

ROCKHAMPTON
ART
GALLERY

explorer pack



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Rockhampton Art Gallery is owned and operated by Rockhampton Regional Council

explorer pack

This education resource has been designed to support the exhibition *Cream: four decades of Australian art* and to encourage meaningful connections to the permanent collection of Rockhampton Art Gallery. Designed as a starting point for generating ideas and discussions, this resource can be used during your gallery visit, in the classroom, or at home for your own enjoyment.

This pack contains 12 cards that feature reproductions of key works within the permanent collection of Rockhampton Art Gallery. Highlighting major themes within Australian Modernism, each card provides an image of the focus artwork, an overview and a series of questions and activities for early years, primary and secondary students.

Specific areas of interest for students:

Art forms: printmaking, drawing, painting, collage, photography

Art movements: modernism, abstraction,

Subject matter: landscape, portraiture, still life, narrative

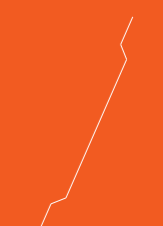
Visual devices: design elements (line, shape, colour, tone, texture, space, value and time),
design principles (repetition, contrast, balance, movement, perspective, harmony)

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Educators are invited to select and modify as appropriate for individual students and classes. The questions and activities are to be used as prompts and provide opportunities for different levels of engagement for each phase of learning. The final prompt on each card offers a broad interpretive question and is intended for encouraging learning beyond secondary school level.

The Explorer Pack has been written to align with the Australian Curriculum and promotes engagement with concepts of artists, artworks and audience. Discussion questions and activities encourage practical and critical thinking skills as students respond to artworks and make their own representations. This resource incorporates the Cross Curriculum Priorities of the Australian Curriculum and encourages learning across disciplines.





Charles BLACKMAN [Figure with flowers] 1955 © Charles Blackman/Licensed by Viscopy 2013

Charles BLACKMAN

b. 1928

[Figure with flowers] 1955

oil on cardboard laid on board | 94.3 x 68.7 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1977

*I am a romantic painter, (but not sweet) – oh no. That's wrong. Dreams are what you're made of, and very often nightmares, too. A dream is quintessentially a reality when it is fulfilled.*¹

Charles Blackman was a major figure in Australian art, particularly in the development of postwar modernism in Melbourne. He was also a member of the Antipodeans, a group that supported figurative art and was opposed to abstraction. Blackman came to prominence with a series of works begun in 1952–53. These were paintings of figures, including schoolgirls, which appear in empty urban or industrial landscapes. The surreal and sinister imagery shows Blackman's interest in contrasting the innocence of childhood, with a sense of impending menace.

In December 1954, Charles, and his wife Barbara, had travelled to Avonsleigh in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne to visit fellow artists Joy Hester and Gray Smith. They rented a nearby farmhouse for approximately six months, and Blackman started a series of landscape, flower and figurative works. [Figure with flowers] is from 1955 and relates to this particular time and place. Blackman used his wife and friends as models. This painting shows a girl in a blue dress, wearing black Mary Janes, holding a bunch of flowers, and staring at the viewer with her eyes wide open.

Barbara had impaired vision, and her reliance on Blackman's eyesight sharpened his artistic observation. His empathy with her predicament led him to focus on haunting and enchanting images of women and girls, and on portraits depicting figures with huge, dark, expressive eyes.

¹ Charles Blackman in Sue Smith, 'Review', *Courier Mail*, 6 March 1999.

EARLY

Explain what objects you see in this artwork.

What do you think the girl is doing in this painting?

Do you like the way the artist has painted this artwork? Explain why.

PRIMARY

Write down everything that you can see in this artwork. What do you think is happening? Explain why you think this.

The artist has used contrasting colours in this artwork. Photocopy a photograph of yourself and add paint, oil crayon and black pen to show the use of contrasting colours.

Describe the expression on the girl's face. What do you think the artist is trying to make you feel when you look at this artwork? Explain why.

SECONDARY

Suggest why the girl in the painting might be picking flowers. Describe the mood of the artwork. Do you think that the mood reflects the activity of picking flowers? Explain why.

Can you think of the story the artist might be trying to convey about the young girl? What might an alternative title be?

The term 'sinister imagery' has been used to describe some of Charles Blackman's artwork. Do you think there is something sinister or uneasy being conveyed in this artwork? Explain why.

