

Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Art Centre  
VOLUNTEER GUIDE TRAINING PROGRAM  
Lecture notes

## Lecture 1: Myths and half-truths about art and guiding

### Myths and half-truths about art

**“Art is about the real world.”**

**“Art is personal expression”**

**“Art is...” (etc.)**

Each true, but not the *whole* truth. (Subject of lecture 2)

**“It’s all subjective, isn’t it?”** Or ... “There’s no such thing as good or bad art.”

“IDKMAA-BIKWIL” (I Don’t Know Much About Art – But I Know What I Like)

“There are no bad reasons for liking a painting; there are [only] bad reasons for not liking a painting.” - EH Gombrich, *The Story of Art*

**“Art should be beautiful.”**

It depends on what you mean by “beautiful”. E.g. is Goya’s *The third of May* “beautiful”?

**“Art should be skilful.”**

Maybe, but is technical skill enough? E.g. [bit.ly/jolie-vermeer](https://bit.ly/jolie-vermeer)

**“Monetary value is (or should be) a reflection of artistic value.”**

\$ value = demand/supply ... nothing else!

### Myths and half-truths about guiding

**“Art is not for everyone.”** Or ... “I’m not artistic.”

Do you have to be able to play violin to appreciate violin music? No.

**“The artist is the only real expert.”**

Once artwork leaves studio, it belongs to the world. E.g. Jeffrey Smart

**“To properly appreciate art you have to know its historical context.”**

Context can sometimes take you *away* from appreciating the artwork.

**“If possible, start with earliest and progress to the most recent.”**

You can harness the emotional energy (i.e. outrage) generated by more recent art by presenting it first and then working backwards through time.

## Lecture 2: What is art?

First, we should distinguish between **intrinsic and extrinsic aims**.

Extrinsic aims: those that could be just as valid for *non-artistic* matters.

So what are the **intrinsic reasons** for artists to create art?

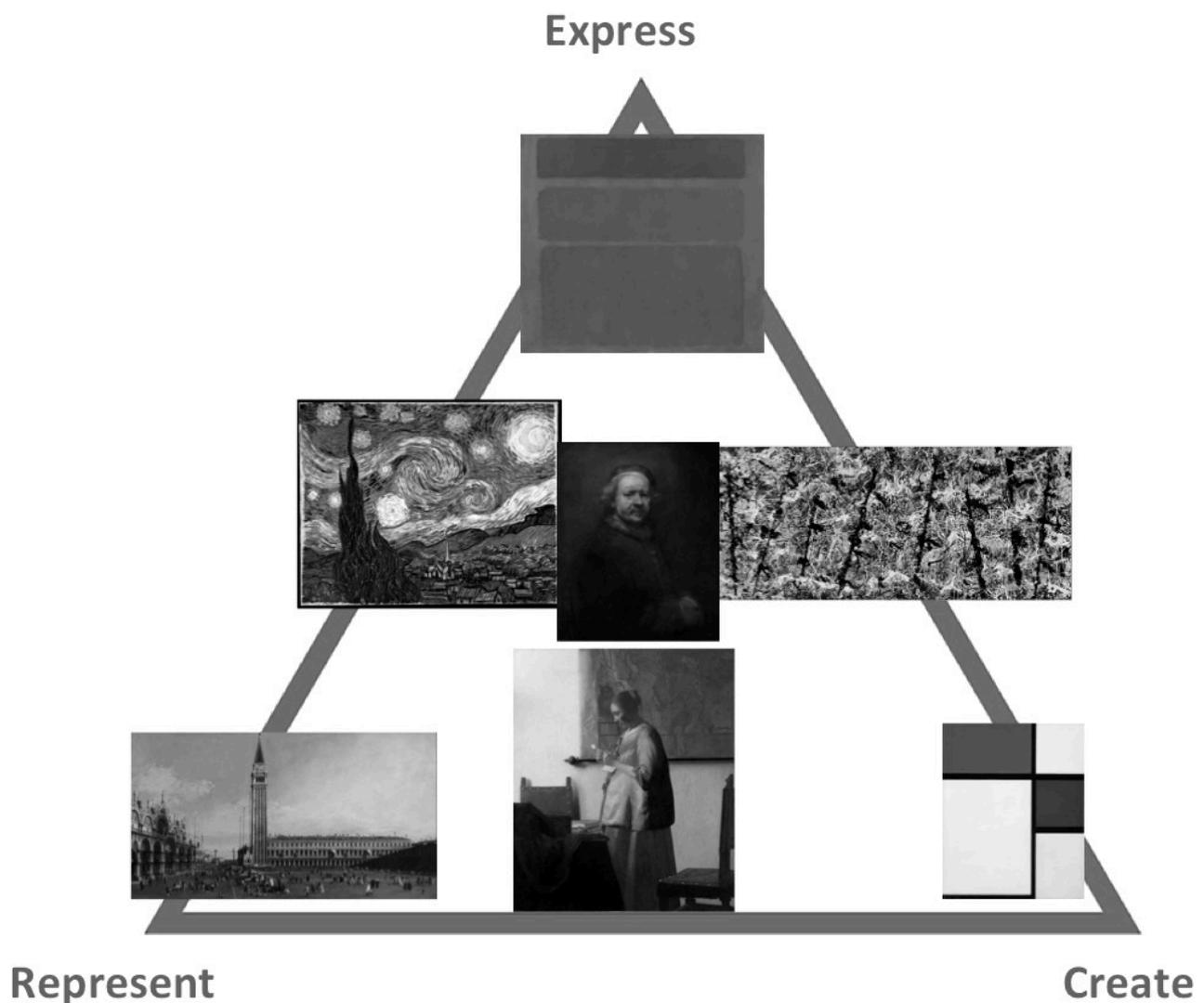
Art can be for...

- Creating
- Representing
- Expressing

Plus ...

- Showing off skill (in *creating, representing or expressing*)
- Experimenting (with *new methods of creating, representing or expressing*)

In fact most artists do the 3 (or 4, or 5) at the same time.



