

A photograph of Betty Churcher, an older woman with short grey hair, smiling and painting a large abstract work. She is wearing a white shirt and a necklace. A hand holding a paintbrush is visible in the foreground, applying red paint to the artwork. The background is a bright yellow wall.

HIDDEN TREASURES

WITH BETTY CHURCHER

inside the National Gallery of Australia

FilmAustralia

TEACHERS NOTES
Prepared by Gail Frost



Film Australia Collection © NFSA

Series synopsis

The National Gallery of Australia has more than 100,000 works in its collection—an extraordinary reservoir of creative vision and cultural history, from decorative arts to photography and sculpture.

Yet on a visit to the gallery, you'll see only the tip of this iceberg. Carefully stored away are the things that can't be placed on permanent display.

These unseen gems include works of exquisite fragility, from brilliant hand-painted fabrics to delicate works on paper. From Australia, the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Oceania, there are masks and carvings, lithographs and linocuts, set designs and stage costumes, sketchpads and handprinted books, marionettes and maquettes, teapots and textiles, and much, much more.

Now in this series of micro-docs, former director of the gallery Betty Churcher presents an insider's guide to some of these 'hidden treasures'.

In the entertaining, accessible style for which she is renowned, Betty Churcher takes us behind the scenes, sharing with us her passion and insights. From her unique vantage point, she makes intriguing connections between a range of different objects and artists, linking them to the stories that surround them.

These are fascinating tales—about the works themselves, the people who created them and the challenge of preserving them—and a tantalising look at some of the ideas and influences that have shaped modern art across the globe.

Before watching each episode

Students should:

- have an understanding of the historical context in which the material in the program is set.
- be familiar with the language of art used in the program (see vocabulary lists).

Episode 1: Ballet Russe

Synopsis

When Betty Churcher joined the National Gallery of Australia in 1990, the first 'hidden treasure' she found was one of the world's finest collections of costumes from the celebrated Ballets Russes.

Commissioned in Paris by Serge Diaghilev for his revolutionary troupe of dancers, many of these gorgeous costumes have been handpainted by radical young artists who were to become giants of 20th century art, among them: Henri Matisse, Giorgio de Chirico, Natalia Goncharova and Jean Cocteau.

Without Diaghilev, the course of modern art could well have been different, because he had the entrepreneurial flair to hear and celebrate the drumbeat of a new century.

His genius lay in spotting genius in others. He brought together in creative collaboration some of the most original, inventive and difficult young artists of the early 1900s, such as the painter Pablo Picasso, the dancer Vaslav Nijinsky and the composer Igor Stravinsky.

Among the stars in the National Gallery of Australia's collection is Matisse's design for the Chief Mourner in the *Song of the Nightingale*.

There's also Leon Baskt's costume designed for Nijinsky in *The Blue God*. It is marked with his make-up, which the gallery's conservators carefully preserve—for the stains are as much a part of history as the costume itself.

After Diaghilev's death in 1929, a number of new groups followed his original troupe. When the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo toured Australia in 1940, Sidney Nolan was commissioned to design the sets and costumes for *Icare*—adding his own brand of poetic lyricism and his Australian accent to this artistic treasure-trove.

Vocabulary

Taciturn: Inclined to silence; reserved in speech; reluctant to join in conversation.

Icarus: In classical mythology, Icarus attempted to escape from Crete with wings of wax and feathers, but flew so high that his wings melted from the heat of the sun, and he plunged to his death into the sea.

Lyricism: Song-like, musical character or style, as in poetry.

Antipodes: Places diametrically opposite each other on the globe; usually applies to Australia and the Pacific region, as seen from the viewpoint of those living in the northern hemisphere.

Activities

The National Gallery of Australia has one of the most important collections of modern theatre art in the world. In 1973 at auction, the NGA purchased 47 lots, comprising about 400 assorted items. It has taken years of conservation and research to piece together these various items – hats, belts, coats, trousers, dresses – into about 100 complete or nearly complete costumes.

- Discuss the National Gallery of Australia's responsibility for the preservation, restoration, examination, documentation, research and education of the artworks in their care. Refer to the NGA's website for information about conservation of various media, including paper, textiles and objects as well as an essay of the evolution of conservation at NGA. (See references)
- Discuss the NGA's preventive conservation of the artworks in relation to: environmental conditions, handling, procedures for storage, exhibition, packing and transportation, pest management. What policies and procedures for these are in place at the NGA?
- In Indian mythology, the god Krishna is generally depicted with blue skin, the result of being bitten as a child by the evil serpent Kaluja. Carry out research about Krishna and the episodes in his life, then create an illustration for the front cover of a theatre program for a production of *The Blue God*.
- Find a folk tale, myth or legend, then design and construct a mask for one of the main characters in the story.
- To work out the overall design for *The Song of the Nightingale*, Henri Matisse constructed a small stage out of a wooden crate for all his stage décor and characters. He used little pieces of coloured paper which he moved around inside the stage. Write or find a short story that could be adapted to a stage play, then construct a similar stage setting for the story using recycled boxes and cut paper.
- After looking at other artworks by Matisse, create a collage of an environment familiar to you, using cut paper shapes in a limited colour range.

References & further resources

Book

Olivier Berggruen and Max Hollein (eds), *Henri Matisse: Drawing with Scissors: Masterpieces from the Late Years*, Prestel, Munich, 2006

Websites

National Gallery of Australia – conservation:

www.nga.gov.au/conservation

From Russia With Love - Ballets Russes:

<http://www.nga.gov.au/Russia//edu/KIT.pdf>

(Follow links Education - Resources and scroll down.)

Episode 2: Matisse & Islam

Synopsis

Islamic art was a major inspiration for French artist Henri Matisse, who loved the interdependence of its shapes.

The arabesque in Islamic art stands for the vulnerability of life, which can be bestowed or withdrawn at any moment. The positive forms of the arabesque create the negative shapes of the spaces in between; these empty spaces symbolise that which 'belongs to God'—the permanent but invisible reality of the divine principle. Similarly for Matisse, what remains belongs to God. Of his belief in a higher power he said, 'When I work I feel myself helped immensely by someone... It is as if I were watching a conjurer whose tricks I cannot see through'.

