

Date of interview—18 August 1978

## **JAMES GLEESON INTERVIEWS: LLOYD REES**

**James Gleeson:** Lloyd, could we begin with this painting *Hillside Bathurst*, which came to us as a gift from S.H. Ervin in 1962. Can you remember anything about this painting?

**Lloyd Rees:** I can remember lots about it. The mountain at the back is Mount Rankin, and that is done from the orchard where I stayed; my brother-in-law's orchard, Walter Russell Pollard. It is just looking across the road and the fields up to the hills. I can't place the exact date, but these are the type of blow tone paintings that followed my period right through the thirties towards the forties, when I was doing a lot of pencil work. This sort of painting developed in the south coast, and this would be a follow-up. It would have been done in the 1940s, I would say, but I can't give the exact date.

**James Gleeson:** I see. You did quite a number of paintings around the Bathurst area, I remember.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** And they were all after those south coast paintings, or interspersed with—

**Lloyd Rees:** I have never been physically very venturesome, is the reason for that. We got that little cottage down at the south coast, at Bathurst, later on at Duramana and then south of Goulburn, at Gunning. They are all related, except our own place down at Gerringong, where my wife Marjorie's family live. So I always had the feeling that she was happy and I was happy. There was lovely material around those places. I was lucky that it was a part of Bathurst where you could look away into the primeval section or look down into the cultivated Macquarie Plains.

**James Gleeson:** How far out of Bathurst is it?

**Lloyd Rees:** Just eight miles.

**James Gleeson:** Eight miles from Bathurst.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** Can you remember where that's been exhibited? Was it, for instance, in your retrospective exhibition?

**Lloyd Rees:** I can't remember any of its subsequent history, but I don't think it was in the retrospective. I think I'd remember that.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** All right. We'll go now from that one to a drawing. This one is *The church on the hill*—at least that's the title we have for it—a drawing dated 1935.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right. That is an early drawing done at Lane Cove. When I came out to Lane Cove, it did not have the sort of skeleton and muscle character that Milson's Point and McMahon's Point and all round there had. I found suburbia, with all its comfortable cottages, not to be drawing material. When I looked at that, I thought of Italy or Spain or something or other. So it's a transformed Lane Cove Roman Catholic church.

**James Gleeson:** Is it accurate?

**Lloyd Rees:** To a degree it's accurate. The tower is reasonably accurate, although I always felt it was a rather clumsy Spanish type. It had the apse going around the French form, but it didn't have transept like that.

**James Gleeson:** So part of it is invention—

**Lloyd Rees:** Part of it is invention, yes.

**James Gleeson:** And it was certainly an Italian sort of landscape you had in mind?

**Lloyd Rees:** I think so. I was being nostalgic when I did that. When we lived at McMahon's Point and round the Waverton Bay Road, as it were, I was absolutely held by my subject. The suburbia floored me rather. That is why a nostalgic element came into that. It inspired a pen drawing that is in the Sydney gallery. I think I called it *The cathedral*.

**James Gleeson:** That's interesting. Again, that is part of the S.H. Ervin gift of 1962.

**Lloyd Rees:** Is that so?

**James Gleeson:** This is a very well-known one: *Sydney 1951*. It won the Jubilee Art Competition.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right. That has quite a history, which I'd like to dwell on a bit. One day there was a ring; it was Laurie Thomas on the phone. He was connected with the committee handling this. He said, 'Would you join a group to paint a picture for a Jubilee prize?' I think each artist was to get 150 pounds. I said, 'Yes, I'd be delighted to do it'—but it had to be a given size; it couldn't be under a certain size. I never for one moment thought I'd win it because it was commemorative, and there were figure artists in it. There was Dobell and Dadswell and Heysen—I forget the whole number. I think I got that prize because it was a subject I had already started on with full enthusiasm, whereas in every

Date of interview—18 August 1978

other case that I heard of they had to go searching and, as you know, for artists that is not the happiest state. I believe that there was an intensity about the picture, a conviction. I already had it nearly painted. I remember I went down and found that I was right in the measurement area for it.

**James Gleeson:** That was very good. Lloyd, the view is very similar to one you have here, from this house. Was it painted from this house?

**Lloyd Rees:** Absolutely based on what we used to see from that balcony. That is Bay Street Wharf, and then the headland of Greenwich, and this is St Bride's Church.

**James Gleeson:** On the right?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. In those days the highest point in Sydney was the top of the AWA tower. Of course, I lifted it higher.

**James Gleeson:** My word, the skyline has changed today.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. There was a little episode with that too. If you examine the picture, it had a disaster; it fell over just when it was done and was torn. You'll find a patch on the back.

**James Gleeson:** Before it was even exhibited?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** That was in your retrospective exhibition, was it?

**Lloyd Rees:** I don't think it was.

**James Gleeson:** It would have come into the national collection at that time then. It was an acquisitive prize, I remember, wasn't it?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, it was an acquisitive prize.

**James Gleeson:** So it has been in the national collection since that day.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I think there was something about lending it. But I think you'll find it was not in the retrospective.

**James Gleeson:** Now, another very beautiful drawing. This one is called *The valley* 1935—and 1935 seems to be a great period for your drawings. Quite a few memorable ones were done at that time.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. That was when I still hadn't developed, shall we say, a technical idiom, at McMahon's Point, in the early days here. I think we had moved to Northwood, because that was done in Greenwich Bay.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** That bridge actually exists down there?

**Lloyd Rees:** That's the sewerage bridge.

**James Gleeson:** It looks much more romantic than that.

**Lloyd Rees:** It's there. It made a wonderful form, going across. That great tree that you see dominated the whole thing against the morning light. I am glad that the Commonwealth has that.

**James Gleeson:** Yes, I think that's a particularly good one.

**Lloyd Rees:** I am so glad. After a couple more years, when I found that this area was too domestic, I sought the ones that hit me. For instance, Adelaide Gallery has one of the Greenwich cliffs opposite—

**James Gleeson:** Yes, I remember that one.

**Lloyd Rees:** Those were related to the McMahon's Point. But I came to a realisation. I said to John Young, holding the exhibition, 'John, this is my last pencil exhibition', because I began to realise I was painting with the pencil. There was a sort of edginess going out. I thought, 'I've got to come to grips with oil painting'.

**James Gleeson:** But you had been painting in oils long before.

**Lloyd Rees:** Long before, but I was more an Impressionist in early years. That period of drawing made me conscious of the importance of form and design in a way I hadn't been. But it took me about ten years to evolve an idiom, almost. That's where the south coast was so valuable, because I'd have the long university vacations without responsibility. The university work never took more than half the week. So the painting went on in the studio and down there I could just lose myself. You will understand the question of finding an idiom. It was a follow-through from the pencil.

**James Gleeson:** You mentioned a period of ten years when you were working with the pencil to a very large extent.

**Lloyd Rees:** The intensive pencil period was from about 1927 through to the beginning of 1935, then 1936, when I was beginning to do more painting than pencil work.

**James Gleeson:** But drawing has never ceased to be a preoccupation with you. You are continuing.

**Lloyd Rees:** Continuing, yes.

**James Gleeson:** *The river* is a well-known one.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** I am very happy that the Commonwealth has that picture, because there was never another. I lived on that river. It's not like the Shoalhaven at all.

**James Gleeson:** It is the Shoalhaven?

**Lloyd Rees:** It is the Shoalhaven, but going up on Cambewarra Mountain and looking down on that river meandering through the flats, right out to the ocean. Things are there—in a way that is Mount Coolangatta, but it became a creation with me. I almost canoed down it. I had the picture under way for a long while.

**James Gleeson:** It is certainly a major statement on that subject, the Shoalhaven.

**Lloyd Rees:** I think that is one of my key pictures. I have that feeling.

**James Gleeson:** We would agree with that, yes. I am very glad we have it. That is dated 1963.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right.

