

# Labassa *lives*

Volume 1, Issue 2, July 2013



## Madam X: Antoinette Starkiewicz



Above: Antoinette Starkiewicz c.1971. Photo: A. Starkiewicz.

Three illustrations on the wall of Labassa's main cellar have puzzled visitors and curators for more than 40 years. One theory was that they had been there since the 1930s. We now know that they are the work of artist Antoinette Starkiewicz created c.1969 when the cellar was her studio. The serial images, of a face pinned on a wall, point in the direction of what was to become Antoinette's *oeuvre* and profession for the next 42 years.

Designer, animator and animation director, Antoinette Starkiewicz's

credits include *Puttin' on the Ritz* (1974) and *Pussy Pumps Up* (1979). *High Fidelity* (1976) and *Zipper* (1998) were both in competition at the Cannes Film Festival. Antoinette has also been Animation Juror for the AFI Awards and the Sydney Film Festival; Animation Director with Film Australia; and a teacher of Life Drawing with the Australian Film, Radio & TV School where she studied for her MA in Computer Animation.

Her Pop Art paintings and drawings have been exhibited in galleries throughout Australia and

in Zurich and London. Her works are in the Museum of Modern Art, NYC; British Film Institute, London; the Australian War Museum; and the National Film & Sound Archive.

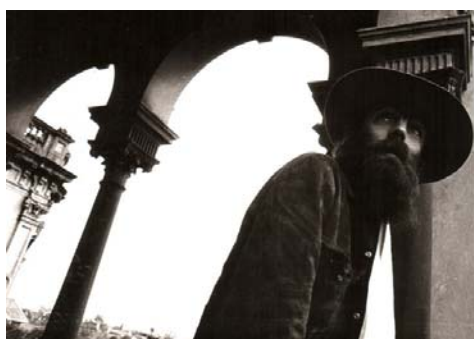
Antoinette's first animation film, *Secret of Madam X* – an experimental film, funded through the Australian Film Development Corporation (1970) – was conceived while Antoinette lived at Labassa. "The cutout stars in the opening credits were inspired by evenings in Labassa's cellar," she says.

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## Looking for ... Alan Braithwaite



Left: Alan Braithwaite. Photo: Penny Carruthers.

Alan Braithwaite, tenant of Flat 7, circa 1969 – where are you? We have several photos of you and your co-residents have vivid memories of your

time at Labassa. Our only clue is that you may have been called up for National Service and opted to be a cook as a protest against active service.

## Madam X: Antoinette Starkiewicz continued



At the time Antoinette lived with her boyfriend Randall Bouchier, whose piano composition and performance features on the soundtrack.

Antoinette sums up her appreciation of life at Labassa as “a taste of the idea that artists can live together in one building harmoniously... there was a feeling of belonging, surrounded by creative people.”

As is often the case with Labassa, Antoinette has

another indirect connection with the mansion. She provided the illustrations for *Love poems* (1998) by Sebastian Eden, a pseudonym for another tenant of Labassa, Peter Sinnott (Flat 10), whom Antoinette met through friends after leaving Labassa. Antoinette now lives in Sydney.



**Above left:** Antoinette with her paintings on assessment day at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School where she was a student 1969-71. Photo: A. Starkiewicz.

**Top right:** Cellar showing images created by Antoinette c.1969. Photo: Stephen Hall.

**Above right:** Screen shot from *Secret of Madam X*.

## Shane & Miriam's return

Miriam Gregory, Shane Pieper and son Liam Pieper recently returned to Flat 2, the family home from 1978-86. They not only brought a collection of beautiful photos and stories but a small section missing from the mahogany fireplace in the “Billiards Room”.

The return of this small but significant piece means that the

mantelpiece is now almost complete. Shane and Miriam's stories and photos will be featured in a future issue of *Labassa Lives*.

**Right:** Property Manager, Bronwyn Worrall, repositions the missing piece from the Billiards Room mantelpiece. Photo: V. Shuttleworth.