Matisse discovered the opulent colours of Islam in the textile bazaars and souks of Morocco, which he visited in early 1912. His ancestors had been weavers for generations and he was supremely confident with scissors and cloth. So when severe illness in his 70s confined him to bed—away from his paints and brushes—he naturally took to scissors and coloured paper.

One night when he couldn't sleep, he cut a swallow from white paper and asked his nurse to pin it over a dirty patch on the wallpaper of his bedroom —its dull gold matched his memory of light in the Pacific. Soon two walls were covered with shapes that recreated his memories of Tahitian lagoons, where he had visited 30 years earlier. A tracing was taken and sent to a printer in London who made an edition of 30 screenprints on tough linen. Not all survived but fortunately one edition of *Oceania, the Sky* is preserved in the National Gallery of Australia, along with a folio of paper cut-outs made the following year, which Matisse called *Jazz*.

Many sheets in the folio refer to highly practised circus acts that Matisse related to personally. Sword swallowing, the trapeze, knife throwing—all balanced on a knife-edge between success and disaster. And, of course, Pierrot the clown, whom Matisse thought of as the artist's alter ego. For both, the gift of giving pleasure is hard won but must appear spontaneous, effortless and full of joy—no matter what the cost.

Vocabulary

Tendrils: Twisting, threadlike part of a climbing plant.

Activities

- Research and discuss the impact of Islamic arts on western art. Identify the principles of Islamic art.
- Research and discuss how Henri Matisse's artworks were influenced by Islamic art.
- Discuss Matisse's influence on the pattern painting style of the 1970s.
- Discuss the meaning of positive and negative space in a work of art, and review the principles of design: balance, emphasis and unity. Create a collage using cut black and white paper utilising positive and negative space. One colour accent may be added for emphasis and centre of interest. For both this activity and the next, ensure that you are able to discriminate between foreground and background, and that the positive and negative shapes are balanced.
- Matisse created shapes cut out from brightly colour papers and arranged them on another sheet of construction paper. These images were then printed by silk screening techniques. With Matisse's artwork in mind, use the serigraphy method to create a silkscreen print.

References & further resources

Books

J. Cowart et al, *Matisse in Morocco*, National Gallery Art, Washington, 1990

S. Jane, *Art Is 2: Making, Creating & Appreciating*, Jacaranda, Milton, 1999

D. Saff and D. Sacilotto, *Printmaking History and Process*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, Orlando, Florida, 1978

N. Watkins, *Matisse*, Phaidon Press Ltd, London, 1992

Websites

www.islamicart.com

Follow links Architecture - Articles - Influencing the West

Henri Matisse:

www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/matisse

Episode 3: Max Ernst Collection & Lake Sentani Figures

Synopsis

What kind of art does an artist collect? At the National Gallery of Australia is part of a collection once owned by

European surrealist artist Max Ernst. An eclectic collection of masks and carvings from Africa and the Americas, it's a fascinating glimpse of Ernst's personal passions and preoccupations as an artist.

Like other surrealists, Ernst felt himself to be at the tail end of a European tradition that had for centuries been dedicated to visual realism. To his eyes, the indigenous artists he collected had by birthright what the surrealists longed for: access to human instincts that lie buried under the layers of inhibitions and societal taboos of European civilisation.

American-born British sculptor Jacob Epstein was also an avid collector. Amongst his collection were a series of imposing figures, probably from the 18th century. Dredged up from the bottom of Lake Sentani in West Papua in 1929, they once would have formed the post of a house built over its water. Now they're part of the National Gallery's collection.

In Australia, it was the European surrealists who most inspired a group of young artists in Melbourne as they responded in their work to the trauma of the Second World War. Among them was Albert Tucker who was appalled by the licentious behaviour he saw in the blacked-out city streets. In the gallery's collection is his *Image of Modern Evil 24*, with its brilliant red crescent a symbol of female depravity. Its watcher on a balcony is as weird and inventive as anything the European surrealists came up with, but the setting—a cast-iron balcony—makes it unmistakably Australian.

Vocabulary

Primitivism: Quality or style characterising primitive art.

Licentious: Going beyond customary or socially acceptable bounds of behaviour and morals.

Microcosm: A thing regarded as encapsulating in miniature the characteristics of something much larger.

Malaise: Vague or unfocused feeling of mental uneasiness, lethargy or discomfort.

Surrealism: Style of art developed in the early 20th century, stressing the subconscious or non-rational significance of imagery.

Activities

- Research the life of Max Ernst and discuss how influences from his collection of figures and masks and other sources can be seen in his artwork.
- Albert Tucker was one of the artists known as the Angry Penguins. Who were some of other artists in this group and what were the characteristics of their artwork?
- What do the images by Max Ernst, Jacob Epstein and Albert Tucker have in common?
- Select paintings from each of Ernst, Epstein and Tucker. Choose symbols from the paintings and suggest possible meanings for each.
- Drawing on the works of Ernst, Epstein and Tucker for inspiration, create a surrealist still life from magazine collage. Using a grid enlargement, reproduce the still life image then render the collage in ink and coloured pencils or with water-soluble pencils.
- Create surrealist portraits or objects by combining various images inside a shape or outline that represents its inner workings. Ensure there is a focal point and show awareness of positive and negative space. You may use digital photographic portraits and appropriate graphics software for this activity. Document the process, noting your use of past skills and the new skills you have acquired.