***DOES THIS FIGURE BELONG IN THIS LANDSCAPE?
ELABORATE ON THIS QUESTION AND USE RESEARCHED
EVIDENCE TO JUSTIFY YOUR ARGUMENT.**



Arthur BOYD *Woman in a jinker* 1976 © Reproduced with permission of Bundanon Trust

Arthur BOYD

1920–1999

Woman in a jinker 1976

oil on canvas | 182.7 x 175.3 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1976

Arthur Boyd belonged to a unique artistic dynasty. His grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters all engaged in creative pursuits including art, architecture, writing and music. Work and family life were intertwined with the arts, and painting, drawing and modelling with clay were encouraged. Naturally, Boyd became an artist, and during the 1940s and 1950s Boyd was recognised for his figurative landscape paintings of the inland Wimmera region and of Berwick outside Melbourne.

He first encountered the Shoalhaven River in New South Wales in January 1972, when he and his wife Yvonne were invited by art dealer Frank MacDonald to visit Bundanon, a property on the river. This visit was a turning point. Boyd purchased Riversdale on the Shoalhaven in 1974, then Bundanon itself in 1979, and began his celebrated series of works about life on the river.

Woman in a jinker is part of that series. Boyd returned to painting *en plein air* and took pleasure in depicting the searing white light and the vast rocky and timbered outcrops. The horse and jinker is a recurrent subject in other paintings. Boyd used the jinker as a poetic motif but also to evoke fear and symbolise death. Here the driver is a wild heroine with streaming hair who spurs her horse towards a treacherous gully and cliff overlooking the quiet Shoalhaven. Boyd's ability to weave emotionally charged themes through a strange and sometimes harsh landscape helped position him as one of Australia's greatest artists.

EARLY

Where in Australia do you think this artwork has been painted? How can you tell? Describe what you see in this artwork to a friend.

A jinker is a cart or trailer used to transport timber. Describe the woman riding the jinker. Look carefully for her reflection in the water. Draw the woman on a piece of paper or card.

PRIMARY

Arthur Boyd enjoyed painting Australian landscapes. Write down as many colours that you see in this landscape. How might they be a reflection of the colours you would see in an Australian landscape?

Find images from the internet or magazines of places in Australia. Recreate one of these images using colours similar to the colours used in Boyd's landscape.

Imagine you are telling the legend of the 'woman in a jinker' around a campfire. Write a descriptive paragraph to explain what is happening in the artwork. What happens next?

SECONDARY

Research other paintings by Arthur Boyd where he features a woman in a jinker. Compare and contrast the images. What significance does water have in this narrative?

Using magazines, find pictures of what we use today instead of jinkers. Using collage techniques, reinterpret *Woman in a jinker* in a contemporary context by using contemporary vehicles, settings and characters.

*BOYD HAS USED THE JINKER TO SYMBOLISE DEATH. RESEARCH AND DESCRIBE HOW HE HAS CREATED THIS ALLEGORY IN AN AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT.



John BRACK *Portrait of Lyn Williams* 1976 © Helen Brack

John BRACK

1920–1999

Portrait of Lyn Williams 1976

oil on linen | 129.6 x 96.8 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1977

Many regard John Brack as Australia's pre-eminent artist of his time. His images of people and places in Melbourne bear a distinct personal style. They portray postwar urban culture through irony, humour and metaphor, with a well-developed understanding of art history.

Brack became a celebrated portrait painter. Fellow artists, friends and family sat for him in his studio, and he observed people in the wider community at work and at play. Brack said of his portraits:

[They] are not simply a sort of photograph appearance of the subject. I call them cerebral paintings. I am interested in obtaining a synthesis which is a commentary on the subject and human conditions. The portrait is not just the subject but what he means in the past, the present and the future.¹

In 1976, Brack painted a portrait of Lyn Williams, who was the wife of his fellow artist and close friend Fred Williams. To help make the final painting, Brack completed two graphite studies: one a full portrait sketch and the other a study for Lyn's hands. Brack, a measured painter, made sketches in pen-and-ink and graphite before commencing each painting.

In *Portrait of Lyn Williams*, the work is balanced by vertical composition: angular floorboards lead the eye to the sitter's face. She sits relaxed, with her hands in her lap and looking into the middle distance. Helen Brack, the wife of John Brack, has said that 'the people John felt he knew about he placed at the frontal picture plane'.²

- 1 John Brack interview, *Herald*, Melbourne, 30 November 1965. Robert Lindsay, 'The Figure in the Carpet: some literary and visual sources in the work of John Brack', in *John Brack*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1987, p. 17.
- 2 Helen Brack in *Portraits by John Brack*, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, 2007, p. 19.