**James Gleeson:** By parenthesis, it's interesting that Arthur Boyd was down on the Shoalhaven painting.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, I was so interested to know.

**James Gleeson:** It was inspiring him in a quite different way.

**Lloyd Rees:** Quite a different way, yes.

**James Gleeson:** The panoramic views, Lloyd, that you get in so many of these paintings—almost bird's-eye views—how do you arrive at that sort of vision, that point of viewing it?

**Lloyd Rees:** In some ways it is in defiance of my dislike of the aeroplane. Do you know the reason for it? Although in a sense I would be a representational painter, I have a feeling that a painting—this is only personal—wants to fill the whole canvas. I wanted to move away from the idea of a landscape being trees and something against a great sky. I have loved being up high. Our house is not very high—

**James Gleeson:** But it has altitude?

**Lloyd Rees:** The sense of height. I am always happy to come back to it if I have been in a low-level place. I think that is the reason. You are high enough up above the Cambewarra—an aeroplane could quite easily fly that height and lower. So that sort of S-shape moving through—

**James Gleeson:** The high skyline.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** I am not conscious of influences, but I think of Mantegna's landscapes, and the other Italians, who go right through. This was essentially a drawn landscape.

**James Gleeson:** Yes. It was painted from a mountaintop?

**Lloyd Rees:** It was painted from a mountaintop, yes.

**James Gleeson:** A beautiful painting. Now, *Tasmania, a mountain stream*.

**Lloyd Rees:** Do you mind me telling stories about these things?

**James Gleeson:** Yes, go ahead.

**Lloyd Rees:** This is a reward for a virtuous—if the picture warrants such a term—decision on my part. How it happened is Alan, our son, and his wife and family moved to Tasmania when we were away. In 1967 we came back. They wanted us to go over there, and we wanted to go over there. So I wrote over about accommodation and we were told that their family was too big for us to stay with them. Alan wrote back and said, 'There are two places. There's a house on the top of Mount Nelson. We had never been there. He said, 'There are magnificent views, you could have a room to paint in, there are lovely gum trees and great views of the river'. He said, 'The other is a flat down near the university'. One side of me was longing for the house—I thought it would be marvellous—but the other side was that Marjorie would have a house to look after. The final argument was that we were there to have access to the family, and Alan was at the university. So we thought we would go to the flat. So I reluctantly turned my thoughts away from Mount Nelson. I thought, 'We will probably have the car outside in the street, and we'll have a very formal flat'. When we got down there, it was absolutely the reverse. It was a student unit building, right in the bush leading up to Mount Wellington. When I went out in front, I found this little rivulet coming down out of the mountains and, on the back, a magnificent cliff. That is the only oil picture that is hanging in this house of mine—in the lounge. To go out in front of this little unit and find these wonderful gums—

**James Gleeson:** Unexpected.

**Lloyd Rees:** So I always think it is a sort of reward.

**James Gleeson:** That is dated 1 January, 1967.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right. There was snow on top of Mount Wellington.

**James Gleeson:** There often can be, right in mid-summer. These are just photocopies of drawings—1967, *Peaks in Majorca II*.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** That's Majorca. I was using just a bit of pen line; the rest is sort of scrubbed in ink. I was using ink and wash and all sorts of things—carbon.

**James Gleeson:** Carbon?

**Lloyd Rees:** Carbon pencil.

**James Gleeson:** We have here 'charcoal'. So it's actually carbon pencil.

**Lloyd Rees:** Carbon pencil was very much adopted by me. I found that you could draw a line and then, when you put the wash over, every bit of loose carbon melted and gave a slight greyness to your wash but left a line so clear that I remember even Wallace Thornton thought they were pen drawings once because of the beautiful black.

**James Gleeson:** You were there in 1967, obviously.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right.

**James Gleeson:** Did you do a lot of drawing in Majorca?

**Lloyd Rees:** I did a lot, yes. We got up into the little township of Fornalutx.

**James Gleeson:** That's where Paul Haefliger lived for a long time.

**Lloyd Rees:** He did.

**James Gleeson:** Yes, he may still be living there.

**Lloyd Rees:** No, they're not living there. We saw a lot of them. They're living down on the flats more—on the other side of Sòller, the little town. They're about two miles east of Sòller, or north of it. Fornalutx was about the same distance up the hill. But they lived there. It was through Jean's recommendation that we went to Fornalutx—fascinating.

**James Gleeson:** Were these hills near Fornalutx?

**Lloyd Rees:** They were part of the ranges that were behind Fornalutx. Marjorie got influenza when we arrived. We stayed a couple of days in the hotel, and these were part of the ranges that go up some 5,000 feet—a lot of snow. Wonderful! The sheer vigour of that outcrop attracted me tremendously. I got just out of the fringe of Sòller. The impact of that was terrific.

**James Gleeson:** Do I see a connection between this kind of drawing and the Ayers Rock/Olgas ones that you've been doing recently?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** There is the same bold realisation of forms—and yet, a kind of dissolving quality in the light.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. That was what appealed to me in Majorca, these great mountains. They're quite a link. Just as a little aside, for what it's worth—it has nothing to do with the mountains but it does with Söller—we heard the devastating news there of the bushfires in Tasmania. Alan hadn't moved there; they moved very soon after. The little paper there published it.

**James Gleeson:** Really?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, and quite a lot of the detail was right. The only thing that was wrong was probably a little editorial note to the effect that a British frigate was standing off the island to take off the inhabitants.

**James Gleeson:** A misconception of the size of Tasmania. Now, *Brisbane River* 1914.

**Lloyd Rees:** My early drawing was not very disciplined. It was very impressionistic and almost rugged. That is just a pencil drawing. I used to work on rough paper. It was only later that I realised the marvellous possibility of smooth paper. You get influenced by what you learn at art school—it was always the assumption that you use cartridge paper. This wasn't cartridge—I think you will find that is Watman's handmade paper, which is particularly rugged. I think was on a boating trip—some friends took me up the river—and I did the moat. How fascinating it should get in the gallery in Canberra, because I wouldn't know its history at all.

**James Gleeson:** We bought it from the Von Bertouch Gallery in Newcastle in 1973. We understand it is Chelmer; is that a place on the river?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. That's Chelmer. We lived at Indooroopilly, on this side.

**James Gleeson:** That rough paper certainly breaks the mark of the pencil and gives that vibrancy.

**Lloyd Rees:** It does. It gives it—

**James Gleeson:** An impressionistic quality. I recall those drawings of Seurat, where he uses that very heavy paper and breaks the tone to give this vibrant—

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. What a wonderful artist he was. Last time we were in Paris I got three or four slides. I don't know the French title, but you know that famous riverbank one with the figures?

**James Gleeson:** Yes—*La grande jatte*.



Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. It shows you a highly naturalistic sketch of the riverbank without a figure. Then it's another sketch with some figures in it—still, but the colour, the lovely warm distance. It is a very instructive group to show to students—and then the monumental character of the final picture.

**James Gleeson:** That was his great achievement: to achieve that delicacy of light with that monumentality of form.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. It's a radiant picture.

**James Gleeson:** These are two that I don't seem to have photographs for, Lloyd. One is a painting—*Landscape at Duramana*. Whereabouts is that?