## A cool cellar

For 1970s residents, especially those who lived in Flat 7, the main cellar was a very “cool” place—an artist’s studio, a recording studio, a band rehearsal space, the scene of many parties and a discreet place for a marijuana crop. Others lived in the cellar including “Boris” whom George Varney remembers as ringing a bell outside Flat 9 whenever he returned “to roost”.

Linda Wilson who, with Geoff Lawson, had lots of parties in the cellar says: “People often had difficulty in finding where we were if they had not been there before.”

For Ian Sproul, “The Cellar was our friend and there was a vibe down there that was conducive to making/recording music created by some very notable players, for example, Bob Fortesque (Black Feather, Chain, Dave Hole etc.), Tom Watts and Phil Pruity (Fatty Lumpkin, Ash etc.) and Kent Hughes (Zydeco Cats). I have fond memories of many hours spent there in 1973 honing my recording craft on equipment

which by today’s standards was quite primitive, but nonetheless the results have stood the test of time and ‘The Cellar Tapes’ (recently re-mastered to CD) are legendary amongst the music community.”

Stephen Hall recalls that he moved into Flat 7 sometime after an unsuccessful dope crop in the cellar. “The people that tried to grow it spent/borrowed thousands on fluoros, pots etc. They must have hauled tons of potting mix and water pipes and wiring. I heard it cost them \$2000 and they had many happy hours spending their profits in their heads.”

In the more genteel days of the 30s and 40s the cellar was occupied by the hot water furnace. Margaret Gleeson (tenant 1940-48) recalls that “every afternoon at 4pm Mrs Brearley went down to the main cellar to stoke the hot-water furnace, to ensure the tenants had their hot water for the evening.” (There was no hot water for the morning and if you were tardy you could have missed out ).



**Above:** Brearley family: James, granddaughter Patricia, and, Emily who tended to the cellar furnace, c.1939 outside Flat 9. Photo: Pat Dunn.

Labassa has two cellars – the legendary main cellar and a small wine cellar entered through the bathroom of the Drawing Room Flat. There’s evidence however, that both were once used as wine cellars. Following the death of Alexander Robertson in 1896 the “Gentlemen of Melbourne and Suburbs, Connoisseurs, and Others” were invited to a large sale of the Choicest Foreign Wines from the cellars of Ontario (Labassa) which included Pommery Champagne, Lafitte Claret and Madeira.

## Looking for . . . Flora Katie Watson



This painting of Flora Katie Watson, owner of Labassa 1904-1920 was painted by Evelyn Watson, wife of John Boyd Watson III. A large painting, it once hung over a fireplace in the home of Malcolm Watson until he donated it to a regional gallery around 1935-37. None of the Victorian Regional Galleries contacted has any knowledge of the painting or the bequest. If you have any information on its location please let us know.

## John Harland: a photographic retrospective



John Harland, camera in hand, was a familiar sight around Labassa in the 1970s. Occasionally, he would slip a print under your door. Many of his shots never went beyond negative, and nobody but John had seen them – until now. John's collection of more than 350 photos covers a whole era of life at Labassa from 1973 to 1982. It includes intimate portraits, children at play, Labassa's art group, and resident excursions to Wilson's Promontory and art galleries.

"There was never any intention of using all the photos I took," John says. "I experimented with a lot of different cameras, different films and different modes of processing. In those darkroom days, one selected a few of the best from a roll of film, or several rolls if it was a special event, and put a lot of work into getting the best-possible print from the negative. It has been a great joy rediscovering these negatives for the memories they have brought back. It was a wonderful time shared with so many wonderful people in a wonderful place."