References & further resources

Art exhibition catalogue

M. Ryan, *Angry Penguins and Realist Painting in Melbourne in the 1940s*, South Bank Centre, Hayward Gallery, London, 1988

Book

J. Burke, *Australian Gothic: A Life of Albert Tucker*, Random House, Sydney, 2003

DVD

Frank Heimans (director), *Australian Biography: Albert Tucker*, Film Australia, Sydney, 1993

Websites

Max Ernst:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Ernst www.tendreams.org/ernst.htm

Jacob Epstein:

<http://epstein.3forming.com/Biography> Search these sites for

‘Albert Tucker’:

<https://www.heide.com.au/sites/default/files/Albert-Tucker.pdf>
www.heide.com.au

Episode 4: Natalia Goncharova & Alexandra Exter

Synopsis

The Ballet Russe attracted artists to Paris from all over Europe but particularly from Russia. The impresario, Serge Diaghilev, had been barred from employment in any service to the Russian Crown after falling out with the Imperial Theatre in St Petersburg. Instead, he dedicated his talents to promoting the arts of Russia outside Russia and introducing the Russian avant-garde to Paris. Among the first he lured there was Natalia Goncharova.

The costumes she designed for his ballet *Le Coq D’Or*—now in the National Gallery of Australia’s collection—were exactly what he wanted. The saturated colours and bold designs became the trademark of his performances.

While other European modernists were looking to alternative traditions for their inspiration, to what they referred to as the ‘primitive’ art of Africa and Oceania, Goncharova drew on her own. She looked to early Russian religious icons and folk art.

Around the time that Goncharova left Russia, Alexandra Exter was returning, keen to participate in the Bolshevik experiment of 1917. She too loved theatre design, believing it to be the most democratic and inclusive of the arts. However, her costumes were inspired by the abstract geometry of revolutionary Russian constructivism.

Among her work preserved in the National Gallery is her costume design for a Martian guard in the 1924 science-fiction film *Aelita—The Queen of Mars*, and two marionettes that were to take the place of actors in another silent film, where they were intended to epitomise the commercialism of streetlife in New York.

Although Exter died in poverty and obscurity in 1949, she still had the two marionettes with her, preserved as fond memories of her first flush of enthusiasm for the new order—a symbol of the optimism of those early days of the Russian Revolution.

Vocabulary

Constructivism: Modern art movement originating in Moscow during the 1920s to reflect the machine-like rhythms of the modern age. Large non-representational structures made of industrial materials such as plastic, glass and sheet metal were applied to painting, architecture and design.

Marionettes: Puppets operated by means of strings attached to their hands, legs, head and body.

Activities

- Around 1910, Russian intellectuals began to theorise about the place and purpose of machinery in modern life. The art movement of Soviet constructivism derived from these theories, and from other styles in art such as cubism and futurism. Constructivism eventually became concerned with the view that art had a social purpose, that there should be no pure aesthetic beauty in art at all, but only simple forms and shapes that served an intellectual purpose. Select appropriate artworks from this period and discuss how they express these notions.
- Select works by Alexandra Exter and Vladimir Tatlin and explain how they demonstrate the constructivist style.
- Compare the influences that impacted on the artworks of Natalia Goncharova and Alexandra Exter. Discuss the major differences in their artworks.

- Using materials such as cardboard, tin and wood plies, create a sculpture in the constructivist style. Give important consideration to the space between the forms.
- Discuss how constructivist artworks utilise the elements and principles of design in non-objective composition, then create your own composition. Begin by cutting chipboard or lino into small squares and rectangles. These shapes are inked and placed on a sheet of rough paper in the style of the constructivist artists, using normal printing process. When dry, use coloured pencils, crayons, and oil pastels to complete the composition. Shapes may be outlined or linked together with line.

References & further resources

Book

Richard Andrews and Milena Kolinovska (intro), *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914–1932*, Rizzoli, New York, 1990

Websites

Natalia Goncharova:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natalia_Goncharova

<http://artinrussia.org/natalia-goncharova/>

Constructivism:

<http://katsclass.com/10817/topic06.htm>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/c/constructivism>

Episode 5: The Australian Surrealists

Synopsis

During the Second World War and immediately after, a group of talented young Australians drew on the ‘dream’ imagery of European surrealism to express their disquiet at world events. In so doing, they produced Australia’s first dynamic contribution to modern art in the western world.

In 1940, James Gleeson wrote, ‘Surrealism comes from the deeper recesses of the mind that the logical mind, with its prescribed formulas of thought is incapable of exploring.’ His work *The Citadel* is the stuff of nightmares—a psychological landscape where flesh, internal organs and rock are interchangeable.

By manipulating several photographic negatives, Max Dupain created composite images with strange juxtapositions and sexual overtones, where the body is a landscape and the landscape is a body.

In London in the early 1930s, James Cant responded to an advertisement to take part in a clinical trial of the effects of the hallucinatory drug, mescaline. He found the drug produced visions more intense than any dream he’d had. Although not painted under its influence, *Returning Volunteer* is a nightmare vision of desolation and despair.

Albert Tucker had direct experience of war when he served as a conscript at a military hospital. There he saw not only bodies torn apart by shells but also the shellshocked. In *Death of an Aviator* he turns a dead man’s head into a surreal landscape. In *Possessed* he tries to get inside the skin of a shellshocked victim; he wants us to understand how it feels.

Sidney Nolan, however, stood apart from his contemporaries. He’d been as drawn to poetry as he had to the visual arts so when he experimented with surrealism, he was more interested in the poetry of chance than he was in bizarre dream images. Among the ephemeral and fragile works in the National Gallery of Australia’s collection is his *Secret Life of Birds*—a flowering tree made from a twig and the soft, pink and white feathers of a galah.

Vocabulary

Juxtapose: To place two or more objects or images together, mainly to suggest a link between them or to emphasise the contrast between them.

Hallucinatory: Experience of believing you have seen, heard, or sensed something real which may have only taken place in your mind.

Claustrophobia: Irrational fear of being in a confined or enclosed space.

Activities

- Analyse and discuss the elements of fantasy and the evidence of imagination in the artworks of James Gleeson and Max Dupain.
- Select one of James Gleeson's artworks. Describe the image. What appears to be happening in the artwork? What mood do the colours convey? From the contents of the artwork, write a story.
- Look at Rene Magritte's *The Blank Signature*; using this as a reference piece, create a surreal seascape, landscape or cityscape in which the positive shapes and negative spaces are interwoven into a reversal of the visible and invisible. Use colours in the realist scene that are different from and contrast with the colours of the dividing scene. Place a piece of tracing paper over the realist composition and sketch the second drawing into which you will weave the first choice. Decide which scene will be visible in each area, and transfer to your final drawing.
- Draw something that does not exist in the real world. Examples may be everyday objects with human form, or animals with mechanical parts.
- Combine parts (human, animal and mechanical) cut from magazines to create a surreal image.
- Use the image created to write a short surrealist poem OR write the poem first and then use it as the basis for an artwork.