EARLY

Who do you think this woman might be? Where do you think she is? Explain why you think this.

What colours can you see? Has the artist used colours that are the same or different from each other?

Imagine you are sitting in the chair. What would you be wearing? What colour would you wear? What does this colour say about you?

PRIMARY

Describe the lines used in this artwork. Why do you think the artist has done this?

Draw a portrait of someone you know. What do you want to say about the subject of your portrait?

John Brack composes his artworks very carefully. Composition describes how artists rearrange the elements and principles of art within their work. This artwork has a vertical composition. How does the artist do this? Explain your answer by describing the use of line, colour and tone in this artwork.

SECONDARY

Create a grid on a piece of tracing paper or clear plastic. Look at this artwork through the grid. What do you notice?

Research other artworks by John Brack. Does the grid reveal similarities in composition with his other artworks? Create your own portrait using the grid to guide you in your composition.

*DISCUSS HOW JOHN BRACK'S EXPLORATION OF URBAN AND SUBURBAN THEMES CHALLENGES POPULAR IDEAS ABOUT AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY.



John COBURN

1925–2006

Tropic of Capricorn 1975

oil on canvas | 140 x 158 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1977

John Coburn was a leading Australian abstract artist who worked in painting, tapestry, and printmaking. He had a love of European modern artists, including Henri Matisse and Paul Gauguin. Their work and lives demonstrated to Coburn that through abstraction he could bring colour, tone and form to his two passions: the landscape and the spiritual. These preoccupations of landscape and spirituality intersect in Coburn's highly individual depiction of landscape as flat abstraction with symbolic shapes in varying colours placed across the canvas.

He stated in an interview:

I've always been very interested in the quality of shapes and the distribution of the shapes all over the canvas, and the relationship of tones. A certain tonal quality has always been very important to me.¹

Tropic of Capricorn shows Coburn's particular style. The canvas is divided in half, between the baked brown earth and a red evening sky. Flat crescent and hourglass shapes, circles and concave-sided rectangles in multiple hues seem to hover in this two-dimensional space. Though apparently simple in colour and form, Coburn has achieved a dynamic treatment of space through the controlled process of working up sketches and translating them to the final painting. Through using abstraction, Coburn was able to combine a very specific Australian experience of vivid colour and landscape with a personal religious faith.

1 Interview with John Coburn, 30 May 1979, James Gleeson Oral History Collection <http://nga.gov.au/Research/Gleeson/Default.cfm> accessed 18 November 2013.

EARLY

What shapes can you see in this artwork? Describe the colours that you see.

What shapes and colours do you see in your school playground? Use these colours to make your own artwork by cutting out shapes from coloured paper.

PRIMARY

An abstract artwork means the artist has used shapes, forms, lines and colours to show a theme or tell a story. Make a list of all the shapes you see in this artwork. Do the shapes remind you of anything? Redraw the artwork and label what each shape might represent.

What type of place is being depicted in this artwork? What visual clues has the artist used to express his ideas? What do you think the artist is saying about this place? Look at the title of this artwork. What is the *Tropic of Capricorn*?

What do you think a landscape should look like? Ask a classmate to draw while you describe a landscape to them. Does it look like what you imagined?

SECONDARY

Find other examples of abstract landscapes. Do you like abstraction? Why or why not? How do you think the audience would have reacted to this artwork when it was first displayed?

Discuss the use of shape, colour and composition in John Coburn's landscape. Which element or elements do you think creates the most visual impact? Explain your opinion.

*DISCUSS HOW COBURN USES VISUAL DEVICES TO CONVEY PLACE, TIME AND MEANING.



Noel COUNIHAN *Albert Namatjira* 1959 © Estate of Noel Counihan

Noel COUNIHAN

1913–1986

Albert Namatjira 1959

linocut on paper | 55.7 x 22.7 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1977

Noel Counihan was a cartoonist, painter, illustrator and printmaker. He was also a communist and a political activist—as the title of Bernard Smith’s biography of his friend indicates, he was both ‘artist and revolutionary’.¹ Counihan travelled, worked and exhibited both in Australia and abroad, and was committed to challenging social inequalities through his art.

