



Christopher Langton

Australian, b. 1954

*Brat Pack*, 1996

PVC, synthetic polymer paint and air  
dimensions variable

Lyon Collection of Australian Contemporary Art

# 4

## SUBJECTS AND THEMES

This chapter investigates common subjects and themes that have inspired artists throughout history. Exploring subjects and themes in art reveals clues that will help you understand artworks.

Artists have created art to tell stories, to represent people and places, to record everyday life and to reveal artists' inner and imaginary worlds.

How and why artists choose to explore particular subjects and themes can be influenced by the artists' personal experiences and beliefs, and by the historical, cultural and social context in which they work.

### Learn about:

- subjects and themes in art
- how art can be influenced and inspired by an artist's personal experiences and beliefs, and by their historical, cultural and social context.

### Learn by:

- comparing, analysing, evaluating and interpreting artworks
- discussing and communicating ideas and opinions about art
- creating your own artwork.

# THE ART OF NARRATIVE

## 4.1

### THE ART OF STORYTELLING

Artworks that tell stories are often described as **narrative**. ‘Narrative’ is another word for ‘story’.

Artists throughout history have created narrative artworks to tell stories about real and mythical events. They also tell stories about their culture, beliefs and personal experiences, and other stories from their imagination.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to learn about a related artwork by Munduwalawala.

Munduwalawala was a custodian or guardian (*djungkayi*) of his mother’s country around the Limmen Bight area of the Gulf of Carpentaria. His country includes the Four Archers, a group of rocky ridges near the Limmen Bight River and about 45 kilometres inland from the Gulf of Carpentaria.

In July 2000, the Australian Federal Court recognised native title rights to the land around Limmen Bight River and other nearby areas on the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Munduwalawala became widely known as the ‘boss of colour’.

Ginger Riley Munduwalawala  
Australian (Marra),  
c. 1936–2002

*Mara Country*, 1992  
synthetic polymer paint on  
canvas  
244 × 244 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Presented through The Art  
Foundation of Victoria by  
the artist, Fellow, (1997.146)  
© Reproduced courtesy of  
the Estate of Ginger Riley  
Munduwalawala & Alcaston  
Gallery, Melbourne

### Stories in Country

Stories from the **Dreaming** are an important source of inspiration for many Indigenous Australian artists.

#### A story from saltwater country Ginger Riley Munduwalawala

(c. 1936–2002) was born in the coastal saltwater Mara country in the Gulf of Carpentaria, south-east Arnhem Land. As a young man, he worked as a stockman and travelled extensively in the Northern Territory.

An encounter with artist Albert Namatjira (1902–1959) left a lasting impression on the young Munduwalawala; however, it was not until 30 years later, in the 1980s, when Munduwalawala had returned to the Aboriginal community of Ngukurr, that

he had the opportunity to make his own paintings.

Munduwalawala painted his mother’s country and stories relating to its creation. He used brilliant colour and expressive **painterly** marks that ranged from broad, sweeping strokes to delicate, stippled patterns.

Recurring motifs in his paintings of the country around Limmen Bight include important landmarks, such as the Four Archers; Garimala, the powerful ancestral snake that created the Four Archers; and Gnak Gnak, the white-breasted sea eagle.

*Mara Country* was inspired by the story of a group of young boys who angered Garimala by killing some flying foxes that lived near the Four Archers. Garimala could take different forms, and in the form of Bulukbun, an angry,



fiery serpent, he pursued the boys and killed some of them. The boys who escaped hid in caves at the top of the Four Archers. Bulukbun reached in and breathed fire on them. Gnak Gnak is seen watching over the scene.

The triangular shapes that frame the sky are based on traditional designs used for body painting.

### A story from the east Kimberley

**Rover Thomas** (c. 1926–1998) was born in the Great Sandy Desert, but he lived most of his life in a small Aboriginal community called Warmun, near Turkey Creek in the east Kimberley. Like Munduwalawala, Thomas spent many years working as a stockman before he started to paint in 1982.

Thomas's first paintings were made on boards for the Kurirr-Kurirr ceremony, an important public ceremony in the Warmun community. Thomas helped to establish Warmun as an important art centre.

Thomas developed a unique, abstract style of painting, stripped back of all but essential detail. His paintings depict the landscape from a **bird's-eye view** and include many stories of country. The stories of country are told in a distinctive visual language made up of bold, simple shapes edged with subtle dots and textured surfaces painted with natural **ochres**.

In *Dreamtime Story of the Willy Willy*, Thomas depicts the path and power of a

willy-willy in Jaru country. A willy-willy is a whirlwind or dust storm; it can move quickly, sucking up dust in a vertical spiral.

In the top right-hand corner of the painting, the willy-willy starts as a gentle swirl. It then gathers momentum and force as it moves through the country. When it reaches a waterhole, seen at the centre of the canvas, the willy-willy is swallowed by Garagi, the Rainbow Serpent, who is associated with storms in the Kimberley.

- 1 Compare *Mara Country* with *Dreamtime Story of the Willy Willy*, explaining how each artist communicates a story about their country.

#### EXPLORE

Find another painting by Munduwalawala, Thomas or another artist from the Warmun or Ngukurr communities that includes a narrative about country. What is the story and how is it told in the work?

#### DISCUSS

The individual styles of painting that Munduwalawala and Thomas developed challenged the stereotypes often associated with Aboriginal art. Do you agree? Why?

The Kurirr-Kurirr ceremony was revealed to Thomas in dreams not long after a female relative died in a car accident in 1974. The journey of the woman's spirit over sacred and historic sites in the Kimberley formed a cycle of songs, dances and images for the ceremony.

Thomas, who had not yet started painting, explained the stories to his uncle Paddy Jaminji (1912–1996), who was already a painter and who painted the boards.

Aboriginal workers played a significant role in the development of the pastoral industry in central and Western Australia; however, it was not until 1968 that they were legally entitled to equal wages for their work.

Because of equal wages and other industry changes (such as low beef prices, helicopter mustering and rural recession), pastoral employment opportunities rapidly declined, and many Aboriginal people were forced to move from stations where their families had lived for generations.



Rover Thomas  
Australian (Kukatja and Wangkajunga), c. 1926–1998  
*Dreamtime Story of the Willy Willy*, 1989  
earth pigments and natural binder on canvas  
160.1 × 200.1 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Felton Bequest, 1990 (0.1–1990)  
© Rover Thomas. Licensed by Viscopy, 2016

# THE ART OF NARRATIVE

## 4.2

### AUSTRALIAN STORIES

Stories of the settlement of Australia have shaped Australian history and identity. Stories about life in modern cities often reflect a different perspective on Australian life.

At Federation, on 1 January 1901, the six self-governing colonies of Australia were united under one central government.

Nationalism is a form of national pride that values and promotes the unique qualities of a nation.

A pioneer is someone who leads the way in opening up or settling an area.

McCubbin was part of the group of artists who became known as the **Australian Impressionists**. Working **en plein air** was an important part of the practice of artists associated with Impressionist painting.

McCubbin was living in Mount Macedon, a rural area outside Melbourne, when he painted *The Pioneer*. Although the painting is large, he worked outdoors. By lowering the painting into a deep, specially prepared trench, he was able to reach the top.

Frederick McCubbin  
Australian, 1855–1917  
*The Pioneer*, 1904  
oil on canvas (three panels)  
225.0 × 295.7 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Felton Bequest, 1906 (253–2)

#### Settlement story

*The Pioneer* by Australian artist **Frederick McCubbin** (1855–1917) tells a story about Australia's past. It was painted just a few years after Federation, a time of great **nationalism** in Australia. The large scale of the work and the **triptych** format (which is traditionally used in religious paintings) indicate the importance that McCubbin placed on this Australian story.

The triptych format divides the painting into three parts and creates a beginning, middle and end to the story. Repeating elements, including colour, create a strong feeling of **unity** across the panels; however, the differences in each panel, especially in the sky, landscape and figures, suggest the passing of time and provide important clues to the story. The gestures and expressions of the figures also provide clues.

Many viewers agree that the first two panels tell the story of a young couple who work hard, with few resources, to create a

life in the bush; however, viewers often have different ideas about the identity of the figure in the last panel. The distant city and the grave are perhaps the most important clues, and they indicate that a considerable period of time has gone by. The grave may represent the passing of the pioneers, while the city seems to suggest what was achieved as a result of their hard work.

#### DISCUSS

Why might different groups of people have different opinions about McCubbin's portrayal of Australia's settlement? For example, consider how the scene might be viewed or understood by an Indigenous person, an environmentalist or someone newly arrived in Australia.

Consider how the view of settlement in *The Pioneer* differs from that in Malya Teamay's *Broken Law* (p. 80).



- 1 Describe how McCubbin achieves unity across the three panels in the composition of *The Pioneer*.
- 2 Write a short paragraph explaining your understanding of the story in *The Pioneer*.
- 3 Make an annotated copy of *The Pioneer* and note where you see evidence of your understanding of the painting's story.
- 4 McCubbin's painting is often seen as a celebration of the settlement of Australia. Suggest why the painting might be interpreted in this way.
- 5 What different ideas about Australia are communicated by *The Pioneer* and 'Boatman' No. 2 by Guan Wei (p. 159)? Suggest reasons for the differences.

## Art inspires stories

Even when an artist does not intend to tell a story, sometimes viewers build a narrative from what the artist presents.

Australian artist **Jeffrey Smart** (1921–2013) did not set out to create narrative paintings. He was more interested in the **formal** aspects of painting and was inspired to paint by the strong, simple, geometric shapes, lines and forms that he saw around him in the constructed environment. He found beauty in the modern world, and his subjects included highways, factories and apartment blocks.

Smart painted with realism but was selective about what he included in his compositions. His urban landscapes are often strangely empty and mysterious. He said he included people mainly to emphasise the size and shape of the buildings and constructions; however, their presence adds to the mystery of his images and often encourages viewers to create stories about what they see. What do you think the man in *Cahill Expressway* is doing? Why is he all alone? Why does he have only one arm?

### EXPLORE

Write your own fictional short story inspired by *Cahill Expressway*. Your class's stories could be assembled to create a short-story collection.



- 6 Suggest why *Cahill Expressway* may inspire viewers to create a story around what they see. Consider:
  - what is represented
  - how it is represented, including the arrangement of objects in the composition and how elements such as line, colour and form are used to move viewers' eyes around the composition and create mood.
- 7 Is it obvious that *Cahill Expressway* was painted more than 50 years ago? Why?



### CREATE

A well-known 1948 film, *The Naked City*, which later inspired a police drama television series (1958–63) ended famously with the lines 'There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them'.

Working as part of a small group, use this line as the starting point to create a photograph or series of photographs that tells a story about life in the place where you live.

Your story should include at least one character. Consider how your character's gestures, expression and costume, as well as background, lighting and props, may be used to make your story clear.

Jeffrey Smart  
Australian, 1921–2013, lived in Italy from 1965  
*Cahill Expressway*, 1962  
oil on plywood  
81.9 × 111.3 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased 1963 (1306–5)  
© The Estate of Jeffrey Smart

The *Cahill Expressway* was built in the early 1960s to efficiently move cars through Sydney.

*Expressway*, a book of short stories inspired by Smart's *Cahill Expressway*, was published in 1989.

# THE ART OF NARRATIVE

## 4.3

### INSPIRED BY MYTHOLOGY

Traditional stories, including myths and legends, often have their origins in religious and cultural beliefs. Some of these stories are thousands of years old. Art has played an important role in preserving and transmitting such stories in many cultures.

Myths and legends are traditional stories, and they are common in many cultures. Although they characteristically include improbable events, they usually have deep symbolic significance and help explain difficult concepts about the world and human behaviour.

Myths are generally understood to be entirely fictional. Legends are understood to contain some historical fact, such as references to a real person or event, but often aspects of the story become exaggerated or distorted over time.

*The Iliad* tells the story of the Trojan War, during which the city of Troy was under siege for 10 years. The conflict was triggered by the abduction of Helen, wife of the Spartan King Menelaus, by Paris, a prince of Troy.

*The Odyssey* focuses on the aftermath of the Trojan War, particularly Odysseus's long and challenging journey home to the island of Ithaca after the war. He faced many obstacles, including the wrath of some of the gods he had angered in the war.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to see other views of the siren vase.

The name and details of the artist who painted this red-figured vase are unknown; however, scholars have named him 'the siren painter' based on the subject matter of this vase.

### Classical myths and legends

Classical myths and legends have been an important source of inspiration for many western artists since ancient times. Classical mythology encompasses a rich variety of ancient Greek and Roman myths and legends. They feature a cast of characters that includes many gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, and fantastic creatures.

Many myths and legends originated in Greek literature, including Homer's epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, written in approximately the eighth century BCE.

The ancient Romans' gods and goddesses were closely aligned with those of the ancient Greeks. The Romans also adapted many Greek legends, as well as creating their own.

### Ulysses and the sirens

The ancient Greeks were accomplished potters. They made vases in different shapes and sizes for use in daily life, including for storing, carrying and serving water, wine or oil. Vases were also made for rituals and offerings to the gods.

Many vases were decorated with scenes from myths and legends, and Greek vase painting has played an important role in preserving ancient stories.

This vase features the story of Odysseus and the sirens. In the twelfth part of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus and his ship's crew encounter the sirens who lived on the cliffs above a stretch of water they needed to pass on their journey home. Odysseus was forewarned that the heavenly singing of the sirens lured men towards the dangerous rocky coast and death.

In this vase painting, the artist has depicted the sirens with the body of a bird and the head of a woman. Can you see that there is a siren perched on the cliff top on each side of the boat? Mysteriously, another siren appears to be plummeting downwards to the boat, her eyes closed as if she were dead.



Getty Images/Leemage

Greek art

*Odysseus and the Sirens*, c. 480–470 BCE

Attic red-figured stamnos, by the siren painter, from Vulci

35.56 cm (height)

The British Museum, London, United Kingdom

Odysseus was curious to hear the sirens' beguiling song. Can you see how he survived this? He instructed his men to lash him tightly to the mast of his ship so he was unable to steer his boat towards the dangerous shore. He also instructed his sailors to plug their ears with beeswax so they could not hear the sirens' song. In the painting, the sailors maintain their focus and safely row their ship through the perilous stretch of water.

### A story retold

Narrative paintings featuring stories from classical mythology have been of interest to artists and audiences during many periods of **western art**. The English artist **John William Waterhouse** (1849–1917) was well known for his paintings of Greek and Roman subjects.

Can you see the connection between Waterhouse's painting and the Greek vase? Waterhouse visited The British Museum and studied this Greek vase to give his painting historical authenticity. *The Odyssey* does not



John William Waterhouse  
English, 1849–1917  
*Ulysses and the Sirens*, 1891  
oil on canvas  
100.6 × 202.0 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Purchased 1891 (p.396.3–1)

specifically describe the appearance of the sirens, so Waterhouse took his inspiration for the sirens in his painting from the vase.

Since ancient times, it had become popular to depict the sirens as beautiful women whose bodies were as seductive as their song, so some viewers in the nineteenth century were shocked to see the sirens in Waterhouse's painting represented as birds of prey with the heads of beautiful women.

- 1 Compare the ways the siren painter and Waterhouse have told the story of Odysseus and the sirens.
- 2 Waterhouse's *Ulysses and the Sirens* continues to be admired by audiences visiting the National Gallery of Victoria. Why do you think many people admire this work?

#### EXPLORE

Identify an artwork based on a myth or legend that interests you. Create a presentation that explains:

- the cultural and historical context in which the myth or legend developed
- the main characters, events and places of the tale
- how the narrative is communicated in the artwork.