**Lloyd Rees:** It's on the road to the goldfields. What is it called now, the famous mining town—Hill End?

**James Gleeson:** Yes.

**Lloyd Rees:** It's on the way out to Hill End, north of Bathurst.

**James Gleeson:** Can you remember the date of that? We bought it in June 1973, from the Macquarie.

**Lloyd Rees:** It jolly well would have been that date, I think. That is another case. I am a very domestic person. Jim, I have to be frank here, because I don't like hiding things. In my teens I had an illness that should have killed me—they expected it to—and nature restored me. There's no other word for it; I got away from doctors and everything else. But it left me with a nervous weakness: I have never been very good at going off on my own. That is where Marjorie has always been so marvellous: wherever I have gone, if I wanted to go to a place, she would go, and I have always gone to places she wanted to go to. Another one of her brothers bought this property out at Duramana, right out in the hills. He and his wife got right away, so they couldn't see a house. They've got that love of it. That would be about when they moved there. That would be about our first visit there. But I wish I could remember the painting; I can't.

**James Gleeson:** Is it on the road to Sofala, or Hill End?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, it's on one road to it. You get off the road a bit, but it's on the road.

**James Gleeson:** Now, another one, for which there is unfortunately no photograph.

**Lloyd Rees:** Is that a landscape in oils?

**James Gleeson:** The *Landscape at Duramana*?

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** I believe so.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I did a number of oils there.

**James Gleeson:** *Banksias at Waverton*, bought September 1975 from Joseph Brown in Melbourne. There's no indication here whether that is a drawing or a painting, although it is listed under 'Australian painting'. Do you remember that?

**Lloyd Rees:** I wonder how long ago. There's no suggestion of date there, only the date of purchase?

**James Gleeson:** Yes.

**Lloyd Rees:** It is possible it is a painting, done at Ball's Head. If it had been one of the early ones with a title on it, it would have had 'Bay Road' and not 'Waverton'. But I think that could be an oil. I have a vague memory of these massive trees against the distance, looking into Waverton.

**James Gleeson:** What period would that be, approximately?

**Lloyd Rees:** That would be not ten years ago.

**James Gleeson:** Comparatively recently.

**Lloyd Rees:** Comparatively recently.

**James Gleeson:** Some time in the 1960s, perhaps?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** The late 1960s?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** We will try and find photographs of these and, if there is any doubt about them, we will come back to you on those.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, all right, because I think with the early drawings it was then Bay Road.

**James Gleeson:** Here's another drawing called *Medical School Sydney University 1922/76*.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's fascinating. That's a drawing, is it?

**James Gleeson:** Is it an etching?

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right; it is an etching. Why I ask is that I thought they might have got one of the original drawings from which the etching was done. But that's the etching.

**James Gleeson:** It's listed here as an etching.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right.

**James Gleeson:** The date puzzles me a bit—1922/1976. Did you work on the plate over a period?

**Lloyd Rees:** It was done in 1922.

**James Gleeson:** The drawing?

**Lloyd Rees:** The etched plate. I must have left it, and another plate, in my drawer at Smith and Julia's. James Adam was a Melbourne artist linked with Percy Leason. Jim, being a good Scot, must have retrieved that, and some things from Wakelin's drawer, which eventually were given to me by his daughter after he died—not ten years ago. They had been completely lost all that period.

**James Gleeson:** And you've never made a print from it?

**Lloyd Rees:** I've never made a print from it. The other one, called *The tower*, John Santry cleaned up and took a few prints. But this one had never been touched. Port Jackson Press—that is, David Rankin—came to see me and later Max Miller. Because I'd done linear work, and they were setting up their press, they thought that I would do some linear work for them. I didn't want to because the stress of etching it worried me—all the biting and the necessary finesse and so on. I was hedging. I thought, 'Life's too short to give six months to experimentation'. But I said to David, 'I have two plates. If I can find them, you might care to experiment with them'. Luckily I found them, because I do lose things. This one had purple and red and patches; you couldn't have seen what was on it, and it printed perfectly.

**James Gleeson:** Isn't that interesting?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I think I put that date there to indicate the publishing date.

**James Gleeson:** I see. So that gives us both the date when it was originally etched and the date of issue.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** I think the next one is also an etching.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's the one I already mentioned. That's *The tower* that never issued; just a few proofs were taken for John to let me see what was there. With

Date of interview—18 August 1978

that one, all I can assume is this. My brothers, during World War I, used to send me postcards. I think that is a tower in France, and I interpreted, because I was doing a bit of experimental etching then.

**James Gleeson:** You had never been to Europe in 1922?

**Lloyd Rees:** No. These must have been done just before I went to Europe, and I never did a thing about them. I just left the two plates unprinted.

**James Gleeson:** Now, a very beautiful one; I remember this—*The canal at Torcello*, ‘watercolour and crayon’.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes; alter it to ‘carbon’. That’s an absolute carbon pencil drawing. I’d even have a rough board, James. I’d have a rough board and a fine paper and when I used the carbon sideways I’d get the granulation. You were talking about the granulation of a rough paper; well, this is a granulation of a rough board with a fine paper.

**James Gleeson:** I see.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. But that’s unquestionably just carbon pencil with a bit of wash.

**James Gleeson:** It’s almost a frottage technique.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** I can see how that has come through.

**Lloyd Rees:** We had lovely days there out at that place.

**James Gleeson:** We have a date for that—1966.

**Lloyd Rees:** That’s right; 1966.

**James Gleeson:** And you did other drawings of Torcello and the Italian lagoon area?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, but they are nearly all in my sketchbook. Some of them are in the book of my drawings that has just been published. But this one wasn’t a little drawing, was it?

**James Gleeson:** No, it was quite a big one.

**Lloyd Rees:** That’s right.

**James Gleeson:** It is 34.6 centimetres by 45 centimetres.

**Lloyd Rees:** That’s right.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** So it is quite a big one.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I remember—fine-ish paper; you get that sort of granulation. This is sort of fun for me because I didn't know you had all these things.

**James Gleeson:** *The plains of Provence* 1967.

**Lloyd Rees:** We came over from Majorca. Fred Jessup had asked us, if ever we were over that way, to call on him. So we took the boat to Barcelona—we travelled by boat then—got off at Beziers and went to see him. The railway station, like all railway stations in France and Italy, was on a low level. It was a sort of new town—not uninteresting. It had a very good hotel we could just walk into from the station, almost. I'll never forget exploring the town. Opposite the station were two great gates belonging to the last century—not really old—with steps inside, rather monumental, and a war memorial, a great width. I remember walking up this and into a wonderful natural park, but with formed lakes with swans on them. I remember all the daffodils coming out. Then I became aware that flanking this park were Louis-type mansions of great beauty—very, very French—and I walked up to the top. Have you ever been to Beziers?

**James Gleeson:** Yes. I've never stayed there. We've just driven through.

**Lloyd Rees:** There is this tremendous civic space up on the top as wide as the whole park. We wandered through to the fantastic cathedral—it has about three styles—and then came out on a terrace and looked right down over the country. So this is one of the drawings done there.

**James Gleeson:** This again has that very high skyline and that view, looking down.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I react to that.

**James Gleeson:** Have we got the medium right—watercolour and ink?

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right.

**James Gleeson:** And it's at Beziers?

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right, yes—a very rewarding experience, apart from the fascinating visit to Fred Jessup.

**James Gleeson:** *The plains of Egypt* 1967.

**Lloyd Rees:** That is Indian ink. Does this one say 'ink'? It should be 'ink'.

**James Gleeson:** Yes—'watercolour and ink'.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right. It was an old fountain pen with a gold pen, and I would use the pen at the back. That was drawn as the ship glided through the canal. There again, I'm rather high up in relation to a very flat area.

**James Gleeson:** So it's drawn from the Suez Canal. That must have been shortly before it closed down.

**Lloyd Rees:** Shortly before, yes. It's a very mysterious experience, isn't it, to see it going into infinity each side?

**James Gleeson:** Very strange, yes.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** *Dusk in Burgundy* 1973—or we have here 'Evening in Burgundy'. Which title do you prefer?