**Top:** Ann Weir, upper room of tower, 1977

**Above:** Labassa art group, Flat 12, c.1978

**Right:** Emma Watkinson, Flat 12, 1977.



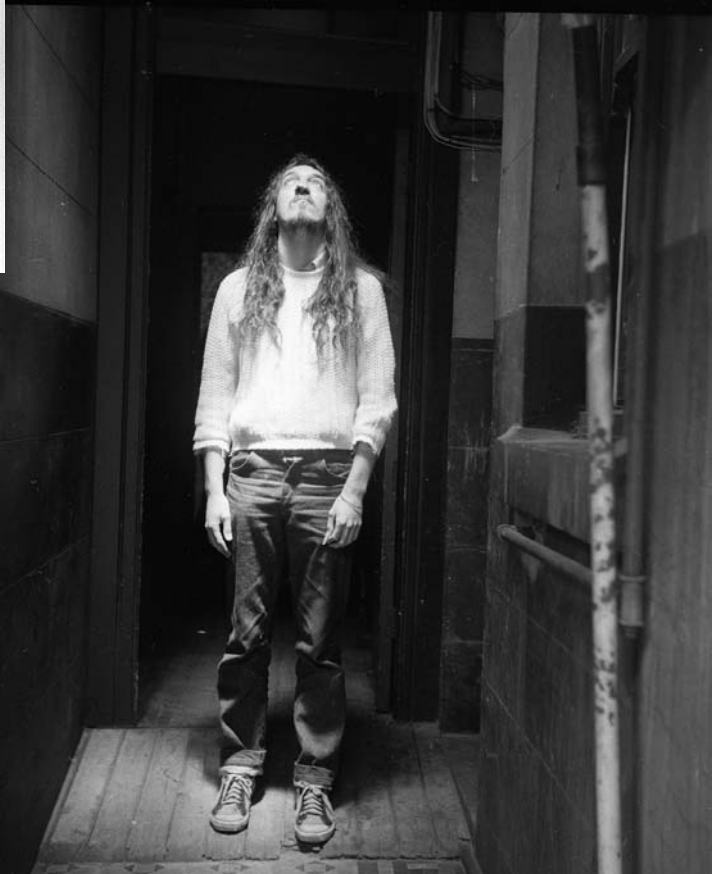
## a photographic retrospective *continued*



**Left:** Stephen Hall, Flat 3, 1976 at the Joan Gough Gallery, (Contemporary Arts Society Annual Prize Exhibition)

**Below:** Stephen Hall, under the skylight of the Labassa colonnade

**Bottom:** Ruth Harland, Willas flats steps, 1979.



### *The cast*

The photos on these pages are a small selection from John's collection and highlight the extraordinary quality and sensitivity of his work. The Friends of Labassa are currently working with John to preserve these wonderful photos and mount an exhibition.

Subjects of the photos include: Alita Tong; Angela McKelvie; Ann Weir; Bill McKelvie; Bonny Henderson; Diana (Di) Gibbs; Dita, friend of Diana; Donjal Chisholm; Emma Watkinson; Esther Gregory; Felix Meagher; Frances McGillicuddy; Fred and Vera Halford; Geoff Lawson; Hans Krueger; Howard Watkinson; Ian Hance; Jason Ford; Javant Biarujia; Janeen (cousin of Javant Biarujia); Jeff Watkinson; Jim Gulvites; Joanna, Pam and Tom Prosser; John Watkinson; Judy Brunet; Judy Cordingley; Heather, a friend of Judy; Leonie Gregory; Linda Brown; Louis Irving; Malachy and Jessica Tarpey; Marc Brunet; Mark Tong; Michael Adcock; Ron Nichols; Ruth Harland; Sam Murphy; Sean Murphy; Simonne Ford; Stephen Hall and his father, Geoff; Trevor Stephen.



# Recollections: 1952 - 1966

(an extract) by Noam White

My family moved into the Willas flats in late 1952 or early 1953. We occupied Flat 1, which abuts onto the Labassa complex. We shared the inner courtyard of Labassa and because our kitchen and dining room faced into the courtyard, we were as much a part of Labassa life as any of the Labassa residents.

In 1958, the Gruner family moved into one of the Labassa flats and for the first time I had someone about my own age to play with. Peter Gruner was a little older, but we often played chess together. About that time an event that brought us and most of the neighbours together was the first Sputnik<sup>1</sup>. We all stood chatting to each other and watching with great excitement at this amazing historical development. I think it was this event that convinced me that I should become a scientist or an engineer rather than a doctor.