#### CREATE

Create an artwork inspired by Greek vases.

Find or write a legend or myth that explains something significant to you, and create an artwork that tells the story.

Study a range of Greek vases that feature paintings of myths or legends. Look at the shapes of the vases and how their images complement the form of the vase and tell a story.

Create a large **silhouette** of a vase of your own design, and add a narrative image to the vase. Use art elements, including pattern, to add interest to your work.

Display the class's designs and share the stories that have been told.

#### DISCUSS

Modern audiences are still fascinated by ancient stories such as that of Odysseus and the sirens. What gives a story enduring appeal?

Odysseus was one of the heroes of the Trojan War. It was his idea for the Greeks to build the giant wooden horse that ended the war.

Greek soldiers were hidden inside the horse, which was left outside the city of Troy. When the Trojans discovered the wooden horse and saw the Greeks retreating, they believed the horse had been left as a peace offering. They took the horse into the city. At night, the Greek soldiers inside the horse came out of hiding and opened the city gates to let in the Greek army, which finally conquered the city and ended the war.

In Roman times, Odysseus became known as Ulysses.



# THE ART OF NARRATIVE

## 4.4

### STORIES AND HEROES FROM JAPAN

*Ukiyo-e*, manga and anime originated in Japan. They are important artforms for storytelling and have reached wide audiences.

Popular subjects for *ukiyo-e*, manga and anime include legendary and fictional heroes.



Follow the links from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to access educational resources about *ukiyo-e*.

The samurai were a powerful military ruling class in feudal Japan. The samurai followed a strict ethical code (*bushido*) and were men of culture as well as warriors.

Kabuki is a popular form of traditional Japanese theatre that began in the seventeenth century. It is characterised by dramatic and spectacular staging and costumes, and **stylised**, exaggerated movements and gestures.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to learn more about the life of Yoshitsune.

#### *Ukiyo-e*

Colourful **woodblock prints** known as *ukiyo-e* were an important artform during the Edo period in Japan (1615–1868).

*Ukiyo-e* literally means pictures of the floating world; *ukiyo* means floating world, and *e* means picture. Initially, the subjects for *ukiyo-e* were drawn from the cities' pleasure districts and depicted a world of fashion, glamour and human drama.

By the nineteenth century, the subject matter of *ukiyo-e* had broadened to include views of popular landscapes and subjects inspired by history and myth, including heroes and warriors.

*Ukiyo-e* were produced by commercial publishers who **commissioned** artists to create the designs. The publishers then employed skilled craftsmen, including carvers and printers, to make the prints. Each multicoloured print required many wooden blocks.

*Ukiyo-e* were produced in large numbers, especially if the subject was popular. They were affordable to ordinary people and were usually simply pinned to a wall, more like disposable posters than precious artworks.

#### A warrior in action

Yoshitsune (1159–1189) was a famous Japanese samurai. His heroic adventures, tactical skills and military victories are celebrated in many legends, stories and kabuki plays.

As a young man, Yoshitsune was known as Ushiwaka (little ox). After his father and two brothers were killed in a rebellion, he was sent to live at a temple where he devoted many hours to studying and practising martial arts rather than to his religious studies. He ran away when he was 15 years old and joined an armed caravan of gold merchants.

A gang of bandits attacked the caravan. The ensuing drama, and Yoshitsune's fighting prowess, are clearly revealed in this **trptych**. The scene takes place at night, but a beam of light cuts across the three panels and illuminates the main action. Yoshitsune is in the centre panel; he is fighting one opponent while fending off another. In the subdued tones of the surrounding shadows, the artist has included other views of the fighting that add to the drama and energy of this action-packed scene.

- 1 Describe how art elements are used in Yoshitora's work to create a bold and innovative composition and to tell a story.

Utagawa Yoshitora  
Japanese, active 1850s–80s  
***The Night Attack of Kumasaka at Akasaka Station in Mino Province***, 1860  
colour woodblock (trptych)  
(a–c) 36.9 × 75.4 cm (image)  
(overall); (a–c) 36.9 × 75.4 cm (sheet) (overall)  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Purchased 1992 (AS12.a–c–1992)



## Manga and anime

Manga and anime have their origins in Japan, but they have become popular worldwide.

Manga are Japanese or Japanese-influenced comics. Comics are often thought to be just for children, but there are many forms of manga that cater for audiences of different ages and interests, such as salary-man manga for businessmen, mecha manga about robots, magical girl manga and school-life manga.

Japanese manga developed from early forms of popular art, including *ukiyo-e*, expressive line drawings and caricatures made by artists such as Hokusai (1760–1849). Modern manga developed after the Second World War and were influenced by American comic books and animations, notably the work of Walt Disney (1901–1966).

Anime are Japanese, or Japanese-influenced, animated films and television shows.

Both manga and anime have a graphic style; they use strong lines, bold contrasts of tone and colour, flattened space and dramatic **viewpoints** and characterisation. Characters tend to have large, exaggerated eyes and hair, and small noses and mouths.

### The father of modern manga

Astro Boy has been a favourite character for many generations of children. He is an android, a nuclear-powered boy robot who lives in a futuristic twenty-first century world and fights injustice and evil using his seven powers, which include great strength, jet flight and high-intensity lights in his eyes.

Astro Boy is the most famous creation of **Osamu Tezuka** (1928–1989), who became known as the ‘father of manga’. His Astro Boy manga series (1952–68) was adapted for a television series that ran for 193 episodes (1963–68). The television series was the first example of the modern anime style.

From a young age, Tezuka was constantly drawing, and he developed a love of storytelling from going to the theatre with his mother. He completed medical studies as a young man but followed his mother’s advice to pursue what he loved most. He was a great fan of Walt Disney, whose work was an important early influence on Tezuka’s art.

2 Suggest a storyline that might be linked with this image of Astro Boy. Give reasons, based on your observation of the work.



Osamu Tezuka  
Japanese, 1928–1989  
Astro Boy, title page for  
*Mystery Man of the Blast  
Furnace*, 1961  
gouache  
34.3 × 23 cm  
Shonen, published by  
Kobunsha

- 3 How does the image of Astro Boy communicate his character and powers?
- 4 Compare the image of Astro Boy with the portrayal of Yoshitsune.
  - What connections are there in the subject and themes?
  - What qualities do the works have in common? How are they different?
  - Which work interests you the most? Why?

#### EXPLORE

Find an example of *ukiyo-e*, manga or anime that tells a story. What is the narrative and how is it communicated through the artwork?

#### CREATE

Identify a hero or heroine from mythology or real life. What stories or qualities make the person or character heroic?

Create a narrative work about the hero inspired by the style of *ukiyo-e*, manga or anime.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to watch a video about Hokusai’s manga.

The term ‘manga’ literally means whimsical drawing.

Manga is usually read right to left, unlike western comic books.

A manga is usually the work of a single cartoonist (*manga-ka*), but anime is often created in a production house by many people.

Tezuka was a prolific artist. He is said to have created over 150 000 pages of manga during his lifetime.

# THE ART OF PORTRAITURE

## 4.5

### PORTRAITS AND IDEAS

**Portraits** are representations of people.

Portraits often depict a physical likeness and focus on the sitter's identity and personality. Artists also make portraits to explore and express other ideas. These ideas frequently reflect an artist's formal or artistic concerns or the influence of the time and place in which the artist works.

#### A personal context

Australian artist **Grace Cossington Smith** (1892–1984) was the second eldest of five children and was still a teenager when her family settled in the Sydney suburb of Turramurra in 1914. Although she travelled and lived abroad on several occasions (1912–14 and 1948–51), the house at Turramurra remained her home for the next 65 years.

At a time when there was not always a strong focus on the education of girls, Cossington Smith grew up surrounded by books, music and interesting discussion. Her family encouraged her interest in art and professional art career, building her a studio in the garden of the family home, and supporting her art studies.



Grace Cossington Smith  
Australian, 1892–1984  
*Not titled (Sister Sleeping)*,  
c. 1920  
drawing in charcoal  
39.1 x 28.8 cm (sheet);  
30.2 x 28.0 cm (sight)  
National Gallery of Australia,  
Canberra  
Purchased 1975  
© Estate of Grace Cossington  
Smith

Although perhaps most well known as a painter, drawing was an important part of Cossington Smith's art practice, and she filled numerous sketchbooks with drawings. Her drawings include many informal portraits of family members. *Not titled (Sister Sleeping)* features her younger sister Madge, who was also the subject of *The Sock Knitter*, one of just a few painted family portraits by Cossington Smith.

- 1 Suggest why Cossington Smith made so many drawings of family members but painted only a few portraits.

#### A historical and social context

In *The Sock Knitter*, Madge is depicted in the garden studio knitting socks for the Australian troops fighting in the First World War.

Although women were not allowed to fight, many supported the war effort in other ways, such as by making quilts and socks, and by providing other comforts such as cards, cakes and chocolates for the troops. Cossington Smith volunteered in the War Chest Flower Shop in Pitt Street, Sydney, to raise funds for the soldiers. She was also a strong supporter of conscription, an important issue in Australian society during the First World War.

While we can recognise Madge's features in *The Sock Knitter*, she is not identified in the title. The painting is widely seen as a symbol of the contribution women made to the war effort, rather than solely a portrait of a specific person.

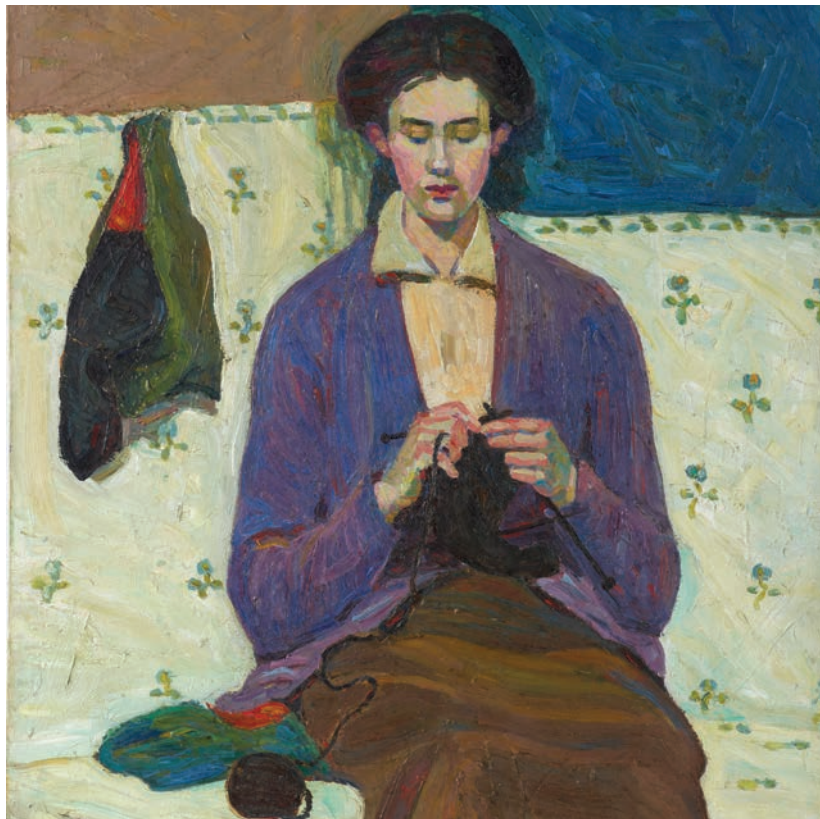


Photo: AGNSW 0A18.1960

Grace Cossington Smith  
Australian, 1892–1984  
*The Sock Knitter*, 1915  
oil on canvas  
61.8 × 51.2 × 1.7 cm  
Art Gallery of New South Wales  
Purchased 1960  
© Estate of Grace Cossington Smith

2 What is your personal interpretation of the significance of *The Sock Knitter*? Do you see it as a family portrait, a work with social and historical significance or both? Why?

3 Create an annotated image of *The Sock Knitter* highlighting how the artist has applied three or more design principles (unity, variety, balance, rhythm, focal point, space) in the composition.

## An artistic context

At 18 years of age, Cossington Smith began art classes at the studio of Anthonio Dattilo Rubbo (1870–1955) in Sydney. Rubbo introduced his students to modern artists such as Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) and Vincent van Gogh (p. 29). These artists were associated with the development of **Post-Impressionism**, a style that built on the innovations of Impressionism to use colour and form in new ways. *The Sock Knitter* was possibly inspired by reproductions of paintings by Cézanne that Rubbo had on display in his studio.

Cossington Smith was only 23 when she painted *The Sock Knitter*. For its time, *The Sock Knitter* is a strikingly modern painting. It is often described as Australia's first Post-Impressionist painting because of its bold, strong colour and form. Strong contrasts of light and dark tones focus attention on the central figure of Madge, who is shown seated and three-quarter view, focusing intently on her knitting. Her downward gaze and the strong diagonal lines created by the outlines of her arms, hands and cardigan and the trail of wool, draw our attention to the knitting.

The artist has used broad, obvious strokes of paint and lively colour combinations. Skin tones include green shadows and pink highlights, and the purple cardigan is enlivened by blue and red highlights. In the areas of colour and pattern of the flattened, shallow background, we also see how the artist creates unity and variety in the composition through the repetition of colours such as red and green and a dynamic balance of irregular shapes and forms.

Cossington Smith made a unique contribution to the development of modern art in Australia. By the 1930s, she had developed a distinctive painting style characterised by luminous colour and distinctive mosaic-like brushstrokes. This style is also seen in *The Bridge in-Curve* (p. 95).

### DISCUSS

In the pre-Internet age of the early twentieth century, artists in Australia seeking to learn about international art often relied on black-and-white reproductions and written descriptions of artworks. How do you believe that modern communication technology has influenced how artists learn about art?

### DISCUSS

Of the portraits you see in your daily life, how many are photographic and how many are in other media? What are the reasons for this? How do you think the development of photography changed or contributed to portraiture as an artform?

### EXPLORE

Compare *Self-portrait* with *The Sock Knitter*. Identify and suggest reasons for any similarities and differences. Which portrait do you prefer and why?

### CREATE

Create a portrait of a family member or friend doing an activity that you believe represents contemporary life. You may need to brainstorm a few ideas about activities before you begin.

Carefully consider how you can use art elements and design principles to focus attention on the activity and create an interesting composition.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to view family portraits from the artist's sketchbooks.

To celebrate the centenary of *The Sock Knitter* in 2015, Wauchope Community Arts Council and Mid North Coast Refugee Support Group in New South Wales launched a community arts project. The project asked people to donate wool or knit scarves, shawls and socks for people in Syria displaced by war. Female artists were also invited to participate by painting portraits of the knitters.



Follow the links from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to read more about the community arts project.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to view *Self-portrait* by Cossington Smith.

Australian women and children knitted more than one million pairs of socks during the First World War. Knitters were provided with an official pattern and were often part of knitting circles.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to learn more about the woollen comforts provided to Australian soldiers during the war.

# THE ART OF PORTRAITURE

## 4.6

### LOOKING CLOSER

**Portraits** usually provide clues about the identities of the people they represent. Many portraits also express other meanings and ideas, but you sometimes need to look closely to discover them.

Loretta Lux is not the artist's birth name. She adopted this name just before the opening of her first exhibition in 2000.

Some of the 1970s vintage clothes worn by the children in Lux's photographs were the artist's childhood clothes.