**Lloyd Rees:** This is a watercolour, isn't it?

**James Gleeson:** Watercolour and ink.

**Lloyd Rees:** Watercolour and ink—that's right.

**James Gleeson:** With some touches of ink.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, that's right. That was done from the terrace behind the Great Basilica at Vezelay.

**James Gleeson:** At Vezelay.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I did a big painting; I think I called it *Dusk*. Therefore, this is either dusk or evening. I think I'd prefer *Dusk*, if you have to choose one or the other.

**James Gleeson:** I think we ought to have an official title for it, so we'll call it *Dusk*.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. It was a lovely experience working there.

**James Gleeson:** It's a fascinating place.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes!

**James Gleeson:** Watercolour and ink: *The orange groves of Granada* 1967.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. It was an electrifying experience, on the bus coming up from the plains—which was all so Spanish, as you know—and suddenly coming upon

Date of interview—18 August 1978

these rolling hills, with all these plantations expressing the rhythm of the country. That was all done in the hotel that night from impression.

**James Gleeson:** I see. In Granada?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** So it is actually not a portrait of a landscape; it is a recollection?

**Lloyd Rees:** A recollection of one, yes—the excitement of the rhythms. I must say, I accepted what was almost a convention—the way those little clumps of trees define the form.

**James Gleeson:** Of course they do. They follow the contours, almost sculpturally.

**Lloyd Rees:** I did that because it was an electrifying experience and sometimes you hold it more vividly when you get away from it, don't you?

**James Gleeson:** Yes.

**Lloyd Rees:** So that's the history of that. I am very definite. I remember that.

**James Gleeson:** Was the hotel you were staying at the Washington Irving, up near the Alhambra?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. At the back of the hotel you look down—

**James Gleeson:** Yes, and the Sierra Nevada is up behind, too.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, that would be it.

**James Gleeson:** This is an etching and aquatint, one of a suite of six *Memories of Europe* 1976.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right. These were due to a very reluctant person. Having produced those plates of the tower and the medical school, which were very successful from their angle, they wanted me to do more etching. I didn't know about soft ground etching. I'm not a good person to say, 'No, I'm not going to do it', so in the end I said, 'I'll come down one day and have a look at what you're doing there'. I went down and automatically I found myself at a table. Do you know Max Miller?

**James Gleeson:** Yes.

**Lloyd Rees:** He very quietly said: 'Would you mind doing a drawing on this bit of paper?' He'd put it over a bit of blue aluminium. So I did some memory sketch or

Date of interview—18 August 1978

something. I might have had a notebook; I can't even remember that. I did a memory sketch because European architecture lends itself so wonderfully to that—the simple architecture. I think I had done two etchings by lunchtime. I am not sure, but I think one of these—I can't vouch for it—proved so successful that they used it in the series *Memories of Europe*. I followed through and did that group with the soft ground technique. I feel fraudulent—all I did was a little linear drawing. Max did the rest.

**James Gleeson:** I see.

**Lloyd Rees:** It was very different to doing etching the hard way on your own—preparing the plates and doing the etching and then the biting. In Brisbane, when I was doing the early etchings, I put the box with all the plates somewhere and I must have been impatient, because I upset the acid. The next time I went in the room I was nearly fumigated.

**James Gleeson:** Goodness me!

**Lloyd Rees:** And that was the end of the etching.

**James Gleeson:** There's now a whole—

**Lloyd Rees:** There's a set of those, a set of six. That is how they came. These are all fairly factual, from my notebooks.

**James Gleeson:** The original experiments were memory ones, but when you came to do the actual drawings for them you did use the notebook to suggest the composition?

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right, yes.

**James Gleeson:** Any particular identifications for the subjects?

**Lloyd Rees:** I think I can, except I won't be able to officially remember. That one was just a little impression of the first Spanish village near to Portugal. That's all I can say—'Village near Portugal'.

**James Gleeson:** Good. I'll get that down—'Village near Portugal'.

**Lloyd Rees:** The bus stopped and I got a little note.

**James Gleeson:** That's a harbour scene of some sort, is it?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. May I have a look at this one? Let me do the ones I'm dead sure of. There is the plaza—the Spanish word is 'plaza' isn't it?—the Sòller.

**James Gleeson:** Majorca.



Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** That looks like the Redentore in Venice—the Church of St Giorgio Maggiore.

**Lloyd Rees:** It should be but—

**James Gleeson:** Oh no, it's not—

**Lloyd Rees:** This is the little *Monastery in Corfu*.

**James Gleeson:** That's right.

**Lloyd Rees:** This subject was on the coast of the Island of Rhodes. Now, that is *Farmhouse, Majorca*, but if you like to put 'Fornalutx'—

**James Gleeson:** Yes, 'Majorca'.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, that gives it further identification. A good way to describe that would be a sort of Italian fantasy, because that's what it is.

**James Gleeson:** It is a mixture of impressions and typical buildings—

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, yes.

**James Gleeson:** We have this listed as 'Pen drawing 1935, ink on white paper'—possibly *Stable building, Crows Nest House, North Sydney*.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I am going to have a look at this because I think this is a case of very fine paper with a chalk surface, and that's a pencil drawing.

**James Gleeson:** Really?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. That is the very point that I made about the intensity of black that one got on this white paper. It's unquestionably a pencil drawing. It is the stables of old Crows Nest House.

**James Gleeson:** I'll change that: 'Pencil on paper with chalk surface'.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** Any special name for that kind of paper?

**Lloyd Rees:** I don't know. I couldn't get it in Sydney. I used to get it from Melbourne, but I don't know the name of it. One thing I have noticed is I have never seen mould on it.

**James Gleeson:** Is it the sort of paper they use for silver point?

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** It could well be, but I couldn't answer to that. It is a delicate paper, but as long as it's in its frame they seem to last remarkably well.

**James Gleeson:** On silver point you use Chinese white don't you?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** That is not quite the same as the chalk surface?

**Lloyd Rees:** No.

**James Gleeson:** If I remember correctly, there is another drawing of the same subject.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** Which I think we'll come to presently. It is in our collection as well. It has a big mass of trees here.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** The building is the same but you've altered this background.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** We will put this one aside and when we come to the other one we'll talk about the two together.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I put a fantastic background in there.

**James Gleeson:** Yes. That is a very Italianate background.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** Is it a made-up one?

**Lloyd Rees:** It must have been, because I think that there was sort of suburbia there that I reacted against, and put that distance in.

**James Gleeson:** This one is one of my favourites—*The Avenue of the Champs-Elysees*, oil on canvas, from the Norman Behan collection.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right.

**James Gleeson:** Could you put a date to that? Is it 1955? Apparently, we have that date on it. Would that be right?

**Lloyd Rees:** I want to be exact here. I painted that on the spot.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** Did you?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. It would be 1953.

**James Gleeson:** So I'll change that to '1953'. Whereabouts were you when you painted that?

**Lloyd Rees:** On the Tuileries Terrace.

**James Gleeson:** You set your canvas up there?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I couldn't do that now. I just had the feeling that I wanted to paint in Paris. I never did oils again. I did some drawing, but I never did oils again. I did several paintings there.

**James Gleeson:** Am I right in remembering it as rather autumnal in colour? Was it autumn?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, it was. The colour is quite autumnal, yes.

**James Gleeson:** Again, the same high skyline looking down from an elevation.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I remember when I was working there—whether it was this occasion or a later one—the American tourists coming around and photographing me, even getting down like that. I got quite worried about one of them. I said: 'I hope he doesn't ask me to talk because he'll get an awful shock when he finds I'm English'. I think he'd go home—'French artist at work', you know.

**James Gleeson:** It's a marvellous view, isn't it, up to the Arc de Triomphe?

**Lloyd Rees:** Oh yes, inspiring, civic. Norman Behan? I knew he had it, but I'm glad it's gone into the Commonwealth collection.

