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**Acknowledgements**  
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Christopher Langton
Australian, b. 1954

*Brat Pack*, 1996
PVC, synthetic polymer paint and air
dimensions variable
Corbett Lyon and Yueji Lyon Collection of Australian Contemporary Art
SUBJECTS AND THEMES

This chapter investigates common subjects and themes that have inspired artists throughout history. The subjects and themes of art reveal clues that 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 artist’s 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.
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 (1902–59) 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 Gnaka Gnak, the white-breasted sea eagle. The triangular shapes that frame the sky are based on traditional designs used for body painting.

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 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
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by the artist, Fellow, 1997
244.0 × 244.0 cm (NGV)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
© Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of Ginger Riley Munduwalawala & Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne

WHAT IS NARRATIVE?
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.
Four Archers. Garimala could take different forms, and in the form of Bulukburn, 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. Bulukburn reached in and breathed fire on them. Gnâk Gnâk is seen watching over the scene.

A story from the east Kimberley

Rover Thomas (c. 1926–98) 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 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.

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 Jampini, 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.

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?

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

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?

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

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.

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

---

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.
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.

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* from about 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 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 clifftop 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.

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 boat 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’s history. 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 specifically describe the appearance of the

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The Siren Painter

*Siren Vase*, c. 480–470 BCE

pottery: red-figured stamnos

height: 35.56 cm

The British Museum

Follow the link from [http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au](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.
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?

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 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.

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

THE ART OF NARRATIVE

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.

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 (1159–89) 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 triptych. 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.
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 (1901–66).

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, 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 (1928–89), 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.

Tezuka was constantly drawing from a young age and 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 his.

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

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?

Osamu Tezuka
Japanese, 1928–89
gouache
34.3 × 23 cm
Shonen, published by Kobunsha
© Tezuka Productions

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.

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.
A strong identity
In her many self-portraits, Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907–54) presented herself in the same upright pose, looking directly at the viewer with a serious expression. Her thick, black eyebrows, which were an important part of Kahllo’s personal identity, are a distinguishing feature of her portraits.
The value Kahlo placed on her Mexican heritage is evident in most of her self-portraits. *Tree of Hope* shows the brightly coloured dress and headdress, traditional to the Tehoutec women of south-west Mexico, that Kahlo wore in real life. The stories, symbolism and bright, decorative colour of Mexican folk art, including retablo paintings, were an important source of inspiration for Kahlo's paintings.

Kahlo's self-portraits are a vivid record of the artist's ideas and feelings about events and experiences in her life. When she was 18, Kahlo was involved in a serious traffic accident that caused severe injuries to her spine, pelvis and internal organs. As a result, she endured more than 30 operations, was frequently in pain and was never able to have children. In *Tree of Hope*, her physical suffering is revealed by the figure of Kahlo lying on a hospital trolley. Her back is exposed to reveal large surgical incisions. Can you also see that the seated Kahlo is holding a surgical brace and wearing another?

The dry, empty landscape in *Tree of Hope* can be seen as a sign of Kahlo's infertility. The dark area underneath the figures also appears ominous; perhaps it is a sign of the emotional despair that Kahlo sometimes felt.

There are, however, positive signs in the painting. The painting's title is taken from the words on the flag held by the seated Kahlo. The Spanish words translate to 'tree of hope stand firm'. The seated Kahlo, despite a tear in her eye, does appear to be 'standing' firm and proud.

The blood in the painting, which appears to be associated with suffering and pain, could also be seen as having healing qualities, as it does in both Aztec and Christian traditions.

The painting's combination of night and day is also important. In Aztec mythology, the sun and the moon are powerful symbols of male and female, and the cycle of night and day suggest the continuity of life.

1. List six facts that you learn about Kahlo from looking at her self-portrait. Find evidence to support each fact.
2. Do you think another artist would have been able to create a portrait of Kahlo that communicated the same ideas or meanings? Why?
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 creates highly constructed images that inspire curiosity and invite the viewer 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 photo-shoots 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 or 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 make a personal response to her work, but she has suggested The Waiting Girl is about time and timelessness. What is your response to this work?

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 just an individual, or a more abstract quality such as isolation, innocence or freedom.

Think about how you can use visual elements, dress, setting and pose to communicate your idea.
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 between 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
Bendigo Art Gallery
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

Follow the link 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.
**A PORTRAIT TRIBUTE**

**CREATING A RECORD**

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.

**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.

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

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 Xiao Xian is also an artist (p. XX).