Counihan taught himself the art of linocutting and in 1959 produced a suite of linocuts, which included *Albert Namatjira*. This linocut shows Counihan’s passionate concern for the well being of Aboriginal Australians. He promoted the work of Albert Namatjira, an artist from the Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission west of Alice Springs, who created watercolour landscapes of the surrounding MacDonnell Ranges.

The art establishment generally rejected Namatjira’s work, but in the broader population he was celebrated as a model of assimilation, and in 1957 was granted Australian citizenship.² Namatjira had endured years of tensions and difficulties. When he died in 1959 of heart failure Counihan completed the linocut, which shows the artist crucified. This image was published in the newspaper, the *Guardian* in 1959 with an article by Counihan, in which he honoured Namatjira and also challenged the treatment of Aboriginal Australians. Later Counihan stated:

He was a man between two cultures, and I respected him very much. I felt that something should be done about his tragic end, so I did a sort of a crucifixion figure, with Namatjira crucified.³

- 1 Bernard Smith, *Noel Counihan: artist and revolutionary*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993.
- 2 Sylvia Kleinert, ‘Albert Namatjira’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/namatjira-albert-elea-11217/text19999>, accessed 19 November 2013.
- 3 Interview with Noel Counihan, 2 November 1979, James Gleeson Oral History Collection. <http://nga.gov.au/Research/Gleeson/Default.cfm> accessed 18 November 2013.

EARLY

This artwork is done by making a print. Rather than drawing or painting, the artist transfers a picture from one object onto a surface.

Flatten out a piece of plasticine, then using different bits and pieces, press into the surface of the plasticine. When you have made an interesting image, roll on some paint and carefully lay a piece of paper over the top and gently rub the back of the page. Remove the page to reveal your print. See how many prints you can make.

PRIMARY

When an artist creates a linocut print, parts of the image that will not be printed on to the paper are cut away from the lino with a sharp tool. Can you see the solid areas of black ink? These areas have been not been cut away. Explore this effect by using white chalk on black paper or card.

Look at the artwork. Describe what you see. Where have you seen similar images? The artist has used a popular story to tell us about someone. What story has the artist used? Why do you think the artist has used this story?

SECONDARY

Who was Albert Namatjira? What is his story? Why do you think the artist told the story of Albert Namatjira in this way? Create a headline for a newspaper that summarises Noel Counihan’s intention.

Printmaking allows an artist to make multiple versions of their artwork. Poster art can convey social and political messages. Create a poster using a linocut print that comments on a current political or social issue.

* RESEARCH AND ANALYSE CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN AUSTRALIAN ART.



William DARGIE *Portrait of Rex Pilbeam* [Mayor of Rockhampton 1952–1982] 1977 © Rockhampton Art Gallery

William DARGIE

1912–2003

Portrait of Rex Pilbeam [Mayor of Rockhampton 1952–82] 1977

oil on canvas | 101.5 x 83.9 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1977

William Dargie could not be considered a modern painter. He preferred to work in the style of academic tonal realism. This technique drew on the scientific and analytical approach of the Max Meldrum school, whereby tonal values were laid down in a particular order.¹ Given his interest in science and mathematics and his passion for the arts, this practical philosophy suited Dargie. This was a very popular style of painting with the general public, and Dargie completed three, or four portrait commissions a year. He won Australia's most prestigious art prize, the Archibald Prize for portraiture held by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, a record eight times.

In 1977, Rockhampton City Council commissioned Dargie to complete a portrait of the Mayor of Rockhampton, Rex Pilbeam. The painting was made over six sessions, with each lasting two hours. Pilbeam was Mayor of Rockhampton for thirty years, and during that time modernised the city—sealing roads, improving the town's water supply, and creating recreation facilities.² Pilbeam is depicted seated, wearing a grey pinstripe suit with maroon tie, and sporting a neat moustache. The work neither hints at a gregarious character once shot at by a former lover, nor indicates that this was a man who would pitch in at a working bee or walk door to door to raise money for an Olympic swimming pool.³ Rather, this is a far-from-modern portrait of the very model of a responsible civic leader.

- 1 Bernard Smith with Terry Smith and Christopher Heathcote, *Australian Painting 1788–2000*, 4th edition, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2001, p. 179.
- 2 See Doug Tucker, 'Transforming a Provincial City: the Pilbeam mayoralty in Rockhampton 1952–1982', in *Queensland Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1, May 2003, pp.163–174.
- 3 Taylor, 'Transforming a Provincial City', p. 170.