**James Gleeson:** It is one of my favourite ones, and I'm very glad we have it. This is *The verandah, old home, Potts Point* 1936. It is pen and ink with watercolour.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, that's right. John Brackenreg was a terrific fellow to find drawings. He showed me that and I looked at it, and I said, 'Who did that?' This was a rare thing among any of these drawings; this was a commissioned work. Otherwise I would not, in the ordinary way, have set out to do that drawing. It was a hospital at the time, but I can't tell you more. Undoubtedly I did it. The memory came back. I think the matron was leaving. It was a presentation picture. I would love to know the history. Have you got any history of it?

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** No, we haven't, except that it was an old house in Potts Point. There used to be an old hospital there, I remember, called Claremont. Does that ring a bell?

**Lloyd Rees:** It does, and that could well be it.

**James Gleeson:** I think it's gone now—a long time ago.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, a long while ago. But that was a hospital.

**James Gleeson:** We can perhaps find out.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** But I do remember there was a hospital up there, called Claremont, in the 1940s.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. It has come back to me. I clearly remember it as a commission. Then I did get very interested in it. It was an absolute exercise in that sense. I put this slight lemony yellow over it, which livened it. It was one of the few errors the printers made in my drawing book. They never hesitated, where a drawing had tint, to print a double plate or so together. I just wanted that touch of gold over it all.

**James Gleeson:** We reproduced it in our catalogue of the *Aspects of Australian Art*. Have you seen this catalogue?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. There's a slight tone there, isn't there?

**James Gleeson:** Yes, there is.

**Lloyd Rees:** That is just what the print in my book lacks. That's good.

**James Gleeson:** There are the stable buildings, with that mass of trees, instead of the view on to that Italianate landscape. There's the other one—

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right. I would say that's the one nearer to, more objective, than this one.

**James Gleeson:** We will come back to those later. This is a photocopy of a pencil drawing, No 1, *Ball's Head, Sydney Harbour* 1934, graphite on white paper; would that be right?

**Lloyd Rees:** That is right. There's a point that could be of interest. I remember one of the travelling exhibitions in Sydney. I forget who was in charge of it, but he was talking in the country. This came through to me—it is important. He said, 'Of course, he used three or four pencils in this' and so on. I never used anything but one pencil.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** Is that so?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** You got all that tone and all that variation with just one?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I found there was a chain. I never wanted to be bothered picking up; it was all done through pressures and sharpening. You get a unity that you don't get when—

**James Gleeson:** What sort of pencil—soft, medium?

**Lloyd Rees:** About 2B used to be my general one, sometimes 3.

**James Gleeson:** To get that very fine line you'd sharpen it to a needle point.

**Lloyd Rees:** I had to be sharpening all the time. These drawings were fairly thoughtful ones. I would often have periods of rumination when I was sharpening my pencil. They were not necessarily done in the one sitting or anything like that.

**James Gleeson:** Oh no, they couldn't be.

**Lloyd Rees:** No. As you know, often the face of nature, your balances and composition—everything—is all so overwhelming. So quite often I would take a drawing home and rub back to alter it to work on it the next day.

**James Gleeson:** I see.

**Lloyd Rees:** I did several like this. If I may say so, this is one of the best ones I did. I'm so glad about that happening there.

**James Gleeson:** They always give me the feeling that they've been very consciously structured, that you have organised your forms in almost an abstract way.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** They are not simple transcriptions of nature.

**Lloyd Rees:** No. One thing led to the other. That's why I went on years working because there was so much more to discover all the time. I can hardly remember any oils done, except still life done inside. There seemed to be a link with that. I wanted to get my painting more basic.

**James Gleeson:** Yes, I see. So the still life group of paintings came at the same time that you were working on them, and they were all concerned with the search for form and structure—

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, they were.

**James Gleeson:** Moving away from the more impressionistic, earlier—

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right. They were moving away very much from that. I began to feel that I was at least, within this monotone medium, getting a grip on something. I remember wondering if I could evolve an approximate oil technique. I hope I did eventually, but it took a long while. I think one of the experiences of that penetration is to make you feel the miraculous in all creative things, don't you think?

**James Gleeson:** Oh, yes. This one, Lloyd—*South Coast road* 1951.

**Lloyd Rees:** That is a very important picture in relation to that period. I was always fascinated by this road winding around the forms of the hill. One day I suddenly saw my subject and I was able to get a space off the motor track and paint that on the spot.

**James Gleeson:** Whereabouts on the South Coast?

**Lloyd Rees:** It would be about four miles south of Kiama, looking north.

**James Gleeson:** Gerringong somewhere?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes; Gerringong is about seven miles from Kiama. When I was painting that, Kiama would be lost over that hill, and Gerringong clearly visible at the back of me.

**James Gleeson:** I see. But quite obviously these rhythms of the roads and fences are emphasised in order to give form to that composition.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. That's what I felt about that South Coast country. Realistically if you looked out in a colour sense it was often too green for me. So sometimes I'd absolutely bring the warmth into it. I would sort of link Bathurst colour sometimes with it. Finally, I found that colour in my later works became a very personal thing. I use the colour that comes happily.

**James Gleeson:** It's an expression of your own feeling.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** To a certain degree it is here, too because you have imposed the colour you wanted on the subject, rather than interpret it exactly as you saw it.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right. With a lot of my painting, when I began to get a sufficient grip on things down the South Coast, I realised that I might be out the whole morning but I hadn't looked at the subject once. I had been looking at the

Date of interview—18 August 1978

picture all the time, the canvas. The sense of environment— to be working on a headland and to get the ozone off the ocean, with the waves pounding—was to me what made it so important working out of doors. You may like to hear a little episode concerning this. An official in the Kiama Council, the health inspector, was very fond of art. He had studied with Julian Ashton. He loved art. If an artist came to that district he always liked to meet them, or to look at their work. The village signwriter had a lot of work painting the names, tonnages and so on, on the wagons. He had strict instruction from the official that, if ever he saw an artist working, to come and tell him. I was working on this one day when a car pulled up and three or four men got out. You cannot tell people they can't look, but when I am working I get a bit grumpy, so I'm afraid I was not cooperative at all, and I heard that I got a very unfavourable report. They said, 'He goes up and puts one stroke on, and then stands back and looks at it for half an hour, then puts on another'. I got to know them after that, though, and they were lovely people. They just loved art, and they didn't intrude. But I wished I had been a little kinder to them.

**James Gleeson:** Lloyd, I find it interesting that when you're painting outdoors—and you obviously were on this occasion—you are looking at the picture more often than you are looking at the landscape.

**Lloyd Rees:** Much more.

**James Gleeson:** It's the landscape that creates the urge—

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, almost the moment of creativity. That makes a picture. At this stage the drawings I did were merely enough to indicate the rhythm. A lot of them have not even survived. It is entirely different to the actual drawing period that precedes it. The thoughts were entirely on the painting. But I did want to feel it always. Having once started, that is quite true—the whole interest was on that.

**James Gleeson:** When you start on the painting, do you lay in the basic rhythms first, in the bold strokes of the movement of the landscape, and work from that?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I always—however short the session—cover the whole canvas. I never start with a section and then move from it. I must cover the whole thing.

**James Gleeson:** That's interesting.

**Lloyd Rees:** That is a very cultivated landscape. It belonged to the Potter family. I think a Miss Potter, who was a student at the university, more or less directed her parents to get a picture of mine.

**James Gleeson:** How does that colour in Renée Free's book—

**Lloyd Rees:** It is reasonably suggestive, but the colour generally is not—

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** No.