# Lecture 3: Getting to know a work of art

Three steps:

## 1. Look intently

Look non-judgementally. Imagine creating a treasure hunt for others. Include intrinsic implications if possible, e.g. 'What direction was the artist facing?'

## 2. React and relate

Be imaginative. Use other-sensory equivalents, e.g. 'How would it taste?'

Artworks have many things to offer, e.g. art history, social history, insight into the artist's life, aesthetics, techniques of art... (the 'hooks').

People have many things that interest them, not necessarily including the list above, e.g. food, weather, television, music, sport... (the 'loops').

The first step in art appreciation is **motivation**: to *want* to be there, looking at the art. This will only happen if some hooks catch onto some loops, i.e. if the artwork has some **relevance** to the viewer. So, it's OK to **tease out new hooks**.

Some suggested questions:

- Imagine walking through painting with bare feet. How does it feel?
- Imagine painting is a person. What's the artwork's favourite sport?
- How would it escape from the Gallery?
- What kind of animal would it be?
- Give a weather forecast for the artwork.
- What would it taste like if you could eat it?
- What music would go well with it?
- Does it remind you of a childhood experience?

## 3. Be critical

Is there such a thing as 'good art', and therefore 'bad art'? While it's tempting to say, 'I know bad art when I see it,' the problems come when we don't know what *good* art is. We need **criteria**.

First, try to determine the artist's aims: describe/express/create.

Every artwork needs **interest** and **unity**.

If an artist breaks with reality (e.g. perspective or proportion), there needs to be a trade-off, in terms of expression and/or composition.

Sometimes, it's easier to be critical of an artwork when comparing it with a *related* work (e.g. William Buelow Gould still life versus Henri Fantin-Latour still life).

## Lecture 3 "coda": Reading a gallery room

Rooms in a gallery or art museum aren't arranged randomly or by visual compatibility. They tell stories, usually about styles, movements and major artists. Look for:

- artist's nationality
- year artwork created (or artist's lifespan, if artwork's year not given)
- subject matter
- treatment of subject matter (naturalistic? exaggerated? symbolic?...)
- how other artworks in same room treat the same (or similar) subject matter

### Summing up lectures 1–3

- Your own personal responses are valid
- Every artwork has intrinsic info (what you can see) and extrinsic info (what you need to research)
- Aesthetic vision (seeing independently of what you know)  $\neq$  survival vision (not bumping into things)
- 1. Look intently ... 2. React/relate ... 3. Be critical (don't skip a step... although there's no hurry for #3)
- Give art time
- Don't forget to "dance"!

## Lecture 4: Modern art and its origins

### Three seeds of modernism

- **Relativity** – artist acknowledges that his/her experience is not necessarily the same as others'.  
E.g. Renaissance (linear perspective), Baroque (dramatic light & shadow), Impressionism (fleeting effects of light & atmosphere)
- **Self-sufficiency** – artwork, as a thing, can be more important than its subject.  
E.g. Impressionism (bold, broken colours, obvious brushstrokes), Kandinsky (inspired by Impressionism of Monet)
- **Experimentation** – artist wonders, “Why do I have to always do something according to rules or customs? What would happen if I did it differently?”  
E.g. Mannerism (breaking laws of perfect proportion), Dada (ready-made, randomness), Abstract expressionism (physical act of creation, unusual materials)

(Experimentation + self-sufficiency leads to a kind of self-awareness, art about art = the essence of 'post-modernism'.)

### Lecture 4 “coda”: Drawing

**Drawing is a natural activity.** Eg drawing on a foggy window or in sand, and doodling. It is a direct trace of movement. Quality of line can reveal personality. E.g. signatures.

**Stages of development in drawing:** scribble; controlled scribble; assigning meaning; storytelling; complexity; attempted realism; crisis. After “crisis”, many teenagers abandon drawing altogether.

**Why is it important to draw?** It helps to exercise the right side of the brain (intuitive, non-verbal), to see *without labeling*. One way to encourage this is to draw things upside-down, so that one is unable to rely on formulae.

Recommended book:

Betty Edwards, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* (various editions available)

## Lecture 5: Western art in 60 minutes

One more myth about art: “Being able to talk about art will get you into the ‘right’ circles.”

Bluffing may be enough for the social art game. However, it is better to *look* at an art work, than to immediately categorise it (or judge it) instead.

But as long as aim is to appreciate individual art work better and not to impress others, it's OK to develop the skill of recognising the period/movement to which an art work belongs.

**Timeline: a bird's eye view of western art from ~1400 to present day:** see over.

### General principles of periods and movements in art history

#### Periods/movements overlap

E.g. Rococo and Neoclassicism co-existed

#### Precursors + long tails + revivals

E.g.

- The Norwegian artist Edvard Munch was a **precursor** to German Expressionism.
- Impressionism is still being practised today (a **very long tail**).
- In some ways Pop art was a **revival** of Dadaism (Warhol's Brillo boxes and Duchamp's readymades)

#### Movements and periods are usually understood as an evolution from, or revolution against, a prevailing philosophy and practice

E.g.

- Italian Baroque evolved from Mannerism.
- The simplicity and symmetry of Neoclassicism was a reaction to the ornamentation and asymmetry of Rococo.

#### Variations occur, both geographic & personal

E.g. Caravaggio's Baroque style was different to Rembrandt's, partly because Caravaggio was Italian and Rembrandt was Dutch, but also because their personalities were different. That is why his style and that of Rembrandt's Dutch contemporary, Vermeer, are so different.

#### Many artists belonged to *no* movement

E.g. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, William Blake, Edvard Munch, Jasper Johns

#### Some artists were associated with more than one movement

E.g. Picasso was associated with several movements, including Cubism, Classicism and Surrealism.

#### Away from movements' origins, shifts & coalescence occur

E.g.

