

Profile of a President

by Wendy Wilkins,
Friends Review editor

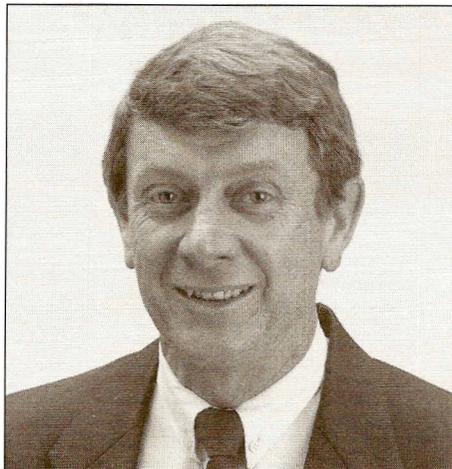
The new President, Max Dingle, is an intense, enigmatic presence. He speaks in a quiet voice that compels close listening. And rewards it: Max is a man of many parts.

Born in Maryborough in Queensland, and brought up at Hervey Bay, Max left school at 14 and a half to join the navy to train as an electronics engineer. After working on aircraft for 12 years he took a radically different career path and enrolled at the National Arts School as a full-time art student, immersing himself in painting, screenprinting, sculpture and ceramics. Emerging from this saturation in aesthetics, Max began renovating & selling houses and teaching at night, to finance his first house-cum-studio. He then joined the University Co-operative Bookshop, becoming senior manager before leaving to set up an architectural bookshop at the Sydney Design and Information Centre, then on to the Australian Museum in 1984, where he was appointed Head of Community Relations in 1987. Max is now Assistant Director, Commercial and Visitor Services, at the Australian National Maritime Museum. Clearly, Max's managerial side has been ascendant in recent years, but the artist's sensibility endures: there have been works in half a dozen group exhibitions, two one-man shows of sculpture, and occasional exhibitions of ceramics and screen prints.

In 1983 Max bought 45 hectares at Sussex Inlet and built a house, conceived and designed as a work of art which would accommodate not just the landscape in which it sits but also the lifestyle of the occupant. Within, there is a fine collection of abstract art by Australian artists, Australian women abstract artists particularly.

Max's philosophy is premised on his firm belief that in this world of mass production people are looking for authenticity and quality in their lifestyle, for things that will mark them as individuals. The museum experience is in essence and by definition an individual one, and belonging to a Friends group enhances this experience.

Max has also always felt strongly that people should contribute to society, and in their vastly different ways, his military and artistic experiences have been all about this, about the worth of an individual's contribution to society. In the navy and also as an artist, Max felt that he was giving something back. His work at the Australian Museum intensified this



concern, and explains why he became so involved right from the beginning with the Australian Museum Society, membership providing an ideal way of connecting with the community. After he left the Museum Max joined TAMS council, became interested in the AFFM, and now ... well, it's more or less taken over: He's wound up as President of AFFM and is organising the 1999 World Congress of the WFFM.

Max is a member of the Friends of Bangarra Dance Theatre and a subscriber of the Sydney Dance Company. He goes to every contemporary dance performance in Sydney and attends every Adelaide Festival primarily for dance. He is a Friend of the Adelaide Festival and a supporter of the Griffin Theatre and the Performance Space. Max is a volunteer and prime mover at the Lady Denman Heritage Complex in Jervis Bay, which combines his interests in museums, in maritime heritage, and in community. There is a strong element of Aboriginal history and culture at the Lady Denman, and Max's interest in Aboriginal art is in a way an extension of this. He finds this art fascinating not merely as art but for its spirituality, and in the way it is changing, evolving, before our very eyes.

Another obsession is food - theory of, history of, the social meaning of food, the pleasures of cooking - and, there it is again, the notion of giving something back to the community. Always, Max comments, social interaction between peoples is over food. There is a clear connection.

Max is Chairman of the Planning Committee for the Tenth Congress, which is a challenging and exciting position, but his ambitions and concerns are for Australia and for Australian Friends. That said, it is a good feeling to be a part of an international community.