**Lloyd Rees:** I have had second thoughts about the Jubilee Prize picture. I have a feeling that the thumbnail photographs at the back would have been put in as part of my production and not necessarily as part of the exhibition. At the back of Renée Free's book there are a whole lot of tiny little reproductions. In the one you have that the Jubilee picture comes in, that is part of my production but not necessarily part of the retrospective exhibition. I am only voicing an opinion there. I am not sure of it. I must have done about ten drawings of this mass of rocks. I couldn't leave it alone—different variations, different backgrounds.

**James Gleeson:** We have, in the *Aspects exhibition, Rock formation, Waverton, North Sydney* 1934. Is that right?

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right.

**James Gleeson:** I'll alter this because we've only got 'North Sydney'. It is *Rock formation, Waverton, North Sydney*, 'pencil on cream paper'.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right, yes.

**James Gleeson:** And 1934 is the right date?

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right.

**James Gleeson:** This façade, this rock face, fascinated you?

**Lloyd Rees:** It fascinated me, yes.

**James Gleeson:** If I remember, there's one in Queensland.

**Lloyd Rees:** The Queensland Gallery—one of the ones that I was felt was pretty complete. Sheila MacDonald purchased it. Sheila MacDonald and her husband hold it.

**James Gleeson:** What did we say in the catalogue here? 'In 1931 Lloyd Rees moved into Moana Flats in East Crescent Street, McMahon's Point, and several versions of Western Bays and headlands were drawn from the roof of these flats'. This must have been around about the same period, in the early 1930s?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** Now, *Trees on hillside*.

**Lloyd Rees:** I quite stylised those trees, as is obvious. Those are the trees that appear in your Ball's Head, on the right hand side of the picture. This was a great gnarled fig tree that I loved so much. That is the movement of Ball's Head into Berry's Bay.



Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** I see. We've got here *Trees on hillside* or *From McMahon's Point looking into Berry's Bay*.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right, yes.

**James Gleeson:** So both are accurate descriptions of it?

**Lloyd Rees:** Both are right. Is there any information as to where it came from or anything like that?

**James Gleeson:** I think we got it from the Artarmon Galleries, but I'm not sure.

**Lloyd Rees:** No, I am not sure.

**James Gleeson:** We bought it only in November 1977. I am pretty sure it was one of a group of works we got from John Brackenreg.

**Lloyd Rees:** I have a feeling—I am not going to be exact here—that this was in the possession of Roland Wakelin at one time. But I am not sure. He had one of these.

**James Gleeson:** Did he really?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** To my mind it's a very beautiful drawing. One thing that interests me, Lloyd, is the way you have drawn margins each time coming in closer, cutting out edges and bits. I notice that you've done that on several occasions. Is this a common habit with you?

**Lloyd Rees:** No, it is a confession of bad judgement. I misjudged. I have to watch some of my early judgements. I think what I did there was wrong. I think it would have been better to just carry out to that line.

**James Gleeson:** Right into the right edge.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I have done that, but I don't quite know what the impulse was at the time. I am often wrong, but I do it.

**James Gleeson:** It is an indication that you think and rethink, and think again.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, that's right.

**James Gleeson:** One of the fascinating things about this is that you've suggested in the sky a cloud effect, a thin cloud, and there's no wash on it. It looks almost as though you've laid a wash on it, but it's all pencil.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, all pencil. That's right. I'd get the pencil sideways, like that, right down, almost parallel. I think that's one of the white paper drawings and it would respond marvellously. The gradations are infinite.

**James Gleeson:** That again would be done with just the one pencil.

**Lloyd Rees:** One pencil.

**James Gleeson:** Probably a 2B?

**Lloyd Rees:** At the very most I would indicate my drawing like you would indicate a painting. I might use an HB because I would only want the faintest— but that is entirely submerged. I would pick up the 2B or the 3B. Having selected the pencil, I would go right through with the one pencil.

**James Gleeson:** Extraordinary, and very beautiful.

**Lloyd Rees:** Where are we now?

**James Gleeson:** This is the *McDonnell Ranges—the last light*.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right.

**James Gleeson:** 'Oil, crown and carbon pencil'. Is that right?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** 1976. This would be one resulting from your visit into the interior of Australia?

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right, yes.

**James Gleeson:** I think we have a number of drawings.

**Lloyd Rees:** You have quite a number of those, yes. I found that, with the oil carbon distributed with turpentine, you get a very rich tonality.

**James Gleeson:** Is this what you do? You work with the oil crayon, and then wash over it with turps?

**Lloyd Rees:** I get a rag with turps and distribute it and mould it even. It transformed this one into a rather anaemic thing. I hadn't got the volume in it. When I did that, I got the volume.

**James Gleeson:** This sort of gives you the body of an oil painting.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, it does. It has certain benefits for me inasmuch as you have to take the colour that's there, like a stained glass artist. That's rather good for me

Date of interview—18 August 1978

because sometimes I'd wrung my colour out with white when I was painting, and it was good for me to get a full colour volume. The oil pastels helped me that way. It's been a later thing in my life, but it has enabled me to get quite big things done under conditions where time does not permit coming back day after day. That happened out in the centre.

**James Gleeson:** This is another one from the same series *The Olgas, distant aspect* 1976. Again it is 'oil, crayon and watercolour.'

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** And pencil?

**Lloyd Rees:** There could be some carbon pencil. The thing about it is that quite often my lines, my edges there, would be carbon pencil, because carbon takes on top of the oil pastel. The way I would use it would be, for instance, all this sort of sage bush that grew right up into defining the base of these great Olga rocks, I would put in with the white of the oil pastel—sometimes highlights and that—and then be free for the wash to go and not have to be going around on all the edges, which is a technical process. You take a lifetime to work on it. So it was a very helpful medium. Then afterwards I found that, for a dead white, you can get out watercolour with a bit of rag, and rub it on to the oil base.

**James Gleeson:** Lloyd, were all of these done on the spot?

**Lloyd Rees:** On the spot.

**James Gleeson:** All of these?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I think I did some on that, when I got back home.

**James Gleeson:** That's the MacDonnell Ranges?

**Lloyd Rees:** But all these drawings were done on the spot. There again, this brother-in-law who lives at Duramana was so marvellously helpful. He would take me anywhere I wanted to work in his station wagon, and would move it round so that I would get the back in shade, and I would put the flap down. In other words, these were not just sketches; they were small studies. He made that possible. It was wonderful. This is a watercolour, isn't it?

**James Gleeson:** 'Watercolour drawing, the MacDonnell Ranges, mid-afternoon'.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. That would have quite a lot of carbon pencil and watercolour, and yet the watercolour dominates this picture very much, doesn't it?

**James Gleeson:** Yes, it does. And these were all done within the space, I suppose, of a few weeks, a few days?

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** About eight days, the whole lot, out there.

**James Gleeson:** What time of the year was it? Can you remember?

**Lloyd Rees:** July—gorgeous sun and freezing nights, but we were in comfort. It was six or seven degrees below.

**James Gleeson:** Goodness! *The great rock*—based on Ayer's Rock—afternoon, coloured pencil and watercolour.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right. With *The great rock*, there was, obviously, the great view; it was very wonderful. Everybody goes out at night to get the last rays of the sun on it. It looks like a very simple mass, but Stan would take me where we'd get the sun slanting along the side of it—

**James Gleeson:** And modelling it.

**Lloyd Rees:** Highly sculptured, yes. I accentuated that, the sort of rhythm, because it enthralled me so much.

**James Gleeson:** It is fascinating the way it dominates the whole surface of the paper.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** That is the sort of thing that you were getting in those hills at Fornalutx—exactly the same sort of thing.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, the same sort of thing.

**James Gleeson:** This is closer to home, another one of *The great rock*— *study at evening*.

**Lloyd Rees:** This is bigger than that one and more evolved. The other was a first rhythmical one. I went back another afternoon and it has more development there, as though *The great rock* continues.