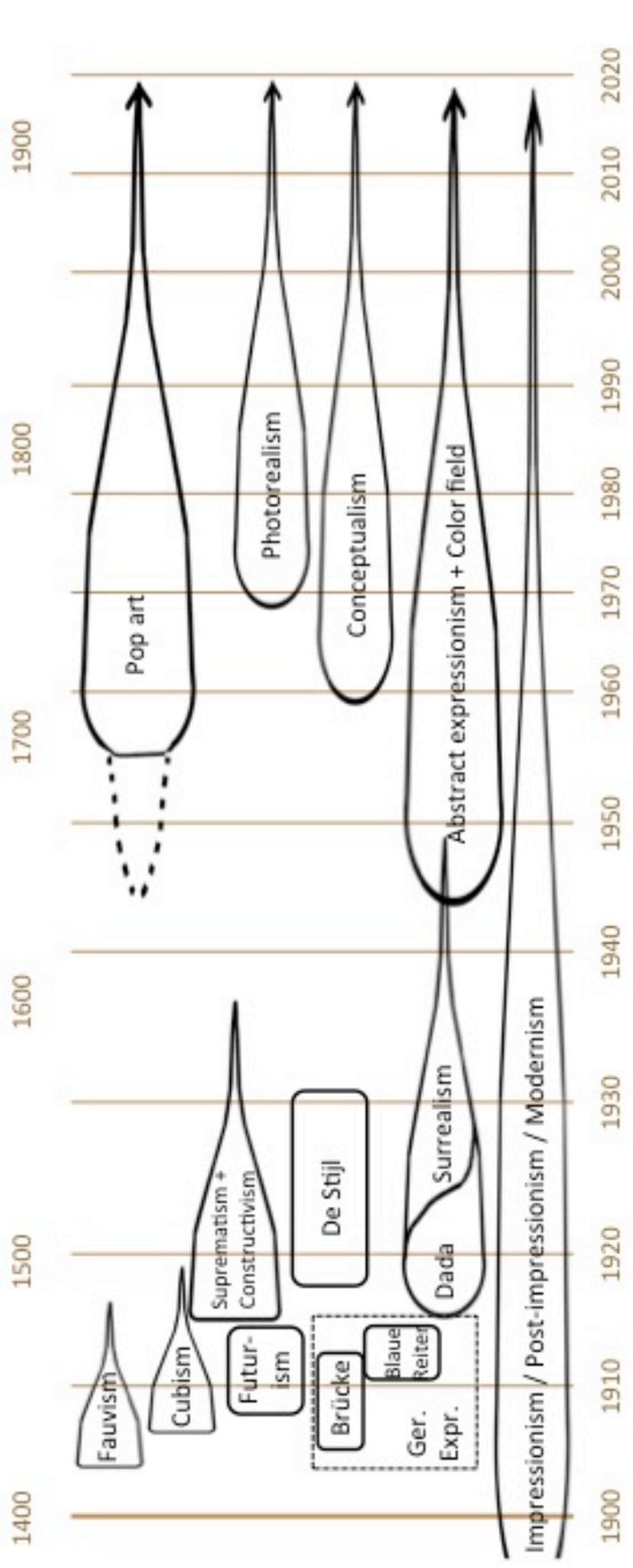
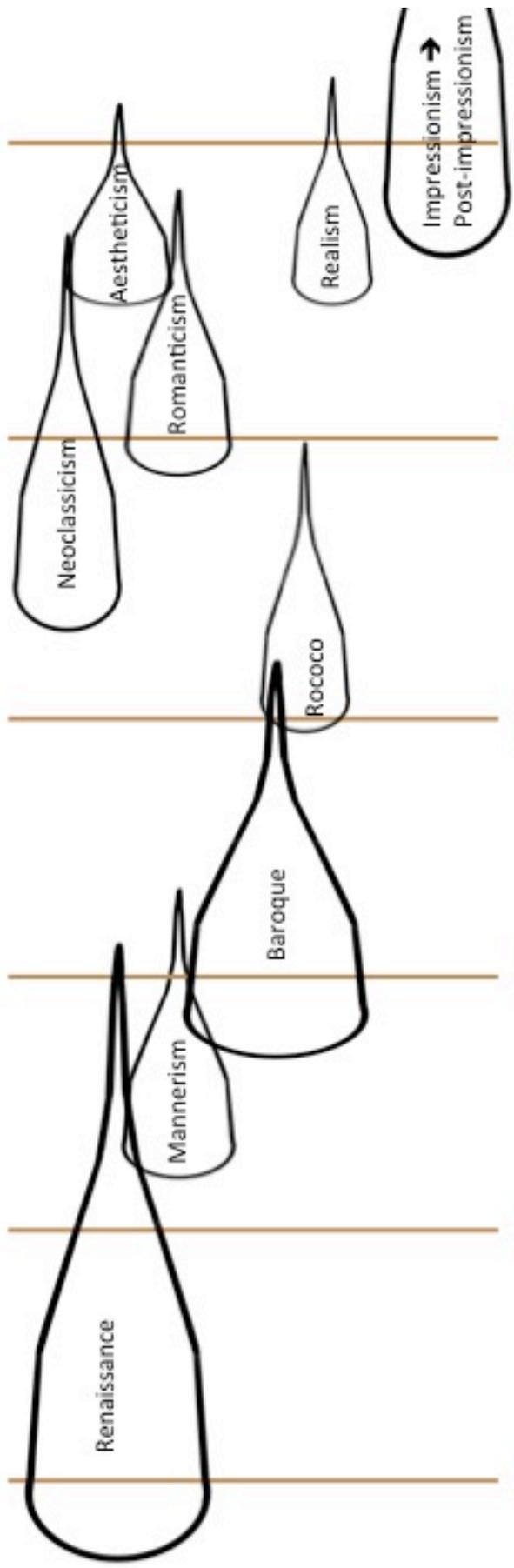
The Heidelberg School, often referred to as “Australian Impressionism”, was a mixture of English Impressionism (e.g. Whistler), French Impressionism (e.g. Monet) and nationalistic Romanticism (e.g. Delacroix).

