersonal quality of terrazzo in a residential setting. Instead he's created a galactic expanse made for contemplation and joy.

To follow the career path of this free-wheeling "sixties hippy" to the presently determined, rigorous entrepreneurial businessman of the 21st century is exhausting enough in itself. Put it in a cultural context and it's very exciting indeed. If there is PhD student looking for a thesis subject then David Humphries may be your man. The task at hand will be made much easier as a methodical Humphries has chronicled his professional and artistic life so meticulously that it would put a smile onto the most stringent librarian's face. Mention any chapter in Humphries voluminous life and he will provide evidence, be it press clippings, slides, journals photographs, CD's, postcards. These records are housed in shelves and drawers in the expansive study he has painstakingly designed. An obsessive compulsive's treasure!

Born in Wollongong in 1948, Humphries defied convention and was the only student to study Art for the Leaving Certificate at Illawarra Grammar in 1965. He gained admission to the National Art School and moved to Sydney, paying his way through college by working at BHP steelworks as a labourer in the holidays. The experience in big industry and intrigue with the industrial landscape has stayed with Humphries for life, fuelling his love of complexity and mega proportions. Although winning the National Art Students Prize in 1968 Humphries direction was already becoming eclectic.



Leaving Australia in 1974 to live in London Humphries completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Arts Administration. This time was a real eye opener for the "boy from the 'Gong'" hob nobbing with the 'who's who' in London fashion and theatre scene. A mutual friend, photographer Grant Mudford introduced him to the unconventional textile designer Zandra Rhodes with whom Humphries still has a friendship and close professional relationship, collaborating on the vast and magnificent terrazzo terraces of Rhodes' California beach house and the entrance hall to her new Fashion and Textile Museum in London (soon to be opened by the Queen).

A year working on the Lower East Side in New York City on a model project "Seven Loaves" became a catalyst for changing Humphries' perception of the artist as an individual to that as a collaborator in the community context. He returned to Australia as an inspired muralist and was determined to make a difference. From being an Arts Festival Director in regional NSW, Humphries moved into community mural projects, which culminated in a five year stint as the first Policy/Project Officer for Community Arts with the NSW Premier's Department.

For the next ten years, Humphries and his then partner Rodney Monk worked with various community groups directing hundreds of murals across Australia including the '10th Year Celebration Mural' at the Sydney Opera House in 1983. In 1985 they won the prestigious Sir John Sulman Prize for their mural in Redfern and, to cope with the constant and growing demand for information on murals wrote "The Mural Arts Manual" - a guide to community murals in Australia (still the standard text for high schools today) Working with public servants in a bureaucracy at the Ministry of Arts enabled Humphries to broaden his range of reference yet again and develop new skills- budgets, dealing with corporations, government bodies, red tape, deadlines and collaborating with other professional individuals. This new - found expertise would serve Humphries well in his next incarnation; back as a practicing artist with Public Art Squad.

Instituting yet another change in the art world Humphries forayed into previously unexplored territory and formed financially rewarding and professionally challenging liaisons with commerce and industry. His relationship with the Merlin International Properties Group provided one of the most exciting periods in his professional career when they set an "art architecture" precedent with the original Harbourside Festival Marketplace in Darling Harbour and Skygarden.

Humphries has since been responsible for some of the most memorable public art commissions in Australia. As the artist, Humphries considers every project unique and consciously strives to create something "which can't be copied". He stresses that even though he is the specialist skill base apropos the terrazzo techniques he has developed and refined over the last ten years, it's the continuing process of creating which keeps him inspired and is as important as the finished product.




Penny Tweedie



Adrian Hall

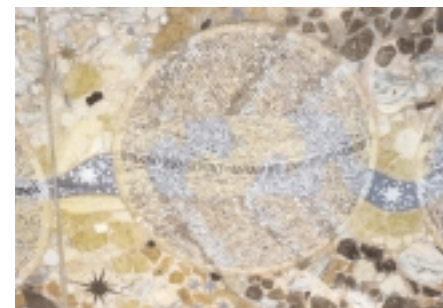
Humphries cites his commission at Queensland Clunies Ross Centre for Science and Industry in Brisbane where the conscious use of hi-tech water jets to precision cut the marble from a computer generated image of seven circular shapes floating in space highlighted the vital relationship between the future, art and science. When AMP, as an Olympic sponsor, wanted to create something that would express the way ordinary Australians felt about Sydney hosting the Olympic Games, Humphries was the perfect choice to fulfil the brief. His understanding of the processes and mechanisms that inspire public participation resulted in "The Sign for the Dream". An extraordinary concept " composed of the marks made by hands of 23,000 Australians, it records cultural diversity and symbolises unity". The monumental serpent may be resting now but it will ensure the pathway in Darling Harbour will resonate with history, memory, imagined possibilities...