References & further resources

Art exhibition catalogue

James Gleeson: beyond the screen of sight, catalogue to accompany National Gallery of Australia exhibition of same title, The Beagle Press, 2005

Websites

James Gleeson:

www.neram.com.au/gleesonkit.html

www.nga.gov.au/Gleeson/index.cfm

James Cant:

<https://www.daao.org.au/bio/james-montgomery-cant/>

Episode 6: Fiona Hall

Synopsis

The many exotic species brought back from the South Pacific by 18th century European explorers fuelled the western imagination with ideas of paradise lost (in the old world) and regained (in the new).

Australian artist Fiona Hall has created a series of stunning botanical sculptures from sardine tins that she calls *Paradisus terrestris*. The lids of the tins roll back to reveal tiny sculptural forms.

The series alludes to the western world's notion of the Garden of Eden and to the enormous variety of botanical species, and implies that paradise may be lost if environmental degradation is allowed to continue.

If, as the saying goes, money doesn't grow on trees then, in *Leaf Litter*, Fiona Hall seems also to be telling us that there are some things that no amount of money can buy. In this work, she again reminds us of the fragile diversity of the natural world.

The series consists of 183 sheets each containing a life-size portrait of a leaf, meticulously painted in gouache over banknotes from the leaf's country of origin. The leaves are transparent in places so that the person on the note underneath shows through. These multiple sheets are then held together with paper tape on the back, which when hung on a wall, allows the lower part to flex and move.

As well as displaying a whimsical imagination and a quirky sense of humour, in Fiona Hall's work there is a palpable sense of her passion for the beauty and vulnerability of all living things. Only a deep love and commitment would provide the extreme patience required to create these exquisitely delicate works of art.

Vocabulary

Repousse: Pattern raised on a thin piece of metal by being hammered through from the reverse side.

Activities

- Much of Fiona Hall's work is about the environment. Identify and discuss the ideas and concepts evident in both Hall's pieces *Leaf Litter* and *Paradisus terrestris*, also drawing any similarities and differences between the two.
- One of Fiona Hall's works is *Tender*, which features dozens of fragile birds' nests made from shredded United States dollar bills, a commentary on the effects of modernisation, global trade and deforestation. Carry out research into art preservation techniques then discuss the methods required to preserve both *Tender* and *Paradisus terrestris*.
- Make a series of environmental drawings of the same object. The first drawing of the object should be the most detailed. In each of the following drawings, reduce the amount of detail so that you progress from highly descriptive to a more obscured image. From your drawings create a series of whimsical, metal sculptures. Consider using recycled materials from objects such as aluminium cans, jewellery parts, wire, nuts, nails, screws or bolts. Include at least three different materials to create texture and interest within the piece.

References & further resources

Book

Julie Ewington, *Fiona Hall*, Piper Press, Annandale, NSW, 2005

Websites

The Art of Fiona Hall – Education Resource:

http://nga.gov.au/WrongWayTime/PDF/FionaHall_EducationResource.pdf

Fiona Hall's fern garden:

https://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agasa/home/Exhibitions/Past_Exhibitions/2005/fionahall.html

Episode 7: Violet Teague & Jessie Traill

Synopsis

During the first two decades of the 20th century there was a spirit of emancipation among Australian women. Many now saw art as a viable career, enrolling in art schools across the country.

Violet Teague and her friend Jessie Traill were part of a remarkable group of financially independent, middle-class women who never married, allowing them to devote their lives to art. From an early age both women travelled regularly overseas, which put them in touch with international trends.

Jessie Traill's hand-coloured aquatint *The Red Light, Harbour Bridge, June 1931* shifts the emphasis of etching from the intimate to the dramatic. It owes more to the etching revival in Europe than the brightly coloured wood and lino block prints popular in Australia in the 1930s.

Violet Teague's handprinted children's book *Nightfall in the Ti-Tree*, which she made with Geraldine Rede in 1905, uses handmade recycled paper made to look like Japanese mulberry paper and Japanese methods of binding and applying water-based ink with a brush. Even the asymmetrical placement of objects on the page is Japanese.

In 1920, Teague's portrait *The Boy with the Palette* was exhibited in the Paris Salon, where it won a silver medal, and in the following year it attracted acclaim at an exhibition at the Royal Academy of London. It's a splendid painting, equal to any portrait painted in Australia before World War One, and Traill's etchings too hold their own. So why are both artists seldom mentioned in the story of Australian art?

Perhaps because they were women, but more likely because Teague interrupted her career to look after an ailing father. And also because the independence of both women enabled them regular trips abroad, which meant they were more in touch with artists and art movements there than at home.

Vocabulary

Aquatint: Method of etching a copper plate by which an artist can produce prints resembling watercolour.

Asymmetrical: Object not arranged in a neat or balanced way in relation to its surroundings or to its constituent parts.

Emancipation: Act or process of setting somebody free from restrictions.

Woodblock: A block of wood carved with a picture or design, from which prints are made.

Activities

- Research and discuss how the era in which both Jessie Traill and Violet Teague lived influenced and inspired their artworks.
- Discuss the conservation and preservation methods required for prints. Consider types of paper, framing, lighting, environmental conditions, handling and storage.
- Compare and contrast Jessie Traill's and Violet Teague's prints. For example, do they share any qualities or visual styles?
- Look at the techniques and materials used by printmakers, then create a multi-coloured woodcut or lino print. Consider the balance of light and dark within the composition.
- Create a print using the intaglio method, which will result in an almost painterly quality. This may be achieved using metal or acetate plates.
- Using appropriate graphics software, create images utilising variable exposures and continuous tonal images to reproduce the positive image in a number of steps. Transfer to printing blocks.