What we now call Australian “early modernism” is the result of a number of influences from Europe, including the Post-Impressionists Cézanne and Gauguin, and Fauvism.

#### There is a fundamental point of difference among periods and movements: how unity is achieved

**LINEAR:** Art work is an arrangement of several clearly delineated, separate elements. The artist's task is to harmonise them.

**PAINTERLY:** Art work is, from the beginning of its creation, an indivisible whole. The artist's task is to make forms and colours emerge in interesting ways.



## Lecture 6: Style as intention

“**Meantness**”: Does it look like it’s meant to be there?

How can this be achieved?

- Lining up
- Sorting / grouping likes
- Compartmentalising (e.g. Yirrkala bark painting, Mesopotamian, Alex Rizkalla)
- Dominant verticals, horizontals (e.g. Norah Heysen *Self portrait*, Jan Vermeer)
- Swirling (e.g. William Dobell *Margaret Olley*)
- Colours shifted, e.g. towards yellow (e.g. John Brack *Nude with 2 chairs*)
- Colours, shapes echoed across picture (e.g. Charles Meere, Frederick Leighton)
- Dark background, strong light source (e.g. Bernardo Strozzi + other Italian Baroque painters)
- Fog, evening (e.g. James Whistler *Nocturne in grey and silver, the Thames*)
- Snow (e.g. Rah Fizelle *Snow in Umbria*)
- Bright sunshine (e.g. Elioth Gruner *Bondi*)
- Geometry of rectangular format (e.g. Joshua Reynolds *James 7th Earl of Lauderdale*)
- Classical landscape recipe (e.g. Richard Wilson, Charles Eastlake, Louis Buvelot etc.)
- Simplification of forms & shapes, dissolving of some edges (e.g. Rah Fizelle *Morning*)
- Fragmentation (e.g. Eric Wilson, cubism)
- Confetti-like fragmentation (e.g. Camille Pissarro, pointillism, Godfrey Miller)
- (Almost) total obscuration! (e.g. Peter Booth *Painting* 1974)

## Lecture 7: Australian art

What is “Australian art”? Art made in Australia? Art made by artists who identify (or who are identified) as “Australians”? Is nationality still relevant today, esp. in contemporary art? What is the role of “place” in art? What happens to ideas and styles when they have been transplanted from elsewhere and allowed to grow?

### A very brief survey of periods and styles in Australian painting

#### *Early colonial*

- First 50 years after Cook (or first 30 years of colony)

Visual records of flora, fauna, topography and native inhabitants.

Really British art... in the antipodes.

Examples:

John Frederick Miller, after **Sydney Parkinson**, *Banksia serrata* 1773. NHM, London

**Thomas Watling**, *A Direct North General View of Sydney Cove* 1794. SLNSW, Sydney

**Joseph Lycett**, *Aborigines hunting waterbirds, New South Wales* c.1817. NLA, Canberra

- Early to mid 19th century

Nostalgia: Landscape, portraiture, still life (very minor).

Examples:

**John Glover**, *Patterdale farm* (c.1840). AGNSW

**Maurice Felton**, *Portrait of Mrs Alexander Spark* (1840). AGNSW

**William Buelow Gould**, *Flowers and fruit* 1849. AGNSW

#### *Late colonial*

Latter half of the 19th century

Increasing emphasis on aspects of Aus. landscape that made it different to English countryside: wildness and dryness.

Examples:

**WC Piguenit**, *Mount Olympus, Lake St Clair, Tasmania, the source of the Derwent* 1875. AGNSW

**Louis Buvelot** *At Dromana, Victoria* 1876

### *Australian "impressionism"*

(aka "Heidelberg School", after the town – now a Melbourne suburb – in which they had their first artist camp)

Mainly between 1888 (centenary of colony) and 1901 (Federation)

Examples:

**Charles Conder**, *Departure of the Orient - Circular Quay* (1888). AGNSW

**Tom Roberts**, *Bailed up* (1895). AGNSW

(Note: from now on most titles will have imaginary quotation marks around them.)

### *Ex-patriots*

Basically the same period as the Heidelberg School (end of 19th c – beginning of 20th c), but different artists, working (mainly) in Europe.

Examples:

**John Peter Russell**, *Antibes* (c.1890-92). AGNSW

**Rupert Bunny**, *A summer morning* (c.1908). AGNSW

### *Early modernism*

From 2nd decade of 20th century

Examples:

**Grace Cossington Smith**, *The sock knitter* (1915). AGNSW

**Roy de Maistre**, *Rhythmic composition in yellow green minor* (1919). AGNSW

### *Mid-century modernism*

Examples:

**Ralph Balson**, *Construction in green* 1942. AGNSW

**Rah Fizelle**, *Morning* (1941). AGNSW

### *Social realism, expressionism, surrealism*

Also mid-20th c, various artists. Subject matter more important, whether real, mythic or imagined

Examples:

**Noel Counihan**, *At the start of the march 1932*, 1944. AGNSW

**Arthur Boyd**, *The expulsion* (1947-48). AGNSW

**James Gleeson**, *The sower* 1944. AGNSW

### *Abstract (or semi-abstract) expressionism*

1960s – 1980s

Examples:

**John Olsen**, *Spanish encounter* 1960. AGNSW

**Peter Upward**, *Surry Hills Green* 1960. AGNSW

### *1970s+*

Examples:

• pop art: **Mike Brown**, *The beautiful one is here* 1969-70. AGNSW

• photorealism: **John Bloomfield**, *Tim Burstall* 1975. AGNSW

• op art: **Lesley Dumbrell**, *Spangle* 1977. AGNSW

• conceptualism: **Imants Tillers**, *52 displacements (no. 2)* 1979-80. AGNSW

### *postmodernism*

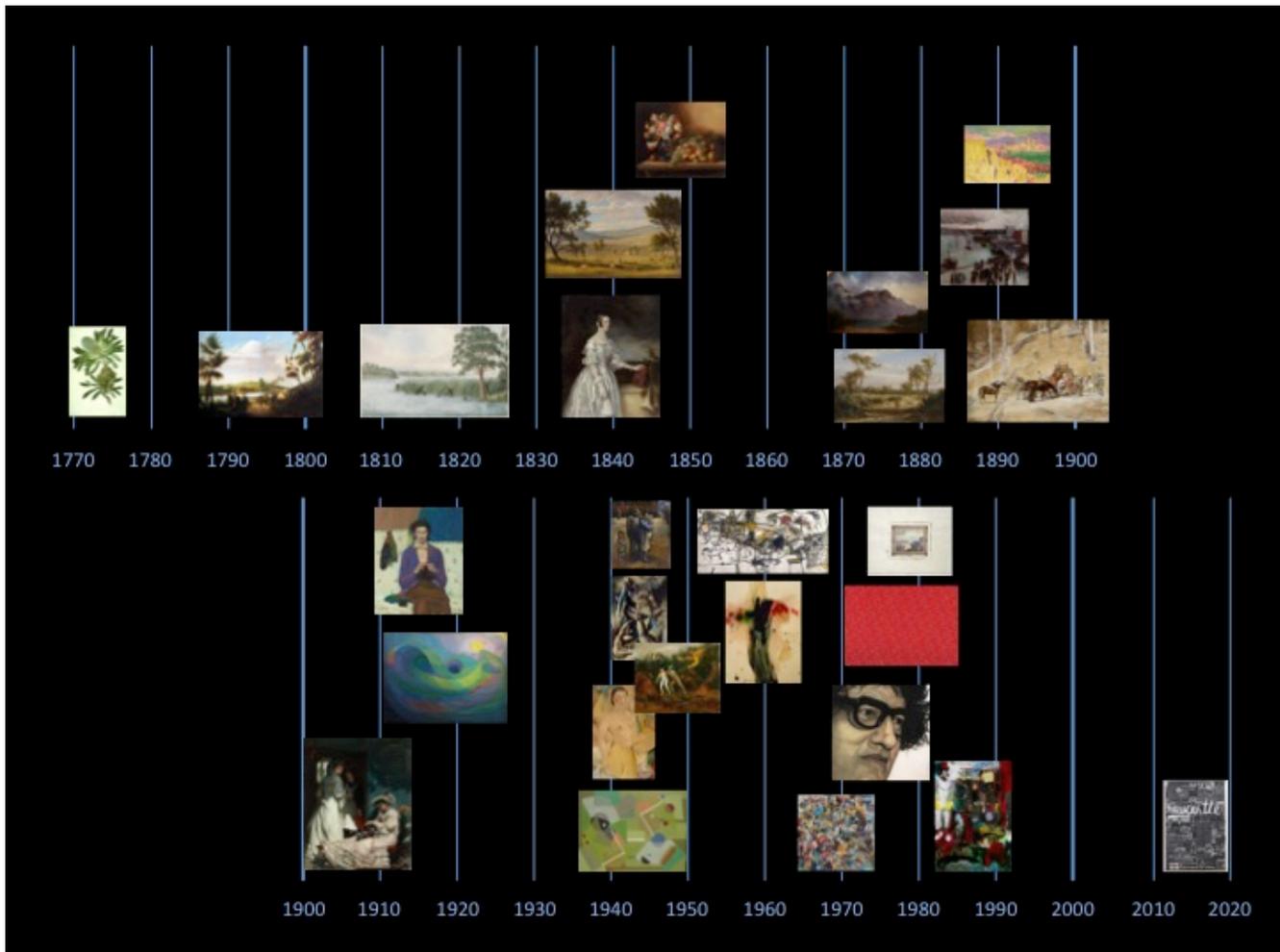
1980s – present

Examples:

**Susan Norrie**, *fête* 1986. AGNSW

**Nell**, *Where Newcastle meets Maitland* 2015. AGNSW

## Timeline



### Works in more detail

Classical landscape recipe. Ingredients: framing trees, dark foreground & edges, small people – at rest (in light), long shadows, water, buildings, mountains, clouds

Examples:

Jan Frans van Bloemen, *In the Campagna* early 18th c. AGNSW

Richard Wilson, *St Peters and the Vatican from the Janiculum, Rome 1757*. AGNSW

Charles Eastlake, *Classical landscape* c.1825-30. AGNSW

**John Glover**, *Patterdale farm* (c.1840). AGNSW

Only thing missing is water.

**Conrad Martens**, *Wiseman's Ferry in 1838* (c.1838). AGNSW

The “U” has become a “V”.

**Eugene von Guérard**, *Waterfall, Strath Creek* (1862). AGNSW

Lifted horizon, “V” again.

**John Glover**, *Launceston and the river Tamar* (c.1832). AGNSW

Central tree, dead fallen tree, transparent foliage.

**Louis Buvelot**, *At Dromana, Victoria* 1876. AGNSW

Buvelot regarded as the father (or grandfather?) of the Heidelberg School, but he still uses the classical landscape recipe “U”-shape.

*A brief look at portraiture:*

An example of the “classical portrait recipe”:

Joshua Reynolds, *James Maitland, 7th Earl of Lauderdale* (1759-60). AGNSW

We have already looked at this painting in terms of composition. Now let’s look at how personality and status are portrayed: Pose (poise), low viewpoint, props and clothing

**Maurice Felton**, *Portrait of Mrs Alexander Spark* (1840). AGNSW

Note: setting, viewpoint, clothing and prop (book).

**Julian Ashton**, *The prospector* 1889. AGNSW

Still a low viewpoint, but the pose and props are about *work*, not status.

Note the date: 1889. Although not a member of Heidelberg School, Ashton could still be very nationalistic.

**Charles Conder**, *Sunset, Sydney Harbour* (c.1888). AGNSW

From the *9 by 5 Impression* exhibition, Melbourne 1889.