...And new Horizons... Humphries is, as always, looking for stimulation and challenge. What will it be? Now that is a question I cannot answer. I admit to complete exhaustion as I read, look at, digest and analyse the breadth of Humphries' contributions over three decades. What is evident is a clever man who has instinctively been able to accumulate, revise and modify his capabilities to make them relevant to our changing society. May I say I find it fascinating that Humphries is as equally obsessed with detail as he is with large scale. Even more interesting to me is that he has of late consciously chosen to work with an amalgam of bits, chips, alloys and fragments, which are sprinkled, spiced and painstakingly seasoned into a beautiful mosaic in order to make some sense of himself and the world he now inhabits. I get a feeling that this consummate post modern man finds a lot of happiness and contentment in the order, discipline and security his work provides. It consumes him.

It is refreshing and inspiring to meet someone who continually works, works and reworks; adapting and almost reinventing the old self into a new self whenever and to whatever is required. The word 'marketing' crops up several times in conversation as Humphries knows it's time to look for new directions for his talents. What will be the next incarnation? Painting? Sculpture? Urban Planning? Residential commissions? These would be my prediction but who knows? What I do know is that to invest every ounce of passion and energy into one's work takes courage and faith. Not to mention trusting that the path you are on is the right one. Humphries obviously has faith in his angels. 

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Sign for the Dream
The Olympic Journey Celebration Pathway
- Darling Harbour - Sydney 1999



Robert Pearce: The Fairfax Photo Library



Jim Brady - 1998

**Hassanein/Rhodes Beach House
terrazzo terraces Del Mar
California USA**
Designed and executed by Zandra
Rhodes and David Humphries 1998
Honor Award - The National Terrazzo
and Mosaic Association Inc USA



Werner Kirgis - 1990

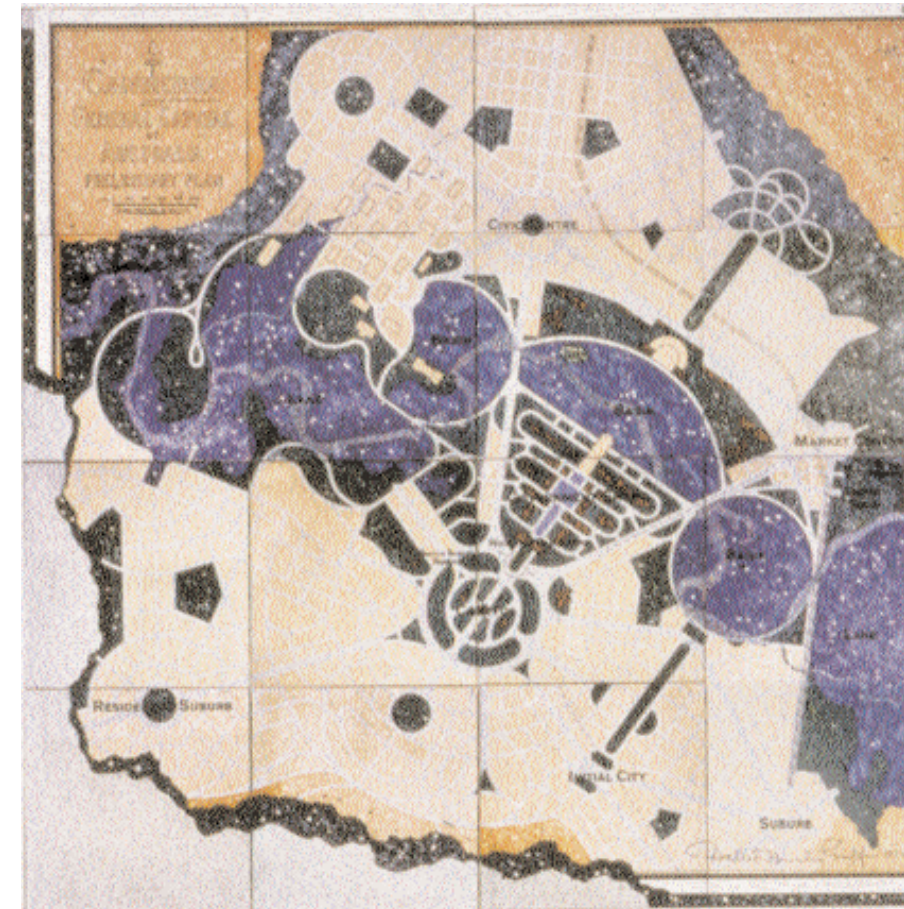
**Skygarden - Castlereagh St Lobby - Feature floor -
Terrazzo with mosaic inlay 1990**

the measure of the man

**Clunies Ross Centre for Science
and Industry Brisbane Lobby Floor
1996**



Richard Stringer - 1996



Sheran Evans - 2000

**Canberra Map forecourt of
Canberra Exhibition Centre 2000**
Terrazzo panels by David Humphries.
Design based on Walter Burley
Griffin's 1913 drawing for Canberra.
David Humphries collaboration with
Bruce Chalmers from The National
Capital Authority