References & further resources

Art exhibition catalogues

K. McKay, *Women Printmakers 1910 to 1940*, Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum, 1995

The Printmakers: Mainly of the Thirties, Important Women Artists, Melbourne, 1977

Works by Jessie Traill (1881–1967), Important Women Artists, Melbourne, 1977

Book

D. Saff and D. Sacilotto, *Printmaking: History and Process*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, Orlando, Florida, 1978

Websites

Jessie Traill:

www.nga.gov.au/federation/Detail.cfm?WorkID=59746

Violet Teague:

www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A120209b.htm

Printmaking:

www.coskunfineart.com/collecting_prints.asp

Episode 8: Linocuts of Black, Syme & Spowers

Synopsis

At the Grosvenor School of Art in London in the late 1920s, English artist Claude Flight taught printmaking with near-missionary zeal. By promoting cheap, mass-produced linocuts, made from ordinary household linoleum, he championed the democratisation of art. 'A work of art,' said Flight, 'should cost little more than a cinema ticket.'

He urged his students to seek and express the rhythms of early 20th century life—the machine age.

Among his pupils were three enterprising young Australian women: Dorrit Black, Eveline Syme and Ethel Spowers.

Together they introduced Australia to a particular brand of modernism, based on the linocut and devoted to conveying the dynamics of movement through line and colour.

When Spowers and Syme returned to Melbourne, they became founding members of the Contemporary Art Group. However, Spowers was forced to give up her artistic career in the late 1930s due to illness. When she died of cancer in 1947, her close friend and artistic companion Syme stopped making prints.

All three were part of that inspiring circle of women who left Australia between the two world wars to become part of the collective experiment of European modernism. But the Second World War seemed to put an end to the utopian dream of modern art for the masses through affordable prints. And today a linocut by one of these leading lights would cost a good deal more than a cinema ticket!

Activities

- Discuss the ways in which early modernism represented a break from the previously accepted traditions for landscape and portraiture genres.
- In the 1929 Dorrit Black returned to Australia from London and Paris. In 1931 she established the Modern Art Centre in Sydney. Research and discuss the following:
 - What were her influences?
 - What and who inspired her?
 - In what ways was she unique in her artistic activities?
 - What contributed to her success?
- Using the style of images created by Dorrit Black, Ethel Spowers and Eveline Syme for inspiration, create lino block prints. Stylise the design and use three or four colours to complete it. After the design has been drawn on newsprint, make a tracing of each colour as a separate block and transfer onto lino blocks separately. After transferring the design use lino tools to cut out everything except the coloured area. Consider registration and inking plate procedures. Follow standard multi-block printing techniques. As an alternative to creating the imagery for the linocut, graphics software may be used. Digital photographs and images may be arranged and simplified further in tonal dropouts, then transferred onto lino blocks.

References & further resources

Art exhibition catalogue

C. Deutscher and R. Butler, *A Survey of Australian Relief Prints 1900–1950*, Deutscher Galleries, Armadale, 1978

Books

J. Burke, *Australian Women Artists, 1840–1940*, Greenhouse Publications, Collingwood, 1980

H. Topless, *Modernism and Feminism: Australia Women Artists 1900–1940*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1996

Websites

Modern Australian Women Artists:

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0448b.htm>

Dorrit Black:

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/black-dorothea-foster-dorrit-5249>

Eveline Syme:

www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160425b.htm

Ethel Spowers:

www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160352b.htm

Episode 9: Poster Mania

Synopsis

In the late 19th century, art left the galleries and drawing rooms of the wealthy and literally took to the streets. Paris was flooded with bright, eye-catching posters, made possible by the invention of lithography—a printing process that allowed coloured images to be mass-produced. One of the most prominent French artists to use this new technique was Toulouse-Lautrec, the only son of one of the most ancient and noble families in France. He was severely crippled by a genetic malformation of the bones—the result of aristocratic inbreeding. To the horror of his father, the proud family name was now being bandied about the streets of Paris. As a compromise, Toulouse-Lautrec developed a monogram of his initials. His *Jane Avril* poster, in the National Gallery of Australia's collection, is a classic—an eloquent comment on the hard, sometimes tragic lives of Parisienne entertainers, but also touched with humour.

Liberation for women was in the air at the turn of the 20th century: in Clémentine-Hélène Dufau's advertisement for a feminist journal *The Sling* shows a bourgeois woman pointing a less advantaged 'sister' towards the Sorbonne University; in Henri Thiret's advertisement for the new craze of bicycle riding among young women; or, now that it was chic for fashionable young women to smoke, in an ad for Job cigarette papers. *The Street* by Theophile-Alexandre Steinlen's for poster maker Charles Vernet shows the people that the new poster targeted: a milliner, businessman, laundrymaid, nurserymaid and governess with her charge. It's in pristine condition, having never been used as a poster, and a detailed study reveals the process used to make such large, multi-coloured prints over and over again.

Lithography and the poster mania of the 1890s gave artists an exciting new avenue for artistic expression—a way to get their art seen by ordinary people. Then, posters were often souvenired almost as soon as they were pasted up. Now, they're highly valued collectors' items.

Vocabulary

Lithography: Printing process using a plate or stone on which only the image to be printed takes up ink.

Activities

- By 1890, the official Salon—the organiser of state-sponsored exhibitions in France since 1667—had become an outmoded institution, unreceptive to the work of avant-garde artists. Research and discuss how these avant-garde artists attempted to gain access to a wider audience.
- Examine the lithographs and posters of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and other artists from the 20th century, then discuss the ways in which they present visual signs of persuasion and protest. Some examples may be poster imagery used as a means to criticise injustice and inequities, or to improve the quality of life, to glorify revolution, or even to define the artist's own reality.
- Write and illustrate a research project on the life and artworks of Toulouse-Lautrec in the 1890s Paris art movement.
- Use the style of Toulouse-Lautrec to design posters for any school event. Any appropriate art media and computer graphics software may be used.
- Discuss in class current local, Australian and world events or social problems that concern you, then choose one of these issues to research and present in an artwork. You should write about how you feel towards the situation, and formulate visual solutions to the problem before starting your design for a poster. Any medium may be used, or techniques of printing lithographs may be explored.

