

# Sculpting The Unconscious

*Viktor Kalinowski is an experimenter with forms. His work is full of subtle contrasting elements embracing the tensions of deeply felt emotions and the liberating truth of humor.*

**By Ian Findlay**



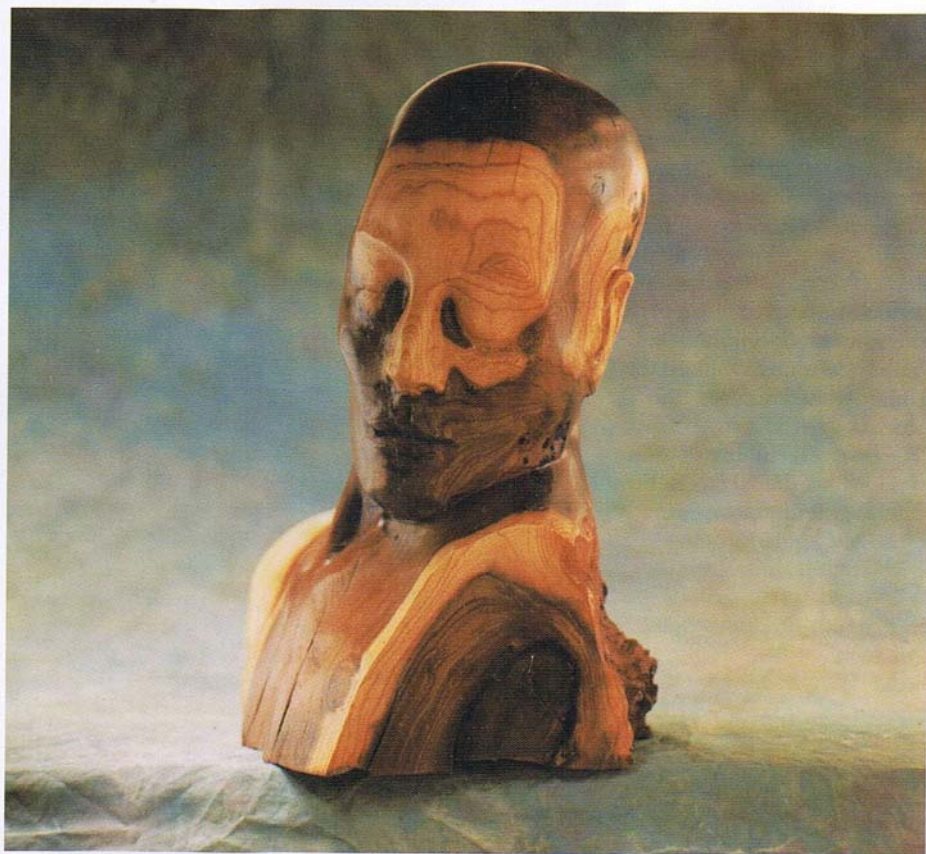
Viktor Kalinowski, **Clown**, 1998, bronze, 27 x 12 x 12 in. All photographs: Courtesy of the Artist and Artefact.

The experience of confronting a new sculptor's work is always rich in surprises, quite unlike that of encountering a painting for the first time. The richness and vitality of contemporary Australian sculpture contains many surprises aesthetically, visually, and materially that sets it apart from the rest of the Asia-Pacific sculptural environment. The solid monumental wood sculptures of Bruce Armstrong suggest a timeless, primitive quality, while the work of Augustine Dall'Ava is "impeccably crafted and fastidiously assembled," according the writer and critic Ken Scarlett. In these two sculptors' works there is a sense of formality. The work of Melbourne-based sculptor Viktor Kalinowski, however, reaches beyond the formal to a point where a fullness of raw emotion and humor reveals as much about the sculptor himself as it does about the art of sculpture. One of his best works to reveal these qualities is his small bronze entitled *Clown* (1998).

Kalinowski's sculptures are rarely large, yet the obvious lyrical and emotional qualities that catch the eye confer the notion of a size greater than their physical reality. The course of his line and the restraint of his volumes obtain a sense of freshness that in the work of many academically trained sculptors is lost. Kalinowski, an exuberant man, to some extent puts this down to his love of music, something which is apparent in his working environment and private world.

"I like sculpting for it is like making music in many ways, a never-ending song," he says. "That is why I call many of my works *Epos*, a Greek word that means epic poem. There is a liberation of concepts in sculpture, and like making music one is spontaneous, explosive. First there is the concept of a work that is flowing from the unconscious into the conscious and then through training I am able to bring them to life, either two or three dimensionally."

Kalinowski may have a complex nature, but he sees himself clearly enough in the past and in the present: "I'm impulsive but disciplined, too." And as for his role as a sculptor he says, simply, "I understand my studio as a



Viktor Kalinowski, *Epos 9*, 1998, wood, 24 x 24 x 13 in.

laboratory of form. My duty is to do experiments with form." These insights are not recently acquired, but have their roots firmly planted in the past. "My mother was

a photographer and I grew up in a photographic studio. Here, I learned about composition, discipline, and a certain dedication. My father had a muscular approach to life." And as an immigrant to Australia and its influence on him, Kalinowski is equally brief: "I was born in 1957 in Sieradz, Poland. I came to Australia in 1986. I grew up here as a man and married and had children. I became fulfilled here in Australia. And as an artist I moved forward." Each relationship has instilled in Kalinowski very different senses of discipline, awareness of other art forms, and his responsibility as an artist. Although he has been "sculpting since I was 12," he is "mainly self-taught with some private tuition."

In Kalinowski's work there is a determination to blend his personal and artistic experiences and influences as much as possible in work that is direct. Sculptures such as the bronzes *Interpreter of Fools* (1998) and *Voyager* (1998), and the wood *Epos*



Viktor Kalinowski, *My Pet*, bronze, 850 x 800 x 750 mm (approx.)