Loretta Lux  
German, b. 1969  
*The Waiting Girl*, 2006  
Ilfochrome photograph  
38 × 53 cm  
Art Gallery of New South Wales  
Purchased with funds provided by the Photography Collection Benefactors' Program, 2007  
© Loretta Lux/VG Bild-Kunst. Licensed by Viscopy, 2016

### Noticing the unnoticed

Dreamlike, captivating, eerie, haunting, mesmerising, mysterious, intriguing, creepy, serene and disquieting are all adjectives that have been applied to the distinctive portraits of children by German-born artist **Loretta Lux** (b. 1969).

The children of friends are often the subjects of Lux's photographs, but the artist insists that the works are not about the children themselves. Lux is not interested in portraying the personalities or psychology of the children she photographs. She deliberately constructs images that inspire curiosity and invite viewers to discover their own meanings.

Lux leaves nothing to chance in creating her photographs. The children are carefully posed and dressed in 1970s vintage children's clothes. Each image can involve two or

three photoshoots and take several months to complete. The artist originally trained as a painter, and she structures the colours and forms in her photographic compositions as a painter might arrange these elements on a canvas. The composition and finish of each photograph is refined on a computer. Backgrounds are taken from the artist's archive of photographs of interiors and landscapes. Colours are manipulated, unnecessary details are eliminated, and heads, eyes and other features are often subtly enlarged.

- 1 Identify the two adjectives in the first paragraph that you feel best describe *The Waiting Girl*. Give reasons for your choice.
- 2 Lux prefers that viewers interpret her work in their own way, but she has suggested *The Waiting Girl* is about time and timelessness. What meaning do you see in this work?



Photo: AGNSW 220-2007



### CREATE

Using a friend or family member as a model, create a photographic portrait that is more than just a representation of the person. For example, your portrait might represent a type of character rather than an individual person, or a more abstract quality such as isolation, innocence or freedom. Think about how you can use visual elements, clothing, setting and pose to communicate your idea.



## More than meets the eye

*Walking in Tall Grass, Tom* is an enticing and alluring **portrait**. The vivid colours, patterns and descriptive details draw attention; however, very little about the identity of the young man is revealed.

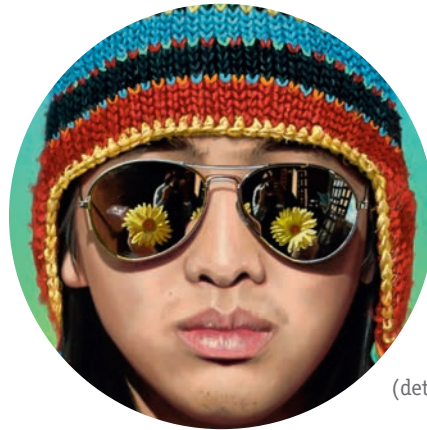
The painting is one of many portraits of young people in the series *Walking in Tall Grass*, which **Jan Nelson** (b. 1955) began in 2001. Each painting is a half-length portrait of a young person. Details in the series – such as vintage and retro shirts, brightly patterned beanies, hoodies, baseball caps, bike helmets and pets – reflect the interests of children and adolescents, who are dressed in a distinctive indie style. Each figure is painted with

### DISCUSS

Look at *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1435) by Jan van Eyck in The National Gallery, London. Notice the reflection in the mirror in the background. What comparisons can you make between this painting and *Walking in Tall Grass, Tom*?

### DISCUSS

How do images define and sometimes confine identity?  
How do you think these ideas might relate to *Walking in Tall Grass, Tom*?



(detail)

mesmerisingly realistic detail and is starkly lit and isolated against a brilliantly rainbow-coloured background.

The young people all appear to have been caught unaware; they seem absorbed in their own private worlds. None of the subjects looks directly at the viewer; they are shown turning away, with their gazes averted, masked or, like Tom, wearing mirrored sunglasses.

Look at the reflection in the sunglasses. Can you see a reflection of the artist photographing Tom? The first step in creating this work was a photoshoot.

The finished painting is sophisticated, both technically and conceptually. Nelson shows technical skill, for example, in the details and textures. Conceptually, the painting explores many ideas and provokes many questions, including questions about painting, photography and portraiture.

The title of the series, *Walking in Tall Grass*, was inspired by the lyrics of American singer-songwriter Bill Callahan and his songs 'River Guard' and 'Held', which include references to sitting and lying in tall grass. For the artist, the idea of walking in tall grass seemed like a good metaphor for adolescence, which is often a time when people are not sure exactly where they are going.

- In an interview, Nelson explained that she wanted to create an image of emotional and psychological intensity rather than focusing on individual identity. Do you believe this work achieves that? Explain.
- What questions about painting, photography and portraiture does this painting suggest to you?
- List similarities and differences you see in Lux's and Nelson's portraits.

Jan Nelson  
Australian, b. 1955  
*Walking in Tall Grass, Tom*,  
2009  
oil on linen  
77.7 × 57.2 cm  
Winner 2009 Arthur Guy  
Memorial Painting Prize  
Collection  
Bendigo Art Gallery 2009  
© Jan Nelson. Licensed by  
Viscopy, 2016



Follow the links from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to hear Nelson talk about her work and to see her work at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra.

In 2009, Nelson was awarded the Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize for *Walking in Tall Grass, Tom*. This prize has been awarded every two years since 2003.

There are actually three people in *Walking in Tall Grass, Tom*. If you look closely at the reflection in Tom's glasses, you will see the artist and the hand of a third person holding the daisies.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to see a reproduction of *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1435) by Jan van Eyck.

The term 'indie' is used to describe aspects of culture – such as music or film – that are independent of mainstream production houses and trends. In fashion, the term refers to an individual style that resists trends and values unique combinations of clothing and accessories, including recycled and vintage items.

# THE ART OF PORTRAITURE

## 4.7

### A PORTRAIT TRIBUTE

Portraits are often made as a tribute to an individual.

Do you have any portraits at home of members of your family? Does your school have portraits of past principals, teachers or students? Many private individuals and public bodies, including governments, religious organisations, businesses and schools, have portraits of people who are important to them. Artists are sometimes commissioned to create such portraits.

Ah Xian first visited Australia in 1989 but settled here permanently in 1990.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to learn more about Ah Xian's work.

Porcelain is a type of ceramic that is made from kaolin (a pure white clay) and petuntse (feldspar derived from granite). Porcelain is fired at high temperatures and is thinner, lighter and more durable than other forms of ceramic. Very thin porcelain has a translucent quality when held to the light. Porcelain also feels cooler to touch than other forms of ceramic.

Ah Xian's brother Liu Xiaoxian is also an artist (p. 155).

### Portrait in porcelain

The **portrait** bust *Dr John Yu AC* was **commissioned** by the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra. Dr Yu was Australian of the Year in 1996. He is a distinguished paediatrician and administrator, known for his outstanding commitment to children's health, medicine, education and the arts.

Chinese-Australian artist **Ah Xian** (b. 1960) thought carefully about Dr Yu's achievements and interests, as well as his Chinese heritage, when designing the bust.

Dr Yu is represented with his eyes shut, deep in thought. The cool, green, jade-like

colour of the celadon **glaze** complements his calm and tranquil appearance. The celadon glaze is a favourite of Dr Yu, who is a passionate collector of Chinese **ceramics**. The colourfully dressed children who scramble over Dr Yu's head and shoulders add contrast

#### DISCUSS

What challenges do you think artists may encounter when they create a portrait of someone? How might these challenges be increased when the portrait is a commission?



Ah Xian  
born China 1960,  
arrived Australia 1990  
*Dr John Yu AC*,  
2003–04  
glazed ceramic  
Commissioned with  
funds provided by  
Marilyn Darling 2004  
Collection: National  
Portrait Gallery,  
Canberra

and a playful element. They clearly reflect Dr Yu's involvement with children, and their presence is culturally significant as many children were seen as a sign of prosperity and happiness in China.

*Dr John Yu AC* is Ah Xian's first portrait commission; however, he has been making **porcelain** busts since 1998, usually using family members and friends as models.

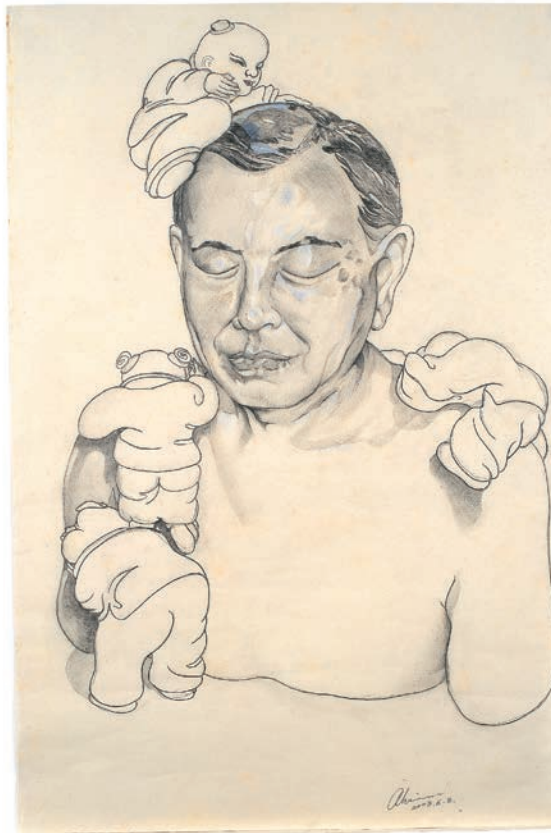
Creating each portrait is a complex process that begins with making a plaster cast of the subject. The cast is then used to make a **mould** for the porcelain form.

In 1999, Ah Xian began working with expert craftspeople in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province, China, to complete the **casting**, firing and glazing of his porcelain busts. Jingdezhen has been an important centre for Chinese ceramics for approximately 1000 years. The techniques used at Jingdezhen to create and decorate Ah Xian's portrait busts are specialised and were traditionally used for functional objects, such as vases and bowls. Many of the craftspeople working with Ah Xian were surprised at first when Ah Xian wanted to use these techniques to make portrait busts.

Using traditional techniques and materials in an innovative way gives them new life and encourages viewers to see them in a fresh way. This is important to Ah Xian. He was born and educated in China and maintains a deep respect for ancient Chinese art and culture. He is very concerned that the powerful influence of **western art** and culture will mean that ancient Chinese artforms will no longer be valued. He explores this issue in his work by bringing together past and present, east and west.

- 1 List three ideas about Dr Yu that the portrait communicates to you. What is it about the work that communicates each of these ideas?
- 2 Does the portrait of Dr Yu match your expectations of a portrait of a distinguished person? Explain why.
- 3 Referring to *Dr John Yu AC*, give an example of how Ah Xian's work brings together:
  - past and present
  - east and west.

Consider the subject matter, materials and techniques used in the work.



Ah Xian  
born China 1960, arrived Australia 1990  
*Untitled (Preparatory Study for Sculpture of Dr John Yu AC)*, 2003  
pencil on paper  
Commissioned with funds provided by Marilyn Darling, 2004  
Collection: National Portrait Gallery, Canberra



Follow the links from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to learn more about museums devoted to collecting and exhibiting portraits.

**EXPLORE**

Imagine the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra has decided to acquire a portrait of you. They have asked for your help to choose an artist who you feel would be appropriate to represent you.

Select an artist who you would like to make your portrait. Because this is a hypothetical exercise, it does not matter if the artist is from the past.

Write a letter, or prepare a short talk, to explain your choice to the National Portrait Gallery's board. In your letter or talk, refer to an existing portrait by the artist.

**DISCUSS**

Why do you think there are museums and prizes devoted to portraits?

What makes portraiture different from other types of art?

What sort of people do you believe should be the subject of portraits in Australia's National Portrait Gallery?

Several prestigious prizes are awarded for portraiture. In Australia, the Archibald Prize for portraiture (pp. 218–19), which was first awarded in 1921, is an important annual event that attracts widespread interest.



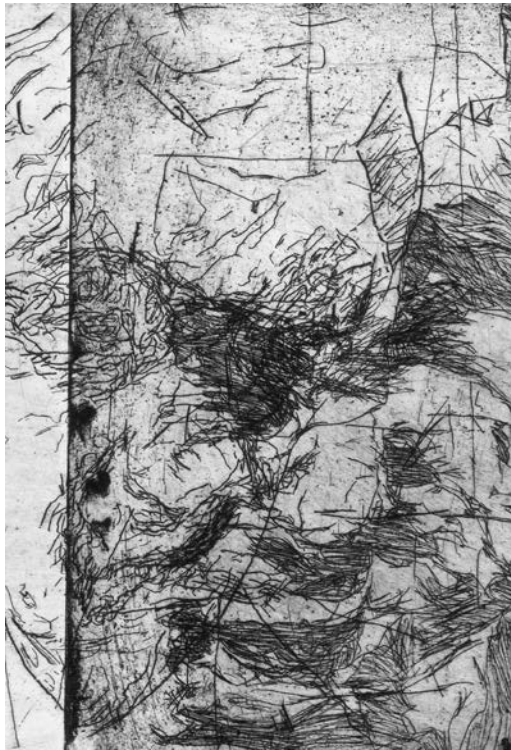
# THE ART OF PORTRAITURE

## 4.8

### A CONTEMPORARY VIEW OF IDENTITY

Contemporary artists often explore portraiture and ideas related to identity in unexpected ways. This includes creating portraits that present viewers with multiple perspectives on identity.

Mike Parr  
Australian, b. 1945  
*100 Breaths* from  
*(Alphabet/Haemorrhage)*  
*Black Box of 100 Self-Portrait Etchings 2* 1992  
set of 100 etchings, with  
foul biting, drypoint,  
softground, roulette, deep  
etching, open biting and  
plate-tone, wood and  
enamel paint (box)  
(a-vvvv) 28.6 × 24.2 cm  
(image and sheet) (each);  
(www) 7.4 × 27.8 × 31.8 cm  
(box) unique state  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Purchased 1994  
(P29.a-www-1994)  
© Mike Parr. Courtesy Anna  
Schwartz Gallery



### Questioning identity

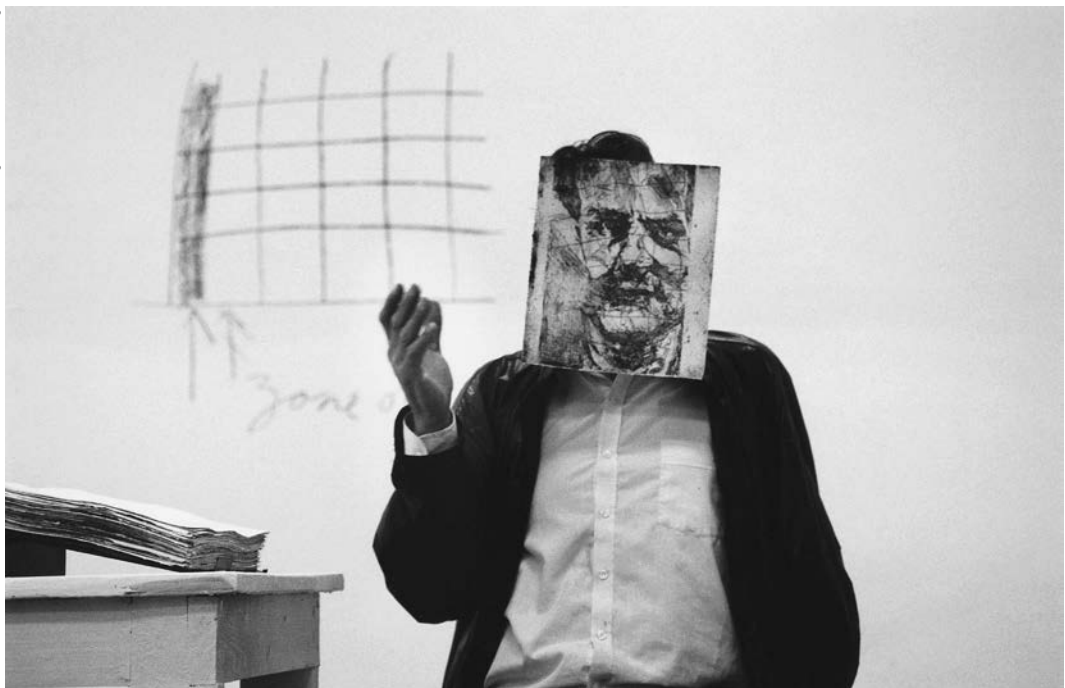
**Self-portraits** have been an important part of the work of Australian artist **Mike Parr** (b. 1945) since the 1980s. Parr's self-portraits pose many questions about identity and representing identity, and he has explored this theme in thousands of works in a range of media, including performance, sculpture, drawing and printmaking.