Introduction to catalogue: "An effect is only momentary; so an impressionist tries to find his place. Two half hours are never alike, and he who tries to paint the sunset on two successive evenings must be more or less working from memory. So in these works, it has been the object of the artist to render faithfully, and thus obtain first records of effects that widely differing, and often of very fleeting character."

However, nothing particularly “Australian” about subject (or style).

**Charles Conder**, *Departure of the Orient - Circular Quay* (1888). AGNSW

Slightly larger but the artist is still interested in atmospheric effects.

Again, this could almost be in England or Europe.

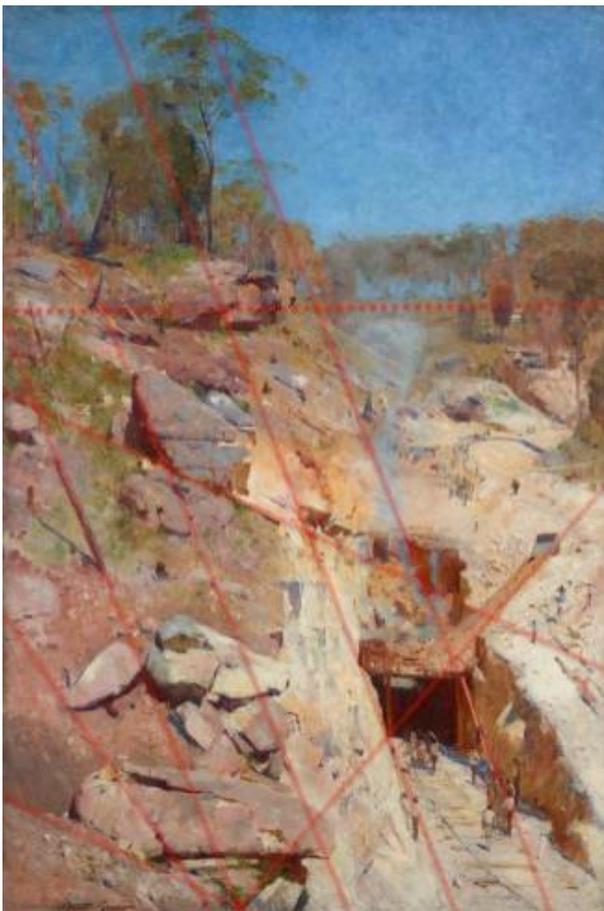
**Arthur Streeton**, *Fire's on* (1891). AGNSW

What has Streeton done with the classical landscape recipe?

Not interested in rest: blazing, hot midday sun + figures working + upright format.

Not particularly interested in depth: ground tilted up.

However, Streeton was definitely interested in composition, even though the landscape looks chaotic:



But it's not just a landscape. The story is about hard work, tragedy and sacrifice

Streeton was generally more interested in landscape than figures.

Not so for Tom Roberts:

**Tom Roberts**, *The Golden Fleece* (1894). AGNSW

To hard work, Roberts has added *mateship*.

**Tom Roberts**, *Bailed up* (1895). AGNSW

This painting is about *rebellion against authority*. But also the *laconic, laid back* Australian character.

How might an American artist have depicted this story? E.g. contrast *Bailed up* with:

Frederic Remington, *Downing the high leader* 1907

We have already seen how Conder wasn't as interested in Australian nationality identity as colleagues Streeton & Roberts. There was another artist who was, but not in a "macho" way: Frederick McCubbin.

Example:

**Frederick McCubbin**, *On the wallaby track* (1896). AGNSW

His paintings emphasised pioneer *families* rather than just pioneer men.

In fact, not all Heidelberg School artists were men. E.g.:

**Jane Sutherland**, *Field naturalists* (c.1896). NGV

Rupert Bunny was an ex-patriot Australian artist working in Europe.

Example:

**Rupert Bunny**, *A summer morning* (c.1908). AGNSW

Another ex-patriot was **George Washington Lambert**, although he did return to Australia a number of times.

Example:

George W Lambert, *Portrait of a lady (Thea Proctor)* (1916). AGNSW

These two Australian ex-patriots were working (or had been working) in Europe, yet their art had more in common with Manet (a proto-impressionist) than impressionism *per se*. Even as late as 1916 in the case of Lambert!

Yet one ex-patriot artist, **John Peter Russell**, was right in the thick of it.

Example:

John Peter Russell, *Antibes* (c.1890-92). AGNSW

Look at the date, and the colour and brushwork!

Russell befriended van Gogh. He also painted alongside French Impressionists (including Monet), who admired his work. Russell even introduced a young Henri Matisse to impressionism and to the work of van Gogh. Matisse later credited Russell as the one who explained colour theory to him.

The young artist **Grace Cossington Smith** studied painting in Sydney from 1910. In 1912 she travelled to Europe, attended art classes in England and Germany, but claimed not to have studied modern art then. She returned to Sydney, resumed her studies and studied European modern art through colour reproductions brought back by her teacher, Antonio Dattilo Rubbo, and a fellow student.

Example:

Grace Cossington Smith, *The sock knitter* (1915). AGNSW

The use of colour in this painting is not as extreme as Matisse. Perhaps closer to Cézanne?

Two other artists who studied under the same teacher as Cossington Smith at the time were **Roland Wakelin** and **Roy de Maistre**.

Examples:

Roland Wakelin, *Synchromy in orange major* (1919). AGNSW

Roy de Maistre, *Rhythmic composition in yellow green minor* (1919). AGNSW

Before studying painting, de Maistre trained at Sydney Conservatorium of Music. He served briefly in the Australian Army during WW1. Inspired by colour-therapy treatment given to shell-shocked soldiers he developed a theory of colour harmonisation based on analogies between colours and musical notes.

It's important to remember that impressionism as a style was still dominant in Australia. (And rural landscape as subject matter.)