EARLY

This artwork is a portrait. Where have you seen other portraits before? Who do you think this man was? Why do you think this?

Draw a portrait of one of your friends. Ask them to pose while you draw them. Do you want them sitting on a chair like the man in this portrait, or will you draw them doing something else?

PRIMARY

Portraits are a way of showing how someone looks, and can also show how powerful or important a person is. This portrait of Rex Pilbeam was painted when he was the Mayor of Rockhampton. What can we tell about Rex Pilbeam by looking at his portrait?

Who is someone important to your town from the past or present? If you were to create a portrait of them, describe what it would look like. Explain why you would paint him or her in this way.

Compare this portrait of Rex Pilbeam with a real photograph. Has the artist changed anything about his likeness?

SECONDARY

Who was William Dargie? How do you think people would have reacted when they heard he was commissioned to paint this portrait of Rex Pilbeam? Think about the ideas of power and status, and truth and likeness, in your response.

Compare this work to portraits painted by Russell Drysdale and John Brack. Discuss the differences and similarities. Do you think a portrait says something about the relationship between the subject and the artist? Discuss your response with a classmate.

*COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE PORTRAIT OF REX PILBEAM TO THE PORTRAIT KING HENRY VIII ATTRIBUTED TO HANS HOLBEIN AT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY IN LONDON. ELABORATE ON THE MOTIVES FOR COMMISSIONING EACH WORK.



Russell DRYSDALE *Outback postmistress and daughter* 1976 © Estate of Russell Drysdale

Russell DRYSDALE

1912–1981

Outback postmistress and daughter 1976

oil on canvas | 91 x 71.1 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1977

The work of Russell Drysdale, particularly his outback landscapes, is charged with defining a new era in the depiction of the Australian bush. His stark images of towns, migrant workers, farmers and Indigenous people present a much harsher reality than do the artists of the Heidelberg School. His work can also be viewed in the context of European painting traditions and a Modernist aesthetic.

Drysdale came from a family of pioneers and pastoralists, so had an intimate understanding of life on the land, and out in the bush. Yet, Drysdale was primarily a studio painter who worked from notes, drawings and photographs. His work, which combined the ordinary with the heroic, was widely embraced at home, particularly by newly arrived immigrants seeking a sense of postwar identity and belonging.

Outback postmistress and daughter, was painted towards the end of Drysdale's life. It has the intimacy of a portrait while presenting an archetypal image once familiar in the outback. Mother and daughter are distanced from the viewer not only by the physical barrier of the serving counter but also by the languid unresponsiveness of their facial expressions. The mother averts her eyes and we are drawn into the painting by the curious yet closed gaze of the daughter.

EARLY

Look at the people in this painting. Why do you think the artist wanted to share their story?

How do you think the artist painted this image? Look carefully at the artwork – pretend you have a brush in your hand and make the same movements that you think the artist used to paint. Explain why you think this.

PRIMARY

Describe what is happening in this portrait. Look at the image and then close your eyes. When you open your eyes which character do you look to first? Why is this? What do you think this character's personal story might be?

Imagine you are going to recreate a photograph of this portrait. Choose two of your classmates and move them so that they look the same as the people in the painting. CLICK! Ask your teacher to view your 'live portrait' to see how it compares to the artwork.

SECONDARY

Consider the use of colour, and texture in this portrait. Discuss why and how the artist has used these visual elements to convey meaning. Find other examples of his artworks that explore similar themes.

Drysdale had a great empathy for people living in the outback and often emphasised Australian qualities of life on the land. Write a journal entry from the perspective of the postmistress or her daughter. What have they have been doing? How did they feel? What else could be happening in their lives?

*ANALYSE DRYSDALE'S CHOICE OF SUBJECT AND HOW THIS CONTRIBUTES TO AUSTRALIAN MODERNISM.



Sidney NOLAN *Burke in central Australia* 1964 © The Artist's Estate. All rights reserved 2013/Bridgeman Art Library

Sidney NOLAN

1917–1992

Burke in central Australia 1964

oil on composition board | 122.2 x 122.2 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1976

An important influence on Sidney Nolan occurred when he joined mail-run flights in central Australia in 1949. He was able to view ancient ranges from an aerial perspective, which inspired a new direction in his landscape painting. The resulting paintings were of blue skies and of red and brown arid ranges and plains that seem to stretch forever.