In Parr's work, identity appears as something shifting and difficult to define. His face appears in endless variations and repetitions, often distorted and twisted in strange configurations. Sometimes, his face appears erased or destroyed.

#### DISCUSS

What factors make up a person's identity? Is it possible to absolutely define or represent a person's identity? Why?

© Mike Parr. Courtesy Anna Schwartz Gallery



In his many self-portrait drawings and prints, the artist characteristically works with expressive lines, gouges and other marks. These marks appear to go beyond expressing emotion or feeling and seem to record an intense battle with the self.

Parr's self-portraits reflect his involvement with both **Conceptual art** and **performance art**. (*Alphabet/Haemorrhage*) *Black Box of 100 Self-Portrait Etchings 2* is a small, black box containing 100 individual self-portrait **etchings**. The work was made to be viewed as an object rather than as a set of individual etchings.

In 1992, Parr used his etchings in the performance work *100 Breaths*. Parr sat beside the box of etchings, took the etchings from the box one by one and sucked each to his face with a deep breath, before letting it fall to the ground. On the video recording of the performance, the physical effort required is evident in the sound of heavy, gasping breaths and in the image of Parr's increasingly crumpled face.

Parr has since reworked the copper plates used to make the etchings to produce two more series of self-portraits, including *100 Self-Portrait Etchings (The Third Imaginary)*. Each series is presented in a different format. Parr's reworking of earlier works reflects the ongoing and intense investigation of self that is typical of Parr's self-portrait projects.

- 1 Why might printmaking be an interesting medium for artists who like to rework their artworks?
- 2 Explain two different ways that the self-portraits by Parr show identity as something shifting and hard to define. Consider, for example:
  - the artist's representation of his physical appearance, including the use of distortion and different viewpoints
  - the form and presentation of the self-portraits, including his use of repeated images and artforms such as printmaking and performance art.
- 3 Do you think that it is appropriate to describe Parr's work as self-portraiture? Explain why.



#### CREATE

Make a photographic representation of your personality.

Start by taking a series of photographs of yourself, straight on and in profile, and even some of the back of your head. Scan the images into the computer. Cut sections of the images and paste them together to create a new image. Manipulate the images using the tools in a computer program, such as image adjustment, contrast, brightness and colour saturation.

Write a short explanation of your image in which you discuss why you have presented your personality in this way.

Parr's sister Julie Rrap is also an artist (p. 175). Rrap is Parr spelled backwards.



#### CREATE

Make a portrait of a split personality that expresses two contrasting emotions.

Before you begin, research the **proportions** of the human face. An understanding of facial proportion – how different parts of the face relate to each other – is helpful when exploring portraits. In realistic representations, the different parts of the face are in proportion. Some artists, however, distort or change proportion for expressive effect.

Make two diagrams of a face, one from the front and one in profile, to show the proportional placement of eyes, nose, mouth, ears and hairline in relation to each other.

Begin your split personality by drawing a large face and dividing it in an interesting way. Complete the drawing by showing a different emotion on each part of the face. Consider how you might distort or change the facial proportions and use art elements, such as colour and line, to express emotions.



#### DISCUSS

Curator and writer Michele Helmrich suggested that watching Parr's performance of *100 Breaths* is like witnessing *The Scream* by Edvard Munch (p. 138) in reverse.

What might this mean?

Consider what audiences see when they look at each artwork and the ideas each artwork communicates.

## 4.9

### CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

In Australia's Indigenous culture, art (including visual arts, song and dance) is an important expression of the people's cultural identity and connection to the country of their ancestors.

Indigenous people have strong connections to specific areas of land or country through birthplace, ancestors, and Dreaming knowledge and lore. This includes a responsibility for looking after the land.

#### The effects of colonisation

When the British colonised Australia, they declared the land *terra nullius*, or under no legal ownership. They did not recognise the Indigenous people's ownership of the land or the Dreaming knowledge and lore that binds Indigenous people to their country.

Spinifex Arts Project  
*Women's Native Title Painting*, 1998  
acrylic on canvas  
187.4 × 123.0 cm



Spinifex (*Triodia* sp.) and vegetated dune, Little Sandy Desert, Western Australia

Many Indigenous people were forcibly, often brutally, removed from their country. Despite the dispossession and the suppression of Indigenous culture by settlers, the spiritual connection to country remains strong for Indigenous people.

#### The Spinifex people

The Spinifex people are the traditional owners of a vast area of land in the Great Victoria Desert. Unlike many other Indigenous communities, they were relatively undisturbed by European settlement until the 1950s and 1960s when the government attempted to clear the desert for atomic testing at Maralinga in South Australia. Some groups were not found by the authorities and remained in the desert; it was not until 1987 that one extended family had its first contact with outsiders.

By the 1980s, the closure of missions and the growing momentum of the land-rights movement led many displaced Indigenous people to return to their tribal lands. The Spinifex people who returned to their homeland and established a community at Tjuntjuntjara found many changes.

In 1993, the Australian Government introduced the *Native Title Act 1993* to recognise Indigenous land rights. The act allows groups of Indigenous people to claim land with which they can prove a continued connection.

The Spinifex people made an application for native title in October 1995. Their claim was negotiated, in a spirit of reconciliation, directly with the Government of Western Australia rather than through the court system, and it was settled in 2000.

## Mapping country

The land of the Spinifex people often appears harsh and inhospitable to Europeans; however, for the Spinifex people, it is physically and spiritually abundant. Over tens of thousands of years, they have accumulated knowledge about the life-giving water sources, bush food and spiritual value of the land. Creator and ancestor spirits live on in the land and its natural species.

In 1996, as part of the Spinifex native title claim, the Spinifex Arts Project was started to help the Spinifex people document their country. This ongoing project involved visiting their country to re-establish connections with important sites and stories. People who had never painted before began enthusiastically recording their ownership and knowledge of the land.

Two collaborative works by the Tjuntjuntjara Spinifex people, *Women's Native Title Painting* and *Men's Native Title Painting*, were formally included in the preamble of the final land agreement between the Spinifex people and the Government of Western Australia. Each painting presents a map-like view of the entire claim area of 55 000 square kilometres and identifies important sites and stories in symbols and strong colour.

The Tjuntjuntjara people also produced another 10 collaborative works to give to the Western Australian people in a symbolic exchange for land when the final land agreement was reached.

Traditionally, Indigenous art has been strongly associated with natural materials, such as bark, rock and sand, and earthy colours produced by natural **ochres**; however, since the 1970s, many Indigenous artists have

used new materials to express their culture and communicate it to wider audiences. Like many other contemporary Indigenous artists, the Spinifex Arts Project artists now generally produce their paintings with acrylic paint on canvas or board.

Works from the Spinifex Arts Project have been publicly displayed around Australia and overseas. The project's artists continue to produce paintings that are a vibrant expression of their culture and their strong connection to country.

- 1 How have the artists who made *Women's Native Title Painting* communicated the physical and spiritual abundance of their country in their work? Consider the use of scale and art elements, such as colour and symbols.
- 2 Suggest why paintings were formally included in the preamble of the land agreement between the Spinifex people and the Government of Western Australia.
- 3 Why do you think artists of the Tjuntjuntjara community continue to paint their land and stories even though they have been successful in their native title claim?



Follow the links from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to learn more about the Spinifex people.



Tjuntjuntjara community

### EXPLORE

Research other artworks produced by the Spinifex Arts Project artists. Choose an artwork that interests you. Describe what you see in the work, and discuss what it suggests to you about the artist's connection to country and why.

### CREATE

Make a large-scale map of your school or neighbourhood using colour and symbols to represent significant places and to communicate the important ideas and history. You may need to do some research about the area before you begin.

This could be a collaborative project.

### DISCUSS

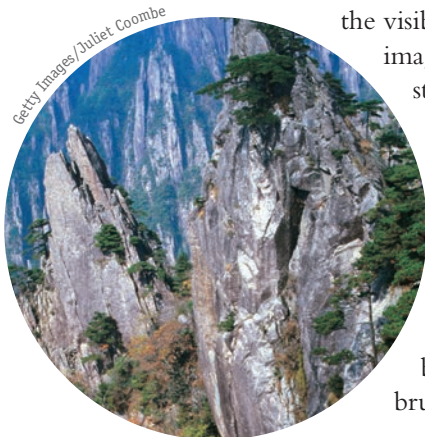
Based on your understanding of *Women's Native Title Painting* and other Indigenous artworks, discuss the role that art can play in helping non-Indigenous people understand Indigenous Australians' cultural traditions and beliefs and the issues facing Indigenous people today.

### AN EASTERN PERSPECTIVE

The landscape has been an important subject in Chinese painting for more than 1000 years, long before it was valued as a subject in European art. Contemplating the natural world through beautiful paintings and poetry provided an escape from the everyday world for cultivated Chinese, including the scholar-officials who played an important role in traditional Chinese society.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to an introduction to Chinese painting.



Mount Huangshan, China

#### Chinese landscapes

Landscape painting techniques were an extension of **calligraphy** and emphasised expressive line rather than colour to convey the spirit and life force of the natural world. Chinese landscape painters were not interested in imitating the appearance of the visible world. They created images of imaginative places inspired by their study of nature and the art of earlier masters. Painters would picture in their mind what they were going to paint and would work quickly with fluent, confident strokes. It would take many years of study and practice to become an accomplished painter, and they began by studying and copying the brushstrokes of 'old master' painters.

#### A walk in the forest

The Chinese artist **Kuncan** (1612–c. 1674) became a Buddhist monk when he was 26 years old. He spent many years living and wandering alone in the mountains and wilderness before he settled at a Buddhist temple.

He was first inspired to paint after visiting Mount Huangshan (Yellow Mountain), in southern Anhui Province. Its beauty has inspired many Chinese landscape painters.

Like other Chinese landscape artists, Kuncan was more interested in creating paintings to convey the physical and spiritual essence of nature than to describe a particular place. He created expressive landscape paintings, inspired by his personal experiences of nature.

Can you see the expressive quality of the brushstrokes in *Walking Through a Pine Forest in Moonlight*? The different brushstrokes convey the life and essence of the natural world, including leaves, water, grass, mists and rocks.

Can you also see how Kuncan has structured the composition to guide the viewer through the painting? A clear pathway leads you through the landscape. The journey begins in the bottom left-hand corner of the painting. A Chinese scholar and his servant set you in the right direction. You are led along paths and past buildings and old gnarled trees. You climb craggy rocks and wind your way beside waterfalls and misty rivers before reaching a retreat nestled among the trees high on the mountain. As you observe the natural world that Kuncan describes on the journey, it is easy to imagine the feel of the cool evening air and the fresh scent of the pine forests.

The experience and feeling of the landscape is also powerfully described by the poem that Kuncan has added to the top right-hand corner of the painting. Painting,

#### The four treasures

Chinese landscape paintings are traditionally made as **scrolls**. The centre of a scroll is usually paper or silk, and it is often surrounded by a silk border. Rods at the top and bottom of the scroll keep the painting flat on the wall for display and make it easy to roll up the painting for storage.

The paintings are made with ink rather than paint. The ink is traditionally made from burnt pine soot and glue and comes as a solid block known as an ink stick. It is ground to a powder on a smooth stone called an ink stone. A little water is added to the ink to create the very dark tones. Lighter areas are painted using more water.

Ink is applied with a brush, which is held vertically. Traditionally, brushes are made from animal hair and bamboo.

Paper, ink, ink stone and brushes are used for both painting and calligraphy and are known as the four treasures in a Chinese scholar's study.



The four treasures: paper, ink, ink stone and brushes



Kuncan  
 Chinese, 1612–c. 1674  
*Walking Through a Pine Forest in Moonlight*, 1660  
 ink and pigments on paper  
 207.2 × 97.6 cm (image and sheet)  
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
 Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria  
 with the assistance of Westpac Banking Corporation,  
 Founder Benefactor, 1978 (AS7–1978)

poetry, music and calligraphy were closely related and highly respected artforms in ancient China. They played an important role in the education of high-ranking officials and scholars. Paintings such as *Walking Through a Pine Forest in Moonlight* were collected, studied and contemplated by scholars.

- 1 Identify and describe four types of brushstrokes that Kuncan has used in *Walking Through a Pine Forest in Moonlight*. Explain the ideas or meanings that are communicated by each.
- 2 There is very little colour in Kuncan's painting. Does this matter? Why?
- 3 Imagine you are one of the characters in the bottom left-hand corner of Kuncan's painting. Describe the journey that you take to the mountain retreat. Refer to what you see, feel, hear and smell along the way.
- 4 Kuncan worked around the same time as Claude Lorrain. Compare *Walking Through a Pine Forest in Moonlight* with *River Landscape with Tiburtine Temple at Tivoli* (p. 28). What similarities and differences can you find in:
  - subject matter
  - materials and techniques
  - art elements, such as colour and line
  - composition, including the representation of space
  - ideas or meanings communicated about the landscape?

Which landscape would you most like to visit? Why?

Can you see the small, red stamps on Kuncan's painting? The stamps are seals, which were usually carved from soft stone and pressed into red oil-based ink for stamping. Seals were (and still are) commonly stamped onto a painting by artists as proof that it was their work. Collectors also often stamped paintings with their own seal as proof of ownership.

#### DISCUSS

'If anyone discusses painting in terms of formal likeness, his understanding is almost that of a child.'<sup>7</sup>

Su Dongpo (1036–1107)

'Painting is no equal to [real] mountains-and-water for the wonder of scenery; but mountains-and-water are no equal to painting for the sheer marvels of brush and ink.'<sup>8</sup>

Dong Qichang (1555–1636)

What do these quotes reveal about the role of painting in traditional Chinese culture? Are these comments applicable to non-Chinese painting? Why?

## 4.11

### FAMOUS AND FAMILIAR VIEWS

Famous and not-so-famous views and landscapes have become familiar to wide audiences through art.

Utagawa Hiroshige  
Japanese, 1797–1858  
*The Bridge with Wisteria*  
or *Kameido Tenjin Keidai*,  
1856  
plate 57 from One Hundred  
Views of Edo  
colour woodblock print  
(*nishiki-e*); ink and colour  
on paper  
35.6 × 24.2 cm  
Publisher Uoya Eikichi

Galerie Janette Ostier, Paris, France/Bridgeman Images



amanaimages/Stapleton Collection/Corbis



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to see the complete series of One Hundred Views of Edo.

As a young man, Hiroshige inherited his father's position and became a firefighter; however, in 1811, his interest in painting led him to start an apprenticeship with Utagawa Toyohiro (1773–1828), one of the most celebrated *ukiyo-e* artists of the time. Soon after, he was given permission to use his teacher's family name and was given the name Hiroshige. He resigned from his post as a firefighter to become an artist in 1823.