**James Gleeson:** Were you intrigued by the effect of light on the rock? Morning light, evening light would change—

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. There was a pearly cream light in the morning. It wasn't a red rock.

**James Gleeson:** Now, that's a fine one—*The Olgas, northern aspect*.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, we went north to have our lunch and all of these were right back in position with a forthright light over the whole thing. It is a rather forthright watercolour, that one, I felt. The dominance of the shapes was all-important.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** *Backyard*, graphite on watercolour paper.

**Lloyd Rees:** Goodness!

**James Gleeson:** By the look of it, an early one, slightly impressionistic?

**Lloyd Rees:** I can say quite a bit about that one. That was a backyard at Mosman. What happened, I think, was this. I came down from Brisbane. In Brisbane I used to do very high key pencil studies, particularly of the Italianate architecture there, like Parliament House and the Old Convent and so on. I evolved that feathery pen line. When I came to Sydney the tonality of Sydney made me feel I could not use white paper as the basis. I already had the feeling that I had to paint, but I was so clumsy. I think my drawing at the time—let's face it—is quite crude. The finesse had gone. I became worried about it. I remember going to see Syd Smith and saying, 'In Brisbane I was never harnessed indoors except for a period in the Government Printing Office'. He immediately said, 'That can't go on; you'll have to have some time off'. Syd was like that.

**James Gleeson:** I see. Isn't that good?

**Lloyd Rees:** I was rather scrubbing with the pencil then, but it's interesting to see it as part of a period.

**James Gleeson:** This would date to the 1920s?

**Lloyd Rees:** That would have been just about 1920, when the Brisbane influence had gone—certainly before I went away in 1923.

**James Gleeson:** So if we put 'circa 1920', that would be fairly close to it?

**Lloyd Rees:** I think that gave time for the Brisbane delicacy to leave. I didn't have the time out of doors, it was nearly always quick and I was conscious of Sydney's deep tonality as compared with Brisbane.

**James Gleeson:** A different effect of light, I suppose?

**Lloyd Rees:** Different altogether. Subconsciously I realised it was only oils that could give that sort of thing to make it really valid. I did that at a friend's place at Mosman.

**James Gleeson:** That is interesting. It is quite an interesting work.

**Lloyd Rees:** Also, with my pen drawing, instead of being feathery, I did great dark drawings of the gasometers and things like that. I think there are one or two, in the book, of quarries and that is where I did evolve an idiom, a certain rich lightness, a sense of light but depth.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** Here's a recent one, *The watertank at Duramana*, ink and wash. This is your brother's property up there.

**Lloyd Rees:** My brother-in-law's property. I am very glad you have that one.

**James Gleeson:** It's a good one.

**Lloyd Rees:** I really used black there. Some of the black was distributed from sheer ink with a rag. That gave the key to it.

**James Gleeson:** This one is very early 1909, or circa 1909, 'pen drawing *After Joseph Pennell*'—

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right.

**James Gleeson:** It is ink on white paper. Tell me about that.

**Lloyd Rees:** Joseph Pennell was not a great artist. He was a disciple of Whistler's. In our early home, when I was a kid, there was no money, but my father had a great feeling for music; he sang and he played. That enriched our lives greatly. There were omnibus volumes of the *Century* magazine and also two great books that influenced me. One was Gleeson White's '*Masterpieces of British Painting*' or something or other. I pored over those books. The books went back to the Civil War and later. The Civil War of America was illustrated in woodcuts. That was subject interest—the thrill of the guns, the explosions, all that. There were later articles, but before the turn of the century, which to me were entrancing. I forget the title, but it was more or less about travelling in Tuscany. Joseph Pennell illustrated them. They would have been among the first examples of line reproductions, as distinct from woodcut. He would have had to conform strictly to the line being narrower than the space between it, almost. I fell in love with Italy through it, because of the white paper and just drawing by shadow. It really gave me my first idiom in pen work, copying these.

**James Gleeson:** So it's very important.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. There's no doubt. I do not claim that is Pennell, but it is very suggestive, isn't it?

**James Gleeson:** Yes. An Italian subject?

**Lloyd Rees:** An Italian subject. That would be one of the Tuscan drawings by Pennell.

**James Gleeson:** That's very interesting.

**Lloyd Rees:** I remember the drawings of Sienna; I thought, 'I must go to Sienna'.

**James Gleeson:** It started a lifelong—

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** I would love to know how that got into the national collections.

**James Gleeson:** The Artarmon Galleries.

**Lloyd Rees:** The Artarmon Galleries?

**James Gleeson:** Sir John Brackenreg formed this enormous collection of drawings, and we have been acquiring from him over a period of years.

**Lloyd Rees:** That would have come down from Brisbane somehow.

**James Gleeson:** Now, this is *Boulders and a distant city 1977*, ink and watercolour.

**Lloyd Rees:** I'm glad of this. You remember the oil one, the first thing we looked at, Mount Rankin—

**James Gleeson:** Yes, at Bathurst.

**Lloyd Rees:** That was looking north from the orchard. This was turning to the paddocks leading down. More towards that way you would have got all the Macquarie Plains. The landscape was highly cultivated. But this was partly rugged. I made the most of whatever ruggedness there was. But that's looking the other way.

**James Gleeson:** I see. Is the distant city Bathurst?

**Lloyd Rees:** The distant city is Bathurst. It just comes in down there, a bit of it. I set a lot of store by that drawing. I got great fascination from it.

**James Gleeson:** I am glad you feel it's an important one.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I am so glad you have it. I am amazed of the extent of them.

**James Gleeson:** I hope we haven't stopped yet.

**Lloyd Rees:** This is this terrible fellow John Brackenreg.

**James Gleeson:** Again, yes. *A wayside park in Northern Tasmania 1970*.

**Lloyd Rees:** That has actual pen work in it.

**James Gleeson:** 'Ink and wash'.

**Lloyd Rees:** That's right—with this old fountain pen that used to kick, a kicky sort of line. I felt that that was one of the best drawings I had done in Tasmania. John purchased that one.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** Was that the time you went down and stayed in this flat with your son, the same visit?

**Lloyd Rees:** No, this is a later visit. I can't tell you the exact year.

**James Gleeson:** It is 1970.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. We went up and stayed at Deloraine. Marjorie drove me around the district. That is where I meant she would be so helpful.

**James Gleeson:** So, it is somewhere in the Deloraine area.

**Lloyd Rees:** It is between Deloraine and Sheffield, in Northern Tasmania.

**James Gleeson:** Good. That gives us a closer location for it. Now, *Sydney Harbour* 1934, graphite on white paper.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, that's right. The carbon does not come in till later. I used the graphite in those early drawings.

**James Gleeson:** That is the 2B or 3B.

**Lloyd Rees:** That is the carbon pencil.

**James Gleeson:** That seems to be a very prolific period for these harbour drawings. You did quite a number of them.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I was right on the spot, so I could just walk to my subjects. I used to meet Percy Lindsay quite often.

**James Gleeson:** He was living in that area?

**Lloyd Rees:** He was living in that area. Then there was our second flat. I don't think we should quibble over this, but Moana Flats is mentioned as our residence. I should correct this, because I am a little careless. You mention working from the roof of Moana. I hope it would not be a great trouble to you, if you are looking at that again, to say, 'Later moved to Keanah Flats, from the roof of which'—because Moana didn't have a roof you could get onto. At Keanah I did quite a number.

**James Gleeson:** So those drawings were really from that roof, not Moana?

**Lloyd Rees:** No, at Moana I had to walk out and get them outside but quite a number were done from Keanah roof.

**James Gleeson:** That clarifies that point.

**Lloyd Rees:** And Wakelin was living in the same flats, Keanah.



Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** I see. Now, *Homestead Hill*, graphite, white paper. Again, Artarmon, but we have no date for that one.

