



With his 'Citizen of the Revolution' sculpture in the background, Murray Walker surveys the raw materials of his art.

Artist finds inspiration in a river's debris

Flotsam and jetsam thrill Murray Walker, the Melbourne artist. When he picks up a lump of old wood, you think he might start cuddling it.

Mr Walker was at one of his favorite spots yesterday, a Yarra inlet in wasteland off Appleton Dock Road, Footscray. You could walk to the city in 15 minutes, yet here was a wilderness. You would not believe the tonnes and tonnes of flotsam and jetsam that tides have piled up there.

One end of the pile has been compacted by decades of pressure. "It is a metaphor for life," Mr Walker said, and turned to indicate the city buildings. "Out there, everything is compacted. Everything is controlled and put into compartments. When I come to this part of Melbourne, I have a great sense of freedom."



LAHEY AT LARGE

Glancing over this dump, which he considers a thing of beauty, he said: "Look at the patterns and rhythms of the older detritus. The tides and the pressure have compacted it that way." Yes. How clear they were once he had pointed them out. Patterns and rhythms. Many painters would like their work to be as lovely.

Mr Walker also pointed out that the detritus had been compacted roughly into the shape of

a ship's prow. This pleased him a lot. Here was an image appropriate to his three years of scavenging on this pile and other Yarra piles around the port of Melbourne.

For three years, once a week, he has been selecting pieces of flotsam and jetsam and turning them into objects of art. Today, his exhibition of more than 100 assemblages, sculptures and other objects goes on show at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. It is called "The River, the Port, the Journey".

He sees the port as the place that embodies the cultural identity of the city, because it is here that people arrive and depart, and it is here that their refuse from a continuing journey so often returns.

He said yesterday: "Here we

have a river that has brought settlers and cultural commodities, and all their traditions, presumptions and prejudices, and here it is all compacted in this new land. So I see the port as the traditional place of transferring spiritual and material culture. You could not do this sort of thing with Tullamarine Airport. It is too young to have the tradition."

The oldest treasures Mr Walker has found on his scavenging are shards of ships' crockery, presumably thrown overboard. He now has a collection of broken crockery bearing the names of sailing ships and steam ships that used the port of Melbourne last century. His most macabre finds were pieces of human bodies. "I left them where they were," he said.