One Hundred Views of Edo is an abbreviation of the original title of the series, One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo.

Hiroshige was still working on the series at the time of his death. It was completed by his pupil and son-in-law, Shigenobu (1826–1869), later known as Hiroshige II.

### A place in Edo

In the 1820s, **landscapes** became a favourite subject for *ukiyo-e*. Laws restricting travel in Japan were eased, and people were keen to have mementos of their travels. In the 1840s, the images of actors and beautiful women in the pleasure districts – which had been the main subject of earlier *ukiyo-e* – were banned. This ban contributed to the popularity of landscapes and other subjects.

**Utagawa Hiroshige** (or Ando Hiroshige) (1797–1858) was a renowned *ukiyo-e* artist who produced approximately 8000 works. From the 1830s, his main subject was the landscape.

Like other *ukiyo-e* artists, Hiroshige created innovative compositions, often with unusual **viewpoints**. Hiroshige built up his designs using layers of colour. He often used gentle gradations of colour in the individual colour layers of his print, which added to the subtle beauty of the scenes.

The contrasting textures of elements such as water, foliage and rocks add interest. His scenes are also often animated by people enjoying the landscape.

Most of Hiroshige's landscapes were completed in series that focus on a particular area. He made several series about Edo (Tokyo), which at the time had a population of more than one million and was the world's largest city. The landscape around Tokyo has many hills, rivers and a bay. This print is from the last and largest series he made about Tokyo, One Hundred Views of Edo. The Kameido Tenjin Shrine is still a popular destination in Tokyo, famous for its wisteria vines and drum bridge.

- 1 Create an annotated copy of Hiroshige's print to show where you can see:
  - innovative composition
  - gentle gradations of colour
  - contrasting textures
  - people enjoying the landscape.

## A private garden

**Claude Monet** (1840–1926) developed a fascination with capturing fleeting atmospheric effects in nature. This led him to work **en plein air** and to experiment with colour, paint and composition.

The work of Monet and other artists of the time who were working from everyday life and creating an impression of their subject rather than a detailed description became known as **Impressionism**.

In 1883, Monet moved to Giverny, a village to the north-west of Paris. At Giverny, where he lived for the rest of his life, he planted a wonderful garden, which he painted over and over again. He planned the garden as he might have planned a painting; the flowers bloomed in different seasons to provide him with beautiful colour combinations to paint all year round. In the 1890s, Monet created a fantastic water garden in the marshland opposite his house. He planted it with all sorts of exotic plants: weeping willows and irises on the banks, and waterlilies of all colours floating on water.

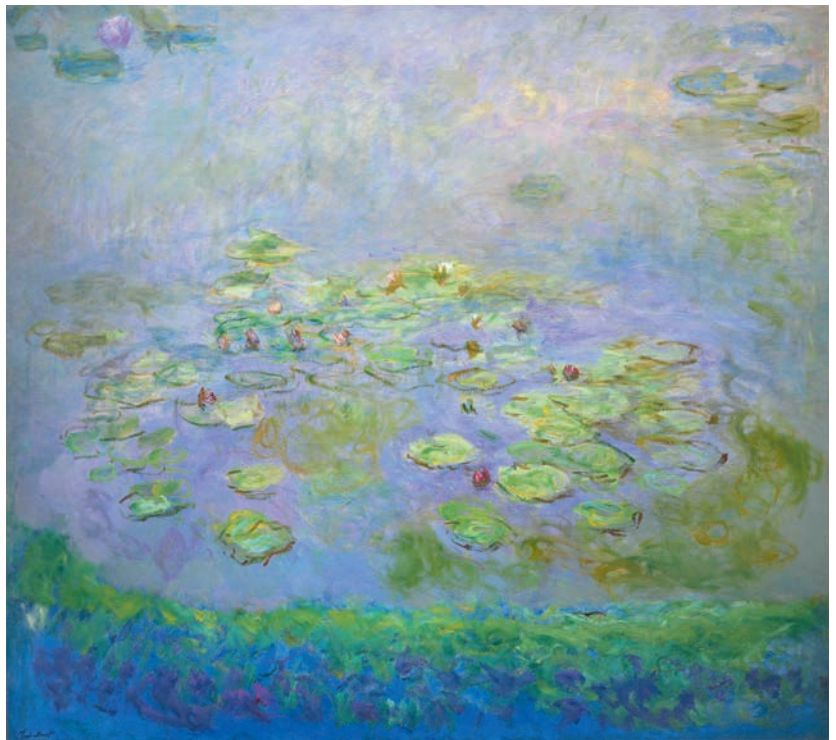
Like many artists in the nineteenth century, Monet was fascinated by Japan, and he collected Japanese prints. He even built a wisteria-covered Japanese bridge over his lily pond, which might have been inspired by a Hiroshige print.

The waterlily pond became the main subject of Monet's paintings in the last 20 years of his life. As the hours and days and seasons changed, it provided him with new, wonderful patterns of colour and light to paint. In many paintings of the series, including *Waterlilies*, the light, colour and pattern on the surface of the lily pond fill the entire surface of the canvas.

- 2 What evidence can you find in *Waterlilies* of Monet's:
  - interest in capturing fleeting atmospheric effects in nature
  - experimental approach to colour, paint and composition?
- 3 Compare Hiroshige's print with Monet's painting. Consider the materials, composition and use of art elements.
- 4 Imagine you are visiting either of the places depicted here. Write a short postcard to a friend to describe the scene.



Claude Monet's water garden at Giverny



Claude Monet  
French, 1840–1926  
*Waterlilies (Nymphéas)*, c. 1914–17  
oil on canvas  
181.0 × 201.6 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
Purchased 1979



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to learn more about Monet's house and garden at Giverny.



### CREATE

Identify a place that is important to you. Create an artwork to communicate what you believe to be important about the place.

Although Monet observed colour and light effects **en plein air**, he often completed his paintings in the **studio**.

Monet's late work was often extraordinarily large. In 1914, he even built a special studio in his garden so he could work on large-scale canvases. In 1918, he decided to give some huge waterlily paintings to the people of France. He worked on them until his death in 1926. They stretch around the walls of the specially designed room at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris.



# INSPIRED BY PLACE

## 4.12

### A MATTER OF INTERPRETATION

When two artists share ideas and interests, and represent the same place, it is easy to see how making art is a matter of interpretation.



Charles Conder  
English, 1868–1909, worked  
in Australia 1884–90  
**Coogee Bay**, 1888  
oil on cardboard  
26.8 × 40.7 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Purchased with the  
assistance of a special grant  
from the Government of  
Victoria, 1979 (A41–1980)

### En plein air at Coogee

These paintings by **Tom Roberts** (1856–1931) and **Charles Conder** (1868–1909) were both painted at Coogee Beach near Sydney during Easter 1888. Conder was only 19 at the time and greatly admired the older Roberts, who was visiting Sydney from Melbourne. Roberts had studied in London and was familiar with the latest developments in painting, including the idea of working **en plein air**.

Plein-air painting spread from Europe to many parts of the world in the second half of the nineteenth century. The plein-air painters rejected the traditional practice of creating landscape paintings in the **studio** from sketches. They took their easels and



Photo: AGNSW 9078

Tom Roberts  
Australian, 1856–1931  
**Holiday Sketch at Coogee**, 1888  
oil on canvas  
40.3 × 55.9 cm (stretcher)  
Art Gallery of New South Wales  
Purchased 1954



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to learn more about the Australian Impressionists.

paints outdoors to capture the colour, light and atmosphere of the landscape directly on canvas or board. They tended to paint what they saw in obvious blocks and strokes of colour and tone, often working quite quickly to capture the transient effects of colour and light.

In many respects, this approach to describing a subject reflects the way people see. For example, when we look at a scene in nature, we tend to see an impression of colour and light rather than details, such as individual leaves.

### Spot the difference

Can you see how Roberts and Conder have both used broad areas of tone and colour, rather than detail, to create vivid impressions of the light, atmosphere and activity at Coogee Beach?

The paintings of Coogee Beach by Roberts and Conder clearly reflect the interest the artists shared in plein-air painting; however, the paintings also reveal the individual way each artist interpreted the subject.

Can you see, for example, how Roberts uses clearly defined brushstrokes and strong contrasts of colour and tone to create an impression of crisp, intense light?

The brushstrokes in Conder's painting tend to be less obvious. The blending of colours and tones creates an impression of a softer light. Conder often incorporated decorative elements in his compositions. You can see evidence of this in the figures and the elegant, flowing lines of the trees in the foreground.

It is not uncommon for landscape painters to rearrange a view, perhaps by moving, removing or adding features in a landscape. Artists have reasons for not imitating exactly what they see. They may want to create a more satisfying or interesting arrangement of elements in their work or perhaps emphasise an aspect of their subject to suggest a particular meaning. After all, making art is often a matter of interpretation.

1 Imagine you are one of the characters in the paintings of Coogee Beach. Based on the artists' interpretations of the scene, write a short diary entry describing your day at the beach.

2 What do the similarities and differences between Conder's and Roberts's paintings reveal to you about:

- the artists' shared interests
- each artist's individual interests and style?

3 Compare the painting of Coogee Beach by Conder or Roberts with the landscape painting by Claude Lorraine (p. 28). What similarities and differences can you find in the:

- subject matter
- painting technique
- atmosphere, light and colour?

4 Imagine you could choose to learn landscape painting from Claude, Roberts or Conder. Explain your choice of teacher by referring to the work of two of these artists.

Not long after Roberts and Conder worked together in Sydney, Conder travelled to Melbourne. Over the next two summers, Roberts, Conder and Arthur Streeton (1867–1943) were among the artists who painted together en plein air at an artists' camp near Heidelberg, on the outskirts of Melbourne. This led to the group being known as the Heidelberg School; however, the term **Australian Impressionists** is frequently preferred because it includes artists who worked at other artists' camps associated with the plein-air movement, including earlier camps at Box Hill and Mentone, where Frederick McCubbin (p. 104) worked with the group. It also links the Australian plein-air artists with international **Impressionism**.

#### EXPLORE

Australian plein-air painters generally used art elements such as natural colour to create a realistic impression of their landscapes; however, European plein-air artists, including French Impressionists such as Claude Monet (p. 123) and Camille Pissarro (p. 69), became interested in colour theories that saw them introduce bold colour combinations in their work.

Conder moved to Paris in 1890. Imagine you are Conder and you have just seen a painting by a French Impressionist. Write a letter to Roberts telling him about the work of the French artist and explaining what you think the main similarities and differences are between French Impressionism and the work of the Australian plein-air painters.

#### CREATE

Find an object that is interesting to look at: something that is made up of lots of different shapes. Look at it closely, then put it away and try to draw it from memory.

Draw the object a second time, this time looking at your object and closely observing the colours, shapes, lines, tones, form and texture. Think about how you are going to place the object on your page to make your drawing as interesting as possible. You may even choose to focus on just part of the object.

Compare your two drawings. Which is the most successful and why?

Investigate the role that observation and interpretation play in creating an artwork. If a number of people have drawn the same object, compare your drawing from observation with others' drawings. What evidence can you see of different people making individual interpretations of the object?

## 4.13

### A DRAMATIC LANDSCAPE

Artists often make art inspired by the places they live in or visit. The Australian outback has been an important source of inspiration for many artists.



The Pilbara

In Australia, the term 'outback' is used to refer to remote, sparsely inhabited locations, especially in inland Australia.

#### The Pilbara

The Pilbara is an area of approximately 500 000 square kilometres in northern Western Australia, extending from the west coast to the Great Sandy Desert.

The Pilbara contains spectacular inland ranges, including the Hamersley Range and Ophthalmia Range, which have rich deposits of iron ore and other minerals. Mining has been the major industry in the area since the 1960s, but the grandeur and beauty of the ancient rock formations, gorges and deserts also attract tourists.

#### Inspired by the desert

Australian **landscape** artist **Fred Williams** (1927–1982) (p. 37) made two short trips to the Pilbara in 1979. He flew over the area by aeroplane and also spent time exploring the country on the ground. Inspired by the vast and dramatic landscape, he produced a series of more than 100 **gouache** paintings in just a few months.

Some were made working **en plein air** in the Pilbara; others were made in the **studio**, using the artist's memory of the area and photographs.

After working on other projects, Williams returned to painting the Pilbara landscape in 1981. He worked rapidly to produce a major series of oil paintings in the studio.

It was common for Williams to immerse himself in a subject and explore its possibilities in gouache, oils and printmaking. His work in each medium influenced his work in other media. While the long break between making the Pilbara gouaches and the oil paintings was unusual, the artist's

interest in the Pilbara landscape had remained strong. He noted in his journal at the time, 'I don't think waiting two years has done me one little bit of harm – in fact it has tended to make my response to the subject more intense.'<sup>9</sup>

It was the **formal** challenges presented by the Australian landscape that most interested Williams. He was fascinated by the landscape's colour, form, structure and composition. His paintings often appear deceptively simple; however, every element and mark in his paintings is carefully considered.

In *Red Landscape*, the composition is simply divided in two by a high, unbroken **horizon** line. The painting's focus is a broad expanse of country, painted with brilliant, glowing red. Scattered across the smoothly painted surface are smudges of darker colour, strong strokes and dabs of thicker, textured paint. The marks suggest areas of mineral deposits, scrubby vegetation and isolated trees, and they create a gentle visual rhythm that moves our eyes through the landscape.

*Red Landscape* demonstrates the bold approach to representing space that Williams pioneered in his landscape paintings. The picture space is flat: there is no **foreground**, **middleground** and **background** to suggest distance as you would see in traditional landscapes. *Red Landscape* seems to combine an aerial (bird's-eye) view, which Williams had already used in other paintings, with a more conventional view.

The simplified compositions, flattened space, intense colour and **painterly** marks in the Pilbara series reflect the unique visual language that Williams developed in response to the landscape.

The Pilbara paintings were Williams's last major series before his premature death from illness.



Stock route, Pilbara, Western Australia



Fred Williams  
 Australian, 1927–1982  
**Red Landscape**, 1981  
 oil on canvas  
 152.0 × 182.4 cm  
 National Gallery of Victoria,  
 Melbourne  
 Presented through the NGV  
 Foundation by Rio Tinto  
 Limited, Honorary Life  
 Benefactor, 2001 (2001.588)  
 © Estate of Fred Williams



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to read more about the Pilbara series in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to Williams's Infinite Horizons exhibition on the National Gallery of Australia's website.

- 1 Williams kept a journal. Imagine you are the artist. Write a journal entry about *Red Landscape* to describe how you made it. Use the following questions to get started.
  - What did you use as references for your work, such as other paintings, photographs and memories?
  - Which colour was put on first? How did you proceed?
  - What types of brushes and brushstrokes did you use?
  - Did you work quickly or slowly?
  - Why are you satisfied with this painting? (Williams only kept work that he was happy with.)
- 2 Explain how *Red Landscape* can be seen to combine an aerial view with a more conventional view of the landscape.
- 3 Imagine you are in *Red Landscape*. Write a descriptive paragraph to explain what you see, feel and hear in the landscape. Use the clues provided by the painting as your starting point.

- 4 Based on your understanding of Williams's artistic interests, suggest why Williams often explored a subject in a variety of media.

#### EXPLORE

Research the work of another artist who has painted the Australian outback, such as Russell Drysdale (1912–1981) or Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri (c. 1933–2002).

Choose a work by the artist who interests you.

- What place or area is represented in the painting?
- What was it about the place that inspired the artist?
- What ideas or meanings does the artwork communicate about the place and how?
- What interests you about this work?