References & further resources

Books

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D. Sweetman, *Explosive Acts: Toulouse-Lautrec, Oscar Wilde, Felix Feneon, and the Art & Anarchy of the Fin De Siecle*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 2000

Film

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Website

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www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2005/toulouse/index.shtm

Episode 10: J.W. Lindt – The Mechanical Eye of the Camera

Synopsis

It's often said that the camera doesn't lie; but because the mechanical eye of the camera is being directed by a human sensibility, the photograph can be manipulated like any other art form. The way an image is cropped, captioned or even the way it is presented can influence the way we read it.

The invention of photography meant that, by the mid 19th century, many more families could own images of themselves. Photo albums were all the rage, and photographers often looked for picturesque or exotic themes for the pictures they took. Helen Lambert posed her subjects in a costumed tableau and her album's handpainted decorations present the images as an eastern fantasy.

Photographs also found their way into newspapers and magazines. Although printing processes of the time could not reproduce photos directly, engravings based on photographs were printed in their pages. In the minds of the readers, this seemed to carry a greater veracity than drawings from life.

An engraving based on a photograph taken by official photographer Mr Burman of dead bushranger Joe Byrne appeared in *The Bulletin* on 10 July 1880. J. W. Lindt's photograph of the same scene is particularly remarkable because, rather than concentrating on the body, which has been strung up for that very purpose, Lindt has taken a wider shot of the whole scene, including a cameraman and the artist Julian Ashton who were there to record the event. His image marks the new age of photographic reporting.

A more recent example of artistic manipulation of an image is David Moore's 1966 colour photograph showing a middle-class Egyptian family who had joined a ship in Melbourne to accompany a relative returning to Sydney after a holiday abroad. When Moore exhibited the photo in the mid 1970s, however, he printed it in black and white and titled it *Migrants Arriving in Sydney*. It has since become an icon of the 1950s European migrations.

Vocabulary

Macabre: Gruesome, often relating to horror.

Activities

- Use the photographs of J.W. Lindt, David Moore and other selected photographers. Examine a display of these images then discuss in class and/or write responses to the following questions:
What is happening in each photograph?
What does the image convey to you?
Do these images provoke an emotional response? Explain.
Where and when do you think each picture was taken?
Are any images in the photographs used as visual symbols, and do you think the imagery has been manipulated by the photographer?
- Using David Moore's photograph *Migrants Arriving in Sydney* as the focus, respond in writing to all or one of the following questions, with explanations:
Do you think newspaper images taken out of context could be misleading?
Why do you think visual images make such lasting impressions on our emotional memories?
Do you think you can count on photographic evidence to 'tell a story'?
- Write an essay looking at photography as a form of fine art and as a way of documenting history. Can photography achieve both ends at the same time, or should photographic evidence be regarded as more important than artistic expression? Create a dual photographic timeline with captions, using both famous newspaper images that have left a lasting impression and personal photographs documenting your own life experiences and memories.

References & further resources

Books

David Moore, 1927–2003 *David Moore, Australian Photographer*, Volume 1 Black and White, Chapter and Verse, McMahons Point, 1988

David Moore, *David Moore, Australian Photographer*, Volume 2 Colour, Chapter and Verse, McMahons Point, 1988

Websites

Ned Kelly photos by Mr Burman:

www.denheldid.com/twohuts/story.html

Dorothea Lange and social-documentary photography:

www.getty.edu/education/for_teachers/curricula/dorothea_lange/background3.html

Digital image manipulation:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photo_manipulation

Episode 11: Tommy McRae and Mickey of Ulladulla

Synopsis

When Aboriginal artist Tommy McRae died in 1901, he was a man of substance in the region of Corowa and Wahgunyah on the Murray River—known as an upright character, a teetotaler and an astute financier, selling his drawings for cash.

Tommy McRae was born before his people were displaced by colonisation, and he was keen to show the newcomers his ancient culture. He drew with pen and ink on paper and sketchbooks bought at the local newsagent in Corowa, and he always began by first drawing the ground on which his figures would stand and his trees would grow. He worked up from the feet with astonishing accuracy, keeping each figure in his mind's eye as an entirety, even when clustered. There were no generalisations—each leaf or clan marking is clearly delineated—and never a misplaced line or a correction.

Mickey of Ulladulla was a contemporary of Tommy McRae but we know little about him beyond the fact that he walked with the aid of two sticks. And that he always showed himself in his works wearing western clothes—a long coat and hat.

He drew with pencils and watercolours, and his skill lay in his depictions of the natural world of the rich coastline of Ulladulla, south of Sydney, which was then a quiet backwater, and in the beautifully precise drawings of the animals and fish that he hunted.

Both artists show the amazing adaptability of Aboriginal artists who had only recently been displaced. When these talented artists wanted to communicate with drawn images they did so with a sensitivity to detail that sets them apart.

Activities

- Discuss the requirements that the National Gallery of Australia needs to put into place to slow down the natural deterioration processes for the conservation of paper, workbooks and artefacts.
- Storyboards for historical fiction and non-fiction perform a number of useful functions. They enable us to understand what has happened and what is important within the story. They serve as a summary to the story. They can serve as a display of the narrative, and they may also be used for developing our own writing. Discuss ways of looking from different perspectives, first from a bird's viewpoint, perched on a tree and looking down, then from a snake's viewpoint looking up from the ground.
- Draw or paint with watercolour a storyboard of a personal story or historical event. Create the same story twice, each one from a different viewpoint as outlined in the previous activity.

References & further resources

Book

Andrew Sayers, *Aboriginal Artists of the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 1994

Websites

Tommy McRae and Mickey of Ulladulla:

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Art site connecting Australia and Britain: [http://](http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/speel/otherart/austral.htm)

myweb.tiscali.co.uk/speel/otherart/austral.htm

On-line exhibitions:

<http://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online>

Episode 12: The Godfrey Shawl

Synopsis

Among the National Gallery of Australia's rarely seen treasures is an astonishing embroidered shawl from Kashmir in India—one of the finest and rarest of its kind. Made in the 19th century from the superfine 'cashmere' wool of the Himalayan mountain goat, it is actually a detailed map of Shrinigar, the former summer retreat of the Mogul emperors, showing its rivers, lakes, gardens and buildings.