Example:

**Elioth Gruner**, *Spring frost* (1919). AGNSW

Contrast *Spring frost* with Cossington Smith and her use of the Sydney Harbour Bridge construction as a symbol of modernity:

**Grace Cossington Smith**, *The curve of the bridge* (1928-29). AGNSW

Today, we know that there were two important female artists in Australia in the first half of the 20th century. One was Cossington Smith, although she was not really (re)discovered until the 1970s. The other was very famous in her time: **Margaret Preston**

Example:

Margaret Preston, *Self portrait* (1930). AGNSW

This self-portrait was commissioned by the trustees of the AGNSW.

Preston's chosen genre was *not* portraiture, or landscape, but still life. But not old-fashioned dusty pots and European flowers, but modern, mass-produced tableware and Australian native flowers.

Examples:

Margaret Preston, *Implement blue* (1927). AGNSW

Margaret Preston, *The brown pot* (1940). AGNSW

Preston was also the first western artist to recognise the *artistic* value of Aboriginal art (as opposed to just ethnological). She had no understanding of the cultural and spiritual significance of the use of certain patterns, but at least it was a start.

The paintings of **Rah Fizelle** are a hybrid of representational and abstract art.

Example:

Rah Fizelle, *Morning* (1941). AGNSW

Note:

- geometric curves & straight lines
- vanishing edges

**Ralph Balson** was a geometric abstractionist. (Interestingly, Roy de Maistre didn't remain with abstract art.)

Example:

Ralph Balson, *Construction in green* 1942. AGNSW

**Eric Wilson** is the closest Australia has to a cubist artist.

Example:

Eric Wilson, *Abstract - the kitchen stove* (1943). AGNSW

The paintings of **Godfrey Miller** are a very interesting hybrid, not just of representation and abstraction but of two approaches to composition that are normally diametrically opposed: linear (there are literally hundreds of lines in his paintings) and painterly (the edges appear to dissolve).

Miller aimed to create works that showed the universe as a shimmering kaleidoscope in continual flux.

Example:

Godfrey Miller, *Still life with lute* (c.1954-56). AGNSW

Many people are familiar with the controversy, and court case, involving **William Dobell** and his Archibald Prize-winning portrait:

William Dobell, *Mr Joshua Smith* 1943

Dobell became something of a standard-bearer for modernism – something he was not really happy with.

He saw his art as a fulfilment of that of old masters, e.g. Vermeer.

Example:

William Dobell, *The boy at the basin* (1932). AGNSW

Even his caricature-like portraits, with very heavy impasto, owed a lot to old masters such as Rembrandt.

Example:

William Dobell, *Mrs South Kensington* (1937). AGNSW

**Noel Counihan** was a social realist, documenting social and political reality.

Example:

Noel Counihan, *At the start of the march* 1932, 1944. AGNSW

Although this painting was done 12 years after the event it depicts, the height of Great Depression.

Much of **Russell Drysdale's** art could be regarded as social realism, with expressive distortion.

Example:

Russell Drysdale, *Sunday evening* (1941). AGNSW

Although some of his paintings verge on surrealism.

Example:

Russell Drysdale, *Walls of China* (1945). AGNSW

This work shows the reality of drought. Drysdale doesn't depict people here, but in a way we as viewers are the *imagined* protagonists.

However, the closest Australia has to a surrealist artist, in the mould of Salvador Dalí, was **James Gleeson**.

Example:

James Gleeson, *The sower* 1944. AGNSW

As we saw in the lecture "Western art in 60 minutes", **Sidney Nolan** initially used the motif of Ned Kelly mask – inspired by Malevich's black square – as a way of adding focus to otherwise unfocused Australian landscape. But it also added a "mythic dimension" to Australia, and Australian landscape.

Example:

Sidney Nolan, *The camp* (1946). AGNSW

Some artists, such as **Arthur Boyd**, used already existing mythology, and transplanted it into the Australian bush.

Example:

Arthur Boyd, *The expulsion* (1947-48). AGNSW

In effect this painting is saying: "Australia is not the Garden of Eden, but the wilderness 'outside'." In this way, Boyd was following in the footsteps of German Expressionists such as Emil Nolde and Max Beckmann.

Between 1943-48, Melbourne-based artist **Albert Tucker** painted 39 paintings: "Images of modern evil". Nearly all are set in the city at night. The "evil" is mostly sexual (specifically involving prostitution). Tucker developed a personal iconography (i.e., a group of symbolic motifs), including the eyeball, grinning lips and the floating, truncated torso.

Example:

Albert Tucker, *Image of modern evil: Spring in Fitzroy* 1943

A very different view of the city is presented by **Jeffrey Smart**.

Example:

Jeffrey Smart, *The stilt race* (1960). AGNSW

Jeffrey Smart, *Truck and trailer approaching a city* 1973. AGNSW

Although Smart's subjects seem very modern, their inspiration is actually much older: the formal compositions of the 15th c. Italian painter Piero della Francesca.

John Olsen, *Spanish encounter* 1960. AGNSW

"Spanish encounter" was painted in Sydney in 1960 after **John Olsen** returned from 3 years living in Europe (mainly Spain). It is an emotional response to his experience of Spain, plus the pulsating activity of Sydney's inner-city.

Shortly after *Spanish encounter*, Olsen painted the series 'Journey into the you beaut country'.

Olsen stated: "I wanted to really come to terms with the experience of a total landscape. Not like there is the foreground, ... middle distance and ... horizon. I wanted that overall feeling of travelling over the

landscape. There you can see the dry creek beds, the nervous system... Then you begin to somehow see the wholeness, the essential untidiness."

Example:

John Olsen, *Summer in the you beaut country* 1962. NGV

A Friend of John Olsen, **Peter Upward** had no direct contact with emerging abstract expressionist movement in America or Europe, but its influence is clear. He was strongly influenced by jazz music and the principles of Zen.

Upward stated: "Everything is done in one movement ... with musical impulse, the same musical impulse as musicians when they improvise. My paintings are a series of chords and notes."

Upward's paintings are often referred to as "frozen gestures".

Example:

Peter Upward, *June celebration* 1960

**Fred Williams** visited the You Yangs (area of granite ridges between Melbourne and Geelong) in 1962, not long after returning from living and working in London. He reduced forms to a series of abstract splodges and strokes.