Nolan combined landscape painting with re-imagining stories from Australia's colonial past, notably the exploits of bushranger Ned Kelly, but also the shipwreck of Mrs Fraser, the Eureka Stockade, and the story the explorers Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills. Nolan wrote:

I think that wanting to paint Burke and Wills really comes from a need to freshen history and to make these remote happenings really belong to us now ... I doubt that I will ever forget my emotions when first flying over Central Australia and realising how much we painters and poets owe to our predecessors the explorers, with their frail bodies and superb willpower.¹

Burke in central Australia was completed in 1964, some fifteen years after Nolan's initial visit into Australia's outback. Burke sits on camel, and below them the land drops dramatically away to an empty riverbed, and beyond it the sun-baked outback lies empty. Nolan painted epic histories in epic landscapes, and in this picture he conveys both the futility of Burke's venture, but also the beauty and danger of the desert.

¹ Sidney Nolan to Geoffrey Dutton, 28 April 1967, London, Cynthia Nolan Papers, quoted in Geoffrey Smith, *Sidney Nolan: desert and drought*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2003, p. 20.

EARLY

Create a landscape using your fingers and hands. Make the picture by smearing and wiping back the paint to create marks.

What colours do you see? Are they cold or hot colours? Use magazines and scrap paper to cut or tear different shades of red, brown and blue. Glue your colours on a page to create an image of a hot and dry place.

PRIMARY

Look at the marks the artist has made as he painted this work. Describe how Sidney Nolan would be moving as he painted this. Use crayons and paint to create an imaginary landscape using the same movements and marks as Sidney Nolan.

Look carefully at the image of Burke on the camel. Describe how he looks. Is it what you expect? Write a short paragraph to describe why this part of the image is important to the landscape.

Think of an event in Australian history that you find interesting. Draw your own interpretation.

SECONDARY

This artwork presents a sense of a great, vast landscape. What compositional devices has Sidney Nolan used to emphasise space and place?

Nolan created paintings that are considered iconic because they mythologise Australian history. What is the difference between re-telling history and imagining history? Research the history of Burke and Wills's exploration through Australia. What has Nolan changed to re-tell their story?

ANALYSE NOLAN'S NED KELLY SERIES AS WELL AS HIS OTHER PAINTINGS THAT DEPICT BURKE AND WILLS. HOW DOES NOLAN EXPLORE CONCEPTS OF AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY IN HIS PAINTINGS?



John PERCEVAL *Nativity scene II* 1948 © John Perceval/Licensed by Viscopy 2013

John PERCEVAL

1923–2000

Nativity scene II 1948

oil and tempera on canvas | 75.9 x 121.7 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1977

In the late 1940s John Perceval created a series of religious-themed works within an Australian setting. *Nativity scene II* is a lively modern version of the biblical story of the birth of Jesus. Joseph is overjoyed to meet his newborn son, who lies in a basket while Mary, who is seated on a stool, looks on. This is a scene of happy chaos. In the lower-left corner a little girl cheekily steals an apple, and on the right a peasant and his donkey have come to meet the baby. In the background a feast is being prepared, with one hen ready for roasting and another being plucked. A cow nestled in mounds of hay looks on, while outside a shepherd tends his sheep.

Perceval loved studying the work of European masters, including Rembrandt, Tintoretto, and Bruegel. The rounded, expressive figures and the cramming of activity into a confined space show the influence of Bruegel. As art historian Traudi Allen has observed, Bruegel's influence brings 'narrative, everyday-life qualities and energy to the painting, animating and dramatizing the scene'.¹

Perceval was not a religious man and he worked in this genre for only a few years. Yet the expressive figures, love of story telling and desire to create animated work persisted in his later paintings, drawings and ceramics.

EARLY

Can you find Jesus, Mary and Joseph? What else can you see? Make a list of everything you see. Draw some of the people and objects.

Have you seen other artworks of the nativity scene before? Where do you see them displayed?

This is a very busy artwork. Imagine that you are standing in the stable. Make the noises that you might hear.

PRIMARY

John Perceval loved storytelling and paints several stories within a story. Can you see a girl stealing an apple? Draw a picture of two other stories that the artist has included in this painting.

What do you know about the story of the birth of Jesus? Why do you think the artist chose to tell a well-known story in this way?

Look at the artwork *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1646) by the artist, Rembrandt. Compare the two artworks. Explain the differences and similarities. Which one do you prefer? Explain why.

SECONDARY

Do you think this is a religious artwork? Explain your answer.