Present your findings as a webpage, publication or PowerPoint presentation.

#### DISCUSS

Until they were donated to the National Gallery of Victoria in 2001, the Pilbara series was the property of Rio Tinto, a company heavily involved in the mining industry in the Pilbara. Why might the company have been interested in the Pilbara paintings?

### PERSPECTIVES ON RURAL AUSTRALIA

How artists see and represent the world is informed by many factors, including their personal experiences and the influence of ideas such as feminism.



Follow the links from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to learn more about Smart's work.

#### A personal perspective

Australian artist **Sally Smart** (b. 1960) grew up on a farm in Quorn, South Australia, an experience that has had an important influence on her work. Many of her works include images of strong rural women and present a view of Australian bush life quite different from the iconic images of Australian art that focus on male pioneers and bush characters.

#### A gender perspective

Smart began her career in the 1980s, when feminism was having a significant effect on the visual arts. Many books and exhibitions focused on female artists, past and present, and many artists were creating work exploring gender issues. The representation and construction of female identity became an important theme in Smart's work. This is evident in references in her work to fabrics, stitching, patchwork and darning: crafts that traditionally have been done by women but have not always been valued in the visual arts.

Memories and experiences of farm life are also evident in Smart's work in the connections she makes to nature and the landscape, usually in shapes or fragments of things such as trees, giant insects and clouds.

Smart was particularly interested in making rural environments the focus of *Shadow Farm* because the work was made for the Bendigo Art Gallery in rural Victoria and later toured to other regional galleries around Australia.

Smart has described *Shadow Farm* as an **assemblage installation**. It includes a variety of materials and forms, such as painted felt and fabric cut-outs pinned to the gallery wall, and some smaller, three-dimensional constructions.

Anyone familiar with rural Australia, even as a visitor, will recognise objects that are part of everyday farm life in this work: a ramshackle assortment of sheds, a stately water tank on its spindly stand, the homestead with its wide verandah, the skeletal remains of disused farm machinery and a gathering of farm animals.

Although these elements may be familiar, the image of rural life in *Shadow Farm* is not a direct description. It has more in common with the fragmented, fleeting and sometimes fantastic images of dreams and memories. Objects are represented by their shadows or shapes; some shapes loom unexpectedly large, while others are strangely small. A tractor becomes a surface for colourful, abstract patterns, while a floral sheet lies behind a paddock gate. Smart creates an unstable reality that reflects the influence of **art movements** such as **Dada** and **Surrealism** on her work.

When it toured regional Australia, *Shadow Farm* changed in each location that it was exhibited. The different gallery space in each location was a practical reason for this change; however, Smart was also interested in how the work could be rearranged to create new meaning.

In *Shadow Farm*, I construct my farm according to an idea of representing domestic spaces in the bush, particularly the spaces of the farmhouse, like verandah, yard, garden and paddock.<sup>10</sup>



Sally Smart  
Australian, b. 1960  
**Horsecraft (*Shadow Farm*)**,  
2001 (detail)  
synthetic polymer paint on  
felt with collage elements  
installation view (size  
variable)  
Bendigo Art Gallery

#### EXPLORE

Hans Christian Andersen's paper cut-outs have been an influence on Smart's work.

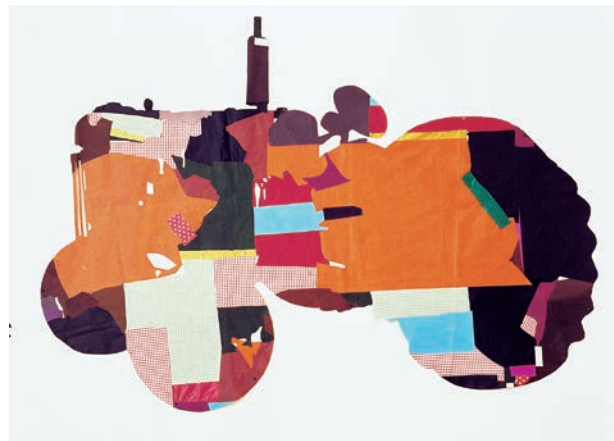
Based on your observation of both artists' work, suggest why Smart may be interested in Hans Christian Andersen's paper cut-outs.



Sally Smart  
Australian, b. 1960  
**Shadow Farm**, 2003  
installation view (size variable)  
Wollongong City Gallery,  
Wollongong, Australia



Sally Smart  
Australian, b. 1960  
**The House that Jack Built**, 2001 (detail)  
synthetic polymer paint on fabric with collage elements  
320 × 410 cm (size variable)



Sally Smart  
Australian, b. 1960  
**Sonia's Tractor**, 2001  
synthetic polymer paint on fabric with collage elements  
240 × 320 cm  
Bendigo Art Gallery,  
Australia

- 1 What meaning does the title *Shadow Farm* suggest to you?
- 2 List three things that you recognise in *Shadow Farm*, and describe how the artist has used art elements – such as colour, shape and line – to represent each. What meanings or ideas does this suggest to you about the things you identified?
- 3 Compare *Shadow Farm* with *Field Naturalists* (p. 193) and *Shearing the Rams* (p. 150) by:
  - describing what aspect of bush life is represented in each work and how it is represented
  - explaining how each artist's personal interests and background, and the historical context in which they worked, influenced their work.



#### CREATE

Create a large collage on the theme of identity, such as personal, cultural, school or community identity. Your collage should incorporate a variety of shapes cut from paper, fabric, felt or other materials to represent aspects of identity. Incorporate some **silhouettes** and some free-form shapes.

An easy way to create a silhouette of a person or object is to stick a piece of paper to a wall, shine a light on the paper and, placing your subject between the light and paper, trace the shadow.

Look at Hans Christian Andersen's paper cut-outs on the Internet for inspiration, and consider how he used folding and refolding to create interesting patterns.

Think about how you might scale different shapes and use art elements, such as colour, texture and line, to add interest to your composition. You should also consider how you will arrange your shapes (such as clustering, spacing, overlapping and layering) for maximum effect.

Your class could work together to create a giant wall collage somewhere in the school. It could even be adapted as an outdoor wall collage if appropriate materials (plastic, painted wood) were used.

## 4.15

## STILL LIFE

A still life is an arrangement of inanimate (non-living) objects. Traditional still-life arrangements often include household objects, food and flowers. Still-life artworks often depict subject matter that is rich in symbolism.

While still-life art is often associated with two-dimensional artforms such as painting and drawing, it can also be three-dimensional.

The variety of fruit in *Still Life with Fruit* would have been quite rare in many parts of Europe in the seventeenth century; however, de Heem would have become familiar with such fruit while he was living in Antwerp, an important trading port in the southern Netherlands.

The Dutch called a still life with precious objects and exotic fruits a *pronkstilleven* (sumptuous still life) or *pronk still life*.

Jan Davidsz. de Heem  
Dutch, 1606–1683/84  
*Still Life with Fruit*,  
c. 1640–50  
oil on canvas  
67.3 × 79.8 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Felton Bequest, 1935 (231–4)

## A worthy subject?

Subjects taken from everyday life, including **still life**, are now common in art; however, until the late nineteenth century, ordinary objects, people or places were often not considered worthy subjects in western art. Subjects drawn from religion, history and mythology were favoured.

This was not the case, however, in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. The Protestant north was dominated by a pious, hardworking, urban merchant class who were wealthy and successful but did not approve of extravagant display. They were more interested in paintings of everyday subjects that reflected the world around them.

Artists in the Netherlands tended to be specialised, focusing on a particular category of painting, such as flower painting, peasant scenes or winter landscapes.

## A sumptuous spread

Dutch artist **Jan Davidsz. de Heem** (1606–1683/84) was highly regarded as a painter of fruit. Can you see why by looking at *Still Life with Fruit*? The exotic fruit is depicted with convincing realism, as are other items in the picture, including the bread, oysters, fabrics and decorative objects. This is an example of a category of still life called *pronkstilleven*.

While Dutch still-life paintings are widely admired for their beauty, they usually include symbolic meaning. **Vanitas symbolism** appears in many still-life paintings to remind the viewer of the transitory nature of beauty and life. Sometimes, the vanitas symbolism is obvious, for example a skull may be used to suggest death; however, the symbolism can also be as subtle as a blemish or a touch of decay on a fruit, or a flower's fallen petal.

- 1 Explain why you think *Still Life with Fruit* could be classified as a *pronkstilleven*.
- 2 What evidence of vanitas symbolism can you find in *Still Life with Fruit*?
- 3 Compare *Still Life with Fruit* with *Killing Time* (p. 51). Consider the subject matter, materials, techniques and use of art elements. How does each work reflect the time and place in which it was made?

## EXPLORE

Look at other paintings of everyday subjects made in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. Find a work that interests you and describe:

- its subject matter
- how art elements and materials have been used to describe the subject matter
- the use of symbolism to convey meaning.



## An artful arrangement

*Blue (Bower/Bauer)* by eX de Medici (b. 1959) is a visual feast – a composition teeming with a diverse collection of objects and dominated by brilliant blue and violet hues with flashes of red and orange.

At first glance, the selection and arrangement of objects appear random. Looking more closely reveals the conceptual complexities of the work. For example, do you notice that the composition spirals out from the tall blue vase on the right to lead viewers' eyes through the composition?

Luxury objects, such as glass dishes, silk ribbons, porcelain bowls and figurines, are interspersed with other objects, including skulls, thorny branches, metal shackles and a smattering of Union Jacks. Can you see the connection to Dutch still-life tradition and vanitas symbolism?

The artist's reference to traditional still-life paintings and her use of **watercolour paint** is deliberate. Historically, still-life and watercolour paintings have not been highly valued and have often been associated with the work of amateurs. The large scale and complexity of de Medici's work challenges such preconceptions.

*Blue (Bower/Bauer)* was the first of a series of paintings that the artist started when John Howard became prime minister in 1997. The artist was frustrated by the Howard government's conservative stance on many issues. The symbolism in the artist's works includes both obvious and subtle elements of social and political commentary, including the *Banksia menziesii* flowers in the tall blue vase. The banksia flowers are a reference to Robert Menzies, who was prime minister between 1949 and 1966 and a role model to John Howard.

- 4 Create an annotated copy of *Blue (Bower/Bauer)* to highlight the design principles important in making the work.
- 5 Identify five objects in *Blue (Bower/Bauer)* that you think have symbolic significance, and explain what you think is the significance of each.



- 6 Compare *Still Life with Fruit* with *Blue (Bower/Bauer)*. Consider the:
  - use of materials and techniques
  - subject matter
  - the time and place in which it was made.

Which do you prefer? Why?



### CREATE

Create your own personal still-life artwork.

Arrange three to five objects that have special significance to you and that communicate something about your life, interests or personality (such as childhood toys or favourite objects).

You may want to represent the objects realistically or simplify them to focus on formal qualities, such as colour or form.



### DISCUSS

Although still-life painting has not always been highly regarded as a serious subject in the art world, it has always been popular with the public. Suggest reasons for this difference of opinion.

eX de Medici  
Australian, b. 1959  
***Blue (Bower/Bauer)***,  
1998–2000  
watercolour over black  
pencil  
114.0 × 152.8 cm (image);  
114 × 152.8 cm (sheet)  
National Gallery of Australia,  
Canberra  
Purchased 2004  
© eX de Medici

De Medici's appreciation of the powerful symbolism of objects such as skulls is partly due to her experience as a tattoo artist.

*Blue (Bower/Bauer)* took the artist 18 months to complete. She did a study for every object in the painting.

In 2000–01, de Medici was an artist fellow at the CSIRO in the entomology division. During this time, she had access to the Australian National Insect Collection, which includes thousands of classified and unclassified species, many rare or extinct. Her microscopic studies of different species of moths became an important source of inspiration for her art.



# ART OF THE EVERYDAY

## 4.16

### ART GOES POP

Subjects, materials and techniques borrowed from popular culture play an important role in the visual arts today.

Although Pop art became an international movement, it often has an American flavour. The United States emerged as the most powerful industrialised nation after the Second World War. American popular culture (including movies, rock 'n' roll and fast food) spread around the world and became part of the popular culture of many different countries.

#### DISCUSS

Do you think that there is a difference between high culture, and popular culture in contemporary life? Explain why.

The colours and tones on many commercially printed images are actually made up of thousands of tiny dots called **benday dots**. Lichtenstein imitated the effect of benday dots in his paintings by using a stencil.

### Popular culture

**Popular culture** is part of our everyday lives. Popular culture is a general term used to describe products and activities that are usually cheap and mass-produced for broad audiences. It includes consumer goods (such as fashion items and fast food) and popular entertainment and communication (such as movies, comics, magazines and advertising).

### High and low

Popular culture has often been seen as 'low' culture and not as highly valued as **high culture**. High culture is traditionally associated with serious art, music, dance and literature: culture that is highly valued and

often only accessible to well-educated and wealthy audiences.

Since the 1950s, many artists have blurred the boundaries between popular culture and high culture. Artists have taken their subjects, and sometimes their materials and techniques, from popular culture.

### Inspired by comics

When American artist **Roy Lichtenstein** (1923–1997) began making paintings, comic books were popular. Lichtenstein created many paintings inspired by images from comic books. Stylistic features he borrowed from comic-book images evident in *Masterpiece* include strong black outlines and flat areas of bright colour. The figures are very closely cropped as though Lichtenstein zoomed in on the faces. The speech bubble is another widely used convention in comics.

Lichtenstein's characters conform to comic-book stereotypes. Brad is dark, handsome and the hero of the scene. The female is a movie-star-attractive blonde and clearly in a supporting role as Brad's admirer. The art theme of *Masterpiece*, however, is not typical of comics. Perhaps this is Lichtenstein having a bit of fun at the expense of the art world.

You can find other important differences between *Masterpiece* and comic-book images. Comic-book images are small, mass-produced and disposable; however, Lichtenstein's painting is large and has been carefully painted by hand.



Roy Lichtenstein  
American, 1923–1997  
*Masterpiece*, 1962  
© Estate of Roy  
Lichtenstein. Licensed  
by Viscopy, 2016

(detail)

Lichtenstein was closely associated with the development of **Pop art**, which emerged in Britain and the United States in the late 1950s and 1960s. Pop art usually features subjects, materials, techniques or visual effects inspired by popular culture.

- 1 List three things that are important in popular culture today. What were three important elements of popular culture when your parents or grandparents were young? What is the most significant change between the generations?
- 2 What does *Masterpiece* suggest to you about Lichtenstein's thoughts on popular culture?

## Plastic people

Australian artist **Christopher Langton** (b. 1954) is interested in making artworks that relate to contemporary life, and he wants his work to be accessible to a wide audience. Langton has made a significant number of large inflatable sculptures, inspired by the giant inflatables that are often used in advertising and at public events. Cheap, mass-produced novelty toys have also been an important source of inspiration for his work.

Although *Brat Pack* may look like it is commercially manufactured, each figure was produced by hand from PVC and vinyl. Features were painted on using a spray gun.

The size of Langton's sculptures adds to their impact. Langton also adds to the effect of his work by repeating the same or similar forms, as you see in *Brat Pack*. Imagine meeting this group of brats on your next gallery visit. Despite their cute, cartoon-like features and smiley faces, these larger-than-life figures can appear a bit confronting.

The repetition of forms in *Brat Pack* and other works by Langton may also be seen as a comment on contemporary society's mass production and consumption of goods.

- 3 Explain how the size and repetition of figures in *Brat Pack* adds to the work's effect and meaning.
- 4 What does the use of plastic add to the effect and meaning of *Brat Pack*?
- 5 Do you believe that Langton has been successful in creating a work that relates to contemporary life? Why?



