LIST OF WORKS:

1. *Ayres Rock*, c2000, oil and collage on board, painting undated [Painting by Joyce & Frame by Stan] 51 x 83 cm
2. *Stan and Joyce*, c2001/2, oil and collage on board, 60 x 50 cm
3. *Cosmos I*, c2002/3, oil and collage on board, 46 x 55 cm
4. *Cosmos II*, c2002/3, oil and collage on board, 34 x 44 cm
5. *Cosmos III*, c2002/3, oil on board, 94 x 47 cm
6. *Stan and Joyce in New Zealand*, 2004, oil on board, 60 x 90 cm
7. *The Light House*, 2005, oil and collage on board, 60 x 90 cm
8. *Christ*, c2003, oil and collage on board, 60 x 90 cm, University of Western Australia Art Collection.
9. *Untitled (Conception)*, 2004, oil and collage on board, 60 x 90 cm
10. *The Miracle of the Birth of Christ*, 2004, oil and collage on board 82 x 90 cm
11. *The Rising Christ*, 2004, oil and collage on board, 95 x 60 cm
12. *60th Wedding Anniversary*, 2004, oil and collage on two boards, 164 x 160 cm
13. *The Last Supper*, 2004-6, oil and multi-media collage and assemblage, 170 x 181 cm
14. Untitled (Shrine), 2004-6, oil and collage and assemblage, 115 x 96 cm
15. 467S/463G, 2004-6, oil and collage on canvas with handmade frame, 144 x 91 cm
16. God is Love: Last Supper, 2004-6, oil and collage on board, cardboard and plastic lids, 87 x 118 cm
17. Untitled (Creation II), 2004-6, oil and collage on board, 77 x 110 cm
18. Untitled (Creation II), 2004-6, oil and collage on board, 94 x 108 cm
19. Weary Dunlop, 2004-6, triptych, oil and collage on board, 115 x 196 cm
20. Heaven, 2004-6, oil and collage on board, 60 x 90 cm
* 21. Untitled (Figures at the base of the crucifixion), 2004-6, oil and collage on board, 60 x 90 cm
22. Untitled (The Connection), 2004-6, oil and collage on board, 90 x 60 cm
23. Untitled (Sermon on the Mount), 2004-6, oil and collage on board, 90 x 60 cm

All works by Stan Hopewell and all in the collection of the artist unless otherwise stated.
Stan Hopewell is an extraordinary artist. As an octogenarian he developed his painting practice as a solitary activity while looking after his wife Joyce, who was infirm and bedridden. With few models of artistic practice to work from he developed a highly sophisticated way of making paintings that describe what was important in his life; his wife, their marriage together for over sixty years, his family, memories of his childhood, his experiences in the Air Force during the Second World War, the Masonic Lodge and his Christian faith.

During that crisis, Stan painted to express his love for Joyce and his love of God. Despite the fact that he had never painted before and never shown any inclination toward making art of any kind until then, Stan began to make paintings brandishing his credo ‘God is Love’. While it lasted only a matter of a few years, this brief moment of creative focus and energy resulted in an outpouring of remarkable images that celebrate the resilience of the human spirit and the creative impulse.

The lives of Stan Hopewell and his beloved wife Joyce intertwined during the Second World War and they remained fused together during sixty years of marriage. Their story weaves through the history of Perth and Western Australia, illustrating how the major changes that transformed a small country town into a wealthy modern city impacted on working people raising a family. What is extraordinary about that story is not only the ebb and flow of a joyous family life but how they dealt with pain, with suffering and with the agonising reality of severe illness, infirmity and finally with Joyce’s death.

In 2003 when Joyce was confined to her bed and Stan became her principle carer, he began to write in his journal and to make paintings and constructions that recorded important events that documented their life together. Throughout it all his faith sustained him and during the years of his wife’s serious medical condition he was driven to give visual form to his love of God.

Stan has an exceptional capacity to create potent images and to re-imagine all manner of events, emotions and activities in his paintings. In this sense his amazing life story acts as a parallel text to the works, illustrating and informing our reading of each complex work. His years in Egypt as a member of the Royal Australian Air Force provided source material for his retelling of Biblical
stories, his experience of the beach at North Cottesloe as a young surf lifesaver was the catalyst for paintings about the ineffable presence of God in nature, and his life with Joyce provided the themes for many paintings celebrating the power of love.