Barry Jones lived in Manor Grove and it was the subject of some mirth amongst the Labassa people that one could observe him some mornings in his pyjamas walking to the corner of the street to pick up a newspaper. In those days there was an honesty system in place where piles of newspapers were left at street corners and one left money in a tin and took a newspaper. Barry always had a book glued up against his nose while walking, reading away and oblivious to all around him, pouring gigabytes of data into that prodigious memory that would serve him so well. It was no surprise that he became a frequent contestant on quiz shows, the most notable of which was "Pick-a-box". What was a source of great amusement amongst the denizens of Labassa was when-



Above (L-R): The White family: Joseph; Judah, Miriam and Noah (1958). Photo: Noam White.

Barry would argue that compere Bob Dyer had been given the incorrect answer. All these events were closely scrutinised and discussed in the Labassa courtyard.

The roof of the building was adorned by a number of stunning statues of brolgas and other items. The disappearance of these brolgas has been something of a mystery. I do recollect that there were several other statues on the roof around the back of the building. One day we noticed that a number of workmen were on the roof knocking them down. When an enquiry was made to the owner as to why this was happening we were told that one of the tenants had complained she had been hit by a falling piece of debris from the roof. The owner decided this must have come from the statues and they should all be removed.

My grandfather [Bere Feiglin] came to live at Labassa around 1960. The presence of my grandfather at Labassa [Flat 7] granted me the privilege of getting access to the cellar. I had never imagined I would

get access as it always had this large padlock on its entry and I was certain that there was no other access. I couldn't resist this one last peek at the hitherto inaccessible. It was somewhat of a let-down as there was no interesting junk down there. There were a few cases of what looked like home made wine. My grandfather made his

own wine and my mother confiscated most of it so it was possible he had salted away a few cases.

At about this time I took an interest in the locked room which was en-route to the tower. I was about to do my "Matric" and needed a quiet – and most importantly – solitary room to study as our flat was rather cramped. We were informed by the owner that I could use the room for rent of £5 month which the owner said was to offset the cost of the electricity. I now had my own hideaway and would boast to friends that I had a study in the tower! Later I would purchase my first gramophone and play all my musical collection of Mozart, Beethoven, Vivaldi and Telemann as loud as I could bear! The neighbours never complained – fortunately!

## Footnote

<sup>1</sup> Sputnik: First artificial Earth satellite launched by the Soviet Union in 1957.



# Rick Amor, Barry Oakley & Bohemian beauties



**Above left:** Rick Amor. Photo: R. Amor

**Above right:** Margaret Hulse and "Sam" 1965. Photo E.Lagzdin

**Left:** Sam Schoenbaum, resident and Margaret Hulse, 1965.

Photo: E. Lagzdin.

While Labassa's opulence has always attracted the curious, it has also invited explorations of other kinds.

Author Barry Oakley has memories of riding to Labassa on his bike in the 1940s to admire its shabby grandeur and "the large concrete kangaroos, emus and brolgas that had fallen from the parapets into the long grass that surrounded the house." In the early 1960s, Barry was a regular visitor at Brian Kiernan and his partner Suzanne's apartment (Flat 2). Barry writes of these visits in his memoir (*Mug Shots*, Wakefield Press, 2012). Labassa was "divided into grand but shabby apartments. Theirs took in a drawing room and ballroom and sometimes we had dinner there. We'd dine on the ballroom's podium

with a distant fire burning in the baronial grate flickering highlights on the wallpaper's gold."

A few years later, when television writer and director Peter Homewood moved into Flat 2, a new wave of visitors arrived – student Ed Lagzdin and his friends Margaret Hulse and "Sam". Peter Homewood was renowned for his Friday night revues for which he kept "a drag bag" of costumes. Ed and friends came for the dress ups and to delight in Labassa as "the rich man's monument". "It was ours for a time. He didn't take it with him," says Ed. "That was part of the 'vibe' as they said in 'The Castle'."

Not everyone was impressed with Labassa's magnificence, however.

Artist Rick Amor had other things on his mind. As an 18-year-old student at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School he was a regular visitor to Philip "Hutchy" Hutchinson's balcony flat (Flat 6). "It was a great place to bring girls for sex," he says. While Rick remembers Hans Poulsen rehearsing his band across the hall, getting drunk on brandy and sitting on the balcony on hot nights, his one special memory of Labassa is a shirt. This shirt, made by one of the female residents, had the sleeves cut out, exposing his lean arms. Rick credits this shirt with the successful wooing of his first wife. He was wearing it the first time they made love and she was very admiring of his arms.