Example:

Fred Williams, *You Yangs landscape* 1963. AGNSW

Similarly to Streeton's *Fire's on*, *You Yangs landscape* shows a tilted ground and a general lack of focus.

In 1961 **Colin Lanceley** and fellow artists **Mike Brown** and Ross Crothall formed a group called "Annandale Imitation Realists" and exhibited in Sydney & Melbourne.

They enjoyed playing a game they called "aesthetic chess" where they made impromptu arrangements of the contents of their pockets (coins, keys etc.), often laid out on a café table.

The art of this group may be considered "pop", but not like American or European pop. According to art historian Christopher Heathcote, Imitation Realism represented "a complete disregard for accepted artistic values."

Examples:

Colin Lanceley, *Glad family picnic* 1961-62. AGNSW

Mike Brown, *The beautiful one is here* 1969-70. AGNSW

Mike Brown noted that at different times their work was called "modern reliquary, satirical goonery, and inspired or uninspired doodling,... It has also been said to comprise a new art movement. God forbid."

John Bloomfield, *Tim Burstall* 1975. AGNSW

This portrait of film director Tim Burstall won the Archibald Prize for artist **John Bloomfield** in 1975 but it was later disqualified when it was revealed that Bloomfield had done the painting from a photograph and not from life. In fact, the artist had never even met Burstall. However, artificiality was probably the whole point!

Op art (short for "optical art") is characterised by the use of optical illusions, such as 3D effects, flashing and vibrating.

Example:

**Lesley Dumbrell**, *Spangle* 1977. AGNSW

In conceptualism, the idea is more important than the visual qualities of the work.

Example:

**Imants Tillers**, *52 displacements (no. 2)* 1979-80 (detail). AGNSW

This and 51 other canvas panels were painted after illustrations in a "How to paint landscape" book. Tillers copied one painting each week for a year (including each gold frame).

**"Postmodernism"** literally means "after modernism" (or replacing modernism).

"Modernism" refers to the avant-garde of the 1860s to the 1950s/'60s, driven by ideas of technological progress ("Out with the old, in with the new!").

Postmodernism isn't really one style or movement, but postmodern artworks are connected by irony, playfulness, the breakdown of barrier between high and low culture, and the undermining of concepts of authenticity and originality.

So, Dada, Pop art, Photorealism and Conceptualism could all be considered postmodern, or precursors of modernism.

Example:

**Susan Norrie**, *fête* 1986. AGNSW

The subject is Disney(land) but unlike the art of the Disney studio or company, the image is not smooth and shiny. Mickey Mouse is wearing a Pierrot costume – recalling Antoine Watteau’s famous painting. The painting simultaneously seduces and repels us.

Another characteristic of postmodernism is the use of words instead of images or abstract shapes.

Example:

**Nell**, *Where Newcastle meets Maitland* 2015. AGNSW

The work consists of text and representations of newspaper headlines, graffiti and gig posters. Like Norrie’s work, different references and ideas have been *jammed* together.

In **traditional bark painting** in Arnhem Land, each work is usually created by the artist sitting cross-legged on the ground, while others (often young people) sit on all sides, listening to the creation story that the painting is depicting. In this way, the work is ephemeral, like a school whiteboard. It also means that there is no definitive “up”. Certain motifs (e.g. water pouring out from primeval waterholes) can be heavily abstracted and still carry meaning. The same applies to certain patterns (e.g. rarrk).

Examples:

Mawalan Marika (Rirratjingu, Arnhem region), *Djan'kawu creation story* 1959. AGNSW (IA68.1959)

Mawalan Marika (Rirratjingu, Arnhem region), *Djan'kawu creation story* 1959. AGNSW (IA67.1959)

Creation is also the theme of the work of Queensland-based artist **William Robinson**:

William Robinson, *Creation series - Man and the spheres* 1991. AGNSW

In different parts of this large three-part painting, we are looking down, across and up.

**Emily Kam Ngwarray**, from the remote, north-west corner of the Simpson Desert, is probably most celebrated contemporary Aboriginal artist in international art world. In her 70s, after decades of painting in a ceremonial context and with her experience with the Utopia Women’s Batik Group, Ngwarray started painting on huge canvases.

Example:

Emily Kam Ngwarray, *Untitled (Alhalker)* 1992. AGNSW

Each painting is of her country, but she never said “this means that”. Perhaps this painting shows the desert in bloom?

## **A few issues to consider**

### *Focus in landscape*

How has the landscape been depicted in terms of focus?

E.g. from the classical landscape recipe to Fred Williams

### *The viewer’s relationship with the landscape*

Are we looking *into* the landscape (through a virtual window) or are we *within* it?

E.g. John Glover, Elioth Gruner, William Robinson, Emily Kam Ngwarray

### *Origins of Australian impressionism*

Nationalistic Romanticism (e.g. Delacroix) + Realism (e.g. Millet) + English impressionism (e.g. Whistler)

### *Origins of early modernism*

Cézanne + Gauguin + Matisse + Kandinsky

### “Masculinism” in Heidelberg School

E.g. Roberts and Streeton vs Conder, Sutherland and McCubbin

Is there (or has there been) an artistic divide between Melbourne & Sydney?

E.g. Counihan, Tucker, Boyd and Nolan vs Miller, Fizelle, Dobell and Wilson

# Guiding approaches

Skill required of audience	Guide's role	Audience's role	Typical statement / question of guide
Listening and looking			"I'll tell you all about it."
Repetition			"I'll tell you, and you repeat in your own words."
Answering			(e.g.) "What's the dominant colour in this art work?"
Completion			"I'll start the story and you'll finish it off."
Transposition			I'll describe this art work and I want you to describe this other one.
Synthesis			"I'll give you individual facts about this art work and I want you to turn them into a general statement."
Analysis			"I'll give you a general statement about this art work and I want you to support it or challenge it with individual facts."
Standing alone			"You tell me all about it."

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