Christopher Langton  
Australian, b. 1954  
*Brat Pack*, 1996  
PVC, synthetic polymer paint and air  
dimensions variable  
Lyon Collection of Australian Contemporary Art

Langton acquired and refined the skills needed to make inflatable sculptures by trial and error over a long period. He began by taking blow-up toys apart to see how they were made.



### CREATE

Create a comic-book hero or heroine for the twenty-first century. Make a drawing of your character in the style of comic-book images. While your hero or heroine should be the focus of the scene, include clues that reveal something about the special character or life of the hero or heroine.

Animate the character using a computer program, such as Flash or Director, or create a series of stills to portray a story.



### EXPLORE

What is plastic? When was it invented? What is it mainly used for? How long will it last? Do you believe it is a suitable material for making art? Why?

Find an example of an artwork made using plastic. Describe the artwork, and explain how the use of plastic contributes to the appearance or meaning of the work.



### DISCUSS

Consider the differences between *Brat Pack* and the inflatables that are used in advertising and entertainment. Why is *Brat Pack* an artwork, while the other inflatables are not?



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to see other works by Langton.

# ART OF THE EVERYDAY

4.17

## ART FROM THE SUBURBS

Domestic and suburban environments have inspired many artists.



Brett Whiteley  
Australian, 1939–1992  
*Interior, Lavender Bay*,  
1976  
Private collection  
© Brett Whiteley Estate

### A familiar interior

Interiors are a strong theme in the work of Australian artist **Brett Whiteley** (1939–1992). He made many paintings and drawings of his Lavender Bay, Sydney, home where he moved in 1969.

Like his other interiors, the drawing *Interior, Lavender Bay* offers a fascinating glimpse into Whiteley's life. Two pet dogs snooze on a mattress covered in large, plump

cushions. Several of Whiteley's own artworks are in the room: sculptures on pedestals and a drawing of a nude on the wall.

The lush garden vegetation is visible through the open windows. The Lavender Bay house's spectacular park and harbour views inspired some of Whiteley's best-known paintings.

Did you also notice that Whiteley has put himself in the drawing? His hands can be seen drawing in the foreground.

When he made this drawing, Whiteley had made a deliberate decision to leave behind earlier themes that had concerned him, including themes related to social issues, politics and intense self-analysis. He became more interested in exploring beauty. In this drawing, he responds intuitively and expressively to his subject using flowing, elegant lines. Decorative detail and pattern – and several areas of intense line work – add interest and contrast to the composition.

- 1 How has Whiteley created balance, unity, variety, rhythm, a focal point and a sense of space in *Interior, Lavender Bay*? You may wish to present your answer as an annotated copy of the image.
- 2 What evidence can you find in *Interior, Lavender Bay* that Whiteley responded intuitively and expressively to his subject?

### Dream home

Domestic interiors and exteriors were an important source of inspiration for Australian artist **Howard Arkley** (1951–1999). The rooms and houses seen in Arkley's paintings were created by the artist from images in home-improvement magazines and real-estate brochures. Arkley explained that the images in *Suburban Interior*:



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to learn more about Whiteley's work and the Brett Whiteley Studio.

come from a Myer direct mail colour catalogue, which I collaged together selecting all the elements that I really liked, those items which I thought were the best: the best carpet, the best light, the best chair plus a domestic pet.<sup>11</sup>

Did you notice that the lines in *Suburban Interior* have soft edges? Arkley painted them with an airbrush. When he began working with an airbrush as a young art student, airbrushes were generally only used in commercial art; however, Arkley liked the smooth ‘coolness’ of airbrushed surfaces and they became an important part of his work.

*Suburban Interior* also reveals an interest in pattern that began early in Arkley’s career. The artist’s early paintings include **non-representational art** with patterns inspired by everyday objects, such as decorative screen doors and fabric designs. Real wallpaper adds to the patterned effect.

*Suburban Interior* was the first painting Arkley made with a suburban house as the subject. Arkley later made many other paintings inspired by suburban interiors and exteriors, often using bright, fluorescent colour and stencilled patterns to create vibrant and dazzling effects.

The Australian suburbs are often dismissed as boring and dull; however, in Arkley’s artworks, familiar family homes seem to become fantasy dream homes and you discover new ways of viewing the suburbs.

3 Identify two places in *Suburban Interior* where you can see interesting patterns. Describe the patterns.

4 Compare *Interior, Lavender Bay* with *Suburban Interior*. Consider the:

- subject matter
- use of materials and techniques
- use of art elements
- meanings communicated by the work.

Which of the interiors would you rather live in and why?

#### DISCUSS

Why might *Suburban Interior* be seen by some people as a more accurate reflection of our national identity than Tom Roberts’s *Shearing the Rams* (p. 150)?



An airbrush is a mechanical painting tool that uses compressed air to apply paint in a fine spray.

Learn more about the research Arkley did and the working processes he used for *Suburban Interior* on pp. 12–13, 16.

Howard Arkley  
Australian, 1951–1999  
*Suburban Interior*, 1983  
synthetic polymer paint on wallpaper on canvas  
160 × 120 cm  
Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne  
The Baillieu Myer Collection of the 80s  
© The Estate of Howard Arkley. Licensed by Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art

#### CREATE

Collect photographs of room interiors from magazines and newspapers. Find an image of a room, or part of a room, that you think would be a good starting point for your ideal room.

Make a line drawing of the room, then, using other images for reference, add some furniture and objects that you like.

Choose a colour scheme for your room and paint it.

Consider where you could use decorative patterns to add interest to your composition. You could use a stencil to do this.

#### EXPLORE

Arkley suggested a connection between *Suburban Interior* and the collage of English artist Richard Hamilton (b. 1922) *Just What Is It That Makes Today’s Home So Different, So Appealing?* (1956), which is often seen as a key work in the development of Pop art.

Find a reproduction of Hamilton’s work and learn more about its significance.

- What connections can you find between Hamilton’s collage and *Suburban Interior*?
- How does each work reflect the particular time and place in which it was made?

#### DISCUSS

Although most Australians live in suburbs, they have not always been a popular subject matter for artists. Why do you think this is so? Does *Suburban Interior* change the way you look at or think about the suburbs? Can artworks change the way we look at familiar things?

## 4.18

## A CULTURE OF CARS

Cars and car culture are an aspect of **popular culture**, and they have inspired a number of Australian artists.



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to read the history of the Holden car on the National Museum of Australia's website.

Dodd used a **mould** to make the basic shape of the Holden cars in this series.

When Dodd made her first ceramic Holden, she was living in an outer suburb of Adelaide called Holden Hill.

Margaret Dodd  
Australian, b. 1941  
*Grassed Holden*, 1972  
earthenware  
19.9 × 43.8 × 21.2 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Purchased 1974 (A5-1974)  
© Margaret Dodd



## A national icon

Although it looks a little unusual in this artwork, the car that inspired this sculpture is a 1948 Holden, the first motor car manufactured in Australia. Because it is regarded as a home-grown car, the Holden is often viewed with great affection by Australians.

Australian artist **Margaret Dodd** (b. 1941) made a series of **ceramic** sculptures inspired by Holdens; however, as seen in *Grassed Holden*, these are no ordinary Holdens. Dodd was not interested in creating the slick finish that is often associated with cars. Her Holdens each have a unique, handmade quality. Each car in the series has a special character that encourages the viewer to think more deeply about the role of Holden cars in Australian society.

What association do you make with the grass on this particular Holden? Perhaps it is a reference to the lawns that have often been seen as an important part of the Australian suburban home. At the time that Dodd

was growing up, a Holden car and a house in the suburbs with a nice green lawn was something many people aspired to.

- 1 Which art elements do you think are most important in *Grassed Holden*? Describe how they are used and the meaning they add to the work.
- 2 *Grassed Holden* clearly appears to be handmade. What gives the work this appearance? What meaning does this add to the work?

## Larking around

What connections can you make between the Holden car that is the **focal point** of the large painting by Australian artist **Jon Campbell** (b. 1961) (pp. 194–5) and the title of the painting, *We Wanna Be Free*?

Being in a car and on the road is often associated with travel and freedom. This is probably especially so for teenagers because their first car can represent new independence. The early model Holden in *We Wanna Be Free* is the sort of car that many teenagers might have had for their first car

## DISCUSS

Since 1948, when the famous Holden car first took to the road, a succession of landmark models have become an integral part of the Australian way of life. In 2013, Holden announced that the company would cease production in Australia by 2017, although they would continue to import and sell cars here.

Do you think cars, particularly Holdens, are an important part of the Australian way of life? Why? Does the fact that some Australian artists, including Dodd and Campbell, make artworks about cars influence your opinion in any way? Are cars as important in other cultures? Why?



Jon Campbell  
 Australian, b. 1961  
*We Wanna Be Free*, 1993  
 enamel and synthetic  
 polymer paint on canvas  
 183 × 244 cm  
 The Vizard Foundation Art  
 Collection of the 1990s,  
 acquired 1995  
 On loan to the Ian Potter  
 Museum of Art, The  
 University of Melbourne  
 Courtesy of the artist and  
 Darren Knight Gallery,  
 Sydney

when Campbell was young. The exuberant figures that are larking around on the car appear full of youthful energy and excitement, celebrating the freedom offered by the car.

The subject matter of Campbell's art reflects the artist's own experiences and observations of everyday life. Youth culture, suburbia, family and music are all important themes in his work.

Campbell draws on a range of sources for his work, including his own drawings and images he collects from magazines and newspapers. He plans compositions carefully, often making a number of drawings, which he sometimes photocopies and colours to determine how all the elements will work together. When it comes to making the finished painting, he often works quite quickly. He likes the idea of his work looking fresh and spontaneous.

Campbell's painting style is bold and graphic. He is more interested in capturing the essence of his subject than describing detail. Forms are highly **stylised** with simple outlines and bold, flat areas of colour.

- 3 Campbell often works with enamel or acrylic paint on canvas. Suggest why he might use these paints rather than traditional oil paints.
- 4 What meanings does *We Wanna Be Free* suggest to you? What is it about the painting that suggests these ideas?
- 5 Do you think the title suits the painting? Why?



Follow the link from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to further information about Campbell and his work.



#### CREATE

The Holden car is sometimes described as an Australian **icon**. List other Australian icons and choose one as the subject of a two-dimensional or three-dimensional artwork that communicates your ideas about its role in Australian culture.



#### EXPLORE

Find another example of an Australian artwork in which a car (or cars) is important. What ideas does the artwork communicate to you about the car in Australian culture? How does the artist express these ideas?

You may want to consider other work by Dodd or Campbell, or artworks by John Brack, Tim Jones, Robert Rooney or Patricia Piccinini.

# INNER AND IMAGINARY WORLDS

## 4.19

### EXPRESSING THE PERSONAL

Many artists create artworks to express personal feelings or experiences. Artworks that communicate feelings and emotions are often described as expressive.

Munch repeated the same images in different media. There are two paintings, two pastels and lithographic versions of *The Scream*.

Astronomers have suggested that the red sky in *The Scream* was inspired by the unusually brilliant sunsets that Europe experienced in the winter of 1883–84 as a result of the eruption of Krakatoa.

*The Scream* has inspired artists and filmmakers and spawned a wide range of merchandise, including T-shirts and mouse-pads, and even inflatable sculptures (p. 205).

### Inspired by experience

Norwegian artist **Edvard Munch** (1863–1944) suffered emotional trauma and loss in his life. When he was only five years old, his mother died, leaving the family of seven children in the care of their father, who was zealously religious, authoritarian and almost insane. Nine years later, Munch's closest and favourite sister, Sophie, died of tuberculosis. Another sister was hospitalised for melancholia. As an adult, Munch was involved in several complicated relationships with women that left him psychologically scarred.

Munch created powerfully **expressive art** based on events and experiences in his life. His work explores and exposes many aspects of human emotion and psychology, including

love, death, desire, jealousy, melancholy, angst, grief and loneliness.

Munch's best-known work is *The Scream*. The circumstances that inspired this image have been described by Munch. He was walking along a path overlooking Oslo with two friends. He could see the place where a good friend had shot himself and he could hear the screams of women in the asylum where his sister was hospitalised.

Then the sun set. Suddenly the sky became a bloody red. [and I felt a ting of melancholy, a sucking pain beneath my heart] I stopped, leaned against the railing, dead tired. Over the blue-black fjord and city hung blood and tongues of fire. My friends walked on and I stood again trembling with fright. And I felt as if a loud unending scream were piercing nature.<sup>12</sup>

Can you see how Munch has expressed this experience in *The Scream*? Streams and swirling waves of thick, black lines, heightened with blood red and deep green, flow around the composition, suggesting a disturbed and unsettled world that threatens to engulf the main figure. Although there are others nearby, the pale-faced and tormented figure appears isolated and on the verge of physical and emotional collapse.

- 1 List three words or phrases that describe the mood and atmosphere of *The Scream*. Explain what it is about the image that suggests these ideas to you.
- 2 List three words or phrases that describe the emotional state of the main figure in *The Scream*. What suggests these ideas to you?

The Art Archive/Masjonnal Galleriet, Oslo



Edvard Munch  
Norwegian,  
1863–1944  
*The Scream*,  
1893

#### DISCUSS

*The Scream* stands alongside the *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) as one of the most recognised and reproduced artworks in the world. What reasons can you suggest for this?

## An emotional response

Australian artist **Joy Hester** (1920–1960) admired the work of Munch. She was among the first artists in Australia to work in an obviously expressive style.

Hester was a passionate and complex woman who faced significant challenges in her short life. In 1947, she left her young son and first husband, artist Albert Tucker (1914–1999), to begin a new relationship. In the same year, she learnt she was suffering from Hodgkin's disease, a form of cancer, from which she died 13 years later.

Human emotions and relationships are a strong theme within Hester's work. Her paintings are dominated by images of women, couples and children, usually with a strong focus on the faces.