Please send contributions, corrections, information, comments and articles, indicating whether or not they are for publication, to the following:

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### Errata: Volume 1, Issue 1



## Forthcoming events

**Open days (3rd Sunday of the month, 10.30am – 4.30pm)**

**July 21**  
**August 18 (Vintage fashion\*)**  
**September 15**  
**October 20**  
**November 17**  
**December (closed)**

\* Vintage fashion from the National Trust's Costume Collection; vintage inspired hats by Paris Kyne and informal vintage appraisals by expert Nicole Jenkins: 11-11.45am; 1-1.45pm (\$5 per item).



Paris  
Kyne's  
California  
Screaming



Vintage expert  
Nicole Jenkins

The caption with Peter Tarpey's photo (Issue 1) had a line missing. It should read as follows:

**Back row L-R:** John Varney, Julie Ryan, Fiona Colin, Brendan Power, Sergio Sill, Hartmut Erdman, Jessica Tarpey, George Varney (on pillar)

**Behind bike:** Sandy Sinnott, Peter Sinnott

**Second row:** Phil Speller, Judith Brooks, Jeff Black

**Front row:** Peter Tarpey (with dog); Judith Cordingley, Helen Ryan

## Roll call February 24

People who were unable to attend the "Return to" in February have requested a list of attendees. This list does not include current partners, recent family members or National Trust volunteers. Please advise us of any omissions or errors.

**Residents & descendants:** Helen Apfelbaum; Rodney Ashton; Jennifer Banks; Dennis Bennett; Ian Boyle; Patricia Dunn (nee Brearley); Rex Brearley; Susan Buckley (nee Grimshaw); Jacqueline Burnell (nee Hodgins); Penny Carruthers (nee Wilson); Jennifer Clarke; Russell Clarke; Fiona Colin; Julie Edwards; Denise Fallon (nee Webb); Ken Forrester; Judi Forrester; Jenny and Peter Gibson; Gerald Grabau; Neil Greenaway; Peter Gruner; Bettina Guthridge (nee Gordon); Barbara & Brian Morley (Halford); Maurice

Hambur; John Harland; Ruth Harland; Elizabeth Huntley; Marianne Kelders; Deirdre Jack (nee Knaggs); Robyn Dullard (nee Knaggs); Susan Krongold (nee Gruner); John Laurie; Geoff Lawson; Rachel Lazar (nee Apfelbaum); Jacqueline Lesage; Sue Meredith; Anne Moir; Kathy Neilson (nee Stewart); John Paige (Watkinson); Jan Pearce; Hans Poulsen; Brendan Power; Andrew Ramsey (Morgan); Julie Rivendell (nee Ryan); Helen Ryan; Eva Seidner (nee Traurig); Alister Sholl; Peter Sinnott; Ian Sproul; Jill Sutherland (Morgan); Louise Svensson (nee Belinskis); Eliza Tarpey; Jessica Tarpey; Peter Tarpey; Sabine Voermans; Jeff Watkinson; Susan Weis (nee Heinz); Noam White; Linda Wilson.

**Owners & servant descendants:** Margaret Campion (Walsh); Marion Crouch (Walsh); Keryn Lilley (Walsh); Bob Maver; Lorraine Palmer (Watson); Meaghan Trenfield (Watson); Margaret Watson; Peter & Jean Watson; Collette Wengrove (Kazer); Lawrie Wengrove (Kazer); Rena Wengrove (Kazer).

**Visitors:** Rozzi Bazzani; Kate Bond; Julius Colman; Frida Eierweis; Srebrenka Kunek; Ian Laurie-Rhodes; Mrs Stienitz; Ivan Susz; Sara Zipor.

**Neighbours:** Abigail Cooper; Andrea Cooper; Betty Hogan.

**Ferguson & Urie (makers of stained glass window) descendant:** Ray Brown.