**Lloyd Rees:** No date? This is an intriguing one as a subject; I might have difficulty placing that exactly. No, I can place it. In the Sydney Gallery, and you might even have one of them, *The road to Berry's Bay*—

**James Gleeson:** Yes, we do have one.

**Lloyd Rees:** Here's *The road to Berry's Bay*. I drew it from over there. At first when I looked at it, I thought, 'This is going to be hard to identify', but I recognised it all at once. *The road to Berry's Road* I drew several times showing the road going down the hill. This is done from down below it, looking to the crest of the hill. That would lead through to Artarmon or Berry's Bay Road, as it was then. So it is really the crest of the road to Berry's Bay.

**James Gleeson:** And it would be what period? In the 1930s?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** In the early 1930s, perhaps?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, it had to be before 1934. But it's an evolved one, so I'd be inclined to put it towards the end of that period at McMahon's Point.

**James Gleeson:** 1933?

**Lloyd Rees:** 1932 or 1933.

**James Gleeson:** I'll make a note of that on it—1932 or 1933.

**Lloyd Rees:** Is that a John Brackenreg one?

**James Gleeson:** Yes, nearly all of them are. This one is called *Thompson's corner* 1932, 'graphite on white paper'.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. I think this was the one that was in Lionel Lindsay's collection.

**James Gleeson:** It must have gone to John Brackenreg from that collection.

**Lloyd Rees:** I may have done two of the same subject, because I thought it was a wonderful subject.

**James Gleeson:** Is the house still there, Thompson's corner?

**Lloyd Rees:** Thompson's corner is now all altered. There used to be a wonderful old pub there and then it became a corner store, with great verandahs and so on. I worked from that verandah, too.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** Is this at—

**Lloyd Rees:** West Pennant Hills.

**James Gleeson:** I'll just make a note of that, 'West Pennant Hills'. This is *Old Sydney* 1932, 'graphite on white paper', Artarmon Galleries.

**Lloyd Rees:** I used to look right across the harbour from McMahon's Point on to the opposite shore. I would say that's part of Balmain.

**James Gleeson:** It looks as though it could be. So you feel it is looking across from McMahon's Point to Balmain.

**Lloyd Rees:** Undoubtedly.

**James Gleeson:** Fine. Now, this one is *Untitled study of a pine tree* 1917, graphite on cream paper. Were you still in Brisbane then or had you come to Sydney by then?

**Lloyd Rees:** That's a Sydney drawing. You'll see already I'm beginning to sort of scrub a bit with the pencil, although I was early enough then to have a valid imprint. It is likely that that old house would have been at Woollahra, because my sister and I had a flat at Edgecliff Road. I was enamoured of the old stone buildings. That is a Sydney drawing—not a Brisbane one.

**James Gleeson:** And you think it could very likely be an old house in Woollahra?

**Lloyd Rees:** I would say it was undoubtedly done in Sydney, of an old house at Woollahra. I would almost vouch for that.

**James Gleeson:** Good. That identifies it.

**Lloyd Rees:** That is a transition between it and the fence one, which is much more rugged.

**James Gleeson:** Yes, the fence one with the mass of foliage against it.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** This would be earlier?

**Lloyd Rees:** Earlier, I would say. Yes. We moved over to Waverton, but that wouldn't have been a Waverton subject.

**James Gleeson:** What year did you come down to Sydney?

**Lloyd Rees:** In 1917.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**James Gleeson:** So it would have been shortly after you arrived in Sydney?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, that would late 1917, I would say.

**James Gleeson:** A beautiful one, this one—*Western bays and headlands* 1933. This is the one I thought was drawn from the top of Moana Flats, but it's the Keanah—

**Lloyd Rees:** The Keanah Flats, yes. There again, you see, I've cut down the size of it.

**James Gleeson:** Yes.

**Lloyd Rees:** A silly thing to do. Yes, that would have been done from Keanah Flats.

**James Gleeson:** It's different from the other one, in the Queensland collection?

**Lloyd Rees:** It's in Queensland. I'm not sure where.

**James Gleeson:** We have more harbour in the foreground here.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** Was this done with the view in front?

**Lloyd Rees:** It would have been. I would make alterations at home in composition and that, but I would never do the actual pencil work in those days except on the spot—always on the spot. Renée Free, by the way, has such a feeling for the drawings of the 1930s that she wants a separate publication dealing with them.

**James Gleeson:** That would be a good idea.

**Lloyd Rees:** I thought that, rather than a book, a folder might be an idea, because you can have them bigger, with plenty of mount around them. We may be doing that.

**James Gleeson:** That would be fascinating. Now we come to *Stable building, Crows Nest House, North Sydney*. It is the same building, I am sure, as in this version.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** But with this mass of trees.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes, right. I am hazarding an opinion here, but I would think that this was the earlier one, and truer to subject. For some reason or other when I

Date of interview—18 August 1978

was doing another one, I wanted a breakthrough. The fact that there would not have been visibility, would have lead me to put in that imaginary background.

**James Gleeson:** Is that ink, and that one pencil?

**Lloyd Rees:** They're both pencil, aren't they? Is one of them ink? As far as I'm concerned, they're both graphite.

**James Gleeson:** This one is pen, I think. It's called 'pen'. I am sure one was pen and the other one pencil.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes; it looks like pen line in that shadow there, doesn't it?

**James Gleeson:** I think we did study them very closely together—

**Lloyd Rees:** This is unquestionably pencil, and that would be done on cream paper, too.

**James Gleeson:** Yes. And that's earlier?

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes. That could explain it. When I did pen work I never did it on the spot. That is why the fanciful background. I would say unquestionably that that is pencil. If the examination of the original shows that this could be the pen one, yes.

**James Gleeson:** I am sure it is a pen drawing. I think we checked that.

**Lloyd Rees:** Yes.

**James Gleeson:** That house; is it still there?

**Lloyd Rees:** No.

**James Gleeson:** Was it there when you drew the stables?

**Lloyd Rees:** Which house?

**James Gleeson:** Crows Nest House—the stable building for it.

**Lloyd Rees:** I have to clarify that. I used to call it Crows Nest House because it was generally known as that, but there was no house there at all.

**James Gleeson:** I see.

**Lloyd Rees:** If I had been precise, I would have said, 'The stable of old Crows Nest House, now demolished.

**James Gleeson:** I see.

Date of interview—18 August 1978

**Lloyd Rees:** I never saw the house, only the stables. That is quite clear: it is simply the stable of the demolished Crows Nest House.

**James Gleeson:** Whereabouts was that in Crows Nest?

**Lloyd Rees:** If you are going up the Pacific Highway, do you know where Bay Road comes into the highway? When you pass the post office going up the Pacific Highway, the first main road on the left is Bay Road and you come to a school with big stone gates. Those were the stone gates to old Crows Nest House. That property went right up, about a quarter of a mile of it, to the girls' high school, on your left. The sad part is that the whole of that was available to the state government to take over as an educational centre. But it was Depression time, and they broke it up for residential purposes. The only thing they conserved was the area for the primary school there. The idea was that they could have sold the girls' high school, which had very limited space, right on the highway. They could have had it right back in this huge area, the sports ground and everything. It's tragic what the lack of the money does, isn't it?

**James Gleeson:** Yes, it is.

**Lloyd Rees:** It was obvious that they would have liked to have done it. So the children's school has the old stone gates of Crows Nest House.

**James Gleeson:** I see.

**Lloyd Rees:** The Lady Hayes Estate, as it was called.

**James Gleeson:** Lloyd, I think that covers it. Thank you very much indeed.

**Lloyd Rees:** My pleasure.