John Perceval was inspired by paintings and techniques of Brueghel. Research and analyse the work of Brueghel. Are there other similarities between the two artists? Consider the use of visual devices and the artist's intentions in your response.

*FIND, ANALYSE AND COMPARE OTHER EXAMPLES OF RELIGIOUS THEMES BY AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS.

1 Traudi Allen, *John Perceval*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1992, p. 78.



Jeffrey SMART *Fiumicino car park* 1975 © Reproduced with permission of the artist and Australian Galleries, Melbourne and Sydney

Jeffrey SMART

1921–2013

Fiumicino car park 1975

oil on canvas | 60.2 x 60 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1976

Jeffrey Smart was one of Australia's leading modern painters. Born in Adelaide in 1921, he developed a love of drawing and painting early in his life and took classes at the South Australian School of Arts. Smart wanted to be an architect, but the high costs associated with studying architecture prevented this career move.

However, his paintings show his interest in architecture, as they are carefully composed to show angles and shadows, and to represent urban life. Smart also focuses on other 'urban' and 'industrial objects' including garages, shipping containers, and oil drums. To Smart, the urban environment was as beautiful as any landscape. In 1999 he said, 'I like living in the 20th century—to me the world has never been more beautiful. I am trying to paint the real world I live in, as beautifully as I can, with my own eye'.¹

Smart moved to Italy in 1963 and *Fiumicino car park* shows a modern scene of a lonely airport car park, in this case Rome's first international airport. The place is somehow familiar—don't all airport car parks look the same? As in all his works, Smart's very deliberate placement of the figure and objects, references the strict discipline of composition employed by artists of the Renaissance. He paints using grey and brown colours, but then contrasts this by pops of bright, almost fluorescent, colour. Smart gives objects that seem ordinary, like a streetlight, parking signs and fencing, with an unlikely status of beauty and importance.

¹ Quoted in Edmund Capon, *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1999, p. 20.

EARLY

What objects do you see in this painting that are familiar to you? Draw them.

Draw three objects that you use every day on three separate sheets of paper. Without gluing them down, rearrange them onto a large piece of paper. When you know you have arranged the objects perfectly, re-draw them and finish off with colour pencils.

PRIMARY

Describe the types of lines and shapes that the artist has used. Choose your favourite feature of *Fiumicino car park* in this artwork using similar lines and shapes. Find images of other man-made objects and draw them.

Look at how Jeffery Smart has used colour in this artwork. Consider the use of tone and contrasting colours to help describe it to someone else.

Explore the ideas of horizon lines, backgrounds and foregrounds in landscapes. Draw or collage your own urban landscapes using these features.

SECONDARY

Smart was famous for painting urban landscapes showing man-made structures, often with a solitary figure. Why do you think the human figure is included in this artwork? Research other artworks by Jeffery Smart that include a figure. What similarities do you see?

Jeffery Smart's composition is complex and calculated. Using your knowledge of composition, explain the possible reasons for the placement of the figure and objects in this landscape.

*RESEARCH JEFFERY SMART'S ART MAKING PROCESS, ESPECIALLY HIS USE OF GRIDS. PHOTOGRAPH YOUR OWN URBAN SETTING AND USE THE GRID PROCESS TO MAKE YOUR OWN REPRESENTATION.



Grace Cossington SMITH *Drapery in the studio* 1940 © Estate of Grace Cossington Smith

Grace Cossington SMITH

1892–1984

Drapery in the studio 1940

oil on pulpboard | 65.5 x 57.8 cm

Rockhampton Art Gallery Trust Art Acquisition Fund 1995

Grace Cossington Smith is recognised as a post-impressionist painter. This is due mainly to how she applied paint to the canvas using a paintbrush to create short vertical strokes. Smith was inspired by the French artists Vincent van Gogh, Pierre Bonnard and Paul Cezanne, and she especially loved how they used bright colours, were interested in patterns, and that they liked to show everyday scenes. Smith applied these ideas to her own life, and so she painted scenes around her hometown of Sydney, particularly the construction of the Harbour Bridge, but also landscapes and her home life.

Cossington was Grace Smith's family home in the Sydney suburb of Turramurra. She had a studio in her house, which looked on to a garden. It is this house and garden that features so often in Smith's work, notably in her glowing interiors of the 1950s and 1960s. These complex compositions of furniture and doorways, mirrors and windows look out to or reflect the garden.