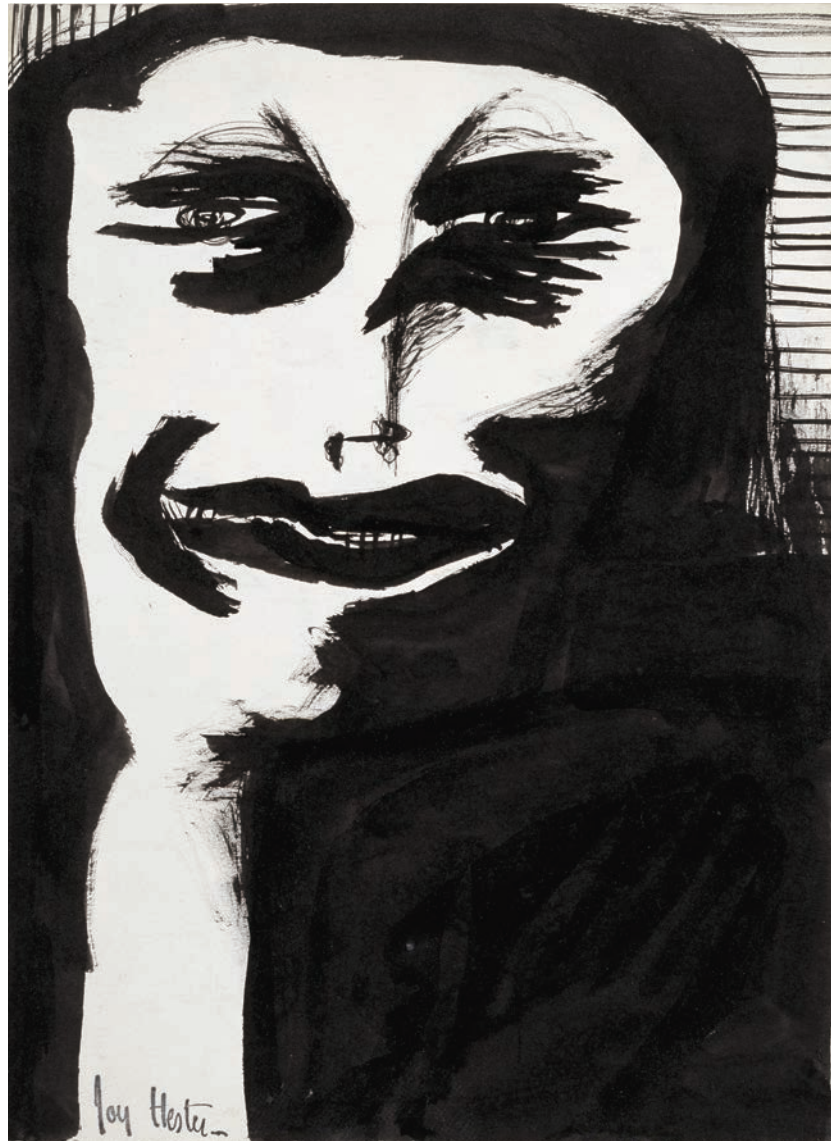
Hester's preferred medium was brush and ink. She often worked rapidly, making 20–40 drawings over a few days. In *(Untitled) (Woman in Black)* the subject's face fills the picture. Her features are described in strong, black lines of varying thicknesses. The concentration of lines and creases around the mouth and eyes and the dramatic contrast of black and white add to the emotional intensity of the image.

## Working expressively

Artists working expressively often create works in which materials and techniques are used in a raw and direct manner. This can sometimes shock audiences who expect artworks to be finished and detailed; however, the rawness and directness of expressive artworks can also make a strong connection between an artist and a viewer.

When the process of making an artwork is apparent, perhaps through bold, flowing lines or obvious brushstrokes, we have a visible trace or sign of the presence, energy and emotion of the artist.

- 3 Suggest why Hester might have worked with brush and ink rather than other drawing media. (Consider the working methods and visual effects that are possible with brush and ink.)
- 4 Based on your observations of both Munch's and Hester's work, suggest what Hester might have admired about Munch's work.



- 5 Imagine you are the director of a gallery that has just purchased *The Scream* or *(Untitled) (Woman in Black)*. Mr I Luvdetail, a member of the public, has written to complain about the purchase, arguing that the work looks crude and unfinished. Write a letter in reply to defend your purchase.

Joy Hester  
Australian, 1920–1960  
*(Untitled) (Woman in Black)*, c. 1948  
brush and ink  
37.2 × 26.9 cm irreg. (image and sheet)  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased 1976 (P128–1976)  
© Joy Hester. Licensed by Viscopy, 2016

### EXPLORE

Find an artwork that represents a person and expresses different emotions or feelings from those expressed in *The Scream* or *(Untitled) (Woman in Black)*. Explain how the artist has used art elements and materials to communicate emotion.



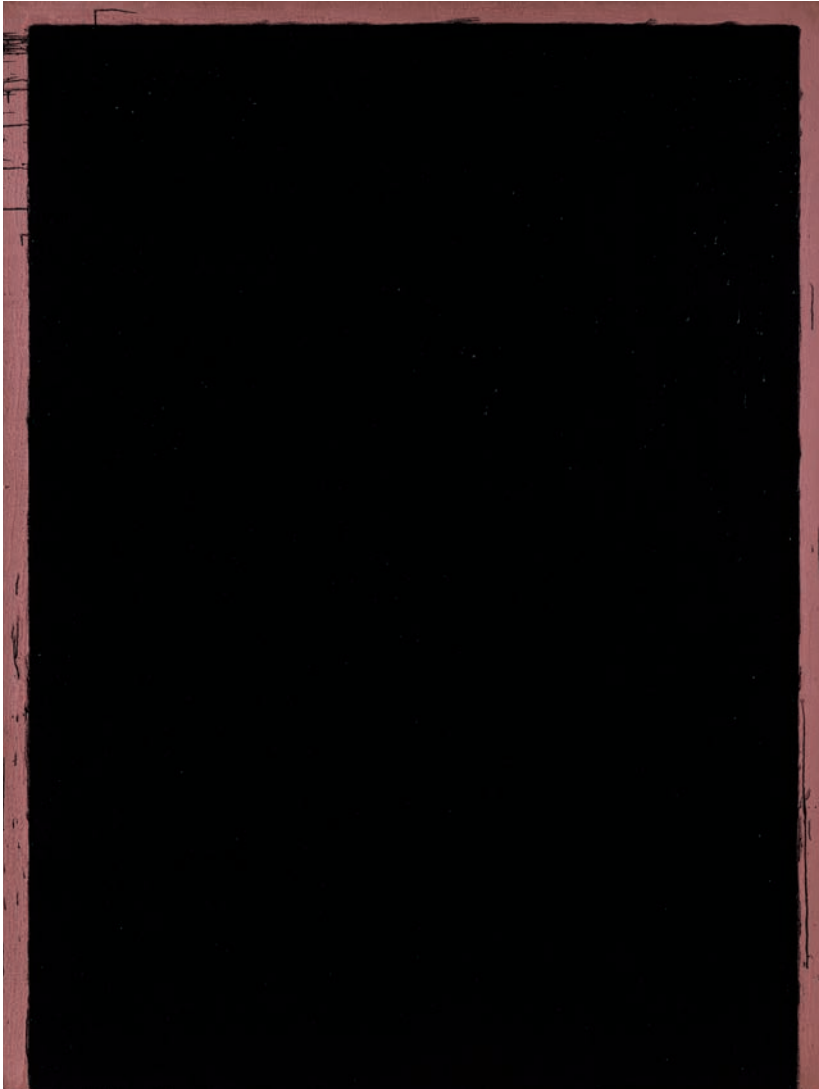
# INNER AND IMAGINARY WORLDS

4.20

## EVOLVING EXPRESSIONS

The style of most artists evolves over time in response to new ideas and influences.

Peter Booth has moved from making abstract **non-representational art** to **figurative art**, but his work has remained highly expressive.



Peter Booth  
born England 1940, arrived  
Australia 1958  
*Untitled*, 1971  
synthetic polymer paint  
on canvas  
245.0 × 184.5 cm  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Purchased 1971 (A8-1971)  
© Peter Booth. Licensed by  
Viscopy, 2016

### A doorway?

Look at *Untitled* (1971) by Australian artist **Peter Booth** (b. 1940). What do you see?

Almost the whole surface of this large painting is black. The blackness is bordered on three sides by a soft, dark-pink edge. Some people suggest that the edge creates the effect of looking through a window or a doorway. The artist has written on the back of the painting, 'never to be hung more than 6 inches [15 cm]

from the ground', suggesting he might have wanted to create such an effect.<sup>13</sup>

Booth made this painting at a time when many other artists were making **non-representational art** (pp. 176–7) and paintings that deliberately avoided references to the visible world or feelings. These artists wanted to create art that was cool and objective. They often did this by using ordered, **geometric** arrangements of art elements and smooth, precisely painted surfaces. In contrast, Booth's non-representational paintings appear emotional and subjective. In his work, he used rich, thick and glossy paint surfaces, and obvious strokes and drips of paint. These marks clearly record the artist's process and 'presence' in the making of the painting.

The **painterly** surface, colour and scale of Booth's paintings also elicit a subjective reaction from viewers. For many people, the black represents a mysterious black space and perhaps the beginning of a journey. For others, the colour black represents darkness and despair. Booth is keen for viewers to form their own ideas about his works; however, he has described the colour black as 'strong and beautiful – the colour of the universe'.<sup>14</sup>

Many people have linked the blackness often found in Booth's work to Sheffield, where Booth lived until he moved to Australia as a teenager. Sheffield is a major steel-producing city in England. The blackened industrial landscape and the destruction of parts of the city during wartime bombing raids left a strong impression on the artist.

### Return to figurative art

Drawing has always been an important part of Booth's art. Ever since he was a boy in Sheffield, he has made drawings from nature.



Peter Booth  
 born England 1940, arrived  
 Australia 1958  
**Painting**, 1977  
 oil on canvas  
 182.5 × 304.0 cm  
 National Gallery of Victoria,  
 Melbourne  
 Gift of the artist in memory  
 of Les Hawkins, 1978  
 (A24–1978)  
 © Peter Booth. Licensed by  
 Viscopy, 2016

He also records memories and dreams in drawings. His drawings were an important source of ideas and images when he began to make **figurative** paintings again after many years of creating non-representational paintings such as *Untitled* (1971).

*Painting* (1977) marked Booth's return to figurative painting. The composition is dominated by the large figure of a man on an empty road. He stares at you with burning, red eyes. A dog seems to stand guard in a blackened landscape, littered with strange plant-like forms and symbols. A city burns in the background. A blood-red sun (or moon) hovers in the darkened sky. Thick, textured brushstrokes create a swirling movement that suggests a hot wind howling through the landscape.

After *Painting* (1977), Booth made many other paintings of apocalyptic scenes, partly inspired by dreams, imagination and personal experience. These images suggest the destructive tendencies of humanity; however, they also highlight the resilience of nature. Booth strongly believes that all living things in the world are closely connected, and this idea is often important in his work.

- 1 Although *Untitled* (1971) and *Painting* (1977) are clearly different, they share some similarities. List the similarities and the differences you find in the features (scale, paint surface, colour) and ideas (subject matter, meanings) of each painting.
- 2 Imagine you are buying a painting for your home. Your choice is *Untitled* (1971) or *Painting* (1977). Use a PMI chart to evaluate each work. Which work would you choose and why?
- 3 The meanings associated with an artwork can change from viewer to viewer and over time. Suggest how personal experiences or events in the world since 1977 (such as war, terrorism or environmental disasters) may influence the meaning that a contemporary viewer finds in *Painting* (1977).

**EXPLORE**

Find an example of Booth's later work that interests you.

- What links can you find between this work and Booth's earlier work?
- What evidence can you find of new ideas or directions in the artist's work?

John Brack (pp. 72, 94) was one of Booth's teachers when Booth attended the National Gallery Art School. Brack was an important influence on Booth's art. He reinforced the value of drawing and visual diaries, and he encouraged Booth to read widely and adopt a serious and professional approach to making art.

Booth has noted that in Mayan mythology the white dog is the guardian of a recent death spirit. It has been suggested that the white dog in *Painting* (1977) may be a sign of **homage** to Laurence Stephen Lowry (p. 90), who Booth greatly admired and who died around the time Booth was working on the painting.

Booth's close friend Les Hawkins was also killed in an accident about the time that Booth made this painting.

# INNER AND IMAGINARY WORLDS

## 4.21

### FANTASY AND IMAGINATION

Fantasy and imagination are an important source of inspiration for many artists, including artists who have created inventive composite images.

Getty Images/Imagno



Giuseppe Arcimboldo  
Italian, 1527–1593  
*Vertumnus (Emperor  
Rudolf II)*, 1590  
oil on wood  
70.5 × 57.5 cm

#### A composite portrait

The inventive composite portraits by Italian artist **Giuseppe Arcimboldo** (1527–1593) are constructed from carefully selected and artfully arranged objects.

Arcimboldo was born in Milan, but in 1562 he moved to Vienna to become a court artist for the Habsburg emperor. His duties included painting portraits and designing costumes and sets for lavish festivities and pageants; however, it is his imaginative composite portraits that have had enduring popularity.

Arcimboldo copied some of his own paintings so that Rudolf II could give them to friends and political leaders.

*Vertumnus*, a **stylised** portrait of Emperor Rudolf II (1552–1612), is Arcimboldo's most famous portrait. Rudolf II was the last of the three Austrian emperors who Arcimboldo served. Vertumnus was the ancient Roman god of the seasons and growth. The portrait's harmonious combination of plants and produce from different seasons is often interpreted as a symbol of the harmony and glory of Rudolf's reign. Arcimboldo's work includes other portraits that feature plants and produce specific to each season.

During Rudolf II's reign, the court at Prague was a leading European centre for art and science. The **Renaissance** was a time of exploration and discovery, and Rudolf II was both a **patron** of the arts and an avid collector of natural science specimens and curiosities. He had a menagerie and botanical gardens that housed exotic species, and collections of stuffed animals, precious gems, mechanical objects, antiquities and other curiosities from around the world. Rudolf II's extensive collections were both an inspiration for Arcimboldo's portraits and a fitting location in which to display them.

Arcimboldo's paintings combine imagination with scientifically accurate observations of flora, fauna and other objects. Other portraits include a librarian made up of books and an admiral made up of fish.

- 1 List four plants, fruits or vegetables that you recognise in *Vertumnus*. Describe how each contributes to the portrait. Do you agree that the different elements used to create the portrait are artfully arranged? Why?
- 2 In what way could Arcimboldo's work be seen as a fusion of art and science?

#### DISCUSS

Why do you think composite images such as these have enduring and wide appeal?



Deva, son of Nathu  
Indian, active mid-19th  
century

**Composite Animals in a  
Landscape, 1851**

opaque watercolour and gold  
paint on paper  
20.6 × 22.9 cm (image);  
25.4 × 27.4 cm (sheet)  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Felton Bequest, 1980  
(AS285–1980)

The Mughals, originally from central Asia, ruled most of northern India from the early sixteenth century until the middle of the eighteenth century, when the British began to dominate. Although the Mughals were Muslim, Hinduism continued to be the main religion in India.

Maharaja was the title given to the hereditary Hindu rulers of Rajasthan in north-west India.

The Renaissance interest in studying the natural world was strong in Arcimboldo's home city of Milan, where Leonardo da Vinci, one of the most famous Renaissance artists, also worked.



Follow the links from <http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au> to websites devoted to the art and life of Arcimboldo and to see Phillip Haas's sculptures inspired by Arcimboldo's work.

## A composite animal

Composite animals became a popular subject of art in Mughal India. Such images are thought to have been influenced by Persian art, which was introduced to India by the Mughals.

*Composite Animals in a Landscape* was created by an artist known as **Deva**, who worked at the court of Maharaja Sarup Singh at Udaipur, Rajasthan. At first glance, the painting appears to depict a simple procession of animals and people in an **idyllic** landscape, which includes temples and houses in the background. On closer inspection, however, it becomes obvious that the horse is made up of entwined male and female figures, and the elephant is made up of humans and animals. Notice also how some of the creatures that make up the body of the elephant appear to be biting or eating the other creatures! To add to the strangeness of the scene, there are also three demon-like creatures, two of which, like the two other figures, are brandishing snakes.

It has been suggested that composite creatures such as the elephant and the horse

depicted in this painting are symbolic of the unity of living things. While the real meaning is a mystery, the image remains intriguing in its inventiveness.

**3** Compare the composite animals in *Composite Animals in a Landscape* with *Guardian Spirit* (p. 48). Consider the:

- use of materials and techniques
- purpose of each work
- way each work is influenced by the culture in which it was made.



**CREATE**

Create a composite portrait or animal made up of other objects. You may use objects from nature in the style of Arcimboldo or you could use something relevant to today, such as machinery parts, consumer products or junk food.

Create your artwork as a collage, digital image or sculpture.

Before you begin, look at other work by Arcimboldo and observe how he carefully selects the colour, tone and form of the objects he uses to create a human likeness. You may also find further inspiration by doing an online image search using the terms 'Arcimboldo effect'.