9 (1998) are clear examples of this determination. Each piece is simple enough and each is a clear statement. There is nothing superfluous here, nothing to be misunderstood either emotionally or aesthetically. And though relatively small works they are strong, self-contained, thoughtful narratives, or Kalinowski might say, poems or brief songs. *Interpreter of Fools* (1998) and *Epos 9* (1998) exemplify Kalinowski's "spontaneous, explosive" lyrical self. In these two works, with similar expressions of peacefulness etched on their faces, Kalinowski suggests the figure's inner world.

Even in more complex recent works like the abstract bronze *Sebkmet* (1999) and the more figurative bronze *My*

*Pet* (1999) Kalinowski reaches for clarity of statement and a sense of the lyrical. *Sebkmet*, with its many legs, has the appearance of a fabulous creature where a human head is topped by a long abstract cone form. *My Pet* is part-lion, part-eagle, the proud head turned and its great wings spread as if in defiance of an unseen foe.

It is clear through such works that all his influences have been extremely important to him, and that they have been absorbed and worked on consciously. "One teacher of sculptor was Peter Orzerski. I met Peter when I was around 22 and he let me know at once the most influential thing I have heard. 'You are responsible for any

marks on the paper that you make,'" says Kalinowski. "This made me understand that in three-dimensional works I am responsible for all aspects of the work, the quality of decision and the finished product, as well as the spiritual aspect. Another influence on me was Luk Zywuszeko, also a sculptor. From him I learned the acknowledgment of the importance of form. I think his work in Poland was, for me, perfect in form. It didn't change my work for a long time. But change did come in my early thirties, and this was a dedication to what I do, a total commitment to my work."

Drawing has always been important to Kalinowski both as a medium of expression and as a form of diary making



Viktor Kalinowski, *Bird Bath*, 1997, 36 x 36 x 30 in.

for his sculpture. "If I am working on something and I have an idea, then I make a visual note in a drawing. That is why my skills in drawing are so important." Where drawing presents him with challenges in two dimensions, the materials which he employs in his sculpture challenge him with textures and forms. Unlike many sculptors Kalinowski is open to a wide variety of materials. "All materials have different aspects," he says. "Stone brings smoothness and the harshness of earth. Wood brings the warmth of life and gentleness. Bronze brings the beautiful aspects of metal. Stone has spirit and a soul. It talks to me. But I love them all. Some concepts work better in wood and in stone. Some things only work for one material. A mixture of bronze and stone challenges me most. In bronze it is in the



Viktor Kalinowski, *Sehkmer*, 1999, bronze and granite base, 750 x 450 x 300 mm.

process, moving from clay to wax and then to bronze. It is like a birth process, but three times. Stone is talking to me. Asking me to give it form. That is what is challenging. It is confronting me with my idea and then becoming a different concept. It feels like that there is not much of an input from the conscious mind. You have to be determined to succeed in a project in bronze. But stone requires enormous determination to extract the image from it."

**A**s with materials with which he feels a special affinity, so it is with some of his works, turning points personally and as a sculptor. *Shadow I* (1996), he notes, was one of the most difficult and it changed his approach to sculpture. "I had a friend, John, who suggested that I get the shadow aspects of my personality—like sadness, anger, and violence—into my work. One evening I felt this. One day I had done some drawings on this as road signs for modeling and its direction. At the time, I had partly completed modeling and I became aware that I was working on a portrait of my father. As soon as I discovered this, I destroyed it violently. I stopped this work for a couple of weeks. But because of these aspects inside me I gradually became accepting of them, coming to acknowledge those aspects of character—violence, love, destructiveness, anger, and so on. I accepted and acknowledged them and then I started again, and it was my father. I had an unconscious anger about my father and his violence. But I accepted the work."



Viktor Kalinowski, *Voyager*, 1998, bronze and granite base, 16 x 3 x 3 in.

This recognition of a "shadow" world within himself has profoundly altered Kalinowski's emotional view of his work, as well as the physical reality of the works themselves. He notes that a subsequent work entitled *Shadow II* (1996) was slightly off balance with an expression that represents "the feminine part of me." But it is *Clown* that really brought a new awareness to Kalinowski's sense of "moving forward and experimenting with shadows," of being able to reveal more of himself personally and creatively. There is both a sense of mystery in the clown figure standing stiffly, hand clasping a flower behind his back, head raised, eyes gazing into the distance, a certain knowingness

about the world as a solitary person. The gender of the clown is unclear, but this is intentional. One, however, assumes the figure to be a man. What is strong about this work is the union of sadness, loneliness, a certain fatalism, and a touch of haughtiness. All of these are reflected in the shabbiness of his clothes and the mask that is his make-up. Yet what is lacking in the figure is the traditional idea of the clown as a fun figure. Kalinowski has clearly entered into the spirit of the figure, but not quite the heart.

"It is difficult to see whether this is a man or a woman. It was a commission for a woman client," he says. "To be able to create a clown I have to become a clown. On his chest he has a large heart, and in his hand he has a flower. His little heart says that he is in love. But he is saying that he is also a clown. The flowers are a representation of proposing love."

There is a sense of the surrealist dream about much of Kalinowski's art, even in his *Bird Bath* (1997) which is touched with humor. But above all there is a high seriousness even in his lightest pieces which shows both the attraction of sculpture as an art form and Kalinowski's own "curiosity of life and the joy of interacting with form, letting creativity happen and fulfilling the needs or desires of creativity. I had breaks from sculpture and drawing. This is just the expression of creativity in any medium. But sculpting has come to dominate," he says. "Perhaps this is an expression of my masculine or even feminine energy. There is both hardness and gentleness in my forms." Δ