Drapery in the studio, one of her first interiors, depicts Smith's new working space. Smith experiments with how light plays on different surfaces to create subtle shifts in tone. The studio, full of warmth and light, confirms her love of the colour yellow, which she articulated later in life as 'the colour of the sun ... the colour that advances'.¹ As a viewer looking into her studio, there is a sense of privilege at being invited to look into this private world.

1 Virginia Duigan, 'A portrait of the artist at 90', *National Times*, 7–13 March 1982.

EARLY

This artist liked to paint with bright colours, especially yellow. What is your favourite colour? Can you explain why you like it? How does it make you feel?

Make your own still life arrangement by using different objects from the classroom or your home. Place them in an interesting way on a table and draw what you see.

PRIMARY

Grace Cossington Smith used short vertical brush strokes as she painted. Experiment with this style by using a picture of an object cut from a magazine. Paint over the top using this technique.

Imagine that you are in this painting. Where would you be standing? How has the artist made you feel this?

Look at the artwork of Vincent Van Gogh. Do you think Grace Cossington Smith was influenced by this artist? Explain why you think this.

SECONDARY

Take a section of this still life and draw an enlarged section. Paint with contrasting colours to explore tonal variety.

Grace Cossington Smith conveys a sense of intimacy. She invites the viewer into a private space and provides a glimpse into ordinary life. Explain how you think she does this. Consider composition in your explanation.

* RESEARCH A POST-IMPRESSIONIST OF YOUR CHOICE AND COMPARE TO GRACE COSSINGTON SMITH'S ARTWORKS.



Fred WILLIAMS *Burning tree at Upwey, Victoria* 1968 © Estate of Fred Williams

Fred WILLIAMS

1927–1982

Burning tree at Upwey, Victoria 1968

oil on canvas | 134.7 x 119.3 cm

Art Acquisition Fund, purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council 1977

Fred Williams was an innovative artist who developed a unique way of portraying the Australian landscape through abstract forms. Williams recognised the landscape had few focal points and he chose to represent the vast expanse through placing flecks of coloured paint carefully on the canvas. As one author described, “the more minimal the means, the more poetic and delicate the effect.”¹ This interest in minimalism and of placing paint shows how Williams was inspired by Chinese and Japanese art.

Williams was living with his family in Upwey, in Victoria’s Dandenong Ranges when devastating fires ravaged the area in February 1968. The weather was hot and dry, and Williams noted in his diary:

3.10pm. Running down the path—a huge pall of orange flame & enormous black clouds coming over the hill ... Many houses burn only a few hundred yards away ... Throw (10) paintings out onto the orchard ... I am exhausted.²

He painted the transformed landscape for many months after the fires, creating an extensive body of work. *Burning tree at Upwey* was started in April 1968, and depicts the remnants of the bush after the fire has passed. Despite the clusters of blackened tree stumps, one with curls of blue and purple smoke, Williams shows how much colour and life re-emerges in the landscape after bushfires.

1 Patrick McCaughey, *Fred Williams 1927–1982*, Murdoch Books, Sydney, 1996, p. 218.

2 Quoted in Deborah Hart, *Fred Williams: infinite horizons*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2011, pp. 98–9.

EARLY

Look at the marks the artist has used in this painting. What do you think they look like?

Using crayons, create similar marks, lines and smudges that the artist has used.

PRIMARY

This artwork was a part of a series of paintings about bushfires. Are these the colours you would expect to see after a bushfire? Experiment by creating contrast colour charts using similar ‘Fred William’s colours’.

Choose one section of the artwork and recreate it using similar lines. Use a stopwatch to paint quickly. Using different tools, apply the paint to the page. Experiment with delicate strokes and hard strokes. Look at the textures, lines and colours you have made – does painting quickly make a difference?

Do you feel a sense of space when you look at this artwork? As you look at this artwork, do you feel as if you are above, below or level with the landscape? Explain what you think the artist has done to make you feel this way.

SECONDARY

Consider the style of Fred Williams and how he portrays the Australian landscape. Make a checklist of five iconic features of his work. Test your checklist by researching other artworks by Williams and see if they share similar features.

Fred Williams believed there were ‘no focal points’ in the Australian landscape. Use your knowledge of composition to discuss this belief and how Williams conveyed this.

*LOOK AT THIS ARTWORK AND THE TIME IT WAS CREATED. DISCUSS AND ANALYSE *BURNING TREE AT UPWEY* IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM.