



## Introduction

A man surrounded by friends finds the road leading to the country of his dreams. He follows the road eagerly, taking his friends with him. But the path proves to be less well charted than he had foreseen. The man has to continue by himself, with a torch so that he doesn't lose sight of the path, his dream, or his friends.

The road consists of clay, water and fire, and the dream represents creativity through clay. With the enthusiasm of all beginnings everything seems to be a game for him. But the more he progresses the more he realises the wealth hidden in the potter's craft, and the more he has to guard his solitude...<sup>1</sup>

Anne Dangar's (AD) story is an exceptional one. It is of an artist who in 1930 left her home town of Sydney and arrived almost penniless in the tiny community of Moly-Sabata, just south of Lyon on the banks of the Rhône, France's largest river. At Moly, which had been established as an artists' colony in 1927 by the French cubist painter Albert Gleizes and his wife, she took up her life's work—the craft of traditional pottery.<sup>2</sup> AD pursued her craft single mindedly by undertaking an apprenticeship with the male potters of nearby St Désirat and Annonay and working with many others in the surrounding region. Despite many obstacles to her success, AD proved herself not only to her male peers

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1 Daniel de Montmollin, *La poterie*, Ateliers Melottée, Haute Provence, 1965. (Translated from the French original.)

2 Albert Gleizes. See Personae.

but also to her mentor Albert Gleizes, a hard taskmaster. In addition she passed on a great deal of her knowledge and values to the children of the neighbouring villages of Sablons and Serrières, and taught them to appreciate the value of art, nature and the dignity of human labour.<sup>3</sup> Of the latter she gained first-hand experience. For at Moly-Sabata she not only worked as a potter/decorator in a feudal fashion, but also had to till the soil, grow vegetables, tend the bee-hives, exchange produce with her neighbours (the farmers of the Ardèche/Isère whom she erroneously called peasants in her letters),<sup>4</sup> and, with no running water, draw water by pump both for the large garden and the old house in which she lived. Anne Dangar stayed at Moly for twenty-one years, leaving her imprint on the hearts and minds of the people of Serrières/Sablons for decades to come.

Born at Kempsey, New South Wales on 1 December 1887, Anne Dangar was a country girl with no artistic advantages whatsoever except for an inborn creative gift.<sup>5</sup> Although AD's extended family was wealthy and successful, she belonged to the only poor branch of the Dangar clan due to her father losing their money through financial mismanagement.<sup>6</sup> Her friend Grace Crowley (GC), on the other hand, came from a privileged background. The daughter of a landed family whose property, 'Glen Riddle' at Barraba in New South Wales, is often mentioned in the correspondence, Grace was born in 1890. She met AD at a sketching class conducted by Julian Ashton in 1912,<sup>7</sup> and they became close friends during their early student days at the Julian Ashton Art School, sharing a house in the Sydney suburb of Potts Point. To support her studies AD worked part-time at a small chocolate factory and later at Angus & Robertson's map store in George Street, Sydney. On completion of her course she taught with Grace at Ashton's school from 1918 until 1925.<sup>8</sup> Although in many ways a contrasting pair, Grace Crowley was

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3 Serrières, just across the Rhône where Gleizes lived in his father-in-law's large house, is in the Ardèche, and Sablons, where AD lived, is in the Isère. In earlier times the two towns reflected the division between the kingdoms of the Vivarais of France in Serrières, and the Germanic kingdom of the Dauphine at Sablons.

4 Presumably due to AD's translation of *paysan*, farmer or agriculturalist, into 'peasant'.

5 Grace Crowley, Biographical Outline of Anne Dangar, Art Gallery of New South Wales [AGNSW] Archives, Sydney.

6 *ibid.*, p. 7. In a letter dated 18 March 1951, AD compared her sister Ruby with their father who never looked ahead and spent everything he had.

7 Julian Ashton. See *Personae*.

8 Grace Crowley, Biography, ms., AGNSW Archives, Sydney.

the only Australian fully to understand AD as an artist and to appreciate her unusual personality. This was no doubt due in large part to the amount of time they spent together in these early, formative years during which time they shared confidences, established trust and cemented their friendship.

In 1926 Anne Dangar and Grace Crowley travelled to Europe to continue their studies in France and live together in Paris until 1928. While it was not unusual in the interwar period for Australian women artists to study overseas before returning to Australia to communicate to others what they had learned in Europe, the majority chose to go to London rather than Paris. However AD and GC were interested in modernist art from France, and during their European sojourn found themselves greatly influenced by various interpretations of cubism. Initially the two women were attracted to the work of the cubist painter André Lhote.<sup>9</sup> With fellow Australian artist Dorrit Black they attended his summer school at Mirmande, a town in the Drôme south of Valence, where they painted the landscape according to Cézanne's principles.<sup>10</sup> But it was when Anne Dangar saw some of Gleizes' paintings that her life-course was set irrevocably. Instantly impressed by his work, she later recalled the moment for her students at Moly-Sabata.

I had seen the pictures of Mr Gleizes in the Salon des Tuileries in June 1928. After having looked at hundreds of canvasses in this exhibition, I reached the depths of the wooden building and found myself in a little room with three large outstanding pictures. In front of these canvases, I was filled with a perfect satisfaction with an internal joy that the Hindus call 'intellectual beatitude' and describe as a 'savourous taste'.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Anne's enthusiasm for her studies, in particular Gleizes' work, she was unable to remain in France. For a while Grace's family helped her financially in the pursuit of her career—Grace's father, for example, paid the fare to Paris while her brother Wilfrid sent a regular allowance—AD had to make her own way. Thus she was forced to go home considerably earlier than Grace as she no longer had the resources to stay. Later she wrote of this moment:

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9 André Lhote. See *Personae*.

10 Dorrit Black; Paul Cézanne. See *Personae*.

11 Anne Dangar, Notes for classes given at Moly-Sabata, August 1949, Gleizes ms., Ampuy, quoted in Peter Brook, *Albert Gleizes: For and Against the Twentieth Century*, unpub. ms., 1996, p. 5.