**Ah Xian**
born China 1960, arrived Australia 1990
**Dr John Yu AC**, 2003–4
glazed ceramic
Commissioned with funds provided by Marilyn Darling 2004
Collection: National Portrait Gallery, Canberra

Follow the link from [http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au](http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au) to learn more about Ah Xian's work.

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?
and a playful element. They also clearly reflect Dr Yu’s involvement with children. Their presence is also 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.

Making each portrait is a complex process that begins with the artist 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 (Sketch for Sculpture of Dr. John Yu AC), 2003
pencil on paper
Collection: National Portrait Gallery, Canberra
Gift of the artist 2003

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.

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

What factors make up a person’s identity? Is it possible to absolutely define or represent a person’s identity? Why?
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 Prints, Number 1 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 are interested in reworking 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.

Parr’s sister Julie Rrap is also an artist (p. XX). Rrap is Parr spelt backwards.

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.

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.

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

What might this mean?

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

CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

In Australia’s Indigenous culture, art (including visual arts, song and dance) is an important expression of their cultural identity, including their 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 law. 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 law that binds Indigenous people to their country.

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 link from [http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au](http://artdetect3e.nelsonnet.com.au) to learn more about the Spinifex people.

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.

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.

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.
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 in describing 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 of the painting to lead 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 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
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. XX). 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.

‘If anyone discusses painting in terms of formal likeness, his understanding is almost that of a child.’

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.’

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?
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) (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 Famous 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 around. 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 to float 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 and 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.
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
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’ descriptions 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 Robert’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 Lorrain (p. XX). 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.

**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. XX) and Camille Pissarro (p. XX) 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?
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 attracts tourists.

Inspired by the desert

Australian landscape artist Fred Williams (1927–82) (p. XX) 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.’

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 quite 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.
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, and memories?
• Which colour was put on first? How did you proceed?
• What type 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.

Research the work of another artist who has painted the Australian outback, such as Russell Drysdale (1912–81) 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.

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?
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 which 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. 

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.
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. XX) and *Shearing the Rams* (p. XX) 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 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.
**ART OF THE EVERYDAY**

### 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.

#### 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 subjects worthy of great art.

This was not the case, however, in 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 transient 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. XX). 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?

#### Look at other paintings of everyday subjects made in 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 appears random. Looking more closely reveals the conceptual complexities of the work. For example, do you notice that the entire 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 his 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?

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 2000–2001, 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.

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.

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.
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 foods) 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 (1923–97) 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.
Lichtenstein was closely associated with the development of Pop art, which emerged in England and America in 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
Corbett Lyon and Yueji Lyon Collection of Australian Contemporary Art

Plastic has been used widely in advertising, entertainment, and daily life. It is a versatile material that can be molded into various shapes and sizes. Plastic is lightweight and durable, making it suitable for many applications. However, plastic is not biodegradable, and its disposal can have negative environmental impacts. It is important to consider the sustainability of plastic usage and find alternatives as much as possible.

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?
ART FROM THE SUBURBS

Domestic and suburban environments have inspired many artists.

A familiar interior

Interiors are a strong theme in the work of Australian artist Brett Whiteley (1939–92). 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 you 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 (1951–99). The rooms and houses seen in Arkley’s paintings were created by the artist from images in old home-improvement magazines and real-estate brochures. Arkley explained that the images in Suburban Interior:
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.11

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?

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

Read more about Arkley on p. XX.

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.

 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?

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?
ART OF THE EVERYDAY

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.

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) 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 as 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 when Campbell

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?
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?

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 (p. XX), Tim Jones (p. XX), Robert Rooney (p. XX) or Patricia Piccinini (p. XX).
**4.19**

**INNER AND IMAGINARY WORLDS**

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

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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. XX).

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**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 tinge 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.12

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?

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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 (1920–60) 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 (1914–99), 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.

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.

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.)

Based on your observations of both Munch’s and Hester’s work, suggest what Hester might have admired about Munch’s work.

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.
Booth made this painting at a time when many other artists were making non-representational art (p. XX) 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.’

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.

**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.

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. 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). 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).

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 (p. XX) 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. XX), 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.
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 and a fitting location in which to display Arcimboldo’s portraits.

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?

A composite portrait

The inventive composite portraits by Italian artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527–93) 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.
A composite animal

Composite animals became a popular subject of art in Mughal India. Such images are thought to be 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 other two 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. XX). Consider the:
• use of materials and techniques
• purpose of each work
• way each work is influenced by the culture in which it was made.

The Renaissance interest in observing and studying the natural world was strong in Arcimboldo’s home city of Milan. Leonardo da Vinci (p. XX), one of the most famous artists of the Renaissance, spent a significant period of his working life in Milan. 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 northwest India.

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’.