



Source: Ewen MacAskill and Simon Tisdall, 'A year on, Ahmadinejad's popularity is soaring', *Guardian Unlimited*, 21/06/06.

Tags: art, death, water, plants

Writer/s: Anne Brennan, Barbara Campbell

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

Was it brass or copper? The metal was so tarnished now they could no longer tell. A small area would need to be tested. The two women surveyed the object: their eyes moving from the narrow opening at eye level, down the sloping sides of the elongated cone, down to the base where the cone fanned out to form an open mouth. And it was down near that gentle turning point that the blacksmith began to rub: small, clockwise motions that opened up a bright window of golden ochre the size of a 20-cent piece. The other woman bent down to inspect. It was certainly brass as she had expected but there was something else there in the brightness. A sleeping mark had been awakened. It was his signature—NR—and a date—'93. She even knew how the mark had been made. The circular burs cut by the small electrical engraver were clearly visible. She could see him holding the tool, could hear the sound of the rotating bit.

The blacksmith advised against soldering. Instead, a base would be glued inside the large opening, changing the object from horn to vessel. It would be ready in a few days.

The morning arrived dark, cold and wet, challenging all those who would normally be asleep at such an hour to prove themselves ready for this day. Three hundred and sixty-five days were needed to move the earth around the sun and now the earth was back in the same position as it had been one year ago. One year and one day ago the world was as it should be but one year ago all that had changed. That date—when the number of daylight hours had equalled the number of night-time hours—was when he had been taken out of the world; out of the spinning earth and away from them.

The sun had risen at 7.22 a.m. but the sun would not show itself that day. The hour of their rising was directed by the moon. It was the weight of this body that pulled the tides in and out and regulated the moments when the in would become out and the out would become in. Such was the complexity of this phenomenon that those who dwelt by the sea and those whose livelihoods depended on the sea needed to consult a book of tables.

The elderly man possessed such a book and all had gathered around the previous evening to consult it. The tide would turn at 9.44 a.m. and then the water would start to flow into the bay again. They must be able to stand on the beach with the water still flowing out into Bass Strait toward the Antarctic continent. This is the direction in which his ashes would flow.

She had arrived before the others with the vessel. She

placed the tall brass cone on the edge of the beach. Into the narrow opening at the top she inserted a leafless branch whose stem had grown at such a violent angle as to be almost horizontal. The wind caught it immediately and used it as a [weathervane](#).

Later in the day the elderly man, his father, gathered them on the beach again. He had observed something earlier and wanted them to see it too. As they huddled together in their different coloured anoraks, he pointed at the bushes growing on the banks of the channel; how they were forced by the wind to grow horizontally, thwarting his desires for a vertical life. She smiled, thinking how pleased the son would be at the father's observation.

I have sought the comfort of a linear narrative to explain the passing of that first year. I have even made myself into a character, someone referred to in the third person who could live the year for me. I could read it out loud and almost believe that it had been that simple. But you know, don't you, that it's not nearly so simple. You will not be surprised to hear that for her on that morning on the beach, instead of feeling the intensity of the moment of release, she felt instead, a strange detachment: as if the promise of that day had not been fulfilled and she would have to wait even longer to feel whatever it was she was meant to feel. So tell me, my friend in a faraway continent, tell me.

*I read recently that our experience of time is not linear. Rather, its topology is more like a crumpled handkerchief. I found this in a book about contemporary fashion. He would have liked that, I thought. He would have enjoyed the humbleness of the metaphor, and he would have laughed at me for the source.*

*These days, a year after, I see that it is a matter of time after all. The theory about the handkerchief is this: we are not separated from the past by fixed temporal distances. If we were to think, instead, of the span of time as a surface like a piece of crumpled cloth, we might imagine its folds bringing parts of it together, touching, overlapping, so that events in the past are brought into proximity with the present. The person who wrote this was thinking of history, but she might have been thinking of all of us, caressing the photographs, touching the clothing, carrying the medals, kissing the monuments in anticipation of that instant of temporal collapse, when we are brought briefly together and are closer than we think.*

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from stories by Barbara Campbell and Anne Brennan.*