In one series of pictures he describes the conception, birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, combining the theological with the personal, the spiritual with the everyday and the ethereal with the banal. The second painting of the series articulately represents Christ’s passage down the birth canal to enter the world and take on his mission of salvation, represented by a golden megaphone protruding from the surface. On the back he describes the *Miracle of the Birth of Christ* and the *Miracle of Creation* in a beautiful drawing that includes a personal commentary on the significance of this event for humanity.

Stan’s ability to summon up a visual language from his own resources, referencing what he discovered in the world around him then digging deeper to reveal new insights, is the essence of significant art and it is what makes these works so powerful, so authentic and so beautiful.

Like others drawn to make images that try to answer the big questions and confront the really important problems in life, the task is so great, so necessary and so profound that it does not seem possible to embark on such a project without assistance. How are artists like Stan, with little or no formal training and little or no relationship to the art world, able to revitalise image making and offer new insights into the power of images to tell significant stories? How was it possible for him to create such powerful works when he had no training and when, until now, he had never considered himself an artist or even attempted to make a painting? His answer was simple. He did not claim responsibility for these works. Stan is adamant that he is only a conduit through which the works materialise. As he explains:

... I have a confession to make to you re my paintings I have done. My hand and arm was guided by an unseen Power on my paintings and the skill which may be evident in their presentation for any one who likes my art is done by an unseen Angel.1
Like those artists often grouped together under headings such as Naïve, Outsider, Marginal, Visionary, Folk or Art Brut, Stan believes his work is guided by forces beyond his control. He adopts a similar position on spiritual guidance that fuses personal narratives with spiritual imagery and compelling visual inventiveness.

After the Second World War, the French artist Jean Dubuffet identified a large group of artists creating “raw” art (Art Brut) from their everyday experiences. He discovered the work of Henry Darger, Martin Ramirez and Madge Gill amongst many others, all artists with no previous training and no links to the art world who nevertheless made astonishingly vivid and compelling paintings and objects which they claimed were inspired by spirit guides, angels or other unseen forces.

There are also a large number of untutored Australian visionary artists whose work provides an informative context for Stan Hopewell’s work. Henri Bastin, James Fardoulys, Charles Callins, Iris Frame, Lorna Chick, Selby Warren, Harold Kangaroo Thornton, Roma Higgins, Sam Byrne and the Western Australian artist Ivy Robson (Jesus Brush), who believed her hand was guided by Jesus himself, are a few of the better known. Of course not all of the above believe in religious or cosmic guidance but they do have the ability to summon up extraordinary images from their life experience and their creative imagination.

For many commentators, this group of artists do have a special ability to reach into the unknown and to see further. When Henri Rousseau died in the Hospital Necker in Paris on September 2, 1910 and was buried in the Cimetiere de Bagneux, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire wrote his poetic tribute to the artist who had painted his portrait, and it was carved on his tombstone by the sculptor Constantin Brancusi:
We salute you
Gentle Rousseau you can hear us
Delaunay his wife Monsieur Queval and myself
Let our luggage pass duty free through the gates of heaven
We will bring you brushes paints and canvas
That you may spend your sacred leisure in the light of truth
Painting as you once did my portrait
Facing the stars

Apollinaire salutes Rousseau and situates him in history as a person blessed with an extraordinary gift: the ability to forge his own path, to follow the stars of fortune and promise.

Together these artists provide a comparison and point of reference that assist us to understand Stan Hopewell’s extraordinary achievement in finding a way to make sense of the world around him, to answer the important questions of life and to commune with his God in the process. His optimism and his certainty in the existence of a benevolent power that will assist and guide him, has been the bedrock of his life and his faith.

Exploring how his work fits within these wider art contexts and critically analysing its success provides revealing insights, not just into the creative process but the human compulsion to create images that make sense of the world by revealing the unseen and decoding the inexplicable.

Ted Snell
Curator

CAMPUS PARTNER

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery would like to acknowledge its campus partner for Stan Hopewell: God is Love, the Western Australian Centre for Health and Ageing (WACHA), Centre for Medical Research, UWA

WACHA is a leading non-profit clinical research and education centre that has helped define the research of ageing in Western Australia. It works to extend healthy lives, to prevent the onset of disabling illnesses, to find better ways to treat diseases common amongst older people and to improve the way health services are delivered. WACHA looks for ways to deliver the world’s best health practice, to influence policy and to improve the quality of life for older people and for those who care for them. As part of the public program researchers will share their specialised knowledge on a variety of issues including the potential for and benefits of creative expression and cultural engagement in later life.

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Cover image: Stan Hopewell in front of his work The Last Supper, 2004-6, oil and multi-media collage and assemblage, 170 x 181 cm. Photo courtesy of Frances Andrijich