It's just one of a number of beautiful Indian works preserved in the gallery's textile collection.

Maharana Jawan Singh Hunting was painted on cotton soon after the British took control of the great Rajput state of Mewar in 1818, attempts to recapture the golden days of the Rajput emperors.

The painting has been arranged in the form of a mandala, with the emperor's tent at the centre, symbolising political power, and the Hindu temple on the right, symbolising religious power. Its rolling perspective, which suggests the rotation of the universe and all things within it, is shared by the great landscape paintings of contemporary Australian artist William Robinson.

Although Robinson's *Creation Landscape* series comes from a very different time and place—not the jungles of Mewar but the rainforests of southeast Queensland, he also takes us on a spiralling sweep through time and space.

From 19th century Rajasthan to 21st century Australia, there is a shared wonder at the universe in perpetual motion and a similar reverence for the splendour of creation.

Vocabulary

Mandala: Geometric or pictorial design usually enclosed in a circle, representing the entire universe. It is used in meditation and ritual in Buddhism and Hinduism.

Activities

- Discuss the principles of ethical behaviour, respect, care, knowledge and education involved in the conservation of cultural materials.
- William Robinson's *Creation Landscape* series depicts a universe in perpetual motion and a reverence for the splendour of creation, unity and oneness in nature. Research and discuss how Robinson approaches his painting style, and how he uses elements and principles to create these artworks.
- Create a personal mandala. First, lightly draw a circle on a large sheet of paper. The circle may be filled in a spontaneous way, or filled with images that come to us in deep relaxation, meditation, through the use of visualisation techniques. Alternatively, fill the circle with scenes from everyday life, or objects of fascination from the world of nature.

References & further resources

Books

L. Fern, *William Robinson*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1995

I. Klepac, *William Robinson, Paintings 1987-2000*, The Beagle Press, Sydney, 2001

Lynne Seear (ed), *Darkness & Light: The Art of William Robinson*, Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 2001

Websites

Making mandalas:

http://raysweb.net/making_mandalas

Indian art:

www.nga.gov.au/IndianArt

Episode 13: From Clay Maquette to Bronze

Synopsis

In 1884 the Municipal Council of Calais commissioned Auguste Rodin to commemorate six historical heroes of the city. These were the governors, or burghers, who gave up their lives to save their fellow citizens after Calais fell to the English in the 14th century. Dressed in sackcloth with nooses around their necks, they went to the English camp to surrender the key to the city gate and offered their lives in exchange for the usual rape and carnage that followed a medieval defeat.

The six figures in *Burghers of Calais* were cast in bronze from clay models. There were several casts taken, and while the original is in Calais, four of the figures are in the National Gallery of Australia's collection, along with models and studies used in their development. Rodin did not want a conventional interpretation for this commission. He wanted to show the human drama, with each burgher isolated by the fear of dying. At first he thought of lining them up but later decided to place them so they all could be seen clearly from any angle. He wanted them standing on the ground, not on a pedestal, so they could rub shoulders with the people of Calais. Rodin usually modelled in clay, and you can see from the maquette in the gallery's collection how he has moulded the form with his hands before it was cast in bronze. As with a painter's sketch, the sculptor's study (or maquette) puts us in touch with the artist and their thoughts.

Also at the National Gallery is a study for another municipal monument, dedicated to the Republic of France, in the Place de la Nation in Paris. This tiny terracotta figure represents artist Jules Dalou's first thought for the figure personifying the republic. It has none of the details of the finished work but it is extraordinarily personable and vulnerable, retaining the intimacy of the moment.

Rodin's *Burghers of Calais* was inaugurated in 1895 and Dalou's *Monument to the Republic* in 1899. Although the completed bronzes might look back to the 19th century, to the great tradition of European sculpture, to Donatello and Michelangelo, it is the small clay moulded maquettes that bring us closer to the artists themselves and seem to look forward to the 20th century, the hallmark of which turned out to be self-expression.

Activities

- Research and discuss the historical events that took place between the Mayor of Calais and Auguste Rodin over the maquette of *Burghers of Calais*.
- As stated by Betty Churcher, Auguste Rodin's original idea for the group of burghers did not include a pedestal. He thought it would be more impressive if it was set at ground level, to emphasise 'the look of misery and the drama of the sacrifice'. What other aesthetics of the sculpture were the Calais mayoral committee disappointed with and why did they demand several modifications?
- Sculptors primarily use the techniques of carving, modelling, casting, construction and assemblage. Some of the processes are subtractive, where material is removed, while others are additive, where material is added.
 - Subtractive method activity: View Rodin's *Gates of Hell*; focusing on his use of both positive and negative space in his composition, create relief artworks using any of the following materials: limestone, soap, wood, herbal stone, clay. Carve into and remove material to create your finished piece.
 - Additive method activity: View Rodin's dancing figures, which focus on movement and rhythm, then create a wire figure in motion. Several line drawings should be completed to develop the gesture of the figure. The figure may be of any scale, however the larger the figure the larger the wire gauge needs to be. For this activity you should note joining, cutting and whipping techniques and the necessary safety requirements associated with the materials. Extension of this artwork may include plaster or Modroc being draped on or added to the form.

References & further resources

Book

M. Laurent, *Rodin*, Konecky & Konecky, New York, 1989

Websites

Auguste Rodin:

www.rodinmuseum.org

www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/rodin

Episode 14: William Dobell – Sketchbooks

Synopsis

During his lifetime very little was known about William Dobell's drawings; he considered them to be no one's concern but his own. They were private aides-memoires to assist with his paintings and it was the paintings that were for public display.

Now, his sketchbooks are an important part of the National Gallery of Australia's collection, revealing the artistic process of one of Australia's most renowned painters.

Perhaps more than most painters, Dobell's art relied on drawing so these sketchbooks are invaluable to our appreciation of his work. They allow us the privilege of seeing the artist's private thoughts, as unformed ideas gradually taking shape. We can witness him develop an idea from first fleeting sketch to final painting.

Dobell never painted his portraits with the model in his studio. He liked to work alone, from drawings and studies that he made earlier.

In 1929, he won a scholarship that took him to London, where he stayed for ten years. By 1935, the money was nearly gone so he took a cheap basement room with a single bed, which he shared with a professional—but it seems not very successful—burglar. Dobell used the single bed at night while the burglar worked, and the burglar used the bed by day, providing Dobell with a sleeping model.

An examination of Dobell's preliminary sketches and his finished paintings—such as *The Cypriot*, *The Cat Lover*, the iconic *The Billy Boy* or his Archibald Prize winning portrait of Margaret Olley—reveal a marked difference between the drawings and the final works, and tells us what Dobell wanted from his paintings. The drawing is *particular*; the painting is *general*. Dobell dramatises the image—suppressing details in favour of a theatrical pose and a riveting gaze, adding mannerist exaggerations, or turning a personal portrait into a generic type.

Vocabulary

Aide-memoires: Something intended to assist the memory.

Nacreous: Iridescent; looking like mother-of-pearl.

Activities

- Betty Churcher states, 'Dobell wanted a shift to take place from his original drawings to the finished painting'. Dobell said, 'The drawing is particular, the painting is general'. View several of William Dobell's drawings and paintings and discuss or write about what he meant by this statement.
- In 1943, amid a storm of controversy, Dobell won the Archibald Prize with a portrait of fellow artist Joshua Smith. Research the issues around this event. Discuss those involved and their viewpoints. What is your opinion?
- Dobell investigates personality in his portraiture, both in his style and his use of aesthetics. Compare his portraits to those of another portrait artist. What are the main similarities and differences between the two? If you were going to create a self-portrait what approach would you take? What would it look like?
- With their permission, take digital photographs of other students. Select one photograph and place a grid over it, or draw the grid directly onto the print. On a larger piece of paper draw an elongated grid with the same amount of shapes as the original grid on the photograph. Transfer the image. This drawing could be produced in any medium of paint, pastels or pencil etc.

References & further resources

Books

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Websites

Archibald prize:

www.thearchibaldprize.com.au/home

William Dobell:

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Episode 15: Internationalism & Regionalism in Pottery

Synopsis

Anne Dangar left Sydney in 1930 at the age of 43 to throw in her lot with French artist Albert Gleizes, who'd set up an artists' colony in rural France.

Gleizes was a second-generation cubist who wanted to introduce cubist design to the everyday life of ordinary people by applying abstract modernism to the artisan crafts of country folk. His workshop offered artists an escape from the standardisation of industrial mass-production and, for Dangar, this became almost a spiritual cause.

Dangar dedicated her life selflessly to Gleizes' ideal. Trained as a painter, she mastered the art of pottery and built her own kiln using traditional peasant methods. Her own work displays a real flair for applied cubist design and exciting colour combinations.

Merric Boyd chose his own way to return to nature, at his bush property at Murrumbena on the outskirts of Melbourne. His bowls were handbuilt, his kiln woodfired, and his clay dug from the earth around his home. Unlike Dangar, he drew inspiration, not from international style, but from the bushland that surrounded his property, where he and his wife Doris established the famous Boyd dynasty of painters, potters and sculptors.

Although not the first to use Australian motifs in his pottery, Merric Boyd's idiosyncratic pots and vases raised the use of Australian motifs in design to new levels of artistry and public popularity.

Milton Moon's inspiration is also the landscape of Australia—not the things of the bush but the ancient, sunbaked, bushfire-blackened land itself.

Both Moon and Boyd travelled widely but, unlike Dangar, they decided to draw their strength from the land of their birth. In a sense, regionalism and nationalism prevailed over internationalism.

Vocabulary

Cubism: Artistic style, chiefly in painting and sculpture, that developed in the early 20th century and emphasised the representation of natural forms as geometric shapes seen from several angles.

Abstract modernism: Revolutionary ideas and styles in art that developed in the early 20th century as a reaction to traditional forms, not aiming to depict an object as it appears to the eye but composed with the focus on internal structure or self-expression.

Anthropomorphic: Non-human, but with human form or human characteristics.

Abnegating: Denying oneself of something, or renouncing it.

Activities

- Research and discuss how Albert Gleizes influenced Anne Dangar's art during her time at Moly-Sabata in the French village of Sablons.
- Research and discuss how Anne Dangar, Milton Moon and Merric Boyd used the land of their birth as inspiration in their art. Confirm your ideas with examples of the artists' imagery.
- Create a non-objective design from a section of a selected art image. Your composition should focus on the principles of design. A viewfinder may be moved around the selected art piece to frame a very small section of the composition. The composition of the final selected section should be complex with some detailed and some ambiguous areas.

Select a large piece of paper for the final drawing. Draw a rectangle a little larger than the proportion of the viewfinder anywhere on the paper and draw what is seen in the viewfinder into this rectangle. Draw an enlarged version of the composition in the background. Do not draw through the rectangle. Add shapes to the background to make the composition more interesting. Any materials can be used for this project, although you may choose to use the materials and techniques seen in Albert Gleizes' artworks. Use four colours plus black and white. Colours can be analogous, complementary, split complementary or monochromatic. Begin by applying colour to the rectangle; when the rectangle is complete, begin work on the background. The goal is to create the background as if the rectangle is floating above it.

References & further resources

Books

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Websites

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www.albert-gleizes.de/e/index.shtml

www.art-et-histoire.com/index2e.htm?gleizese.htm

Anne Dangar at Moly-Sabata:

www.nga.gov.au/dangar/index.cfm

Milton Moon:

www.users.on.net/~miltonmoon

Cubism:

<https://www.masterworksfineart.com/educational-resources/classroom-presentations/cubism/>

Hidden Treasures

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Director: John Hughes

Producers: John Hughes, Philippa Campey

Executive Producer: Anna Grieve

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